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ENGL480 Digital Humanities History and Methods

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Video Storyboard and Script:

Investigating Classic Horror Cinema via Data Mining, or the “Frankenstein Complex”

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|  | What's on screen? | ScriptA rough draft of the narration | Time |
| 1 | Clip of people walking into a movie theater, then maybe a clip to represent data mining (not sure what yet). Or vice versa. Slight spooky music playing in the background of the narration. | I present to you, “Investigating Classic Horror Cinema via Data Mining, or the ‘Frankenstein Complex,’” a digital humanities project involving an intriguing investigation on classic horror cinema, monsters, and film spectatorship! | Less than 1min. |
| 2 | Compilation of classic horror cinema clips, labelled with the film / year of release. Slight spooky music playing in the background of the narration. | You may be wondering, “Why would anyone investigate classic horror cinema and monsters?” Well, when Universal Pictures revealed that the *Universal Classic Monsters: Complete 30-Film Collection* would be released on Blu-Ray, Tianyu Jiang, a Master’s student enrolled within the Department of Media Studies at Stockholm University had a *bloodcurdling* epiphany. Being a horror cinephile, Jiang was fascinated by the promise of behind-the-scenes documentaries and archival footage of some of the most notable horror films of the 1930s/1940s. These classic monsters from almost one hundred years ago are still so notable in the late 2010s and early 2020s, and Jiang started to question *why.* Jiang states that “the mysterious names of the monsters are the representatives of a cultural phenomenon associating with monster and horror, and the meanings of these names have exceeded beyond their cinematic figures” (5). She believes that these classic monstrous figures are notable within pop culture today, surpassing beyond their origins and introductory films … but, why were these classic horror films so notable in the 30s and 40s? Why is classic horror cinema so significant, and how was this branch of cinema impacted by history? Hmm… | Less than 1min. |
| 3 | Clips related to enhanced technology, excerpts from *Frankenstein*, and stuff to show the relationship between digital tools and literature. Music undecided. Maybe some zap noises (in relation to technology and Frankenstein). | Let’s talk about the “Frankenstein Complex” and digital humanities. Jiang references Isaac Asimov’s term, the “Frankenstein Complex,” defined as the human fear of “mechanical men,” or enhanced technology made at the hands of humans. She relates this concept to digital humanities, denoting “a tension between the humanistic research tradition and the emerging digital practices in the field” (12). There is a sense of a dichotomy between digitalization and the humanities, but Jiang’s investigation aims to create a bridge between the two disciplines, demonstrating the relationship they can have within the digital humanities.Jiang focuses on using digital archives and cinema studies/film history research to answer various questions. While investigating theoretical works on classic horror cinema and film history, Jiang proceeds to perform a meta-inquiry of data mining classic horror cinema data via the Media History Digital Library (MHDL). Through this project, Jiang aims to investigate film spectatorship of classic horror cinema, hoping to expand the existing model of queer spectatorship while investigating film theorists’ works regarding the relationship between monsters and the marginalized. Now, let’s explore the meaning and significance behind these practices, Jiang’s results, and what they mean for the future of the relationship between digital tools and the humanities! | Less than 1min. |
| 4 | Pictures of early literature with queer subtext (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*, etc.), The “Hays Code,” and some queer-coded characters. Music undecided. Spooky sound effects? | But, what is the theorized relationship between classic horror cinema and queer spectatorship?Upon discussing early gay literature, James Jenkins of *Valancourt Books* states that LGBT characters and themes within horror fiction can be traced back to the late 1700s (Healey). According to Jenkins, “the traditional explanation for the gay/horror connection is that it was impossible for [LGBT authors] to write openly about gay themes back then (or even perhaps express them, since words like 'gay' and 'homosexual' didn't exist), so they sublimated them and expressed them in more acceptable forms, using the medium of a transgressive genre like horror fiction,” resulting in various queer-coded characters and monsters within the horror genre (Healey). How does this impact classic horror cinema from the 1930s/1940s? Well, in 1943, the “Hays Code” was implemented, which included a strict set of rules regarding what was appropriate for filmmakers to show on screen. According to Inés Mendoza-Pérez of *Control Forever*, despite LGBT issues not being listed or denounced explicitly, there was a code calling for “correct standards of life” and “the sanctity of the institution of marriage,” which implicitly stated that any explicit LGBT characters and themes would not be allowed within American film (“Queer-Coding and Horror Films”). Despite not being allowed onscreen, LGBT characters and themes were ever present in classic horror cinema through implicit themes and subtext.Despite classic horror cinema having queer-coded characters and LGBT themes, it helped to popularize harmful stereotypes involving sexual perversion and queerness (vampires seducing the same sex for blood, werewolves turning into violent animals at night, etc.) that impacted the way LGBT people were viewed, and ultimately, these stereotypes still impact LGBT representation in media today. Jiang aims to investigate the relationship between classic horror cinema and queer spectatorship by analyzing data and trends involving monsters and queer people in cinema, before and after the implementation of the Hays Code, within digitalized journals via the Media History Digital Library (MHDL). | Less than 1min. |
