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by

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2014

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**Rebels, Nudie-Cuties, and Hipsters: A Study of the American Genre
Film Archive**

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by

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Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2014

Abstract

Rebels, Nudie-Cuties, and Hipsters: A Study of the American Genre Film Archive

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2014

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The American Genre Film Archive is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 2009 by Tim League, founder and CEO of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. With a sense of rebellion against established film archives, AGFA is dedicated to the collection of 35mm prints of exploitation films from the 1960s-1980s in order to conserve and distribute these neglected films. A confluence of issues including the history of the films in the collection, AGFA's connection with the Alamo Drafthouse, and influences from the hipster subcultures combine to inform AGFA's practices and mission. This thesis will explore how the American Genre Film Archive conforms to and rebels against the established archive community by means of its mission and institutional structure. Also, this thesis will explore AGFA as a hipster institution through its collecting and exhibition practices. AGFA's roles in the wider film archive community and the hipster community converge into an unusual archive serving unusual films.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| List of Figures | vi |
| List of Illustrations | vii |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Thesis design..... | 3 |
| THE AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE: MISSIONS AND PRACTICES OF A NEW ARCHIVE | 7 |
| Chapter 1: Literature Review | 9 |
| What is an archive?..... | 9 |
| Preservation: Definitions and Practices | 14 |
| Archives as Gatekeepers | 17 |
| Chapter 2: A History of the American Genre Film Archive | 21 |
| Chapter 3: Collection Profile of the Kinsey Collection | 32 |
| Chapter 4: Is AGFA an Archive?..... | 50 |
| Non-Profit/For-Profit Hybrid | 51 |
| Collectors as Archivist..... | 55 |
| THE AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE: ARCHIVING FOR HIPSTERS | 66 |
| Chapter 5: Literature Review | 69 |
| What is a hipster? | 69 |
| Nostalgia and hipsters..... | 70 |
| Hipsters, Authenticity, and Movies | 74 |
| Chapter 6: The Joy of Exploitation Films: AGFA and Nostalgia..... | 78 |
| Chapter 7: VHS and Vinyl: AGFA and Authenticity | 86 |
| CONCLUSION | 93 |
| Bibliography | 96 |

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Distribution of Total Number of Prints in the Kinsey Collection; Data collected by Author..... | 40 |
| Figure 2: Distribution of Total Number of Individual Titles in the Kinsey Collection; Data collected by Author..... | 41 |
| Figure 3: Division of Erotic Title Prints by Genre; Data Collected by Author | 47 |

List of Illustrations

| | |
|---|----|
| Illustration 1: Cover Art for <i>Trailer War</i> and <i>Miami Connection</i> ; Drafthouse Films. | 89 |
|---|----|

INTRODUCTION

In 2013, A&E's *Shipping Wars* aired an episode entitled "Frankenship Horrors." The episode followed the popular show's usual format: one or two customers with unusual items in need of shipping post their jobs on a shipping site that auctions the job to the lowest bidding shipper. "Frankenship Horrors" was particularly unique because it featured a large collection of 35mm film prints. The owners of the films—Lars Nilsen, a film programmer, and Tim League, founder and CEO of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Austin, Texas—enlisted *Shipping Wars* to help them transport their recently acquired films, which were very likely pornography. Eager to exhibit their newfound bounty, League and Nilsen eagerly scheduled a screening of one of the new prints, but there was a problem; all the films they purchased were in Bloomington, Indiana and the screening was only three days away.

The *Shipping Wars* producers presented the audience with a ramshackle assortment of film cans and duct-taped cardboard boxes bulging at the seams when the collection was finally shown. The labels on the boxes revealed, that the films were "artful sexploitation" titles, often a euphemism for pornography. *Shipping Wars* portrayed the films in a titillating manner, using cliché porno style music to play over the segment of packing the films for shipment. After many trials the shipper prevails, and at the end of the episode the Alamo Drafthouse screens its prize. The one question this episode of *Shipping Wars* does not seem to ask is — why? Why do these guys from Austin want a storage unit full of neglected "artful sexploitation" films?

Behind the scenes, the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema was acting on behalf of their tangentially associated American Genre Film Archive. The American Genre Film Archive (AGFA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded by League, in conjunction with

other collectors, in 2009. AGFA, legally, is a separate entity from the commercial avenues of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema but in practice is fairly intertwined with its sister organizations: the Alamo Drafthouse cinemas, Drafthouse Films, and the Fantastic Fest film festival. AGFA's mission is "dedicated to collecting, conserving, and distributing the best classic and forgotten genre films, for the benefit of all humankind."¹ In practice, the archive is dedicated to the collection of 35mm prints of exploitation films from the 1960s-1980s. The exploitation film genre has a long history of being an irreverent, even maligned, part of the commercial landscape of films. Exploitation films feature a wide range of thematic elements, but at its core these films are all based upon sensationalist narratives, often, exploiting sex and nudity. Appropriately, the collection, featured on *Shipping Wars*, was acquired by AGFA from The Kinsey Institute for Research in Sex, Gender, and Reproduction at Indiana University. The Kinsey Collection consisted of sexploitation, softcore and hardcore pornography, and a wide range of other 1970s and 1980s exploitation films that were being removed from the Institute's holdings.

AGFA has chosen to build its collection around a group of films that have a history of being outside of mainstream film production and distribution. AGFA presents itself as being founded by "movie enthusiasts" and dedicated to building an archive that "reflects the rebel spirit of the movies themselves."² AGFA argues that its collection is outside of the purview of the majority of other film archives. As demonstrated by the scenario presented in *Shipping Wars*, AGFA is dedicated to screening the films from their collection. AGFA is involved in a variety of screening events dedicated to celebrating the excesses of exploitation films, including the Alamo Drafthouse's long-running Weird

¹ "About AGFA," American Genre Film Archive, last modified 2013, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://americangenefilm.com/about>.

² "About AGFA," American Genre Film Archive.

Wednesdays, a weekly event that exclusively exhibits exploitation films.³ The combination of rebellion and a mission focused on screening its collection positions AGFA as an unusual film archive.

AGFA is actively attempting to rebel against the current paradigm of the archiving world, which, is often stereotyped as being concerned only with highbrow films of “artistic merit” and exclusively used by intellectuals and academics.⁴ In their efforts to rebel, AGFA archives films that are defined by their excess and tastelessness, actively appealing to a hipster, movie enthusiast audience through their methods of exhibition and distribution. To achieve these goals AGFA has, by virtue of its founders’ connections, worked intimately with the two other enterprises affiliated with the Alamo Draffhouse: Draffhouse Films and Fantastic Fest.

AGFA has taken on the moniker of “archive” while still debating how to structure itself given its unique collection and audience. Operating culturally within a hipster, movie enthusiast sensibility dictates how it collects films and appeals to audiences, but traditional archives still exert considerable influence over AGFA. These qualities combine to make AGFA a unique institution catering to exploitation films. The goal of this thesis is to determine if AGFA meets the industry criteria to be considered an archive and how the ways it does and does not comply affect its ability to preserve and share the exploitation films in its collection.

THESIS DESIGN

This project explores AGFA as a collecting institution and as a facet of the hipster community. To determine AGFA’s status as an archive and the effects of its practices on

³ The Alamo Draffhouse Cinema, "Signature Series: Weird Wednesday," The Alamo Draffhouse, accessed October 10, 2013, http://draffhouse.com/series/weird_wednesday/austin.

⁴ "AGFA Indiegogo," video file, Vimeo, posted by Alamo Draffhouse, March 16, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://vimeo.com/89252355>.

its collections, this thesis is divided into two sections. First, a discussion of how AGFA operates institutionally under the classification of “archive,” in the section “The American Genre Film Archive: Missions and Practices of a New Archive.” Second, how AGFA is influenced in its practices and exhibitions by the hipster subculture in the section, “The American Genre Film Archive: Archiving for Hipsters.”

“The American Genre Film Archive: Missions and Practices of a New Archive,” details the history and structure of the American Genre Film Archive in relation to the established definitions and practices of the wider film archive community. Chapter 1 provides a literature review of the accepted definitions and practices related to defining archives and preservation, as well as an exploration of the archive as gatekeepers of film history. The industry definitions provide a standardized framework for discussing the mission and work of AGFA. Chapter 2, will detail the history of AGFA and the demographics of its film holdings — including, AGFA’s practices related to collection building, conservation plans, and how it utilizes the films in its collections. This chapter will explore AGFA’s desire to build its collection above all other practices in conjunction with its evolving preservation policies. The chapter concludes with a look at AGFA’s structure as a hybrid of non-profit and commercial models. Chapter 3 presents a case study on the acquisition of the Kinsey Collection, the film collection on the episode of *Shipping Wars* featuring the Alamo Drafthouse. The acquisition of the Kinsey Collection models the challenges that accompany the type of collections AGFA pursues and how AGFA is attempting to satisfy its mission with this particular acquisition. Chapter 4 is the culmination of the previous chapters’ exploration, addressing the question, is AGFA an archive? Based on the three previous chapters, AGFA’s mission and practices will be discussed, in comparison to the standardized definitions established in the literature review, in order to ascertain if AGFA qualifies as an archive. This discussion will be followed by

an analysis of the role of AGFA as fixture in the hipster, movie enthusiast community in, “The American Genre Film Archive: Archiving for Hipsters.”

“The American Genre Film Archive: Archiving for Hipsters,” proposes that AGFA is an institution created within the context of the hipster subculture and molds its activities to appeal to movie enthusiasts within the hipster community. Michael Newman describes hipsters thusly, “Hipsters are not defined by their striving to be hip...Hipsters thus comprise a culture in pursuit of hip rather than a hip culture.”⁵ As a part of this culture, AGFA is in the pursuit of the next hip film, collection, or genre that will garner them clout within the hipster movie enthusiast community and must constantly strive to prove their insider status within the community. Chapter 5 will provide a literature review of two key tenants of hipsterdom that situate AGFA and its practices within the hipster community: nostalgia and authenticity. Nostalgia is utilized by the hipster community as a means of rebellion against mainstream culture, as a micro-generational means of revisiting the past, and as exercise in camp sensibilities. As related to AGFA’s mission, authenticity presents itself in the demonstration of vintage items’ age and decay. Authenticity also applies to the exclusivity of experiences as a means of individualizing hipsters. Chapter 6 explores how nostalgia has shaped AGFA’s collecting and exhibition practices. The Kinsey Collection demonstrates a micro-generational nostalgia that allows AGFA to paint a particular image of the era these films arose from for audiences. AGFA also utilizes nostalgic camp sensibilities when programming films from the archive. Chapter 7 examines how AGFA and its partnership with Drafthouse Films demonstrate facets of authenticity on their joint projects, *Trailer War* (2012) and *Miami Connection* (1987). Both of these films seek to demonstrate their authenticity to a hipster audience in order to validate AGFA’s role as the

⁵ Michael Z. Newman, “Movies for Hipsters,” in *American Independent Cinema: Indie, Indiewood and beyond*, by Geoff King, Claire Molloy, and Yannis Tzioumakis (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), 72.

holders of these materials. Nostalgia and Authenticity profoundly impacts how AGFA envisions itself in conjunction with hipster aesthetics and how it interacts with hipsters.

AGFA's unique practices, driven by how it has established itself institutionally, allow for an exploration of how a small archive is attempting to contend with the often-difficult practices of preserving and giving access to their films. In comparing this archive to dominant archiving standards, it is possible to see how AGFA has flourished and where it still has potential to grow or falter in regards to being stewards of exploitation films. Study of AGFA in relation to hipsters demonstrates a new model for how an archive can survive and build bonds with a modern community. This also allows for an inspection of motivations for AGFA's particular collecting and exhibition behaviors. The American Genre Film Archive is starting to expand and at this stage stands at the precipice of how it will align itself structurally and culturally in the future.

THE AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE: MISSIONS AND PRACTICES OF A NEW ARCHIVE

Every cultural institution has its own story, its history, and mission statement. The American Genre Film Archive did not just fall from the sky, one day, fully formed with a mission and a collection of films. As a relatively new archive, it can be easy to overlook that this archive comes with a history as an institution founded by film fans who are aware of the works of older, established film archives. AGFA was established with goals related to the collecting and giving of access to “genre” films in ways that had not been accomplished before by other archives and collectors.⁶ League and his team started assembling the AGFA collection with noble purposes in mind: to collect and screen exploitation films from the 1960s-1980s in order to preserve these films for future audiences. They were driven by the lack of interest in these films from the wider archive community. League, and the others who helped establish AGFA, made a conscious decision to take private film collections, either belonging to them or the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, and, somehow, converge them into an archive.

The American Genre Film Archive operates within the wider context of all film archives that are driven to collect and save films for posterity. This archive has developed as an institution to collect, conserve, and exhibit its particular collection of exploitation films for the same purpose of saving these film in perpetuity. AGFA presents an interesting study of how an archive can consciously design itself; the archive is still young enough to be developing structure but has been established long enough to have executed projects that are predictive of continuing behavior and treatment of film prints in its holdings. These

⁶ Marc Savlov, "Forgotten Films Find a Home," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 25, 2009, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2009-12-25/931306/>.

practices determine what type of institution AGFA currently is and what it has the potential to become.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Unlike scientific labeling, the labeling of cultural institutions like film archives is an inexact process. There are many terms for academic and popular film collections, such as cinematheque, special collection, library, and archive—each carrying their own connotations and particular devotions to the heritage of film. With the use of the term “archive” by the American Genre Film Archive, it is important to assemble a common definition for the archive to understand how the American Genre Film Archive both actively fits with and rubs against how other archives have defined the mission of a film archive. I am going to assemble a working list of ideas and definitions on the film archive primarily utilizing Karen Gracy’s *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*. Gracy’s work creates a confluence of theoretical definitions and practical examples of these terms through interviews and surveys with industry professionals. Through her work coupled with definitions and context provided by Caroline Frick’s *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation*, I intend to construct a standardized set of working definitions that this thesis is operating from.

WHAT IS AN ARCHIVE?

When Tim League and his team decided to name their project for collecting and exhibiting exploitation films the American Genre Film Archive there was an intention for calling it an “archive” rather than a “library,” a “collection,” or any of the other titles that they could have chosen. Whether a conscious decision or not, the team at AGFA entered into a debate of the role of film archives and the connotations the label carries with it. Although all archives will never agree on exactly how and why an institution should collect, give access, and preserve its films there are key elements that are required to be a

functioning archive. The American Genre Film Archive likes to define itself as a rebellious organization because of its decision to collect films they deem other archives have ignored but by labeling itself as a film archive; it now belongs to a wider cultural history of film archiving in the US.

At this time, when there are numerous avenues for making some classic films accessible to a larger percentage of the movie-viewing population than ever before, it can seem completely foreign that there was a time when films' cultural importance was questioned. Early film archives, "were brought into existence because certain individuals shared the opinion that film was worth saving, that it was not merely a bit of entertainment to be enjoyed and forgotten."⁷ It is from these original founders of the film archive that we derive many of our standards on how to best care for and collect films deemed to have cultural merit. The original founders of the earliest film archives collected silent films that were fading into obscurity with the advent of talkies; modern archivists, in the same spirit, are collecting genres of films they feel are, similarly, being lost to time. AGFA fears the disappearance of the exploitation film. Through the existing literature, I will explore how the film archiving community defines an archive, preservation, and an archive's gatekeeping responsibilities.

It should be fairly simple to categorize what is and isn't a film archive. By some metrics, there are set practices regarding the treatment of the films in their holdings that an organization must carry out in order to be considered an archive. It is less direct how an archive should carry out these practices for their particular films and collections. Due to the wide degree of variation among archives and their differing definitions of what constitutes things like "passive preservation" versus "conservation," a standardization of

⁷ Karen F. Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2007), 2.

terms is necessary to have a useful discussion of the practices at AGFA and other archives. In *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions of Value, Use, and Practice*, Gracy teases out what constitutes an archive versus similar organizations like a film library or collection. Institutionally, film archives can be divided into two camps: the non-profit archives and the commercial film libraries. Gracy states,

Film archives have long held film preservation to be their most important goal. In fact, it is their dedication to preservation that distinguishes the film archives from the film libraries which focus primarily on film rental or licensing. The latter may participate in preservation activities on occasion but the primary activities are largely commercial in nature. Many for-profit organizations use the word “archive” in their names, muddying the waters, somewhat, but in order to qualify for institutional membership in the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAPF), an archive must refrain from either commercially exploiting the copyrighted films under its care or making copies for purposes other than preservation.⁸

This commercial exploitation of copyrighted films, and thus the means of generating profit, is the priority of the commercial film library and distinguishes it from the non-profit model because it emphasizes the film prints as a commodity not as a cultural object. The commercial library can do work resulting in preservation, but that is, often, merely a fringe benefit of creating commercial opportunities. Gracy is alluding to the idea that because the non-profit archives are not driven by commercial motives the value of their collections lies in the ideals of cultural heritage the prints represent. The archives view the films in their collections as worth something to the history of a nation, a specific group, or film history as a whole.

The danger of focusing on values that do not have direct financial returns leaves these non-profit archives financially vulnerable during their formation. In order to counteract this, these film archives generally form within established organizations “such

⁸ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 3.

as universities, government agencies, corporations, or other major cultural institutions (e.g. archives and museums), as it is simpler to start a small department and grow from that sheltered position rather than to build a free-standing organization from the bottom up.”⁹ These archives generally share ties with a parent institution with varying levels of integration between the parent organization, its policies, and the archives. The film archive is defined, primarily, as an organization or institution that is a non-profit, devoted to the cultural legacy of their collection, and it can be affiliated intimately with another organization that supports the mission of the film archive.

The film collection as an object of cultural legacy carries with it collection building politics, values of collectors, and the desire to preserve the holdings for future generations to study and enjoy. Gracy argues that in the beginning of archiving silent films as they were being lost and destroyed, the first film archives were focused on acquisition, exhibition, and collection building. This was built on a realistic fear of the growing scarcity of the silent, nitrate prints due to their lack of commercial viability and the fragility of nitrate stock. In G. William Jones’s catalogue of the Tyler Black Film Collection, he cites one of the rallying cries for collectors of nitrate when he wrote in the 1980s that, “estimates are that almost fifty percent of the world’s pre-1950 film heritage is now gone forever—most of it to nitrate decomposition.”¹⁰ The earliest archives were dealing with a volatile medium on top of a large number of films that had previously gone uncollected. The goal was to collect and build importance, as heritage or art, to justify the collections of films that were being built. Acquisition was the forefront concern—with private collector and collection minded archivists leading the charge. Gracy points to collectors being some of the initially

⁹ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 3.

