“Frankenstein Complex” in the Realm of Digital Humanities

Data Mining Classic Horror Cinema via Media History Digital Library (MHDL)

Tianyu Jiang
“Frankenstein Complex” in the Realm of Digital Humanities

Data Mining Classic Horror Cinema via Media History Digital Library (MHDL)

Tianyu Jiang

Abstract

This thesis addresses the complexity of digitalization and humanities research practices, with a specific focus on digital archives and film history research. I propose the term “Frankenstein Complex” to highlight and contextualize the epistemological collision and empirical challenges humanities scholars encounter when utilizing digital resources with digital methods. A particular aim of this thesis is to scrutinize digital archiving practices when using the Media History Digital Library (MHDL) as a case for a themed meta-inquiry on the preservation of and access to classic horror cinema in this particular digital venue. The project found conventional research methods, such as the close reading of classical cinema history, to be limiting. Instead, the project tried out a distant reading technique throughout the meta-inquiry to better interrogate with the massive volume of data generated by MHDL. Besides a general reassessment of debates in the digital humanities and themes relating to horror film culture, this thesis strives for a reflection on classic horror spectatorship through the lens of sexual identity, inspired by Sara Ahmed’s perspective on queer phenomenology. This original reading of horror history is facilitated by an empirical study of the digital corpus at hand, which in turn gives insights into the entangled relation between subjective identities and the appointed research contexts.

Keywords
Digital Humanities, “Frankenstein Complex”, Meta-inquiry, Media History Digital Library, Arclight, Digital archive, Data mining, Classic horror cinema, Film phenomenology, Queer phenomenology, Horror spectatorship
## Contents

1. **INTRODUCTION** .................................................................................................................. 5  
   1.1. Background of the Study .................................................................................................. 5  
   1.2. Research Aims and Research Questions ........................................................................... 7  
   1.3. An Overview of Key Concepts ....................................................................................... 7  
   1.4. Methodology and Material Selection ............................................................................ 8  
   1.5. Disposition of the Thesis ............................................................................................... 10  

2. **UNFOLD THE COMPLEX** ................................................................................................. 12  
   2.1. Digital Practices in the Humanities ................................................................................ 12  
   2.2. The Media History Digital Library (MHDL) .................................................................. 17  
       2.2.1. Searchlight Over the Neglected ........................................................................... 18  
       2.2.2. Scaled Entity Search (SES) and POE Strategy ..................................................... 22  
   2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Meta-Inquiry ............................................................... 27  
       2.3.1. A Cognitive Approach to Monster .................................................................... 29  
       2.3.2. A Phenomenology of Horror Emotion ............................................................... 30  
       2.3.3. Orientation, Queerness, and Monsters Rebound ................................................ 34  

3. **DATA MINING CLASSIC MONSTER CINEMA, QUEERLY** ....................................... 39  
   3.1. Framing the Search Entities .......................................................................................... 41  
   3.2. Distant Reading: Monster, Queer, the Production Code ............................................. 45  
   3.3. Orientation of Classic Horror and Queer Spectatorship ............................................. 50  
   3.4. Suggestions of Further Research .................................................................................. 58  

4. **FINAL DISCUSSION** ......................................................................................................... 60  

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................................... 63  
   Materials from MHDL ........................................................................................................... 63  
   Filmography ............................................................................................................................ 63  
   Bibliography ........................................................................................................................... 64
List of Figures

Fig. 1: “A Vision Test for Film Studies,” Infographic based on JSTOR data.

Fig. 2: The SES triangle method of interpretation.

Fig. 3: A visual comparison of results returned by Arclight between “monster” and “horror”.

Fig. 4: A visual comparison of results returned by Arclight between “queer” and “gay”.

Fig. 5: Search results of the designed entities in the entire MHDL’s digitalized journals.

Fig. 6: Search results of the designed entities in Motion Picture Herald.

Fig. 7: Search with an added entity “Frankenstein”.

Fig. 8: Advertising pages for The Hound of the Baskervilles (Sidney Lanfield, 1939).

Fig. 9: Statistical materials included in the annual Hays report.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

At the end of August in 2018, Universal Pictures dropped a news bomb that the *Universal Classic Monsters: Complete 30-Film Collection* would be released on Blu-ray.¹ What made this collection more attractive than previous individual releases was the inclusion of extra material, such as behind-the-scenes documentaries, archival footages, and even the rare-seen Spanish version of *Dracula* (*Drácula*, George Melford, 1931) made exactly in the same studio at the same time with *Dracula* (Tod Browning, 1931).