| 5 | Screen capturing of MHDL, Lantern, and Project Arclight. Music undecided. | Well, what is the Media History Digital Library? David Pierce, a film archivist and historian, founded the MHDL in 2009, in an effort to improve the way in which historians could find materials related to their research by digitizing classic film and providing public access to media-related journals, trade papers, and fan magazines (Jiang 17). Joining the project in 2011, Eric Hoyt, a digital humanities scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, began building the MHDL and digitalizing several materials. Throughout this process, Hoyt and his team launched a search engine called “Lantern” for the website in 2013, and then later, added “Project Arclight” in 2015, in an effort to, according to Jiang, “make the MHDL’s large-scale collection more user-friendly and analytically” (17).As stated on the search engine’s webpage, Lantern allows for “the search and visualization of nearly two million pages of digitalized books and magazines from the histories of film, broadcasting, and recorded sound,” which creates a great tool for research whether one is a historian or undergraduate student (“Media History Digital Library”).Project Arclight allows users to create graphs based on their Lantern searches in order to analyze trends in media history, which ultimately will provide Jiang with a digital means to investigate the relationship between classic horror cinema and historical events involving cinema (“Media History Digital Library”). | Less than 1min. |
| 6 | Interactive SES diagram. I aim for this visual to explain the method, and I plan to interact with it. Music undecided. | In order to perform a meta-inquiry, or a search of information regarding data and metadata, Jiang aims to utilize “[an] analytical and interpretive method named Scaled Entity Search (SES)” to mobilize the MHDL’s collection (21). Sounds complex, huh? Let’s try to understand this *scary* method!Data discovery methods should help with modeling a topic or visualizing a network, and a keyword search in a search engine could be necessary, but how does one interpret and pick from the results, especially if it is a large amount of data? Here is where Scaled Entity Search (SES) *lurks* in! SES is described as an “interpretive framework,” working to be a “humanistic method” of big data analysis (Jiang 22). This may sound contradictory, but essentially, SES intends to use someone’s interpretations to find related data, which is useful for one doing research or investigating a question, and it makes sense.When thinking about a question, it’s important to utilize SES’s “triangulated”interpretive framework involving the entities, the corpus, the digital, and their overlapping relationships. According to Kit Hughes, who has written about SES, one must “balance critical understandings of the chosen entities and corpus with knowledge of how digital technologies shape and frame results” (“Introducing Scaled Entity Search (SES): Interpretive Framework”). This method encourages the user to think about what the results say (the entities), what factors impact the variety of the results (the corpus), and what digital tools are being utilized to display said results (the digital). Utilizing this method when searching through computational data allows the user to display a “humanities”-based approach, which can ultimately encourage better use of the data.\*\*may add the Prediction-Observation-Explanation (POE) Strategy, but not sure yet\*\* | Less than 1min. |
| 7 | Screen capturing of the data, charts, graphs, etc. Music undecided. Maybe some spooky sound effects. | What did Jiang do to data mine classic horror cinema?By utilizing the digitalized materials on Media History Digital Library (MHDL) with the methods of Scaled Entity Search (SES) and distant reading, Jiang initially attempts to depict a horror movie-going scene during the 1930s/1940s (39). Jiang describes the process of determining her searches for Lantern: “I asked myself ‘why do *these people* like *this horror* in *this place* at *this particular time*?’ and accordingly designed the search entities draft into four categories: *these people*–names from the Universal Studio productions and the film column writers; *this horror–*including the title *Frankenstein*, its star Boris Karloff, and the director James Whale; *this place*–names of movie theatres selected from earlier readings including Rialto, Majestic Texas and RKO Kansas City; *this particular time*–the search narrowed down to a rough period” (40). By utilizing SES, Jiang specifies the information most crucial to the investigation. In addition, she also decides on the keyword “monster” instead of “horror,” and “queer” instead of “gay,” to improve the precision and readability of the visual patterns supplied by Arclight (41).By activating Project Arclight, Jiang’s Lantern searches of “monster,” “queer,” and “production code” are visualized, and she aims to use distant reading, “an attempt at utilizing big data analytics for the purposes of literary scholarship,” to investigate her questions (45).Jiang’s first search utilizes MHDL’s entire collection of digitalized journals, and she later decides to narrow down the results during the second search by filtering for journals only from the *Motion Picture Herald* (46-7). In her second search, she states that there seems to be more correlation between the nodes involving “monster,” “queer,” and “production code,” once the data was narrowed down (47). However, in order to attain more accuracy, she states that the patterns should be “cross-examined by filtering the journals, adding complementary entities, and a closer survey of particular nodes that might lead to useful primary materials if a further explanation of the observed pattern is in question” (49).\*\*go more in depth about the data and its meaning\*\*\*\*possibly go back and edit information used here\*\* | Less than 1min. |
| 8 | Compilation of classic horror cinema clips. Slight spooky music playing in the background of the narration. Flash of lightning and the sound of thunder at the end. | What’s the future of the “Frankenstein Complex” and digital humanities? Jiang outwardly acknowledges the intrigue behind the digital humanities, stating that there is a “puzzling yet strong complexity binding the humanities and digitalization” (60). After conducting meta-inquiry on classic horror cinema via Media History Digital Library (MHDL) by utilizing Scaled Entity Search (SES) and distant reading, she retrieved some information relating monster cinema and queer spectatorship to each other, demonstrating the significance of Project Arclight and MHDL, as long as the search entities are well designed. Upon the question of whether or not digital methods can be utilized in the future to learn more about classic horror cinema, and just cinema in general, Jiang states that she “believe[s] the meta-inquiry has provided a positive answer” (61). Ultimately, discourse on humanities subjects can be further explored through usage of the digital humanities, leading to a future for the “Frankenstein Complex” and *shocking* revelations.  | Less than 1min. |