¹⁰ G. William Jones, *Black Cinema Treasures: Lost and Found* (Denton, Tex.: University of North Texas Press, 1991), 15.

most aggressive advocates in creating this fervor for protecting these films, but their continued role in the world of archives is difficult to define,

Are they pirates (as the studios see them), hoarders (as many archives see them), or last-minute saviors of films thought lost forever? Many archives have their roots in the passionate commitment of a collector—the Cinémathèque Française, founded by Henri Langlois, and the film collection at the George Eastman House, founded by James Card, being the two most famous examples.¹¹

Langlois and Card brought to their archives an obsession for their films. Card argued that his own collection habits were something natural and innately male he had to do, he just targeted film, “ever since, with this atavistic compulsion, men have insisted on collecting. Baseball cards, postage stamps, antique autos, money, or women; a normal male human must collect something...I had to have film, motion picture film, of my own.”¹² Langlois, was famous for his secretive collecting practices and desire to always exhibit his collection, something that won him a legion of devotees and detractors. Langlois and Card’s obsessive collecting practices are not what made the film archive into a cultural institution that could protect the legacy of film for perpetuity.

It has been noted in Caroline Frick’s *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* that the path of preserving film for posterity was really laid by Ernest Lindgren, curator of the Britain’s National Film Library, who first brought a librarians knowledge of cataloguing and care to films. Without Lindgren and others shifting the focus of archives from primarily collecting to preserving, the films could still have been lost to time;

[David] Francis argued, film archivists would find that ‘our cinema heritage would be a random selection of worn-out prints in hands of private collectors, rather than a secure body of work...[Langlois] may have been its greatest

¹¹ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 27.

¹² James Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent Film* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 3.

showman, but the role of the movements visionary, and eventual savior, belong to Ernest Lindgren.¹³

The passion of devoted collector types such as Langlois is necessary for the establishment of archives. This requirement is especially true with regard to the rescuing of prints and showcasing stages of collection building; the eccentric showman who builds attention for their archives has an important place in archiving history. As the practice of film archiving has matured past the period of amassing collections, focus on the quality of care for film prints has become the crux on which the film archive rests. As time has marched forward and the creation of national and international governing bodies, like the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF), have emerged, standards have begun to take hold of what constitutes proper film archive practices. In Gracy's terms, according to FIAF, "a film archive must consider preservation to be its top priority, and thus, if an organization does not preserve films, it is not an archive."¹⁴ If the practice of preservation is what the film archive requires in order to constitute being considered an archive—what does it mean to, truly, preserve films?

PRESERVATION: DEFINITIONS AND PRACTICES

The practice and act of preserving film has gone through many iterations and what the practice actually entails varies across organizations. Preservation can be related to many aspects of the caring for film prints and to wider avenues such as creating access to the content of these films. Overall, the archives based on their budgets, priorities, and materials can vary on what levels of preservation they want to and can provide. In her interviews with professionals in the field, Gracy ran into conflicting definitions of what it means to actually

¹³ Caroline Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics of Preservation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 171.

¹⁴ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 19.

preserve a collection, “once upon a time, preservation meant solely the act of copying nitrate film to a more stable format...Today, the word is a key indicator of an archivist’s responsibilities, commitments, and values.”¹⁵ Nitrate, due to its volatility, created a mass understanding that in order to save these prints they had to be copied to a safer stock. In regards to AGFA as a newer archive and with a collection much younger than those printed on nitrate stock, the concerns of what preservation can mean are related to what is needed to care for their particular collections.

In Gracy’s interview with an archivist from a university film archive, the archivist in question argued that first and foremost her work was to gather materials in a single location and, once the films were gathered, providing the optimal conditions (in regards to temperature, humidity, and storage) to halt deterioration of prints and provide access to the collection.¹⁶ This particular archive values a passive sort of preservation, maintenance of the films, which is focused on cataloging and sustaining them in their current state. This multi-element process is what defines preservation in one archive, but another archivist might view these policies and practices differently. In an interview with an archivist Gracy refers to as Carl, we see some further distinctions,

The active preservation...corresponds to the intermittent interventions to rescue an endangered film, while passive preservation (which other archivists might call “conservation”) reflects the perpetual concern to prevent further harm. He emphasizes the relative importance of passive preservation compared to the more visible active preservation tasks...controlling environmental conditions has not always been a top priority of archivists, and neither has it always been part of the preservation definition.¹⁷

Another archivist Gracy interviewed views the work of the archive dedicated to conservation as just one stage of the preservation process that includes active resurrection

¹⁵ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 142.

¹⁶ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 143-144.

¹⁷ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 145.

of endangered films. Although the flashier work of copying films to newer, more stable stock or digital means looks more active, conservation work is key to the preservation practices of an archive. The active forms of preservation seek to protect the materiality of the films. The devotion to maintaining and sustaining the original has created a cult devoted to the original which is upheld in certain archivist communities as the hallmark of quality preservation practices. Frick illustrates this dedication to the preservation of films on their original format by some archives, “the archives must continue to promote the preservation and projection of 35mm celluloid, Costa proposes, even if such a methodology encourages an almost fetishistic relationship to the medium, and even merit serious financial investment due to the Archives potentially "becom[ing] the producers of...necessary film stock.”¹⁸ This method has its limitations in terms of the number of films in a collection that can be serviced at a time due to high cost of this type of preservation.

As the digital age has expanded everywhere else, the film archive is still debating the role of digital conversion as a means of preservation. Although digital film has its own costs and complications, digital preservation shows greater promise in terms of creating access. When dealing exclusively with films on celluloid, the more a print of a film is played the more susceptible a print is to further damage—this has created an association of preservation and exhibition, a means of wider access, being in conflict. In Frick’s assessment of the adherence to the preservation of celluloid she points to the following complications,

Unfortunately, professionals working in moving image archives continue to struggle with moving beyond the now "traditional" binary opposition in which preservation poses an opposition to access...The decision to privilege celluloid as sacred is fraught with challenge, particularly when faced with an industry shifting

¹⁸ Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics*, 157.

quickly to a new medium and particularly as preservation is, itself, an idealized, unattainable construct.¹⁹

With the rise of digital storage and films being natively existing on digital formats the issue of digital preservation is becoming even more relevant. With a wide variety of methods and formats the right way to preserve films is in flux and now up to each archive's own mission on how they will preserve their own collection. The only absolute way to preserve films according FIAF guidelines is to, "protect [the world's moving image] heritage and to pass it on to posterity in the best possible condition and as the truest possible representation of the work of its creators."²⁰ With changes in the technology that is available to archives and to the public, the conversation about what practices constitute proper preservation will remain active. Regardless of individual practices any attempts to meet conditions of FIAF to preserve film heritage in the best possible condition, can be assumed, to be the ultimate goal of an archive.

ARCHIVES AS GATEKEEPERS

Preservation of the collection is a key marker for the designation of a film archive as an archive, but the archive generally has to engage in other activities, such as exhibition or at least some form of access, in order to receive support from the academic and other communities that it needs to continue its activities. In Gracy's brief history of film archives, it can be noted that many early institutions preferred titles like cinémathèque and filmoteca rather than archive—noting that this choice may have been linked to these organizations' focus on exhibition practices in addition to their collecting and preservation activities.²¹ Some of these organizations, like the Cinémathèque Française, had very robust exhibition

¹⁹ Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics*, 171.

²⁰ Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics*, 170.

²¹ Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 17-18.

programs for their collections that were the impetus for the organization existing. Gracy also found that, “to validate their own status as cultural institutions, film archives became gatekeepers whose primary activities were to collect and classify moving images.”²² To create support for this gatekeeping responsibility, Metro Goldwyn Mayer produced a short titled *Forgotten Treasures* about the value of archiving film as the Museum of Modern Art was practicing. *Forgotten Treasures* argues that the MoMA Film Library’s practices,

asserts uniqueness of film as a precious record of human activity and thereby implores that these decaying pieces of human experience be saved, that they be rescued from what Walter Benjamin once termed "the dustbin of history."²³

As I alluded to at the beginning of this section, film archives began as a means to establish that films, particularly silent films, were culturally important and part of a rich history of human expression.

In these early days, archives and their archivists strove to create a legitimacy and etiquette around film culture. Barry and her Film Library had to begin at the very basics of how an audience should act in a proper movie theater,

Such bad behavior occurred frequently enough that the Film Library's first curator, Iris Barry, had a slide projector permanently installed in museum's auditorium, equipped with a slide that read: "If the disturbance in the auditorium does not cease, the showing of this film will be discontinued." If after the film have been stopped and the warning slide displayed, the audience still did not compose itself, the house lights would come up and the show would be declared over.²⁴

In order for Barry to accomplish her goals of making the films in archive a part of the larger culture of art, she had to force audiences to treat the experience of film viewing with a certain decorum. In a similar way, Henri Langlois created a culture of film viewing based

²² Gracy, *Film Preservation: Competing Definitions*, 17-18.

²³ Haidee Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 32.

²⁴ Wasson, *Museum Movies: The Museum*, 2.

on the authenticity of the experience at his cinémathèque—refusing to show films with subtitles when they were not in the native tongue of the theater, or refusing music and inter-titles for silent features—which J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum in *Midnight Movies* herald as an early precursor to the cult film audiences’ viewing practices.²⁵ These practices were designed to elevate the films from common entertainment to something loftier. Furthermore, these practices were part of each of these archives attempts to make film screenings into an educational and enlightening experience for its audiences.

In the development of the film archive overtime, the focus has shifted from a wide approach to creating legitimacy for the new history of films to focusing in on particular areas of film history that an encyclopedic collection cannot emphasize. Newer archives are striving to create legitimacy for smaller sections of moving image history that their founders have felt were undervalued or excluded by the larger institutions in film archiving. In the ways that Barry and Langlois created environments for their generation of films to be elevated into a revered cultural sphere, the young archives are attempting to do the same with films they feel deserve this same status. The “orphan film” movement, non-narrative films like home movies and industrial films, stands as an example of the types of films that are being bolstered up in recent history for further inclusion into the new model of film archiving. In Frick’s *Saving Cinema*, she shares this hope for the future of orphan films,

More important for truly revisionist approach to American film history, orphans deserve not a segregated place, an addendum or sidebar in the history books, but rather equal standing next to the canonical texts, woven seamlessly into the patchwork of US film. Perhaps "orphaned" archival media in the first decades of the twenty first-century can be more like the Little Rascals: ragtag, slightly scruffy, with a vague notion of home (but one that doesn't intervene too severely) and imbued with a serious sense of wanderlust and adventurous spirit.²⁶

²⁵ J. Hoberman and Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York, N.Y.: Da Capo Press, 1991), 24.

²⁶ Frick, *Saving Cinema: The Politics*, 178.

The archive in its role as “gatekeepers,” as Gracy called them, creates this sense of home and serves as a marker for these films’ importance in the history of US film. As a more radical example, it is in the same spirit that advocates like Eric Schaefer have argued for the collection of pornography and other erotic films to be included in the film archive, “We talk much of ‘orphan films’ these days—those movies that have been left to turn to dust by uncaring producers, indifferent scholars, and overtaxed archives. Adult films are perhaps the loneliest orphans.”²⁷ Both of these movements are attempting to carve out a niche for themselves in the discussion of American film history, no longer satisfied with being passed over in favor of Hollywood and the narrative film. The archive has become a standard bearer for establishing that a type of films are worthy of being included in the canon.

Based on the works of prominent experts in the field of film archives there are three key elements that make a collection of films into an archive: collections built for cultural initiatives and not profit, a dedication to preservation, and acting as authorities on the history of film. The archive is established in order to assert the importance of its films to the history of film and the history of culture. In the next chapter, the American Genre Film Archive’s attempts to work within this framework of “film archive” will be examined by collecting the history of this archive and how it operates in its goals to promote genre films as culturally relevant and important

²⁷ Eric Schaefer, "Dirty Little Secrets: Scholars, Archivists, and Dirty Movies," *The Moving Image* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 80, accessed March 16, 2014, doi:10.1353/mov.2005.0034.

Chapter 2: A History of the American Genre Film Archive

Tim League, the founder of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, formed the American Genre Film Archive in 2009. League has built a reputation in the cinephile world by opening a chain of theaters in Austin, Texas that catered to film fans with screenings of classic films, exploitation films, film themed events, and new blockbusters. Although, highly successful in the avenue of exhibition, the decision to start an archive does not seem, at first blush, like an obvious extension of the cinema. The Alamo Drafthouse Cinema has a soft spot for the exploitation “genre” film of the 1960s-1980s, which first manifested in their film programming. The desire to found the American Genre Film Archive grew from League and his programmers’ fascination with the exploitation era of film. The intention of this chapter is to create a history of the American Genre Film Archive and its relationship with the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema and its other ventures, Drafthouse Films and Fantastic Fest. The Alamo Drafthouse does not have many officially documented sources of its history and policies; this lack of documentation is very much the case for the history of the American Genre Film Archive (AGFA). I have been able to comprise a history of the archive and its policies through interviews in news publications, interviews conducted with staff members, official website publications, and a needs assessment produced by Griffin Brown and John Schooley, Master’s students at the University of Texas at Austin School of Information, in 2012. This history is intended to create a timeline of events for the archives and establish the mission and priorities of the archive.

In 2009, the American Genre Film Archive was formed “by an international band of movie enthusiasts,” with the goal of integrating their individual collections of genre films into an archive.²⁸ There are varying stories about how League assembled the initial

²⁸ "About AGFA," American Genre Film Archive.

collection for the archive; in a behind-the-scenes featurette about the American Genre Film Archive on the Drafthouse Films release *Trailer War*, we see one story that can be regarded as official according to AGFA. The featurette places the origins of the archive with a collection of 200 “drive-in” films that League purchased sometime between 2000 and 2001 from a Midwest private film print collector. League found this collection through an ad he saw in a 35mm film collectors’ publication that he and the programmers at the Alamo Drafthouse monitored for rare prints.²⁹ The films were transported to Austin via overloaded commercial moving trucks, a recurring theme in the history of AGFA’s collecting. These films were then utilized by the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema for a weekly screening series, *Weird Wednesday*, that focused on screening exploitation, “drive-in” films.

The types of films in the initial 200-film collection, which AGFA has termed “genre” or “drive-in” films, are best defined as exploitation films. The archive defines genre films as “exploitation era of independent cinema—the 1960s through the 1980s,” according to their latest mission statement.³⁰ In older versions of the archive’s mission statement they have also indicated that the films were: low budget, lacking in stars for marketability of the film, and these films were made in service of salacious plotlines—common qualities attributed to exploitation films by scholars, like Linda Williams.³¹ The archive uses the term “genre film” interchangeably with “exploitation film” regularly. Eric Schaefer’s *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* is dedicated to the history of the earlier years of pre-1950s exploitation films, but it does provide some valuable explanations for the period of exploitation films that AGFA collects from the 1960s onward. Schaefer defines exploitation films as “derived from the practice of exploitation, advertising or promotional

²⁹ “Behind the Scenes at the American Genre Film Archive,” narrated by Lars Nilsen, *Trailer War*, produced by Drafthouse Films, Drafthouse Films, 2012.

³⁰ “About AGFA,” American Genre Film Archive.

³¹ Linda Williams, *Screening Sex* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 88.

techniques that went over and above typical posters, trailers, and newspaper ads.”³² In the earlier days of exploitation films, these films were low budget without the standard marketing practices of Hollywood pictures, these film gathered notoriety through creating sensation around their pictures. Exploitation films have had a long and varied history and in the 1960s a shift began to happen, “the term was modified to indicate the subject that was being exploited, such as for ‘sexploitation’ and ‘blaxploitation’ movies.”³³ To elaborate, sexploitation films were designed to exploit sexual subjects, such as, nudity and storylines related to sexual matters. Exploitation films from this era were also created as a direct contradiction to the Hollywood model that was unable to exhibit more sensational materials related to sex, drugs, and other scandalous subjects. These films carved a niche for themselves in grindhouse and arthouse theaters looking to fill their programming with low cost fare that dominated the exploitation film genre. These films come from a history built on subversion of the standard Hollywood film and positioned themselves outside of the mainstream film production and exhibition system.

Between 2000 and 2009, other genre films were acquired through individual and batch acquisitions by League and film programming associates, Lars Nielsen and Zack Carlson, at the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. Initially, these films were collected for the express purpose of being exhibited at the Alamo Drafthouse with no official plans for an archive. In 2009, the American Genre Film archive was born to create an official 501(c)(3) non-profit organization to operate the film collection under and conduct activities like film loaning under this moniker. At the commencement of the archive, AGFA had a simple mission statement, the archive was “dedicated to collecting, conserving, and distributing

³² Eric Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!: A History of Exploitation Films, 1919-1959* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 4.

³³ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 4.

the best classic and forgotten genre films, for the benefit of all humankind.”³⁴ AGFA has taken on the official position that they are collecting films that the larger film archiving community has not cared to extend the effort to conserve.³⁵ The mission of the archive does not explicitly state how it plans to conserve or preserve the films in its holdings. Conservation can be considered a passive form of preservation but AGFA does not have any active preservation plans for its collections and lacks formal policies, altogether, in regards to acquisition and conservation methods.³⁶

Recently, AGFA has made a move to implement a plan for how to actively preserve some of its more fragile prints. In response to the discovery of a rare print in the Kinsey Collection, the archive launched an Indiegogo online fundraising campaign to fund a 2K digitally transfer of the print. This new digital copy will allow AGFA to safely loan the film without causing further damage to the celluloid print. Promotional material for this fundraiser promotes the idea that this is the beginning of a new process to actively preserve the most fragile and desirable prints in the collection.³⁷ The only sort of collection policy that AGFA has in place is a collector’s motivation to grow and acquire more films with more diverse varieties of films represented in the archive. There are no set preferences for some genres over others but the collection does have a large amount of Asian produced films and those fitting within the kung fu genre due to some large donations and

³⁴"Main Page," American Genre Film Archive, last modified 2013, accessed February 11, 2014, <http://americangenefilm.com/>.