Two threads of thoughts are invoked by the breaking news of this edition. First, the news delivers a relieving message among horror cinephiles including myself, assuring us that classical film monsters are still alive and far from outdated yet. Indeed, horror productions till today have retained features of those classic monstrous figures born in Hollywood of the 1930s. 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. Take *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) as an example. Owning a giant collection of adaptations, the film has turned into a powerful metaphor manifesting the ambivalent relation between human and science which can be traced back to the thematic root of Shelly’s novel.² The word “Frankenstein” is evolving to symbolize a more conceptual and ambivalent relation between mankind with abundant scientific knowledge (Dr. Frankenstein) and their technological inventions (the creation of Dr. Frankenstein); for instance, science fiction author Isaac Asimov used the term “Frankenstein Complex” in his robot novels to denote the paradoxical emotion of man feeling excited but also fear of losing control over the “mechanical men”, his own creation.³

Apart from reassuring the overall significance of classic horror cinema, the news also brings me an excitement that new primary sources which may help discover unknown facets of

---

² The original title of Mary Shelley’s novel is *Frankenstein; or, The modern Prometheus*, which alludes the myth of Prometheus being punished by Zeus for bringing fire to humanity.
classic horror history can be accessed. The fever for film archival materials has naturally motivated my research interest in digital archiving practices especially the Media History Digital Library (MHDL) launched in 2013. Directed by digital humanities scholar and film historian Eric Hoyt, the MHDL project has already been widely acknowledged by the film academia for its over two million pages of invaluable digitalized materials, which has completely transformed relevant scholarship.\(^4\) Being among the film history enthusiasts, I have experienced the delight the massive volume of data engenders, but I have also confronted barriers and confusion when empirically engaging with the digital interface, for instance, the unsearchable images, the tricky search entries, and the sorting of generated results. While media scholars continuously search MHDL’s corpus to locate materials supporting their own research projects, limited attention has been paid to the curating activities of the digitalization per se, and only few academic work has cited publications of the development team which already intensively raise a number of research issues concerning data practices in the humanities.\(^5\)

The two lines of thoughts intersected as I recalled Asimov’s term “Frankenstein Complex” and then decided to contextualize it within the realm of digital humanities. What would the recognition of data infuse into the humanities research tradition? How should we evaluate the potential contribution generated from the cooperation between human consciousness and computational algorithms? Could it be possible that someday we start to resemble the mad scientist archetype obsessing with the efficiency, accessibility, and the abundance of materials whilst neglecting that data can be massive, heterogeneous, and even vulnerable? To experience the above challenging questions concerning the disciplinary complex towards digitalization becomes the departure point of this thesis project. By performing a themed meta-inquiry on the reenactment of classic monster cinema as a retro gesture towards the conceptual name of “Frankenstein Complex”, hopefully, the project manages to offer insights to the epistemological collision and empirical challenges in the humanities scholarship when utilizing materials and methods in a digital environment.

\(^4\) For an overview of the scholarly significance of the MHDL project, see [http://vimeo.com/143048295](http://vimeo.com/143048295).

\(^5\) There are only four citations of book *The Arclight Guidebook to Media History and the Digital Humanities* published by the development team in 2016 according to the statistics Google Scholar returns I accessed today, May 16, 2019. A comprehensive discussion on the overlooked field can be found in Chapter two.
1.2. Research Aims and Research Questions

My overall research objective is to try out potentials of rethinking film history while mobilizing digital archives. Specifically, the film historical context is that of the classical Hollywood horror cinema, since the themed case study at hand sets out to echo the term “Frankenstein Complex” by backtracking to its etymological ancestor. By combining a theoretical discussion on digital humanities, horror, and film spectatorship with an empirical meta-inquiry on classical monster cinema data extracted from MHDL, the thesis develops the term “Frankenstein Complex” into a relational model that will help to observe and analyze the disciplinary ambivalence towards digitalization in current media research landscape.

The study was propelled by two major research questions:

- How does the emerging digital arching experiences influence the media history research landscape epistemologically and methodologically? In terms of this specific thesis project, what new knowledge can be introduced into the classic horror discourse through the practices of the MHDL?
- How do research positions and identities of the data users intertwine with the interpretation of the data retrieved and the follow-up research output? And why does the notion of “positionality” particularly matter when confronting “Frankenstein Complex” in the realm of digital humanities?