³⁵Marc Savlov, "Forgotten Films Find a Home," *The Austin Chronicle*, December 25, 2009, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2009-12-25/931306/>.

³⁶John Schooley and Griffin Brown, "American Genre Film Archive: Preservation Needs Assessment" (unpublished manuscript, School of Information, University of Texas at Austin, March 19, 2012), Pgs 4-5.

³⁷"The American Genre Film Archive." Indiegogo. April 25, 2014.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-american-genre-film-archive#home>

acquisitions.³⁸ AGFA is a collector's institution—focused on the growth of its collections through acquiring as much material as possible.

With an archive focused on collection building, the management of such a collection can quickly become ungainly. AGFA has such a problem when it comes to managing the titles in its collection and with allocating space for its film prints. AGFA operates on a system of disjointed inventories based on the locations the films are stored and collection by collection basis.³⁹ This system requires an insider's knowledge of the archive to locate films within these inventories. This prevents the creation of more easily accessible inventories to be made available to allied exhibition groups or researchers. The archive also does not maintain any sort of archive profile that is accessible to the public—films are requested for loan through an inquiry system managed by an Alamo Drafthouse projectionist who oversees the inventorying of films.⁴⁰ Most regular borrowers have an established relationship with the Alamo Drafthouse and are in regular contact with the film programmers at the Alamo Drafthouse through email and film programmer message boards. By means of this familiar knowledge with the Alamo Drafthouse, regular borrowers are able to access the insider knowledge of those who manage AGFA to ascertain if certain prints are in the archive. The Cinefamily, a nonprofit exhibition group in Los Angeles, is one such organization with a working relationship with the Alamo Drafthouse and AGFA. The relationship between Cinefamily and AGFA has resulted in joint produced shows, like a Shaw Brothers retrospective utilizing prints from AGFA's holdings.⁴¹ AGFA is able to create mutually beneficial lending relationships with other

³⁸ The collection donated by Dan Halstead contains a significant amount of kung fu films and in the collection profile for the Kinsey collection, there is a large concentration of kung fu films.

³⁹ Collections are based on the films that were acquired together. Such as the Halstead Collection of kung fu films are grouped by AGFA as one collection.

⁴⁰ Sebastian Del Castillo, interview by the author, Austin, TX, November 11, 2012.

⁴¹ "Shaw Nuff: A Shaw Brothers Retrospective," The Cinefamily, last modified December 2012, accessed February 23, 2014, <http://www.cinefamily.org/films/shaw-nuff-a-shaw-brothers-retrospective/>.

cinophile organizations because it can rely on the work and reputations of the programmers at the Alamo Drafthouse, who are intimately involved with AGFA and its collections.

An archive cannot operate on ambitions alone to raise the profile of the films in its holdings and maintain the funding necessary to continue its work. AGFA has a varied set of means for raising the funds it needs to operate the basic functions of an archive. Funds for the archive come, primarily, from special events called Reel One parties, sales of the Drafthouse Film release of *Trailer War* (2012), and, occasionally, donations. The Reel One parties serve a dual purpose for the archive: they are a time for the programmers and projectionist at AGFA to inspect some films in their holdings and an opportunity to raise funds for the archive. The parties consist of the first reels of four to five films to be inspected being screened for a general public audience, who pay a small admission fee to attend. After the first reels are all screened, the audience is given the opportunity to vote on their favorite film that they would like to see screened later that day in full. These parties have also allowed for the discovery of prints unknown to the programmers, in the past.

Alamo Drafthouse film programmers and projectionists conduct the work of inspection, loaning, and other activities because AGFA does not maintain a solely dedicated staff for its operation. The archive, usually, has only one or two individuals on its official payroll—an individual in charge of loans and inspection and a director of the archive who oversees all other concerns.⁴² The individuals on AGFA's official payroll always hold additional positions at the Alamo Drafthouse as well. Sebastian Del Castillo ensures loans are processed and inspected upon release and return. Del Castillo is also primarily employed as a projectionist for the Alamo Drafthouse. The director of the archive at the time of the Kinsey Collection acquisition was Sam Prime. Prime's main title and duties at the Alamo Drafthouse were to act as a film programmer. The rest of the archive's

⁴² Sam Prime, interview by the author, Austin, TX, November 9, 2012.

functions, such as organization, inventorying, and some inspection falls to volunteers, which include Alamo Draffhouse employees, community members, and student interns.

The initial collection, including the first 200 films, is stored at the Alamo Draffhouse Cinema Village location in north Austin. The archive occupies an attic-like space not solely dedicated to the archive that is also used for projectors for the four screens in the theater. The area is not temperature or humidity controlled in accordance with practices standard to a film archive.⁴³ The majority of films have also been stored in the same conditions that they arrived, primarily, meaning that the films are stored on metal reels, some of which are damaged from being dropped or rust, and/or in cardboard boxes. By 2012, the collection had grown to approximately 1500 films that were a combination of original acquisitions, AGFA acquisitions, and private collectors' holdings that AGFA stored and loaned on the collector's behalf.⁴⁴ Space soon came at a premium with the prints overwhelming the storage space of the Alamo Draffhouse Cinema Village location. Films began to be stored between shelves and on the floor of the original location. The holdings continued to grow through a donation of Hong Kong kung fu and horror films from the 1970s and 1980s donated by a Portland based film programmer, Dan Halstead, who acquired the films from a closed Vancouver grindhouse theater.⁴⁵

Upon the completion of the construction of the Slaughter Lane Alamo Draffhouse Cinema location, the Halstead collection, another collection of more modern Hong Kong films referred to as the Tai Seng collection, and the Kinsey collection would be stored in its attic projection space. This space is larger than the original Village location but has run into the same issues. This space has no separate temperature or humidity controls along

⁴³ Schooley and Brown, "American Genre Film Archive," 8.

⁴⁴ Schooley and Brown, "American Genre Film Archive," 5.

⁴⁵ Richard Whittaker, "Martial Arthouse," *The Austin Chronicle* (Austin, TX), June 28, 2013, Screens, accessed March 5, 2014, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/screens/2013-06-28/martial-arthouse/>

with space constraints limiting the amount of shelving available to film prints—resulting in films sometimes being stored on the floor and jockeying for space with other items that need to be stored at the theater. AGFA’s desire to grow and acquire prints has overwhelmed the logistical concerns of the archive regarding space and care of the prints.

With the holdings of AGFA being split between two locations and a lack of formal policies for creating records at AGFA, the current total count of prints is left to estimation. The AGFA website reports that the collection boasts over 3500 films in its holdings.⁴⁶ This estimation is technically true but given data from various sources the collection is most likely much larger than 3500 prints. A 2012 needs assessment estimates the original Village location films count at approximately 1500. An Austin Chronicle article about the Halstead donation adds approximately 1000 prints and internal document of the Tai Seng films put that collection at around 580 films.⁴⁷ My own work on the Kinsey collection holds that collection at 1,273 films. Adding all of these together the collection stands at approximately 4,350 prints.⁴⁸ This number bolsters the claims that AGFA is largest assemblage of genre film in the world, a point of pride for League,

Probably the only collection that's bigger than ours right now is Mike Vraney from Something Weird Video, but his is less of a traditional archive, and he doesn't loan out his films. So there's nothing even close to the size of what we have. In fact, the only other archive that's even close to ours is our good buddy Anthony Timpson in New Zealand...we're trying to take it into a whole new serious and professional level. As far as I know, we're now the largest genre film archive in the world.⁴⁹

Beyond private collectors, other archives do collect these films, as League notes, although not to the same degree that AGFA has aspired to do on. For example, UCLA Film and

⁴⁶ "About AGFA," American Genre Film Archive.

⁴⁷ Whittaker, "Martial Arthouse," Screens.

⁴⁸ This number is only an estimate due to the fact that the Village location holds other collectors films so it's entirely possible that between early 2012 when Brown and Schooley performed their assessment and 2013 when I collected my numbers there could have been fluctuations in total number of prints.

⁴⁹ Savlov, "Forgotten Films Find a Home."

Television Archive does contain some of the same film prints that AGFA has collected in the areas of sexploitation, blaxploitation, and kung fu films.⁵⁰ The Southern Methodist University G. William Jones Film and Video Collection has similar genres of films from an earlier exploitation film period than the AGFA collection. The Brunel University Cult Film Archive collected films beginning in the same period as AGFA through modern day cult films. The Brunel University Cult Film Archive has also added to the academic discussion of cult and exploitation films with the publication of two books and documentaries based on the archives film's and related print materials.⁵¹ AGFA is not different necessarily because of the films it has but because the sheer size of its collection and its dedication to exhibition. The archive is designed as a means of exhibiting the films in its holdings through cooperation with its parent, the Alamo Drafthouse, and allied exhibition groups. League has stated in interviews that exhibition is one of their key missions for creating the archive,

One of the issues that we've had with some but not all film archives is that they do preserve the films but it's not part of their mission to get those films seen. Our main goals are a) to make sure the films are preserved, and b) to make sure the films are actually seen by audiences in cinemas.⁵²

AGFA serves as a provider of films for screenings at both the Alamo Drafthouse and related exhibition spaces.

The archive also serves to offer films for promotion within the framework of the Alamo Drafthouse's other projects at Fantastic Fest and Drafthouse films. Fantastic Fest is a film festival focused on new and rereleased genre films that is held over eight days in September every year. The festival is held at an Alamo Drafthouse location and was

⁵⁰ Mark Quigley, "RE: [Research or Collection Inquiry] Sonney Collection of Exploitation Films," e-mail message to author, September 23, 2013.

⁵¹ "Cult Film Archive," Brunel University London, last modified September 7, 2011, accessed December 28, 2013, <http://www.brunel.ac.uk/arts/research/screen-media/the-cult-film-archive>.

⁵² Savlov, "Forgotten Films Find a Home."

cofounded by League. Drafthouse Films is the distribution branch of the Alamo Drafthouse. Drafthouse Films describes itself as “a curated brand of provocative, visionary and artfully unusual films new and old from around the world. Following the earnestly simple motto of “sharing the films we love with widest audience possible.”⁵³ League has stated that AGFA is a separate entity from the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema but as demonstrated in previous instances and through this example here the archive is densely interconnected with the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema through its theaters and other ventures. In particular, AGFA has collaborated with these two organizations in the distribution and exhibition of the feature film *Miami Connection* (1987) and, an assemblage of trailers, *Trailer War*. Both of these ventures were made from materials acquired and held by the archive and then given means of exposure through Fantastic Fest and Drafthouse Films. Aside from being distributed through Drafthouse Films, *Miami Connection* also had its premiere hosted by Fantastic Fest, complete with the original cast and a band performance from the film. *Trailer War* serves a markedly different role than *Miami Connection* in that *Trailer War* has part of its proceeds from its sales through Drafthouse Films returning to the archive. The collaborations of AGFA, Drafthouse Films, and Fantastic Fest serve as beneficial relationships in certain ways for all parties involved. For AGFA, the impetus for these arrangements is to complete the initial goal of the archive of giving greater exposure to the films in its holdings.

AGFA has since 2009 built itself on the ideals of building a robust collection of exploitation films and providing them with the opportunities to be exhibited. AGFA ensures the completion of these missions by working intimately with the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema and its other ventures. These qualities can be further illustrated by the case study

⁵³ Tim League, "What is the Alamo Drafthouse?," About, accessed January 21, 2014, <http://drafthouse.com/about>.

of the acquisition of the Kinsey Collection that was captured in the *Shipping Wars* episode “Frankenship of Horrors.” In the next chapter, AGFA’s policies and mission will be further examined by exploring the process by which the archive came to acquire such a large collection and how this particular collection fits into the larger schemes of AGFA.

Chapter 3: Collection Profile of the Kinsey Collection

The Kinsey Collection acquisition was the first resolute effort by AGFA to purposefully acquire a collection with a different genre of films in order to diversify the archive's holdings. Prior to the Kinsey Collection acquisition, AGFA's collection was a conglomeration of a variety of exploitation genres that were acquired by happenstance. The Kinsey Collection acquisition demonstrates AGFA's attempt to grow the archive in particular genres in order to optimize the variety of genres and prints represented in the collection. The Kinsey Institute acquisition stands out not just for the genres AGFA sought to add to the archive but also for the manner of which these films were acquired. This was the first developmentally minded acquisition carried out by AGFA in attempts to establish a precedent of seeking out specific films to address gaps in the current collection. In this chapter, I am going to explore the process by which the American Genre Film Archive acquired their collection of erotic films, which I have dubbed the Kinsey Collection, and the profile of the collection itself. The Kinsey Collection presents a rare opportunity to examine the practices and mission of the American Genre Film Archive as it made its first foray into establishing specific practices around its collecting procedures. By probing the narrative by which the collection found its way from a premier research institution of human sexuality to an archive focused on entertainment and novelty will give some insight on the multiple lives a collection of films can live based on the institutions that choose to house it.

The Kinsey Institute for the Research of Human Sexuality is a cornerstone of collecting and gives legitimacy to research materials related to human sexuality, including pornographic and exploitative films. Alfred Kinsey, the founder, began collecting these works to foster his own research after a realization that works related to human sexuality

were being neglected, hidden, or destroyed by the mainstream collecting institutions, such as, national archives and museums hindering his own work.⁵⁴ The Kinsey Institute has established itself as a premier source for researchers from various fields including biology, sociology, history, and studies related to arts and media by forging archives dedicated to various types of work from the scientific journals to 16mm stag film reels.

In 2011, the Kinsey Institute released a notice to other film archives that the Institute would be deaccessioning a collection of film prints. The call for deaccession presented the films in this donated collection as consisting of a variety of genres including: pornography, sexploitation, horror, and other exploitation films.⁵⁵ The Kinsey Institute has developed a broad collecting policy across a variety of mediums and topics to build a collection representative of the multitude of disciplines that have focused on sexuality over the course of human history; the film collection is just one of many areas the Kinsey Institute operates as an archive. As a non-profit organization they generally acquire a majority of objects through donation but the Institutes does have a precedent of purchasing works. In the late 1990s, a donation occurred that bequeathed 1,000+ 35mm film prints covering a wide variety of genres, including pornography, to the Institute. The collection is noted for coming from one anonymous donor to the Institute.⁵⁶ The Kinsey Institute was not actively seeking to increase their holdings of 35mm film prints but held onto the collection for approximately ten years. There is no data on if the Institute utilized any of the prints in this collection in any way beyond labels being attached to a portion of the

⁵⁴ The Kinsey Institute, "Origin of the Institute," The Kinsey Institute, accessed February 5, 2014, <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/about/origins.html>.

⁵⁵ Prime, interview by the author.

⁵⁶ Shawn C. Wilson, "Researcher Inquiring on Collection Policies," e-mail message to author, September 27, 2013.

collection indicating a partial inventory was completed at some point. It can be assumed that this collection was not utilized during the time it was held by the Institute.

The exact reasons for the deaccession of this film print collection from the Kinsey Institute has never been explicitly stated, but based on publicly acknowledged Kinsey Institute policies regarding their film and video collection some assumptions can be made about why this collection was released from their holdings. The Kinsey Institute collects both for the historical and cultural value of items, and ultimately the items must be useful to researchers.⁵⁷ For this reason, the Kinsey Institute has not restricted their collection to any particular formats in regards to their film and video collection. The Institute has acquired a wide breadth of filmic materials: 35mm, 16mm, VHS, DVD. To make these materials accessible to researchers, the Institute's policy is not to make formats other than VHS and DVD available.⁵⁸ This policy is for ease of viewing and reducing the chances for researchers to mishandle or damage rare or older film prints. This makes the collection of film prints strictly for preservation and conservation purposes related to very significant works that may only be available in a celluloid format or the Kinsey Institute retains one of the only remaining copies. Because the emphasis is not on the material composition of the films in their collection, the Kinsey Institute has no desire to hold onto films on 35mm if the Institute can make it available through other formats. Since the Institute does not actively work with 35mm prints and a significant portion of the films in the deaccessioned collection do not fit the archive's criteria of directly relating to human sexuality, this collection was a burden for the Kinsey Institute and keeping of storage facilities for these films would divert funds from other projects at the Institution.

⁵⁷ Shawn C. Wilson, "Researcher Inquiring on Collection," e-mail message to author.

⁵⁸ The Kinsey Institute, "Film Archive," The Kinsey Institute, accessed February 7, 2013, <http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/library/film-contents.html#access>.

When AGFA decided to purchase the Kinsey Collection the goal was to increase the number of prints in AGFA's holdings and to expand the repertoire of the archive by adding more sexploitation and expanding their definition of genre films to include pornography.⁵⁹ Due to the reputation of Kinsey Institute as a premiere collecting institution, AGFA felt safe purchasing the collection, mostly sight unseen, believing it would contain interesting and culturally significant prints in the realms of sexploitation and pornography. It cannot be ignored that the nature by which these films were being removed from the Kinsey Institute seems to have triggered a savior instinct that has guided past acquisitions—AGFA views itself as a sanctuary for films being neglected and ignored. In AGFA's collection building mindset, all of the films they collect are true orphans without homes. AGFA sees themselves as the only place for these genre films to be truly highlighted and valued in an archival setting that motivates them to zealously collect. The Kinsey Institute did not simply abandon the Kinsey Collection; it appears to be thoughtfully deaccessioned in service to the larger goals of the Institution but AGFA read this as another case of genre films being devalued and abandoned. Since the Kinsey Institute publicly stated that there was no place for these films at their archive through deaccessioning the collection, the acquisition satisfied AGFA's mission on two fronts: expanding their collection of genre films and taking in a collection that they deemed unwanted by a larger archive.

With this transfer two very different approaches to the preservation and presentation of pornography came face to face with each other. The Kinsey Institute was established in the 1950s with all of the burdens and misconceptions an archive focused on human sexuality one would expect them to face in regards to public perception and funding.

⁵⁹ Prime, interview by the author.

To combat these barriers to creating a successful collection, Alfred Kinsey was its number one advocate. He allowed himself to marvel at the novelty in some of the objects he collected but he would always bring discussions back to the historical or scientific value of having a particular item in his collection.⁶⁰ This emphasis on the intellectual values of these erotic artifacts and objects would help frame the way the Kinsey Institute would see its purpose and values. The Institute's collecting practices weren't salacious but intellectually driven. The Kinsey Institute views its collections as significant because these objects, texts, and materials are critical contributions to the research of scholars and scientists in furthering understanding of human sexuality. For example, pornographic films are collected because these films can contribute to researchers working in areas related to media and human sexuality. On the other hand, the American Genre Film Archive was begun to ensure that film prints of genre films could be located and accessed primarily for exhibition, not research. AGFA has established its focus as an archive on entertainment and on the commercial values of the film prints they possess. AGFA wanted to expand its holdings of sexploitation and pornography because these films are entertaining, titillating, and they represent filmmaking of an earlier era that can be read as nostalgic or campy. Although these two different methods do not have to be at odds they are vying for drastically different audiences and missions for utilization.

These differing goals would result in a souring of the relationship between the Kinsey Institute and AGFA when the Alamo Drafthouse, representing AGFA, appeared in the episode of *Shipping Wars* with the Kinsey Collection. For unknown reasons, The Kinsey Institute wanted to keep the details of this collection's deaccessing to the American Genre Film Archive a private matter. Some of the conditions of this transfer were that

⁶⁰ Wardell Baxter Pomeroy, *Dr. Kinsey and the Institute for Sex Research* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 17-19.

AGFA was not to identify this collection as having come from the Institute in any publications and press related to the use of the prints or in any Alamo Drafthouse promotional material regarding AGFA. AGFA was amenable to the terms as the inventories for the collection are not publicly available and films loaned are identified as being loaned by AGFA and not attributed to particular collections.⁶¹ Once terms were agreed upon, AGFA became the official caretaker of this film print collection, and the archive's attention shifted to the issue of transferring this large quantity of films to Austin on a budget.

Tim League made contact with the company uShip.com, the company followed on A&E's *Shipping Wars*, explaining what the collection was, emphasizing the "erotic art prints" as they would be billed on the show, and agreed to appear on the show in exchange for budget friendly shipping from Bloomington, Indiana to Austin.⁶² Outside providing a more budget friendly shipping option for AGFA to transport their newly acquired prints, this appearance on *Shipping Wars* acted as a national ad for the Alamo Drafthouse and their devotion to genre film screenings and preservation. The episode presents a down to the wire film transfer situation: the Alamo Drafthouse will be screening a rare sexploitation title they have acquired from an independent seller who has sold them his father's entire collection of "artful sexploitation pictures." The screening is in three days, making it three days to pack, ship, and deliver all the films from Bloomington to Austin. AGFA assumed they were still abiding by the rules of their agreement with the Kinsey Institute by: constructing a fictitious story for *Shipping Wars*, identified the Alamo Drafthouse as the purchasers of the films not AGFA, and they did not name the Kinsey Institute in any way

⁶¹ Prime, interview by the author.

⁶² Zack Carlson, interview by the author, Austin, TX, August 8, 2013.

and avoided showing any print cans or boxes with labels containing the Institute's name. Unfortunately, the Kinsey Institute did not view this television appearance as unaffiliated from the Institute or adhering to the quiet nature by which the Institute had requested the transfer be handled. This resulted in a severing of communications between the Kinsey Institute and AGFA. AGFA did not attempt to repair its relationship with the Institute, and acquiring documentation for the collection beyond what they already possessed was abandoned. The collection was now AGFA's and they could utilize it however they saw fit.

The severing of the relationship between AGFA and the Kinsey Institute has resulted in a lack of paperwork and provenance information for the collection. Although not entirely uncommon for films that find their way to archives, this was originally the type of collection that might have had some donation information and documentation of the history of the collection before it arrived at the Kinsey Institute. The institute only provided a loose inventory of the collection that appeared to have been compiled by either the previous donor or the Kinsey Institute with no effort made to document the entirety of the collection. Upon receiving the collection in Austin, AGFA performed its own inventory of the collection to ensure it was more accurate than existing records. Through researching the collection itself it is possible to reconstruct some of its history—namely, the timeline during which this collection was accumulated, possible sources for the film print collection, and where these films may have been screened.

The print titles, genres, and number of prints in this collection can illuminate some of the details about when and how the Kinsey Collection was assembled by its original collector. The collection consists of 1,273 individual prints.⁶³ The collection can most

⁶³ Incomplete film prints were included in this count because at the moment AGFA is keeping the reels. Also in an early decision following the acquisition some films that had multiple prints in the collection

cleanly be divided along the lines of Adult films and non-Adult film titles. The collection is largely comprised of 35mm prints of theatrical length for both the Adult and non-Adult prints. For the Adult films, the 35mm format and theatrical length suggest these prints screened in public venues such as adult theaters or second-run theaters and drive-ins for the sexploitation titles. There have been erotic themed films created ever since the advent of film technology, but the rise of the 35mm format for sexploitation and pornographic films did not occur until the 1960s and 1970s when changing social climates and the ubiquitous sexual revolution allowed for more sexual content to be screened publicly in the United States.⁶⁴ The collection also holds a few 16mm prints in the Adult film portion of the collection — a more popular format for pornographic films before the rise of adult theaters in urban areas during the 1970s. These dates of more liberated screening practices for pornography correspond with the release dates for a sizeable portion of the Adult films in the collection.

The majority of titles represented in both portions of the collection are in English or were the American distributions of foreign films, based on the alternate titles of certain films corresponding to their American releases. The adult portion of the collection features European erotic films and the other portion contains Hong Kong produced and American distributed kung fu titles. The Kinsey Collection's original collectors seem to have shown a dedication to collecting both the Adult and non-Adult portions of the collection.

The collection, although having a clear dividing point based on content, when it comes to the actual proportions of the collection can be divided differently based on the metrics used to measure the collection. Based on different evaluations of the Kinsey

were taken to another Alamo Drafthouse location to be used as “decor.” Unfortunately, no one had the foresight at the time to keep records of which prints were being taken and some were possibly split meaning a whole print exists but not in the same location.

⁶⁴ Eric Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature," in *Porn Studies*, by Linda Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 370-371.

Collection, a different image of the collection can be constructed. At the individual print level, the collection is divided more in favor of the non-adult film titles—513 total Adult film prints and 760 non-Adult film prints (Fig. 1).

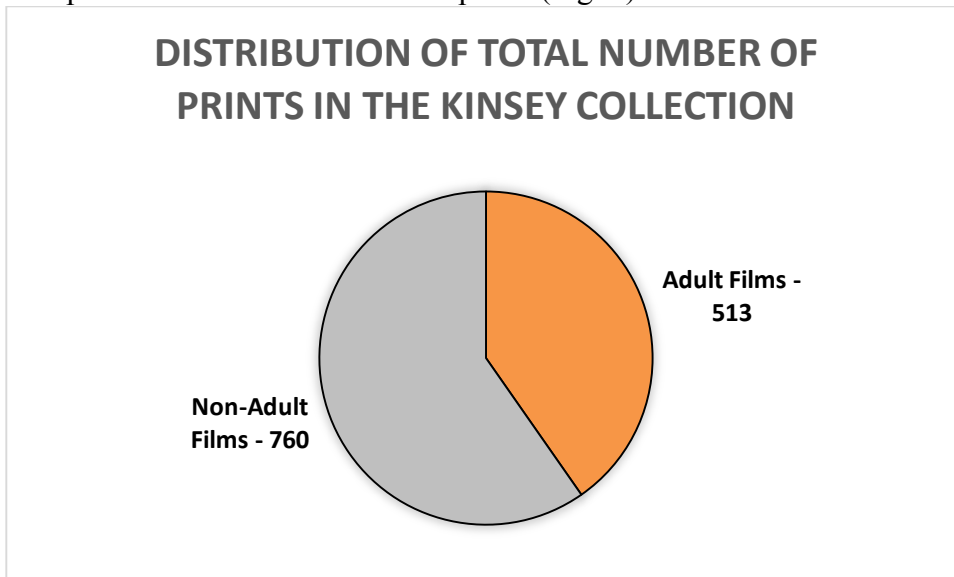


Figure 1: Distribution of Total Number of Prints in the Kinsey Collection; Data collected by Author.

At the individual print level it would appear that the non-Adult films that include genres like horror, kung fu, and blaxploitation are more prominent in the Kinsey collection than the adult film. By number of individual prints, AGFA is adding more of the same genres it already possessed through its other holdings. Although this paints an image of the collection being dominated by the non-adult titles, this data is skewed because of the presence of multiple prints of some titles. This is especially true of the non-adult films with many titles represented by multiple prints, for example, the title *Night Train to Terror* (1985), a schlock horror film, is represented seventeen times in the collection. In contrast, the adult film collection does contains some titles that are represented multiple times but the majority of the titles are only represented in one to two prints. When the collection data

is reconfigured to reflect only the number of individual titles represented, the distribution of the collection looks markedly different. When broken down by title, the collection divides perfectly evenly into adult films and other, non-adult, films (Fig. 2).

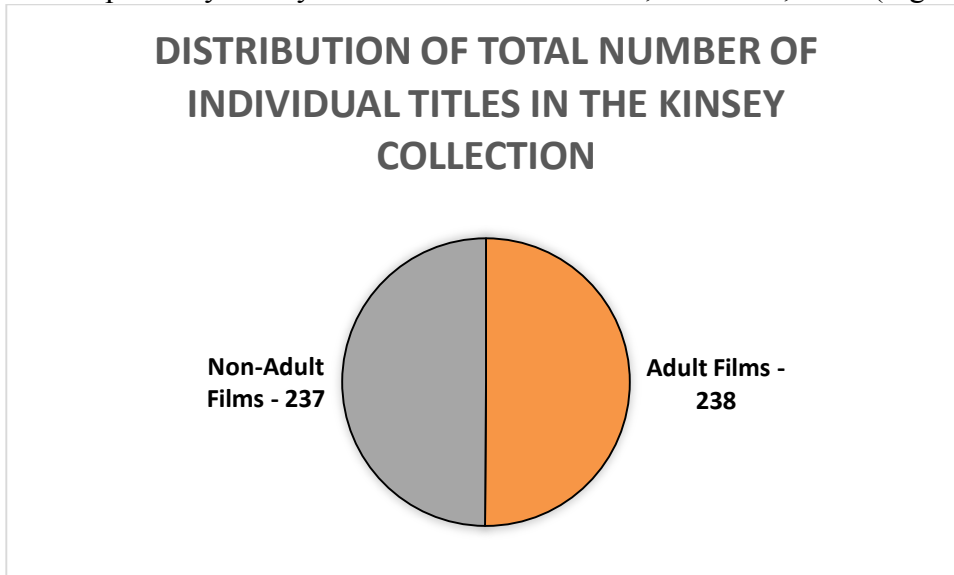


Figure 2: Distribution of Total Number of Individual Titles in the Kinsey Collection; Data collected by Author.

When the collection is analyzed on an individual title basis it makes AGFA’s position that this collection is their “artistic sexploitation” films collection a more reasonable assessment. Although the adult prints only make up more than half of the collection by one print, the adult films represent a novelty in the prints to be added to the overall holdings at AGFA. Although AGFA could decide to favor whatever films they want from this collection this even divide makes the collection fit with the reasoning that this collection was acquired for its unique adult titles and the collection did provide a significant number of these films to AGFA.

AGFA acquires films to build a diverse collection but the archive does mainly utilize their collection for exhibition and lending. Given that AGFA acquired the Kinsey

Collection to diversify its overall holdings, the distribution of the types of adult genres in the collection will determine the usability of the collection for AGFA. For my analysis of this portion of the collection I decided to use the following genre categories: Hardcore pornography, softcore pornography, and sexploitation.⁶⁵ These divisions are more ambiguous than they might appear at first blush. In order to understand these films and how they fit into AGFA's collecting mission, a brief history of the genres is necessary.

In Schaefer's work on 16mm softcore pornography, he clarifies that in attempting to historicize sexploitation and pornography, "the result has tended toward an overly rigid chronology: filmmakers jumping across a series of hurdles, offering greater explicitness with each leap on their way to a predetermined end—nonsimulated representations of sexual acts on screen."⁶⁶ Schaefer is arguing that the history of these films was a period of fluidity between the genres and that there was no predetermined end goal of "nonsimulated representations of sexual acts on screen." The creation of sexploitation and softcore features prior to the emergence of the hardcore feature existed on their own merits and was not forcibly stunted by censorship in their representations of sex on screen. There was never a moment when hardcore pornography came to mainstream attention and sexploitation and softcore pornographic features suddenly ceased to exist. Schaefer argues that, in reality, these film genres ran concurrently. Especially with regards to softcore 16mm genre and the 35mm sexploitation films in the 1960s, "the sexploitation film, which has been characterized as a dead end in the history of filmed pornography, competed directly with

⁶⁵For categorization purposes there is an additional category of unknown titles. The unknown films were categorized as such because the films were either too damaged to inspect and were missing any identification on the reel, the title was not able to be located in any databases or resources on pornography titles. These films were added to the adult category of unknown because the unknown title fit with adult film conventions or some of the print was able to be inspected and revealed adult subject matter.

⁶⁶ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 371.

16mm films, making the former instrumental in the development of hard-core feature.”⁶⁷ In considering these films and the increase of sexual performance and the explicitness of such performance on screen, Linda Williams remind readers of *Screening Sex* that, “the rise of sexual explicitness in the movies cannot be viewed as a transgressive exception to the rules of previous repression, but as the continuation...of a larger discursive explosion of perverse sexualities.”⁶⁸ Filmmakers in the US did not suddenly wake up in the 1960s to the idea of showing the nude female body on screen as a means of revolution rather with the larger cultural shift of permissibility around sexuality began to test the boundaries of presenting sexual performance on the screen. This creates an overlap in time periods for these adult genres and the sharing of elements between genres.

Sexploitation is the earliest of the adult genres that I am including in my history of adult entertainment because of the chronology of the Kinsey Collection indicates that these films are the oldest in the adult category. Although sexploitation can be read simply as a subgenre of exploitation films, it is generally considered to be both a genre subset within exploitation films and a predecessor to hardcore pornography. In Schaefer’s *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!* he gives this definition for sexploitation: “films that focused on nudity, sexual situations, and simulated (i.e. nonexplicit) sex acts, designed for titillation and entertainment.”⁶⁹ Sexploitation films contain a wide range of topics and themes from the early nudie cuties and nudest films to the roughies and women in prison genres that would follow it.

Although these films at their beginning may seem quaint and not very explicit, it is important not consider them as some sort of restricted or repressed genre. In Leon Hunt’s

⁶⁷ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 372.

⁶⁸ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 13.

⁶⁹ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 338.

British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation, he makes a plea at the beginning of his chapter exploring British sexploitation that these films are not “just a retarded pornography: held back by censorship – its cultural affiliations and modes of looking are significantly different.”⁷⁰ The early sexploitation film emerged from the collapse of the Hollywood studio system in the 1950s that helped minimize the amount of self-regulation required by film producers.⁷¹ The “nудie cutie” emerged from this newly liberated period. Films like Russ Meyer’s *The Immoral Mr. Teas* (1959) led the way of getting nude bodies on screen. As Schaefer clarifies, the films at this stage were focused on more modest exposures of the female form, “although female nudity provided the draw, it always remained discreet. Actresses were shot only from the waist up or from behind.”⁷² After this initial introduction, sexploitation film continued to develop for a lack of Hollywood films and European “art” films, with fewer restrictions on sexual representation on screen, to fill programs at theaters.

As the increase of exposure to sexploitation films created a market for 35mm production, a new market began to emerge out of the desire to create content on a faster and cheaper scale, the 16mm softcore film. Softcore can be defined as “featuring nudity and provocative situations up to and including simulated presentations of sex acts.”⁷³ The softcore film does not stand as thematically isolated from the sexploitation feature, the softcore feature inherently includes simulation of sex acts. The softcore film exhibition began to emerge in the late 1960s in San Francisco due to a host of cultural and industrial shifts within the sexploitation industry. Schaefer argues,

⁷⁰ Leon Hunt, *British Low Culture: From Safari Suits to Sexploitation* (London: Routledge, 1998), 92.

⁷¹ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 373.

⁷² Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 373.

⁷³ Schaefer, *Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*, 81.

By 1967, full frontal female nudity—usually limited to fairly brief flashes—was a regular feature of sexploitation films. That 16mm productions remained relatively anonymous and inexpensive and that sexploitation films were somewhat more daring...seems to have given 16mm filmmakers and other low end operators reason to push acceptable theatrical limits and make and show inexpensive beaver films.⁷⁴

These “beaver films” marked a shift in not just materiality of the films but of the content focusing on the more explicit, “the 16mm producers were compelled into a position of innovation to stay a step ahead of traditional 35mm sexploitation, which, in turn, had been forced into greater explicitness by the arrival of the beavers and increasingly sexy Hollywood fare.”⁷⁵ These films began to marry the concepts of narrative from sexploitation films and the explicitness of stag and other 16mm productions to create the softcore genre. Naturally, with the focus on competition to produce more and more provocative performances of sex on screen the hardcore genre began to emerge, “by 1970, the line between simulation and hard core was razor thin. When Marci of MJ Productions was asked to define hard core late in the year she used as her criterion a single word: ‘insertion.’”⁷⁶ That single act would become the difference between the 16mm softcore porn in small, storefront theaters and the emergence of the large scale “porno chic” two years later with the release of *Deep Throat* (1972).

When individuals use the term “pornography,” hardcore pornography is generally what they are referring to—it is the filmed performance of non-simulated sexual acts and highlighting the act of insertion. The film most notable in bringing feature length, 35mm hardcore pornography to the national consciousness was *Deep Throat*, a pornographic romp starring Linda Lovelace as a young woman who finds the secret to her pleasure, her clitoris, is hidden in the back of her throat. Williams argues in *Screening Sex*;

⁷⁴ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 377.

⁷⁵ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 381.

⁷⁶ Schaefer, "Gauging a Revolution: 16mm," in *Porn Studies*, 388.

With *Deep Throat*, feature length, hard-core, sound and color pornography emerged into the mainstream of American movies. Though it was hardly the first feature-length pornography to show on a big screen before gender-mixed audiences, it was the first to become a household name.⁷⁷

Although a true hardcore pornographic film, Williams argues that *Deep Throat* strove to present itself like any other film, creating a politically charged drive for audiences to see it. Williams states, “even those who disliked the film, such as Nora Ephron in *Esquire*, noted that it would be culturally derelict not to see it.”⁷⁸ *Deep Throat* and the hardcore pornographic films that preceded it created an environment in American cinema culture that facilitated the creation of adult theaters that screened feature length hardcore films and shifted 16mm softcore producers to the professional 35mm gauge – creating industry around the screening of sex. Although there were other theatrical hardcore pornographies produced at the same time, “*Deep Throat* and the phenomenon of “porno chic” thus represented the convergence of a number of technological, cultural, and economic factors that were making the screening of graphic sex almost necessary to sexual citizenship in the early 1970s.”⁷⁹ From this time period on through the 1980s, the creation of 35mm, feature length hardcore pornographies became an industry with wider distribution and exhibition in the United States.