1.3. An Overview of Key Concepts

The conceptual framework of the thesis asks for a more detailed clarification of my key concepts and references. First is the methodological prospect of the study. Instead of presenting an individual project pointed with a chosen framework, the meta-inquiry is the study of research itself, which in this thesis project represents the study of film history research using digital methods. The methodological reflection and self-evaluation will be consistent throughout the text because they ensure the disruptions confronting the digital environments are evidence-based and therefore can be potentially resolved.

Second is the notion of “positionality”. How exactly do the researchers position themselves vis-à-vis the objects of study? In the following, the term “positionality” will be used to address the relation between the subjectivity and identity of the researcher, and the digital interface, set categories and search entries of the digital archive in use. My actual
positionality can be tackled from two perspectives: being a media user operating digital archives, and a film researcher data mining the classic horror discourse. However, the awareness of my research position vis-à-vis the present thesis project did not occur at the initial stage of the search. Rather, this awareness was induced gradually in the process of conducting this meta-inquiry on classic horror film history preserved and presented by the digital platform. Mapping the empirical digital archiving practices, I soon realized that the outcome of my search was strongly informed by themes that spoke to my personal identity as a cis female queer person with a non-Western background. The positionality thus aligns with my growing interest in queer theory as one of the major theoretical strands in my take on both horror film, horror film spectatorship, and film historical search in the digital library. Positionality informed my recognition on secondary sources as I gradually craved for theoretical conjunctions between queer film theories and phenomenology. For example, in the introduction of her study on female fear in classic Hollywood horror, film scholar Rhona J. Berenstein has clearly stated her coming out as a lesbian helped her sort out the once mysterious bond between her as a cinephile and the genre. The experience of my encounter with scholars alike who frankly state their own positions in the horror discourse has to a large extent awakened my own queer interpretation of the retrieved data, which will be detailly unfolded in chapter two and three.

Last but not least, the meta-inquiry indicated in the subtitle of the thesis is themed to be on classic horror cinema instead of horror films. It may seem odd to enlarge the research scope towards a broader production history instead of pinpointing specific films that fitted the close reading tradition of the discipline, but this demarcation is tightly connected to the curation and operation of the MHDL project that demand the unconventional “distant reading” method to fully cooperate with the big data landscape the digital library structures upon. A close examination of the formulation on my themed meta-inquiry can be found in the opening pages of chapter three.

1.4. Methodology and Material Selection
The thesis project as a whole could be regarded as a methodological reflection towards what is conceptualized as “Frankenstein Complex” concerning the mobilization of data and digitalization in film history research. It contains a meta-inquiry of classic Hollywood horror cinema by only using digital archive MHDL for primary sources. Touching upon a field filled
with unsettled scholarly debates, conducting a meta-inquiry can either fulfill its role of modelling for further research in terms of rethinking horror film history or help the assessment of digital methods used in the humanities on a broader scale.

Aside from providing the demarcation centering on digitalization of this thesis, I chose the MHDL as the only digital archival source for three specific reasons: First, its ample collection of digitized trade papers and fan magazines provides an archival treasure for this specific study on horror film and spectatorship. Second, the excellent combination of the search platform “Lantern” and its graphic interference “Arclight”, supported my will to visualize the search results while providing double entry points to navigate a huge database. Finally, the team behind the MHDL included digital humanities, media scholars, and data scientists who also wrote articles where they address different aspects of MHDL and Arclight, which largely infused my own study. In fact, the method my meta-inquiry utilizes when consulting MHDL mainly follows the interpretive method “Scaled Entity Search” (SES) and the POE strategy proposed by the team. Chapter three presents an extended discussion dedicated to the MHDL and the mentioned methods.

As the case study is conducted upon the repetitive self-reflection of digital data usage, the research process simulates an empirical scientific experiment which often has undetermined data output yet predictable results. Such resemblances once again reinforce the methodological value of the thesis project, which combines the mobilization of computational techniques and traditional research methods whilst highlighting the evaluation of research positionality. But the intended methodology also has its drawbacks such as the determine of meta-inquiry questions and the locating of relevant previous publications.