Although Schaefer and Williams caution against a rigid, linear reading of the transformation of these genres, it has to be noted that each of these genres carries their own levels of restrictions due to their explicitness. Although *Deep Throat* in its heyday may have received screenings at smaller city downtown theaters not exclusively for the exhibition of adult films, hardcore pornography when publicly exhibited is generally restricted to adult theaters with strict age guidelines and given X or NC-17 ratings. Softcore

⁷⁷ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 120.

⁷⁸ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 125.

⁷⁹ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 127.

and sexploitation features do not always have these same ratings restrictions and with the passage of time some sexploitation features would show no more skin than a standard R-rated blockbuster. These differences are key in understanding how AGFA can integrate these different films given their varied restrictions into the mission of the archive.

The adult portion of the Kinsey Collection is slanted heavily in favor of the hardcore features, with 122 prints out of the total 238 prints. This means that the hardcore features dominate slightly more than half of the total adult films acquired by AGFA (Fig. 3).

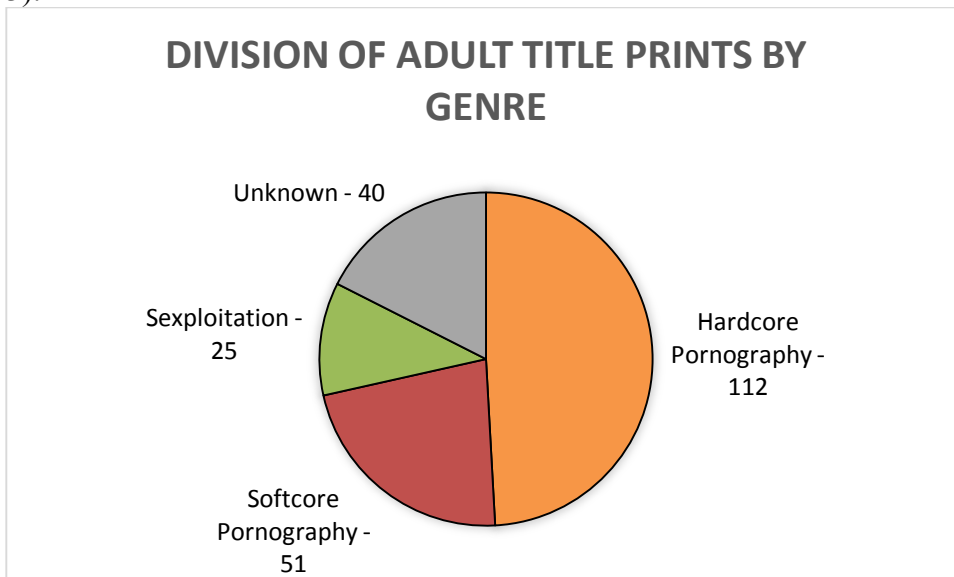


Figure 3: Division of Erotic Title Prints by Genre; Data Collected by Author

The most obvious categories for inclusion into AGFA are the sexploitation and softcore films because of their established relationship with exploitation films. These films are regarded as sensational but rather harmless since they do not depict actual sex acts. These films are safe to screen at typical genre film events that the Alamo Drafthouse and other exhibitors AGFA regularly loans to present. In this acquisition, the number of softcore and sexploitative titles are dwarfed, at 76 combined titles, to the 122 identifiable hardcore

pornographic prints.⁸⁰ Although not as large a slice of the total Kinsey Collection, 76 prints is a sizeable amount to add to the overall archive holdings. AGFA has been able to accomplish the goal of growing the collection not just in size but in diversity of titles through the acquisition. The sexploitation and softcore films will have ample opportunities to be screened at Weird Wednesdays and loaned to other exhibitors. The exhibition of these films began very soon after they were acquired, with Weird Wednesday screenings of the Kinsey Collection prints of *Swinging Naked Stewardesses* (1971) and *Jabber Walk* (1977), two sexploitation features. The hardcore films represent a conscious rebellion against collecting only what is in good taste to screen in a theater but their survival in the archive has yet to be determined.

When choosing to acquire the Kinsey Collection, the members of AGFA involved in the acquisition were aware of the hardcore pornography it included and felt the siren call of the savior mantra for these neglected films. In spite of this acknowledgement that they would be adding a significant amount of hardcore pornography to their holdings, they did not have a plan in place for how the archive would actually utilize the films. This is one of the cruxes in archiving hardcore pornography—it is difficult to ensure that these films receive equal opportunities to be incorporated into the plans for access as described by the archive's mission, especially one like AGFA's which focuses so heavily on exhibition. As of now, AGFA has no plans to mass deaccession the hardcore pornography prints, but they do not have the same opportunities as the other films in this collection. These films can be loaned out to specialized events and screenings focused on pornography but these are not as frequent as events focusing on other exploitation genres. The conservation practices of

⁸⁰ With 40 additional unidentified prints the numbers could surge even higher for the hardcore pornography count or even the playing field for the softcore and sexploitative titles.

AGFA favor films that are exhibited, so as these hardcore features fail to gain exhibition opportunities, the prints will not receive care that will preserve them.

Chapter 4: Is AGFA an Archive?

It takes more than labeling an institution an “archive” for it to be an archive. To be considered an archive, an institution must exhibit certain qualities: be either non-profit or commercial, have a collection building policy, be dedicated to preservation of their collection, and serve as gatekeepers regarding the etiquette and values assessment in the wider film culture. AGFA is attempting to establish an archive dedicated to genre films in order to include them into the canon of films worthy of being collected and preserved. AGFA has not followed a traditional model for creating an archive to serve this purpose. AGFA’s intimate link with the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema creates an unusual set of conditions for this archive to operate under. This interweaving of resources, interest, and profit motives have influenced the way that AGFA has developed and made its inclusion into the world of film archives complicated. In some aspects, AGFA mirrors archives of the era that Langlois and Barry emerged from in that they view collection building as paramount to the success of the archive. In other ways, AGFA more closely mirrors a lending library for exhibitors and a pool of films for Drafthouse Films to consider for distribution. AGFA is not a traditional archive. Through its interconnected work with the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema and its subsidiary projects AGFA has created its own model with its own positive and negative attributes. The American Genre Film Archive represents a hybrid model between the non-profit and commercial archive that focuses on gatekeeping activities through collection, exhibition, and distribution of titles while still building a dedication to preservation.

Tim League has insisted since the creation of AGFA that the archive is a completely separate entity from the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema. The archive, in theory, is supposed to exist for its own sake, to serve the cultural good and be for the expansion of the types of

films represented in film history. League's goal with AGFA, on the surface, is to give these disreputable films that have been labelled as commercial garbage a recognized reputable space to call home—an archive. Like archive founders in the past, League was attempting to build a space for these film prints to gain respectability and give access to those who would want to screen them as well. There are obvious areas where there is overlap between the Alamo Drafthouse and AGFA: staffing, storage space, and regular screening venues, but this is only the tip of the iceberg with regard to their collaborations. In attempts to create greater access to the collection that is held by AGFA, League and the Alamo Drafthouse have created links between the non-profit aims of the archive and the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema through Drafthouse Films and Fantastic Fest, which resulted in a non-profit/for-profit hybrid. The American Genre Film Archive serves as the well of material both for screenings at events like Fantastic Fest and for prints reproduced and distributed through Drafthouse Films. This type of hybrid work can be best encapsulated in the discovery and rerelease of *Miami Connection* (1987).

NON-PROFIT/FOR-PROFIT HYBRID

The cross-promotional power of Drafthouse Films, Fantastic Fest, and the American Genre Film Archive and its blurring of industrial lines came to a head with the re-release of *Miami Connection*. This film was a huge flop upon its release in 1987 and there is no proof it was ever screened outside of Miami, where Y.K. Kim, the director, resided. The film was a first time filmmaking effort by taekwondo master Y.K. Kim. His goal was to make a film that displayed his love of taekwondo and a 1980s sensibility

towards saying no to drugs.⁸¹ The film tells the story of a band of young men called Dragon Sound who perform music together and are also taekwondo masters. Through a series of events, Dragon Sound must take down a ninja drug-selling gang in Miami for the safety of their community. The movie features campy fight scenes, overly sincere bonding moments between the members of Dragon Sound, and 1980s synthesizer filled music breaks performed by Dragon Sound. The film was shelved, forgotten, and decaying in obscurity after its release in 1987. *Miami Connection* fits the narrative of the forgotten film nearly lost that the Alamo Drafthouse and AGFA cherishes.

Miami Connection was purchased by Zack Carlson as one print in a lot of unknown films from eBay for AGFA's growing collection. The first reel of *Miami Connection* was screened at a fundraiser AGFA Reel One Party and was instantly voted an audience favorite to receive a full screening later that same day.⁸² Upon watching the entire film, Carlson and others associated with the Alamo Drafthouse took it upon themselves to try and acquire the rights to distribute this unknown film that charmed them. After initial hesitation from Kim, who initially thought calls about acquiring the rights to the film were a joke, the rights were acquired and Drafthouse Films moved to digitizing the film and distributing it in 2012.⁸³ Fantastic Fest 2012 became the setting for the premiere of *Miami Connection*. The film would premiere at the festival with the Drafthouse Films team accompanied by members of AGFA to introduce the film and tell their story of discovering the print by pure serendipity. In this situation Drafthouse Films and AGFA were presented as a united force in the effort to save an obscure film from the dustbin of history. The Drafthouse team also

⁸¹ Richard Whittaker, "'Miami Connection' Connects After 25 Years," *The Austin Chronicle* (Austin, TX), December 12, 2012, Picture in Picture, accessed March 4, 2014, <http://www.austinchronicle.com/daily/screens/2012-12-12/miami-connection-connects-after-15-years/>.

⁸²Whittaker, "'Miami Connection' Connects After," Picture in Picture.

⁸³ Carlson, interview by the author.

invited Y.K. Kim and several of the actors from the film to be present at the premiere.⁸⁴ The Alamo Drafthouse further undertook to turn the event into a full-blown spectacle by hosting an after-party for the film. The party featured a Dragon Sound band reunion with Tim League as master of ceremonies, sporting promotional Dragon Sound sleeveless t-shirts modeled after costumes from the film.⁸⁵ This was a party not only for the film itself, but also the legend of pulling a film from absolute obscurity and making it a phenomenon.

Miami Connection represents the penultimate cross-promotional Alamo Drafthouse experience. To reiterate the chain—the film was bought and screened by the American Genre Film Archive, Drafthouse Films picked up the film for distribution in theaters and Video on Demand, DVD, and Blu-ray market, and the film had a premiere event through Fantastic Fest 2012. The Alamo Drafthouse was able to have *Miami Connection* taken from unknown "lost" film to a mini sensation entirely in house. Through premiering the film at Fantastic Fest the Alamo Drafthouse brand was able to turn the rerelease of a film no one had ever heard of into a top ticket at their own film festival. This cross-promotional event also stands as the ultimate representation of AGFA's goals in the web of the Alamo Drafthouse brand.

The archive was not created for the express purpose of preserving or conserving film, but as a way of preserving through the act of exhibiting these films and promoting their distribution to larger audiences than the Austin theaters alone can reach. In this sense, AGFA endeavors to preserve the films culturally as well as physically. Through working relationships with Drafthouse Films and Fantastic Fest, the archive is able to guarantee these goals are met; the films in their collection get a larger audience than a one-night

⁸⁴ According to Carlson who invited the guests, several did not believe the sincerity of the event and honestly thought they were on some sort of prank show like MTV's *Punk'd*

⁸⁵"Fantastic Fest - Dragon Sound Reunion 'Against the Ninja,'" Fantastic Fest, video file, posted by Fantastic Fest, September 23, 2012, accessed March 5, 2014, http://fantasticfest.com/videos/entry/fantastic_fest_dragon_sound_reunion_against_the_ninja.

screening can bring. The incestuous relationship between AGFA, Draffhouse Films, and Fantastic Fest blurs the lines between the non-profit and the for-profit roles of the archive. Although the archive does appear to operate on its own for funding to care for its films and oversees its own inspections and fundraising through Reel One Parties, the threads of exhibition and access to AGFA's collection are heavily interwoven with the Alamo Draffhouse. The film was plucked from the archive to be a project for Draffhouse Films and Fantastic Fest. Although, AGFA had their logo on trailers, credits of the released film, and promotional material cites that the materials for the release were sourced from the archive there are no clear profits or direct benefits gained by AGFA. The archive is left holding up a literal non-profit role in the development of these projects. The archive provides the efforts for discovering and maintaining the films to be cherry picked by the other Alamo Draffhouse avenues for the actual work of digital preservation to be provided to a film. This involvement of the Alamo Draffhouse and its ventures is not completely zero sum for AGFA. This fluid relationship absolves the archive of some of the more taxing issues an archive normally would have to contend with. AGFA is absolved of the responsibilities of trying to find storage space for its ever-growing collection and benefit from the established audience base attached to the Alamo Draffhouse. This creates a complicated relationship because, at this point in the archive's development, Draffhouse Films and the Alamo Draffhouse dictate the larger projects for AGFA outside of its lending program. This blending of directions and purposes leaves the autonomy of AGFA as an archive in question.

COLLECTORS AS ARCHIVIST

With the blurred lines between the Alamo Draffhouse and AGFA it can be hard to delineate in practice where the efforts of the archive begin and end. The only clear demarcation for AGFA is the collection—the collection is solely the archive’s responsibility. Since its inception, the American Genre Film Archive has practiced collection building almost exclusively over focusing on efforts to preserve the films already in its possession. This process of almost obsessive collecting is a hallmark of earlier archive founders when they were establishing their collections. For AGFA, like other archives before it, the purpose of the archive is to amass an impressive collection before taking into consideration how to hold on to these films for the long term. As I have discussed earlier, the collection has outpaced the amount of space the archive has been allotted by the Alamo Draffhouse but this obstacle may not refocus the archive’s mission. The archivists of the past amassed large collections because they were attempting to save what they feared was being lost and attempting to build a catalogue of films to build respectability for their cause. AGFA is attempting to follow the same formula but is willfully ignoring lessons that have been learned by these now established archives in regards to preservation measures that should be occurring simultaneously with the work of collection building.

When film archives began, the founders were attempting to take a commercial product that was being destroyed and discarded and elevate it to something worthy of collection. It can also be argued that film fanatics were the catalysts for this reinvention of the way culture viewed films, and their devotion to the product led to them taking their personally amassed collections to the public. James Card’s fanatic devotion to silent films resulted in his drive to exhibit them, “obsession added to the normal impulse to collect soon pushed me far over the edge...The critical added dimension was the proselytizer’s

determination to inflict his enthusiasm on others.”⁸⁶ Through that fanaticism he amassed a collection of silent film prints, and he was able to share this obsession for silent films with those who shared a similar fascination. League and the other founders at AGFA are driven by extremely similar desires. League and his cohort at the archive are bounded together because of their devotion to the content of the collection but also the materiality of it. In this modern archive these collectors amass their collection not just to save the content for posterity but because they believe the 35mm film print is a salient medium of film and worthy of collection as well. The film archive has been established as the place where a fan’s obsession can be legitimized as part of cultural heritage.

With the conviction that the films in their collection are worthy of being considered cultural heritage, AGFA is acting through sheer volume of content and ability to screen large numbers of films to assert themselves as an authority in the area of genre film history and importance. League’s number one claim to the value of the archive is because of the quantity of the number of prints that is has in its possession. The archive isn’t argued to be valuable for the prints individually—official documents and material on the archive do not emphasize crown jewels of the collection—the value is locked in the continual accumulation of prints—the possibility that there could be a rare jewel in the stacks.

Many archivists who have come before League and AGFA have attempted a similar approach to building authority in their field. G. William Jones claimed that his urge to collect was like that of Langlois, “as Director of the Archives, my principle of collection has always been the same as that of the late Henri Langlois... ‘If as Director of the Archives, my principle of collection has always been the same as that of the late Henri Langlois...‘If it’s on celluloid, we want it.’”⁸⁷ An indiscriminate collecting policy is

⁸⁶ Card, *Seductive Cinema: The Art of Silent*, 15.

⁸⁷ Jones, *Black Cinema Treasures: Lost*, 13.

comforting to these archivists because they are assured that they did not miss the opportunity to possibly find a jewel, a rare print. As Langlois once commented on his own eccentric collecting habits he could not risk the chance of losing something precious just because it didn't suit his own tastes at the time. While acting as authorities in their area of collection, the collectors are absolving themselves of having to act on taste and distinguish important works from lesser works. Part of the duties of an archive is to act as a gatekeeper—through the curation of the collection an archive asserts its authority. AGFA has been attempting to avoid the issue of curation because that would require them to evaluate their taste hierarchies as collectors and consider how that weighs on their acquisition policies. AGFA is able to claim they are neutral and all films are equal.

Mass collecting policies are a complex issue for archivists— it makes their archive capable of standing as experts by the sheer volume of their collection, but it can also act as a burden when it becomes too ungainly to control and regulate. Overtime, certain parts of the collection will emerge as more valuable; more worthy of the archives efforts to preserve these particular prints while the rest of the holdings can languish without resources. AGFA is still a young archive, but it is starting to show signs of this course. There are other archives that have faced this issue and are struggling to work past it. Although Langlois and the Cinémathèque Française stand as a classic example of this problem, on a smaller scale, a modern example can be found in G. William Jones' collection at Southern Methodist University. Jones will be remembered for his contribution to the history of black silent film for his work on the recovery and restoration of the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection, but his archive holds much more than that collection. After Jones' death, the archivists who would follow him would have to contend with a large and disjointed collection. This is a precursor to the sort of path AGFA is headed down if they continue to refuse to act as arbiters of their own archive.

The SMU G. William Jones Film and Video Collection is located within the SMU library system and is held within the Meadows School of Fine Arts Library. The Collection is classified as a special collection within SMU's libraries and receives no funds from SMU's operating budget; thus, it operates primarily on grants and donations.⁸⁸ Despite this lack of financial support, they do not operate entirely as their own entity as they are still subject to policies and procedures the university library system enforces on special collections. The archive was founded in the 1970s as the Southwest Film Archive by Dr. G. William Jones, who acted as an outspoken advocate for the university to host its own film and video archive and to be active in collecting and advocating for researchers to utilize the collection. The collection was renamed the G. William Jones Film and Video Collection in honor of his work in 1995. According to its website, the archive is host to some 9,000+ films prints and negatives, 3,000+ videotapes, and a host of other materials. The physical archive storage for the prints and videotapes in the collection are located in a cold storage vault on the SMU campus.

When the archive began in the 1970s and 1980s it had a loose collection policy based around Dr. Jones' interests and the goal of accumulating a large variety of materials. Under Jones' direction, the archive actively collected anything on celluloid it could acquire.⁸⁹ Due to this open collecting policy, Jones and his archive were similar to AGFA in that they filled the role of taking in abandoned films without a clear home. This is how the Jones Special Collection came to be the holders of their most prized collection, the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection.

⁸⁸ Amy Turner, interview by the author, Southern Methodist University Dallas, TX, January 8, 2014.

⁸⁹ After the passing of Dr. Jones and with limits to the archive's space and budget the archive has made efforts to make a collection plan. Turner, interview by the author.

The Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection is a significant collection for the SMU archive because of its historical importance in representing the early work of pioneering Black filmmakers at the beginning of cinema history. These films were found in a warehouse in Tyler, Texas in 1983 and were sent to the SMU G. William Jones Collection, then the Southwest Archive, for preservation. The Collection describes,

The Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection comprises 6 short subjects, 9 features, and a set of newsreels, all produced between 1935 and 1956. The African-American films include comedies, dramas, news, and musical performances, and were made outside the Hollywood system by pioneering directors and producers such as Oscar Micheaux, Spencer Williams, and William Alexander.⁹⁰

The archive's collection benefits greatly by being the sort of archive that would walk into a warehouse of abandoned films and take what was available. By agreeing to accession this collection Jones, was able to find something of value—a possible lost gem—in a mass acquisition. This valuable collection did come with its costs. These films were on nitrate stock and were transferred to safety stock in 1985 for preservation, a costly process for severely aged and neglected nitrate. Jones wrote a book about the films in the collection in 1991, *Black Cinema Treasures: Lost and Found*. In the early 2000s these films would be digitized and made available through a DVD set. In 2011, these films were made even more accessible through the uploading of this video content online.⁹¹ Due to the historical significance of these films, there were great efforts made to research and give greater access to these films. This led to the acquisition of grants and donations to ensure this work was completed at every step of the process from transfer to safety stock to digitization. Without being able to make the case for these films' importance to the archive and to the wider

⁹⁰ "Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection," SMU Digital Collections, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://digitalcollections.smu.edu/all/cul/ttb/>.

⁹¹ Peter Simek, "SMU Releases Tyler Black Film Collection, Offers Content Online," *D Magazine*, March 3, 2011, accessed March 11, 2014, <http://frontrow.dmagazine.com/2011/03/smu-releases-tyler-black-film-collection-offers-content-online/>.

educational community, the archive would not have had the funds to transfer the films to a DVD format or to an online digital access model.

Unlike AGFA, the SMU archive never sought out to collect Drive-In and sexploitation titles specifically, but due to their wide collection policy have amassed a significant collection of these films nonetheless. The Jones Collection has focused its acquisition efforts on the needs of faculty members who offer courses on topics covering exploitation films, pornography, and other related course work the Meadows School of Fine Arts needs for course screenings. The film prints have been collected with a little less direction. When the Tyler, Texas Black Films were discovered there were hundreds of other films in the warehouse as well, and the SMU Collection accessioned some of these films, including some of the exploitation and sexploitation films in the collection. This portion of the collection included classics of the exploitation genre like *Marihuana* (1936).⁹² With their open policies at the beginning of their archive they also acquired other collections that would bring in more exploitation films into the archive. This brought in some quintessential exploitation films including several prints of the sexploitation classics *Mom and Dad* (1945), *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini* (1965), and *The Loves of Cynthia* (1972).⁹³ By virtue of having an early open collection policy, the SMU Collection has been able to acquire a wide swath of films.

As demonstrated by the efforts to preserve and give access to the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection, the cost of preserving older, neglected films is high. The value of the Tyler, Texas, Black Film Collection is obvious—the prints were rare, once presumed to be lost, and from a culturally significant era and genre of filmmaking. The prints are valuable to many areas of research beyond film history, making a wider variety of funding resources

⁹² Turner, interview by the author.

⁹³ Collection profile of G. William Jones “Drive-in Films.” Turner, interview by the author.

available for these films' preservation. The other films in the collection without the obvious academic and historical values of the Black Film Collection confront issues in funding preservation efforts. The exploitation films are able to benefit from some of the fringe resources from the more reputable collections. Due to the importance of the Tyler, Texas Black Films Collection Dr. Jones was able to lobby for space and some resources to be allocated to the archive from the university.⁹⁴ Most important among the resources was the creation of cold storage space that could serve all the films that the archive has in its holdings. Although not all films have received full preservation treatment, they are at least stored in a temperature and humidity controlled facility.

Outside of the fringe benefits from the better-resourced collections, the exploitation films and others that do not fit into the high-profile collection face several hurdles in becoming more accessible to researchers and others who would work with a moving image archive. When using the SMU Film and Video Collection website, a user is quickly confronted with the fact that a general film inventory is not accessible beyond the digitized collections. Only the significant collections are listed on the website, focusing on the Tyler, Texas Black Film Collection, the Gene Autry collection, and an early Hitchcock print. From this synopsis it would be difficult for a researcher to ascertain the variety of films present in the archive. Footage searches are only conducted on a request basis. These footage searches are not full inventories but searches for specific titles and genres, which are noted from previous donation records as being in the collection. Grants and donations dictate which collection will be inventoried and inspected. Greater access to these sorts of funding can arise from research interest and opportunities presented by the collection. The less significant collections are stuck in a loop of being ignored and not being able to be

⁹⁴ Turner, interviewed by the author.

granted full access to researchers. Without the research interest and grant funds to justify it, less “significant” portions of the SMU Collection holdings go un-inventoried, and without these inventories researchers will not be aware of the resources available at the archive.

The loop of access, funding, and research feeding into each other is an issue that AGFA is headed into with its own collection but in a different way. The collections and prints with the most promise to be of value to Drafthouse Films for projects or to be rented by other venues for screenings will be the ones that receive the most resources. Unlike a university archive that is driven by researchers and academic interests, AGFA’s motivations are further complicated by its non-profit versus profit driven ventures. A large number of AGFA’s collection of exploitation film trailers were digitized because they were able to be distributed by Drafthouse Films as the DVD/Blu-ray *Trailer War*. Similarly, because of limited staff, prints are generally only inspected and cleaned when they are to be loaned or returned from a loan. AGFA also lacks a public film inventory for browsing for titles, again, limiting access to those outside of the Alamo Drafthouse’s inner circle from making efforts to access films in the collection. With limited access, the number of films inspected for conservation purposes is a small percentage of the total holdings of AGFA.

Conservation are beginning to change at AGFA as it launches its first campaign to actively preserve a rare and fragile print that was discovered in the Kinsey Collection. When researching the Kinsey Collection for this paper, several prints with promise of being rare or in good condition were identified and the regular AGFA staff was notified that these prints should be inspected. Once inspections took place, a print of *The Astrologer* (1975) was identified. This film turned out to be rare and of interest to regular partners with AGFA which has spurred AGFA to launch an Indiegogo fundraising campaign to acquire the funds

for transferring the fragile print: “The mission is to complete 2K transfers of these endangered titles, and then create digital duplicates... While AGFA is still dedicated to 35mm presentation, we want to make digital copies available of the rarest of the rare in our collection until full restorations can be made.”⁹⁵ This new project, if it takes off, could represent a transition for the archive to designing a preservation plan that could dramatically change the future of the archive.

The past lack of preservation policies brings AGFA’s status as a true film archive further into question. As we have seen, Gracy and Frick both contend that one of the greatest defining features of an archive is its dedication to the preservation of its collection. The method of this type of preservation is up for debate and may change based on the films and technology available to the archive. As Frick notes, there is a cult of dedication to the preservation of the original materiality of film prints within many archives. If the archive only views preservation as the maintenance and continuance of these films on celluloid film stock it can sway what options an archive sees as viable for the preservation of its collection. AGFA is dedicated to this sort of material devotion, part of their mission statement is to give access to these films on their original celluloid.

In the past, AGFA has not been opposed to pursuing digital means of preservation, as demonstrated by *Miami Connection* and *Trailer War*. They do limit this activity only to projects Drafthouse Films is willing to undertake. *The Astrologer*’s digital transfer project could launch an active preservation plan for the archive if it succeeds. Although as illustrated by the statement, “while AGFA is still dedicated to 35mm presentation, we want to make digital copies available of the rarest of the rare in our collection until full restorations can be made,” AGFA does not view digital copies as an end goal of their

⁹⁵ Alamo Drafthouse, "The American Genre Film Archive," Indiegogo, last modified April 24, 2014, accessed April 25, 2014, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-american-genre-film-archive#home>.

preservation process. While making digital copies would be an acceptable means of building a preservation plan for the collections at AGFA, without proper passive preservation facilities AGFA's plan to make new 35mm prints will not be a feasible method of preservation. AGFA has no firm preservation plan; at best, they intend to offer passive preservation, or conservation, to the majority of the collection. As demonstrated by the Kinsey Collection, AGFA has not made plans on how to handle mishandled, damaged films. AGFA has especially not considered how to make the time and space for caring for films that do not show potential for being frequently borrowed through their lending program. This leaves some portions of AGFA's collection only marginally less vulnerable than when they were residing in storage units and abandoned theaters.

Is AGFA an archive in the truest sense of the term? In terms of building a collection and creating terms by which they can create opportunities for the exhibition of that collection, AGFA succeeds and appears to be using an archive sensibility to foster growth and access. This archivist sensibility begins to waver in terms of curtailing collection growth to match the resources and goals of the archive. AGFA also has the issue of being intimately tied to the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, Drafthouse Films, and Fantastic Fest, which creates doubts about the autonomy of the collection. Without autonomy to operate as an independent archive, without the commercial pressures presented by these other avenues, AGFA can never truly create its own separate mission that is dedicated to the preservation of its films. AGFA is an archive on the edge, at five years after its founding, it can still grow and shape itself into an archive that can provide preservation care for the majority of its films. There are limits to the sort of preservation that Drafthouse Films can provide through full theatrical and home distribution due to the cost and scale of these projects. AGFA has demonstrated through these efforts that it is comfortable with digitization. Having a collection that is full of commercial releases with limited information

about rights holders can further complicate efforts to go the commercial distribution route for the majority of their films. If AGFA decides to focus its energies on being more of an archive and less of a repository for the Alamo Drafthouse ventures, it could do well to learn from the archive community that it is a part of.

THE AMERICAN GENRE FILM ARCHIVE: ARCHIVING FOR HIPSTERS

"I wear your granddad's clothes, I look incredible." - Thrift Shop⁹⁶

AGFA is a product of the new modern subculture of hipsters. Hipsters are viewed as highly ironic, privileged, and elitist, but when applied to AGFA the same tendency has allowed them to create unique collection building policies and appeal to a supportive demographic with their films. Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's 2012 hit song "Thrift Shop," about looking cool with thrift shop clothing and accessories, has been heralded by many as a hipster anthem. A key theme throughout the song is the shopper taking pride in wearing clothing and accessories that are no longer fashionable, from an earlier generation, but making them stylish by the way he sports them. For those who argue this is a hipster anthem, it's this type of consumption that seems to define hipsterism. The hipster label is thrown around at urban young adults, sometimes as an insult, but who or what are hipsters? Those who view the hipster in a positive light, or simply harmless, argue for the hipster as a neo-bohemian who builds individual identity through pastiche and creative repurposing of culture and material. Detractors accuse the hipster of being a victim of an ironic life outlook that is overtaking urban areas, as Christy Wampole describes,

The hipster haunts every city street and university town. Manifesting a nostalgia for time he never lived himself, his contemporary urban harlequin appropriates outmoded fashions (the mustache, the tiny shorts), mechanisms (fixed-gear bicycles, portable record players) and hobbies (home brewing, playing the trombone).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ben Haggerty and Ryan Lewis, "Thrift Shop," on *The Heist*, produced by Ryan Lewis, 2012, compact disc.

⁹⁷ Christy Wampole, "How to Live Without Irony," *New York Times*, November 18, 2012, SR1, accessed April 19, 2014, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/how-to-live-without-irony/?_php=true&_type=blogs&_r=0.

I will be arguing that the hipster can and does embody both of these views. The term hipster does not need to be viewed as a pejorative but should be seen as a label for a cultural movement that, like many others, has its positive and negative aspects. The hipster embodies an intense desire to be individual and authentic, to disrupt the system, and to be creative through working with nostalgia. This nostalgia can operate from a place of irony and through rose-tinted lenses and the hipster can be superficial with an emphasis on materiality and consumption. This multifaceted hipster approach applies to the American Genre Film Archive as an archive emerging from the hipster culture. AGFA is a product of a hipster mode of cultural thinking that favors a micro-generational nostalgia. Through its practices it bills itself as a product for cinephilic hipsters to indulge in nostalgia through AGFA's films while constructing experiences that purport to offer a type of authenticity only AGFA can provide.

In this section, I will explore current studies of the hipster to construct a working definition of the modern hipster. As I will cover, the hipster subculture proliferates many facets of life and so I will be choosing to focus in on the two overarching concept with the most impact on hipsters and their culture practices related to popular culture, such as film. In Michael Newman's "Movies for Hipsters," he states: "Indie hipsters must be masters of authentic inauthenticity, embracing gestures of faux naïveté. Indie culture fully internalizes camp, the attitude of seeing an aesthetic dimension in everything, of celebration of excess, of snapping failure from history's dustbin."⁹⁸ The two concepts that have proven to influence hipster culture are nostalgia and a focus on authenticity. David Lowenthal defines the difference between heritage and history thus: "History explores and explains past grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present

⁹⁸ Newman, "Movies for Hipsters," in *American Independent Cinema: Indie*, 75.

purposes.”⁹⁹ In the same spirit, hipsters are engaging in a type of heritage work, heritage-lite, in the way they treat pop culture artifacts.

From the review of the existing literature on hipsters and heritage, I will examine how AGFA exemplifies the hipster themes of nostalgia and authenticity. AGFA exists, primarily, because of a nostalgic impulse from its founders to collect the exploitation films they enjoy and feel are missing from the modern film landscape. I will explore AGFA’s micro-generational devotion to its collections and how this fits with a nostalgia that proliferates throughout the history of archiving films. This nostalgia also manifests itself in the way AGFA regards itself as trying to recapture a type of viewing behavior by exhibiting their exploitation films in theaters and in a communal environment. AGFA’s use of the concept of authenticity will be illustrated through AGFA’s obsession with creating exclusive experiences for its audiences through the use of 35mm prints, emphasis on rarity, and creating an ambiance of insider status through events. Through its works, AGFA is a product of the hipster culture by matter of their founders being products of this culture and also because the supporters of AGFA, attendants of their events, are also members of this hipster culture. The hipster identity oozes into the existence and practices of this archive.

⁹⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*(London: Viking, 1997), xi.

Chapter 5: Literature Review

WHAT IS A HIPSTER?

The hipster subculture, existing in its current conception since the early 2000s, is in its infancy regarding academic study. As a youth based subculture, casual popular analysis of the hipster is rife with online publications, like Wampole's *New York Times* opinion piece, and snappy coffee table books that are more intended to poke fun and denigrate the hipster. This has also resulted in a conception of the hipster as a fad or unworthy of study. As one panelist in *What Was the Hipster: A Sociological Investigation* posits, "the question of the hipster is more frequently answered with tongue-in-cheek jokes or irony - which also prevent a useful conversation from emerging."¹⁰⁰ What these discussion generally fail to do is identify elements of the hipster beyond surface level fashion and entertainment choices (for example, a penchant for drinking Pabst Blue Ribbon beer and sporting "ironic" t-shirts). These works create a taxonomy of the hipster without further inquiry into the cultural impetus for this styling. The hipster is important because although normally billed as a type of pretention, hipsters fancying pop culture objects of another time creates opportunities for the work of groups dedicated to pop culture heritage like AGFA. For the purposes of examining hipsters as a cultural movement, analysis has to go beyond the initial surface level trappings and extend to the ideological motivations behind the subculture. Michael Newman defines the hipster as not a total sum of hip attributes but a drive to find what could be the next cool, hip thing while actively refuting they are a hipster.¹⁰¹ Being a hipster is not concerned with being hip but finding and engaging in what is hip or could become hip. This definition of the hipster provides a

¹⁰⁰ Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation* (New York: N+1 Foundation, 2010), 474, Kindle.

¹⁰¹ Newman, "Movies for Hipsters," in *American Independent Cinema: Indie*, 72.

skeletal framework for the hipster identity; it is not static and is built more on ephemeral concepts and ideology.

To construct a broad stroke analysis of the hipster culture I have looked to two texts that balance on the edge of academic and popular writing, *The Sacred and The Profane: An Investigation of Hipsters* and *What Was the Hipster: a Sociological Investigation*. Both of these works as not social science texts but, rather, are attempts to make the transition from the short form article on the hipster in popular news toward the direction of academic inquiry. *What Was the Hipster* is the transcripts of a symposium the editors and publishers of the literary magazine *n+1*, hosted in 2009 at the New School in New York. The goal of the symposium was to inspire the beginning of critical conversation on hipster culture. *The Sacred and The Profane*, more closely resembles typical cultural analysis and is focused more on a historical perspective. From these two works, the twin issues of authenticity and nostalgia emerge as defining pillars of hipsterism. The two ideas are the most basic elements that bolster the particular style and culture of the hipster that has emerged.

NOSTALGIA AND HIPSTERS

Nostalgia is a feeling every person experiences at various points in his life — watching a beloved movie, visiting a childhood home, eating a family recipe. The Merriam-Webster definition of nostalgia is, “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition.”¹⁰² Nostalgia can be a fleeting thought or feeling but hipsters take nostalgia to an extreme. Wampole notes in “How to Live Without Irony,” the image of the hipster is intimately attached to markers of the past — mustaches, portable record players, well-worn vintage clothes.¹⁰³ Hipster culture uses

¹⁰² "Nostalgia," in *Merriam-Webster*, accessed April 11, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia>.

¹⁰³ Wampole, "How to Live Without," SR1.

nostalgia as a means of constructing a new identity by reworking past objects and symbols.. Although nostalgia can manifest itself in a number of ways, hipster nostalgia is exhibited in three key ways: a means of using the past to rebel in the present, micro-generational stability, and as an exercise of ‘camp’ values.

Hipsters as a subculture seek to subvert the dominant culture, through their use of nostalgia. In *What was the Hipster?* a panelist argues, “most hipster discussion seems to express nostalgia for a time when there was a substantive difference between the underground culture and the mainstream culture.”¹⁰⁴ There is a nostalgia for rebellion and this nostalgia is utilized to conjure new means of achieving it. For example, in Ann Powers dissection of hipster motifs in the song “Thrift Shop,” she notes that the song in its exultation of the kitsch, vintage finds at the thrift store there is an underlying theme of rejecting label-based conspicuous consumption. Powers argues,

Silly celebrations of ridiculous finds (flannel zebra jammies, velour jump suit) share space in Macklemore's rhymes with an understated critique of consumer capitalism: \$50 for a designer T-shirt, he points out, isn't such a bargain when six other people in the club will be wearing the same thing. "I call that getting tricked by business," he declares.¹⁰⁵

The lyrics of “Thrift Shop” illustrates an active rebellion against the conspicuous consumption related to fashion by hipsters taking up thrift store shopping and wearing “grandpa’s style.” Although Powers also argues that this type of fashion trend toward thrift shops may also have a practical base in the limited incomes of the starving artist type common to hipsters, the act of hipsters opting out of consuming in the dominant manner makes a statement. When hipsters pull fashions and trends from the past there is an active process of seeking to “go slumming” and exist outside the status quo. Choosing vinyl over

¹⁰⁴ Greif, Ross, and Tortorici, *What Was the Hipster?*, 457.

¹⁰⁵ Ann Powers, "It Isn't (Just) Ironic: In Defense Of The Hipster," National Public Radio, last modified November 20, 2012, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/therecord/2012/11/20/165578178/it-isnt-just-ironic-in-defense-of-the-hipster>.

MP3s, grandpa's cardigans over a new jacket are choices that draw attention to the fact that the hipster is not participating in the dominant society or trends by means of cultural expression. Nostalgia provides an ever growing past to pull from in order to subvert the prevailing style of modern times.

The types of cultural representations chosen for nostalgic purposes by hipsters as a means of rebellion also demonstrate the issue of micro-generational nostalgia. *What Was the Hipster?* features a conversation on the concept that hipsters focus on the time just before they were a teen or adult, "it represents a style culture which will only be a longing – decade or half-decade by half-decade, therefore micro-generation by micro-generation...the longing will just be for whatever the moment of your origination was."¹⁰⁶ This type of nostalgia is for the immediate past, from a time hipsters are slightly too young to truly remember. Micro-generational nostalgia manifests in events like a film series revisiting blockbusters from the summer of 1986. This is not the distant past of Tiffany lamps, art deco design, or hoop skirts but a past that hipsters may have memories of. Detractors of the hipster, argue that this pull from the recent past is not enough time to develop meaningful nostalgia.¹⁰⁷ In David Lowenthal's work on heritage he notes that the process between a time period being in the present and being considered heritage is shortening, "Formerly confined in time and place, nostalgia today engulfs the whole past. Antique dealers have jettison the former 100-year-old barrier...Obsolescence confers instant bygone status - no sooner is the fire truck out of sight than it becomes an emblem of the vanished past."¹⁰⁸ This instant heritage status, Lowenthal argues, comes from the

¹⁰⁶ Mark Greif, Kathleen Ross, and Dayna Tortorici, *What Was the Hipster?: A Sociological Investigation* (New York: N+1 Foundation, 2010), 750, Kindle.

¹⁰⁷ Wampole, "How to Live Without," SR1.

¹⁰⁸ David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6.

desire to form a sense of stability in a changing world; go with what you know, “beleaguered by loss and change, we keep our bearings only by clinging to remnants of stability. Hence preservers’ aversion to letting anything go, postmodern manias for period styles...”¹⁰⁹ The hipster adoration of nostalgia is complicated, it represents a quest to rebel against current trends but also represents a conformity to the fashions and cultures of a simpler time in that hipster’s life. The obsession with micro-generation nostalgia has the benefit of encouraging a culture that begins to preserve and record heritage before it is too far gone and difficult to access.¹¹⁰ With a shortened time frame from utilitarian object to collectable, a greater quantity of these items will still be in existence and not yet succumbing to the ravages of time. Nostalgia is not just a means for hipsters to reconnect with a recent past but also to act as amateur preservationists in order to maintain the items hipsters want to access.

For the hipster community, a camp aesthetic actively influences nostalgia. Susan Sontag eloquently captured camp in her essay “Notes on Camp” as a love of the unnatural and exaggerated. Camp can be seen in viewing Carmen Miranda movies from the 1930s-40s; Miranda is dancing in a fruit hat flanked by over-the-top sets. Nothing about the scenes appears natural and the performances are so over-the-top that the charm comes from the artifice – this could only happen in the movies! When utilizing the sensibility of camp in conjunction with nostalgia today, hipsters are acting from a place of detachment where the film’s unnaturalness is only heightened. Susan Sontag states, “this is why so many of the objects prized by camp taste are old-fashioned, out-of-date, *démodé*...it’s simply that the process of aging or deterioration provides the necessary detachment – or arouse a

¹⁰⁹ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*(London: Viking, 1997), 6.

¹¹⁰ Greif, Ross, and Tortorici, *What Was the Hipster?*, 750-751.

necessary sympathy.”¹¹¹ Hipsters are detached enough in time from the clothing, the music, and the film to feel that it is safe to view it through a camp lens. There is sympathy and pride for finding an object after it has been discarded by culture and repurposing it. Nostalgia influences hipster culture beyond what it consumes but, also, *how* hipsters consume culture.

HIPSTERS, AUTHENTICITY, AND MOVIES

Like nostalgia, authenticity is a loaded term to deconstruct into exactly what makes an object, event, or person authentic. Hipster culture is often described as a quest for the authentic, the individual. *The Sacred and The Profane* argues that the hipster reading of authenticity is tied to the presence of an object in a specific part of history, “authenticity in this sense can be heavily identified with the one element, “the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking [the original’s] presence in time and space.”¹¹² Authenticity, for hipsters, is wrapped in the aura of an object in regards to its history. The concept of authenticity also crops up in the exclusivity of an event. Newman’s “Movies for Hipsters” attempts to distinguish what makes a film acceptable to hipsters and a product of the hipster culture as opposed to merely pandering to hipsters. As an example of a film that fails to pass hipster muster, Newman points to *(500) Days of Summer*, “whose indie authenticity is threatened by the sense of their striving at representing, and thereby courting the attention of, hipster.”¹¹³ Similar to a reproduction of art, *(500) Days of Summer* does not satisfy a hipster notion of authenticity because it attempts to reproduce an aesthetic seen elsewhere rather than creating something exclusive for its audience. The hipster battle for authenticity is a defining criteria for making something by and for hipsters. In discussing AGFA and

¹¹¹ Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'camp,'" in *The Cult Film Reader*, by Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), 48.

¹¹² Kinzey, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 42.

¹¹³ Newman, "Movies for Hipsters," in *American Independent Cinema: Indie*, 71.

hipsters involved in the preservation of film, the concept of authenticity is best examined in terms of how it is reflected in aesthetic values related to age and how authenticity relates to exclusive experience.

Hipsters put a value on the sign of age and decay on an object to display its authenticity. Although an item in pristine condition would be financially more valuable, the wear and signs of age lend credibility that an object existed within the time and space it emerged from. In the realm of heritage, Lowenthal points out that as an appreciation for ancient ruins developed there was no desire to make a restored version, “Time was felt to ‘ripen’ artifacts, the marks of age to enhance art and architecture.”¹¹⁴ Artifacts were supposed to show their age, their use, and their place in history. For hipsters this is not found in the polish of wind-exposed marble but in the rust on patio furniture, retro voiceovers on 1970s movie trailers, or the scratches and color distortion on a well-worn film print. The age of the item demonstrates that it is one of a kind and, therefore, authentic. Lowenthal also argues that,

Like memories, relics once abandoned or forgotten may become more treasured than those in continued use; the discontinuity in their history focuses attention on them, particularly if scarcity or fragility threatens their imminent extinction. Artifacts of initially transient and diminishing value that fall into the limbo of rubbish are often later resurrected as highly valued relics.¹¹⁵

The drive to reconnect with what has become obsolete offers some context for the hipster attraction to arcane technology, like portable record players. Years after the vinyl record began disappearing from store shelves music fans revived the record player from the obsolete technology bin and made it into a status symbol. Authenticity is demonstrated through age both because of the aesthetics presented by age and due to the scarcity of an object because of changing trends.

¹¹⁴ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign*, 148.

¹¹⁵ Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign*, 240.

The expression of authenticity does not only apply to material object but extends to authenticity of experience. The experiences that are deemed the most authentic can also be equated with being the most exclusive. The hipster is an avid consumer of popular culture; as with nostalgia the hipster is striving to be outside of the mainstream. The hipster is seeking an authentic experience. Kinzey argues,

Instead of authentic experience being outside of ‘middle-brow and low-brow commercial culture,’...the postmodern hipster’s quest for authenticity is firmly bound up in it...the distinction high/low remains and has shifted. Instead of being about what products one consumes, the emphasis has shifted to *how* one is consuming the products (i.e. ‘we may be consuming the same products, but my experience is *more authentic* than yours.’)¹¹⁶

It is this quest to have more authentic experiences that defines how hipsters interact with media and pop culture. For example, viewing Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) can happen on any number of mediums (VHS, DVD, streaming) but the most authentic experience, to a hipster, would be watching it projected from an original 35mm print in a darkened theater. The same content is consumed but the new experience is more in line with the perceived original experience. This necessity for creating authentic experiences rises from a modern devaluing of specialist knowledge, especially, related to media and pop culture. In discussing music, Kinzey argues, “Having good taste was still important, but now anyone could go to a blog with ‘obscure’ music and download ‘uniqueness.’”¹¹⁷ This same principle can be extended to films and hipster cinephiles. The creation of authentic experiences that emphasize how a hipster is consuming cultural products is the dividing line between a poser and a true member of the community.

The hipster devotion to nostalgia and authenticity naturally overlap from time to time in matters of consuming retro products and media. AGFA occasionally mirrors these

¹¹⁶ Kinzey, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 45.

¹¹⁷ Kinzey, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 29.

practices, and this informs much of my discussion of AGFA. Nostalgia and authenticity are defining pillars for hipsters and defining the byproducts of this subculture. Newman's asserts that, "hipster movies appeal to a distinct audience that positions its tastes in relation to mainstream Hollywood cinema."¹¹⁸ This claim, reinforced by the concepts of nostalgia and authenticity, proves a compelling argument for AGFA's inclusion into the hipster subculture. In labeling AGFA as a hipster institution catering to hipsters, I will demonstrate how AGFA utilizes nostalgia and authenticity to justify and promote the archive.

¹¹⁸ Newman, "Movies for Hipsters," in *American Independent Cinema: Indie*, 72.

Chapter 6: The Joy of Exploitation Films: AGFA and Nostalgia

A film archive is naturally coming from a nostalgia-driven mission. The nature of the mission of archiving films demands that a certain amount of affection and nostalgia is required for the films to be collected in the first place. In the case of the American Genre Film Archive, its band of “movie enthusiasts” comes from a place of nostalgia when they collect exploitation films for the archive. AGFA was founded on a base of nostalgia for the films and times that they emerged from, and it has based its policies and collection building on a framework of nostalgia. In this chapter, I will be detailing how AGFA has structured itself on nostalgia through its dedication to 35mm collection and screenings, the Kinsey Collection as an acquisition based on nostalgia, and how nostalgia has impacted the aesthetics of the release of *Miami Connection* and *Trailer War* through Drafthouse Films.

When James Card, Henri Langlois, and other collectors at the beginning of the film archiving movement established their first collections they were longing for a type of film that was starting to be lost to them – silent films. In Card’s *Seductive Cinema*, he introduces his love for the cinema and silent cinema by reflecting on the beauty and joys of attending the cinema as a child. This joy spurred him to begin creating his own collection so he could revisit films that were disappearing from theaters. Other collectors have similar stories. AGFA’s impetus for its founding collectors to begin collecting exploitation films is unknown but it can be assumed that League and others became fans in their youth at some point. Personal nostalgia and devotion to the films is often the motivation to start a collection. Nostalgia, as a facet of hipster rebellion, figures heavily into the creation of AGFA and its mission. As stated previously, League and his team began AGFA because they felt that other archives were not collecting the exploitation films they sought to collect.

AGFA's rebellion is twofold — bucking the modern Hollywood system and, in AGFA's perspective, the wider archive community.

AGFA's collection of exploitation films serves as a rebellion against modern Hollywood films because AGFA is declaring that the modern system is lacking through its collecting. Newman asserts, "Indie hipsters place their tastes in opposition to mainstream Hollywood films." League and his team are actively mourning the passing of this type of film production from the mainstream, but rather than quietly mourning the passing of these films, AGFA has sought to collect and continue to screen them. This process gives the films a second life, a second chance with an audience. That is the goal of AGFA and many other film archives—give the original audience a chance to continue to admire the films they once did and invite a new audience to engage with these works. . The collection and preservation of these films is based in a type of nostalgia that yearns to see these films on the screen once again.

Beyond the content of these films AGFA is engaged in a material nostalgia tied with 35mm film stock. 35mm is a disappearing format and the hipster culture glorifies the older "better" technology of the previous generation. Similar to the vinyl record, 35mm film had been the standard for a long period of time for distributing their particular media. Different from the vinyl record, 35mm has been a format relegated to professional usage — anybody can own and play a vinyl record, 35mm print projection requires a certain amount of training and skill. AGFA is able to develop an archive on the celebration of exhibiting a dying medium because of its conjunction with the Alamo Drafthouse. AGFA laments the passing of this medium but also has to contend with the value of digitization as AGFA continues to develop a preservation plan that allows them to share their films while protecting the original print. He, possibly hyperbolically, fears a culture where films are picked up from Redbox, a limited collection of DVDs picked up from a machine, and that

is the only interaction that people have with Cinema. Just as the past archivists worried about the disappearance of the ambiance they associated with silent film screening, AGFA is building nostalgia for the communal theater experience that 35mm film screenings provided. AGFA continues to romanticize the 35mm format while moving toward a digital means of preservation. As modern film production moves away from the thematic elements of exploitation films and the materiality of 35mm film prints, AGFA utilizes this nostalgic compulsion for these two elements to justify building their collection.

AGFA possesses a firm stance that they are compensating for and rebelling against the wider archivist community in terms of their collection. Although, as I have illustrated in the first section, other archives do in fact collect these films and utilize them, AGFA is distinct in that it is motivated by nostalgia to collect. Other archives assemble collections with exploitation films because they represent a historical place in film history – a particular time and style of film production outside of Hollywood. AGFA is collecting because they enjoy and admire these films. A prime example of AGFA’s desire to distinguish itself from the wider archive community comes across in their fundraising campaign for their latest project to digitize the 1975 film *The Astrologer*. In a video that AGFA produced for an online fundraising campaign on Indiegogo Zack Carlson demonstrates the case for why AGFA is bucking the wider archive community,

There are so many archives in the world that have been built to protect movies that have artistic merit. But that merit is decided by, you know, intellectuals...but the fact is that is only, maybe, 5% of the films that have ever been made....and the movies that AGFA protects and serves are the movies that were made for everyone. Movies that were made to entertain the world. Movies that had explosions, killer sharks, and super dogs.¹¹⁹

Carlson is aligning AGFA with the “everyman” that they view the archive community is ignoring through their practices. AGFA’s nostalgia for this period of film

¹¹⁹ "AGFA Indiegogo" video file.

motivates their dedication to its preservation because these films represent a rebellion against, what AGFA views as standard archive practices. AGFA equates other archives with intellectualizing films and removing them from the context of entertainment. Accusing these archives of creating a system where films that do not have artistic merit are not given the same elevation to being worthy of preservation. AGFA is romanticizing the idea of a time when films were not evaluated by any standard beyond their ability to entertain. AGFA's nostalgia for these films dovetails with the cultural aspects of paracinema.

Paracinema does not refer to a singular type of film but to a larger notion of experiencing and evaluating the value of films generally considered in poor taste, including exploitation films. Jeffrey Sconce, the originator of the term, delivered this categorical definition for the types of trash films included within the label;

In addition to art film, horror, and science fiction films, "paracinema" catalogues "include entries from such seemingly disparate genres" as badfilm, splatterpunk, mondo films, sword-and-sandal epics, Elvis flicks, government hygiene films, Japanese monster movies...about every other historical manifestation of exploitation cinema from juvenile delinquency documentaries to ...pornography¹²⁰

The paracinema label also refers to the cultural element related to the types of fans of these films that positions its taste counter to the mainstream. Sconce states, "the caustic rhetoric of paracinema suggests a pitched battle between a guerrilla band of cult film viewers and an elite cadre of would-be cinematic tastemakers. Certainly, the paracinematic audience likes to see itself as a disruptive force in the cultural and intellectual marketplace."¹²¹ By collecting films they feel have been ignored because of taste values in other archives they

¹²⁰ Jeffrey Sconce, "'Trashing' the academy: Taste, excess, and an emerging politics of cinematic styles," in *The Cult Film Reader*, by Ernest Mathijs and Xavier Mendik (Maidenhead, Berkshire, England: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill Education, 2008), 101.

¹²¹ Sconce, "'Trashing' the academy: Taste," in *The Cult Film Reader*, 101.

are disrupting the cultural marketplace that is the wider archive community. This is enhanced by the nostalgia of the collectors at AGFA. AGFA is a paracinematic institution, but it's the nostalgia for these films that intersects with the hipster community. As a product of hipsters, AGFA is seeking to cause disruption and discord by celebrating films that were not designed to be treasured and held on to. AGFA and its practices celebrate these films because they come from a different time of filmmaking, a different format of filmmaking, and now a different construction of the heritage of film.

The hipster nostalgic drive culminates in the acquisition of the Kinsey Collection. The Kinsey Collection was acquired by AGFA in order to expand the holdings of the archive but there were ideological influences that impact this collection. As noted in the previous section on the demographic of the Kinsey Collection – the collection has a fair amount of adult pictures sexploitation, softcore pornography, and hardcore pornography. These films have the twofold problem of being unable to acquire willing archives to save them or the means to exhibit them. AGFA has gathered these films because of the nostalgic and camp aesthetics captured in this type of exploitation film. The nostalgia for these films is wrapped in ideas of rebellion and liberation that accompany a popular memory of the sexual revolution. The founders of AGFA, one would hope, have no memories of the adult films in the Kinsey Collection screening in theaters because they would have been children when porno chic was having its heyday. The founders are all in their 30s and early 40s, born during the 1970s, they would have only had a peripheral knowledge of *Deep Throat* and the cultural shifts that allowed for its emergence into theaters and the national consciousness. By acquiring this collection and attempting to bring them back to life through the archive AGFA is trying to capture an imagined nostalgia. Lowenthal argues that this sort of exercise of encountering an imagined past is common because modern visitors to this heritage are able to approach it from a safe distance.

Nostalgic excursions are often brief, circumscribed, inconsequential. The American 'Western' reflects "a desire to get out of modernity without leaving it altogether; we want to relive those thrilling days of yesteryear, but only because we are absolutely assured that those days are out of reach."¹²²

Lowenthal references the Western because the idea of the cowboy and the Wild West is romantic with a popular nostalgia for it. Carrying the ideas of freedom and adventure but glossing over the danger and unpleasantness of the actual work involved in being a rancher in the open plains of the United States. The nostalgia for this freedom clouds the image of the difficulties and dangers that this time presented to the cowboys and adventurers who actually lived in the times captured by the Western. Those nostalgic for the Western times can enjoy the fantasy because there is no threat for them of having to interact with the unpleasant aspects of the period. In the same way, for AGFA, the adult films of this era represent a time of liberation and rebellion in the culture. The era conjures images of young Americans becoming sexually liberated and viewing pornography becoming socially important. As Linda Williams details the cultural experience of viewing *Deep Throat*, "even those who disliked the film, such as Nora Ephron in *Esquire*, noted that it would be culturally derelict not to see it."¹²³ The film was viewed as culturally important to see, something that has not happened with an adult film since. AGFA through collecting these films is trying to recapture this experience because of a nostalgia for unconventional films being deemed culturally valuable. This nostalgia is similar to the Western, in a micro-generational way, it glosses over the difficulties of the time and the unpleasantness that may have accompanied the period. These films were originally screened at theaters downtown that were not in the safest neighborhoods. It was not a time where it became acceptable on date night to take someone to a porn film—as AGFA might like to imagine. AGFA is able to participate in the heritage nostalgia that Lowenthal describes because they

¹²² Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign*, 7.

¹²³ Williams, *Screening Sex*, 125.

can celebrate the adult films that came from this era without having to acknowledge some of the ugliness that accompanied them.

The historical distance between AGFA and the creation of the films in the Kinsey Collection allow for a hipster camp sensibility to be applied to these films. As noted in Sontag's "Notes on Camp," time allows for a heightened sense of the unnaturalness and excessive nature of these films. Sexploitation films that were titillating because of the fleeting bits of skin can now look especially artificial because of how restrictive they now seem. AGFA utilizes this Camp aesthetic to bill the usage of these films in Weird Wednesday screenings. When AGFA has screened prints from this collection it is not the narrative of the film that they are promoting. In an online promotion for the screening of *Swinging Naked Stewardesses* the film was billed,

Another one of the long-running series of German "Sex Report" films. Previous installments have shed light on the sexual lives of students, secretaries, and gynecological patients (sorry again for that). Now it's time to learn all about the original fly girls. Fasten your seatbelt, it's going to be a humpy ride.¹²⁴

The promotion is cheeky and emphasizes the novelty of this film and demonstrates the history this film comes from – style of German sexploitation “sex report” films. The films are not narratively complex and are now involved for the camp value of enjoying a film that was only an excuse to show young women nude. The excess of this type of film is celebrated with a sense of humor that is essential to the hipster use of camp.

Nostalgia is essential to AGFA's mission to archive exploitation films. They utilize the hipster understanding of nostalgia to build the basis of their practices and missions. Hipster notions of nostalgia can serve as a disruptive force but nostalgia can also serve as a means of white-washing a film's heritage. Camp and nostalgia give a means of viewing

¹²⁴ Lars Nilsen, "Weird Wednesday: SWINGING NAKED STEWARDESSES," Alamo Drafthouse Cinema, last modified July 24, 2013, accessed January 12, 2014, <http://drafhthouse.com/movies/swinging-naked-stewardesses/austin>.

the films that the archive has acquired. Nostalgia has its upsides and its downside for collection building because it can cause resistance to ideas that may not keep the object in its original conditions. As I will discuss in the next chapter, AGFA is actively working with the nostalgic impulse that has grounded the archive into the hipster culture by offering and creating authenticity with their collection.

Chapter 7: VHS and Vinyl: AGFA and Authenticity

Authenticity is truly a difficult concept to describe and is highly subjective. Hipster concepts of authenticity are focused on the creation of an authentic identity – separating out an individual as unique. For AGFA, authenticity is a means of establishing an identity for the archive and a means of establishing credibility within the hipster cinephile community. AGFA efforts to establish authenticity are based on a means of reaching out to their audience and stating that they are offering the most authentic experiences of their films for that audience. They are not pandering to them, AGFA is for and from them. In order to explore AGFA's efforts to extol the virtue of authenticity I am going to use AGFA's collaborations with Draffhouse Films and Fantastic Fest with the projects of *Miami Connection* and *Trailer War* to demonstrate how AGFA performs authenticity.

AGFA collaborates with the sister programs founded through the Alamo Draffhouse, Draffhouse Films and Fantastic Fest to create distribution opportunities for the films in their collection. These collaborations have so far been the films *Miami Connection*, a narrative discovered in the archive, and *Trailer War*, a compilation from the 2,000 trailers AGFA has in its collection. *Trailer War* was one of the first projects to be undertaken in a joint effort between the Draffhouse Films and AGFA. The movie consists of a compilation of 46 trailers from a wide range of exploitation films, from kung fu films, to explosion-filled action mayhem, and sexploitation. The publicity material makes it clear that these films are being dredged up from the depths of forgotten film history;

Unleashed from the vaults of the Alamo Draffhouse, a meticulous selection of the best, strangest and most amazing coming attraction trailers in the world! Most have never been available in any home format, and all are presented for the first time in high definition...each 3minute masterpiece is like a beckoning portal to another, more exciting dimension. It's a crippling overdose of towering flames,

mechanized destruction, lurking fear, poor sexual choices and spiritual devastation on an apocalyptic scale.¹²⁵

Although not in their original format these trailers are being marketed as a curated selection of authentic trailers from the recent past of exploitation film making. These trailers are rare, one of a kind, and have never been assembled before. By watching this compilation in theaters or on DVD the audience member is getting to experience the real deal of trailers for exploitation films from the era. Authenticity in this case is being evoked in the manners of age and exclusivity. Lars Nilsen describes the films in AGFA's holdings as "disreputable with their bumps and scrapes."¹²⁶ The digital transfer of *Trailer War* retains some of the scratches, dust, and color fading to be expected on a vintage reel of celluloid film. The trailers show their age, giving the trademark look that they have been through the grindhouse theater projector several times. There is no artifice presented by cleaning and brightening them – the value is heightened in these trailers because they show their age and wear. The trailers in *Trailer War* are also marketed as being an exclusive experience. In the promotional statement Drafthouse Films states, "Most have never been available in any home format, and all are presented for the first time in high definition." These trailers are exclusively released because of the work of AGFA and Drafthouse Films, the viewer is being granted an exclusive experience by watching or owning this compilation. Due to the exclusivity of the experience, it would be deemed by hipsters as more authentic. Anyone can go on YouTube and search for exploitation and grindhouse trailers, but only those in the know will have seen *Trailer War*. The release of *Trailer War* highlights both aspects prided by hipsters as elements for authenticity – displays of age and exclusivity of the experience – which solidifies AGFA and its work as part of the hipster culture.

¹²⁵ "Trailer War," Drafthouse Films, last modified 2012, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://drafthousefilms.com/film/trailer-war>.

¹²⁶ "Behind the Scenes at the American."

The AGFA/Drafthouse Films collaborations also work to present authenticity through the merchandise and design they employ to represent their projects. In creating the material for the releases of *Trailer War* and *Miami Connection* AGFA and Drafthouse Films decided to create cover art that attempted to reflect the time the film and trailers originally came from. In creating these films that did not have significant releases, AGFA and Drafthouse Films were able to create new designs without having original imagery to compete with for the claim of authentic cover art. Although the creation of new art that attempts to imitate design from another era could be bordering on pandering, a practice loathed by hipsters, AGFA and Drafthouse Films have authority in the area of these works because they have represented themselves as the authentic presenters of these projects. In the art design for these covers, the AGFA/Drafthouse Films team created designs that mimicked posters and cover art from the 1970s-80s exploitation films through color and style (Illustration 1).



Illustration 1: Cover Art for *Trailer War* and *Miami Connection*; Drafthouse Films.¹²⁷

The two films share similar color schemes and a painterly style that has come to be associated with low budget 1980s film posters. Even if this iconography is lost on some viewers the color schemes have a distinctive look that does not fit with modern aesthetics of poster art for films post 2000. This new art hints that these films are not of the modern era, working as an effective preview for the authenticity of these finds from the archive. This artwork also demonstrates the authenticity of the work that AGFA does with exploitation films by displaying their deep knowledge of the era that these films came from. The eccentric sort of material that pulls audiences in for these types of films is on full

¹²⁷ Drafthouse Films, *Trailer War* Cover Art, image, Drafthouse Films, 2012, accessed April 4, 2104, <http://drafthousefilms.com/film/trailer-war>.; Drafthouse Films, *Miami Connection* Cover Art, image, Drafthouse Films, 2012, accessed April 4, 2104, <http://drafthousefilms.com/film/miami-connection>.

display: ninjas, explosions, ghoulish monsters, and mullet-sporting guitarists. The artwork exhibits the excessive nature of these films.

Design as a means of signally authenticity goes a step further with the merchandise for *Miami Connection*. With the release of this film AGFA and Drafthouse films created a special edition VHS and 7" vinyl of the songs by Dragon Sound from the soundtrack of the movie. *Miami Connection* was originally released in the 1980s, although new prints of these items, the VHS and 7" vinyl would be considered a symbol of authenticity for the rerelease of this film. These two special edition items are kitschy, but they couple the values of age and exclusivity. While VHS and a vinyl pressings of a soundtrack are rarely created for a film now, the creation of these retro objects draws attention to the age of the film. Drafthouse Films only created a limited number of both of these items – 300 vinyl records, 400 VHS copies – and the vinyl records sold out.¹²⁸ Drafthouse Films made these items authentic to their brand by making them an exclusive item. It created an exclusive level of fandom around *Miami Connection*, an ability to make the film more authentic for audiences. Through the merchandising of *Miami Connection*, AGFA and Drafthouse films were able to bring authenticity to their audiences. Further, the authenticity of *Miami Connection* was centered on its premiere at Fantastic Fest.

With the rerelease of *Miami Connection*, AGFA was able to make a new experience for a film that had previously been ignored. By rereleasing this film AGFA was rewriting the script of *Miami Connection*'s history and changing what authentic meant for this movie. AGFA toyed with the notion of authenticity by emphasizing exclusivity for fans, creating a specialized connection with this film. The premiere of the film was at the 2012 Fantastic Fest where it was introduced by members of AGFA and featured stars from the film as

¹²⁸ "Miami Connection," Drafthouse Films, last modified 2012, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://drafthousefilms.com/film/miami-connection>.

guests. While screening this film in a theater would create an exclusive experience not many would get to claim, an after-party that followed the premiere would be the exclusive authentic moment of rereleasing this film. The party featured a reunion of the band Dragon Sound, with Tim League as master of ceremonies, sporting promotional Dragon Sound sleeveless t-shirts modeled after costumes from the film.¹²⁹ Having a party with the band from the film created an insider status for those who were at the premiere. AGFA and Fantastic Fest were also able to play up the camp aspects of the film by having this reunion performance and emphasized the excess of the film through Dragon Sound's over-the-top style. The premiere and party were ways of creating an event in-house that would make the film appear to be exclusive. The exclusivity of these events created a special insider knowledge for fans and solidified AGFA's hipster credentials.

Authenticity can come in many forms but AGFA has zeroed in on demonstrating the age of their holdings and creating exclusive experiences to perform authenticity. When working with a collection that already has a community, like exploitation films do, AGFA must demonstrate that they are authentic and create means to display that the archive is part of the community. AGFA is establishing itself as an authority in the area of exploitation films that can be trusted with these films. Demonstrating authenticity is a key way in which AGFA proved its value to a hipster cinephile community.

Because AGFA emerged from hipster sensibilities it must constantly demonstrate its value. AGFA has to establish itself within a community as a new archive in order to have a loyal support base for its efforts to promote its collection and fundraising. AGFA has a natural niche within the hipster community because of its practices related to nostalgia and demonstrating authenticity. The hipster culture puts a value on nostalgia and

¹²⁹"Fantastic Fest - Dragon Sound Reunion 'Against the Ninja,'" Fantastic Fest, video file, posted by Fantastic Fest, September 23, 2012, accessed March 5, 2014, http://fantasticfest.com/videos/entry/fantastic_fest_dragon_sound_reunion_against_the_ninja.

authenticity to create an insider status for those within the community. AGFA has utilized nostalgia to build its collection and justify its practices around how AGFA exhibits its holdings. They have built a collection around their nostalgia for exploitation films in order to demonstrate a rebellion against modern Hollywood features and presenting themselves as rebels fighting for the rights of outsider films in the archive. The pinnacle of using nostalgia as an act of rebellion comes with the acquisition of the Kinsey Collection, which also served as a demonstration of nostalgia as means of rewriting a rosier history. AGFA also pioneers new ways of demonstrating the authenticity for their films and projects. AGFA's collaborations with Drafthouse Films for the releases of *Trailer War* and *Miami Connection* are designed to support these items as authentic representations of exploitation trailers and lost genre films that they have discovered in the archive. This work solidifies AGFA's place as a hipster institution and efforts to appeal to a hipster cinephilic audience.

CONCLUSION

The American Genre Film Archive is an archive in flux. In the four years since its founding it has jumped from a hodgepodge of films that were only used by the Alamo Drafthouse for repertory screenings of exploitation and horror films to something with grander plans. When AGFA began, League and his team had only a vague mission – to acquire films, exhibit, and somehow protect them from destruction. What began as a dream of an archive that would tailor itself to exploitation films has started to become a reality. At this point in time, AGFA’s full potential is still a dream that, fortunately, those at AGFA are still pursuing. They have demonstrated that they are more than capable of gathering large amounts of film prints and even finding gems that appeal to their particular community of film fans. The archive has also demonstrated skill at designing their own means of creating opportunity for their films by blurring the lines between the non-profit and the commercial world. Drafthouse Films and AGFA’s partnership, although possibly a compromising position for an archive and its motives to put preservation first, has created opportunity for strange films that could have gone ignored, allowing them to once again to have their time of fun on the screen. While AGFA’s execution of conservation and preservation still leaves an observer with enough reservations to doubt whether this institution is truly an archive, AGFA is doing important work for its genre films. The promotion of the Indiegogo campaign to digitize *The Astrologer* by crowdsourcing can only serve to draw more attention to the archive and the need for funds to make these types of projects come together. Even the most well-known archives have to solve the problem of how to fund their projects. If AGFA succeeds in funding this first project and creating a small pillow for future work, they could begin developing a preservation plan and turn their loaning library into a full archive.

The future promises opportunities for AGFA to create new means for it provide care for its collection but there is also a change AGFA could stagnate. They could become content with releasing a film every few years from the archive through Drafthouse Films, loaning out prints until they are too fragile to screen, and continuing to just cram as many prints into the limited space they have. They could lose momentum and just rest on the small pile of laurels that their devoted cinephile fan base has laid down for them for their repertory screenings and past big projects like *Miami Connection*. Due to their connection with the profit driven enterprises of the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema and Drafthouse Films, I do not believe AGFA will ever completely collapse. These other enterprises have benefited from the buzz that AGFA events have created with hipster cinephiles and this endearment to their enterprises helps keep business booming. AGFA has motivation to keep this relationship working, to keep finding films, keep building bonds that will allow them to acquire the rights and distribute films through Drafthouse Films. The problem for AGFA and its 35mm film prints is that time is not on their side. Although time and funding are the crux for all archive development, already fragile and damaged film prints will not wait for AGFA to figure how to preserve their existence before decaying to an irreparable state.

AGFA is AGFA; it is its own beast that has taken some parts of the official archive formula and supplanted others with its own design. Although sporting the label of “archive” in their name, AGFA is not completely an archive. AGFA is not stable or disciplined enough in its policies regarding preservation and access to claim the moniker. However, while AGFA is lacking in traditional expertise, they have also come up with new ways of creating access and a type of preservation that relies on commercial avenues. League and his team have made a hybrid that satisfies their biggest current goal, exhibition. They allow their own tastes to dictate when and how they will build their holdings and

show no sign that they might ever stop trying to grow. They have made efforts to wear their nostalgia for the films in the archive on their sleeves while demonstrating that this admiration is authentic. As Zack Carlson once said about the future of Fantastic Fest, “At its heart [it] is safe and true and will remain consistent. Or I will set myself and this place on fire.”¹³⁰ Carlson, League, and the others who started AGFA and maintain it now are dedicated to it being the archive they want it to be. As the archive moves forward and, hopefully, delivers on the promise of creating meaningful preservation for the films that they love they can become the archive that they have sought out to be.

¹³⁰ *Arts in Context*, "All My Friends are Vampires," KLRU-PBS, first broadcast November 29, 2012, directed by Mario Troncoso.

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