Both primary materials and secondary scholarly publications are necessary for this project, and the emphasized types of materials differ depending on the stage of the research. However, the problematic aspect lays between the arrangement of the research stages. I first followed the conventional path which puts secondary materials on horror film studies in the first place as a clear theoretical framework is generally speaking necessary to tie up the meta-inquiry with the main research skeleton. Nevertheless, most argumentation and conclusions of previous scholars within classic horror studies are neither based on digital methods nor considered to be studied as “data”, resulting in a direct reference towards their arguments to be loose and unconvincing. The meta-inquiry questions need to be drawn throughout the
actual research process, thus I prioritized secondary materials on digital humanities and MHDL to get a grasp of nowadays landscape of the realm. I paused my readings on the pre-assumed relevant secondary materials after the empirical collection of data via MHDL, which then situated to be phenomenological perspectives of gender, sexuality, and performativity in classic horror cinema.

While a repetitive process of discovering digital archives and referring to previous studies within above fields is consistent during the meta-inquiry, the evaluation of me as a researcher in digital humanities confronting “Frankenstein Complex”, experiencing both skepticism and positivism towards the gradually datafied research discipline is nevertheless persistent throughout the project.

1.5. Disposition of the Thesis

To offer a concise theoretical thread binding the proposed “Frankenstein Complex” and the investigation of classic horror cinema as an empirical experiment utilizing digitalization, the thesis has been structured into three main chapters regardless of the methodological order in practice.

Chapter two depicts such theoretical thread firstly by introducing “Frankenstein Complex” as an ambiguous attitude concealed in a broader scholarship regarding digital humanities. I then continue to the theoretical focus on the MHDL by reviewing its self-published scholarly guidebook, the position of the developers towards cultural data analysis, and the two main research methods mentioned (SES and POE) which influence the methodology of my meta-inquiry. What follows is the theoretical framework of the meta-inquiry. I provide a literature review of different approaches to some of the key questions within the horror genre, emphasizing the phenomenological reading of horror emotion and the queer theories of the discourse, pointing out a potential phenomenology of classic horror that could possibly expand the existing model of queer spectatorship.

Chapter three presents the meta-inquiry of data mining classic horror cinema data via MHDL. The delineation of the searching entity and semi-research questions will be first explained. Grounded in an awareness of research positionality confronting the digital interface, the case study develops its research questions on the performativity of queer spectators in classic
horror cinema and offers a complementary methodology to visualize what the preceding queer film theorists have proposed on monsters and the marginalized. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research on the topic using digital tools.

The conclusion chapter functions as an evaluation. It rounds up the meta-inquiry with the initial research objectives by reflecting on the process of search–how it corresponds both with the specific features of the digital library as with the positionality of the research/media user. This chapter further proposes my alternative vision in the next chapter of the digital humanities. I argue that the emergence of digitalization within archival practices, on the one hand, has granted new perspectives on film history access to the crucial material base, yet such tendency also urges the current pedagogy and methodology normalized in film historical context to go beyond humanity disciplines without losing the humanistic strive for knowledge production, critical reflection and interpretation.
2. UNFOLD THE COMPLEX

2.1. Digital Practices in the Humanities

The notion Isaac Asimov coined for in his robotic fictions as “Frankenstein Complex” is humans fear of the mechanical man. Such fear exposes the epistemic complex that humans cannot fully comprehend their own creation built upon the existing knowledge. Digitalization, being one of the most identifiable creation of contemporary social apparatus, similarly stimulates a complex among the human creators. If we contextualize “Frankenstein Complex” in the realm of digital humanities, the term denotes a tension between the humanistic research tradition and the emerging digital practices in the field. The interdisciplinary collaboration between the humanities and other fields brings out exciting research potentials, but it also puzzles the discourse of digital humanities per se because practitioners regardless of their research backgrounds can all have a say on the issues of digitalization. Consequently, despite a wide variety of scholarly argumentations have jammed into the debates in the digital humanities, to digest these bewildered discussions can be a challenging task since the writings can differ a lot in terms of contents, structures, and positions. Film historian Eef Masson in her article on humanistic data research has presented one alternative depicting such disciplinary complex. Masson sharply divides the critiques into two groups – the sceptics who have barely tried digital research, and the scholars arguing for a critical engagement with the tools. She has then concluded two sets of arguments used by both groups: the concern over the “interpretive intervention” which the humanities are known for, and the concern centering on practitioners’ reluctant attitude towards the results of data research being a product of interpretation.6 Inspired by Masson’s summary of the ongoing arguments of humanistic data research, I attempt to provide two perspectives that further help sketch out the delineation of the research complex.

The first perspective emphasizes the theoretical collision of epistemic traditions. One of the notable figures in the digital humanities – visual theorist Johanna Drucker has touched upon the disciplinary confrontation from this perspective in a number of essays. While Drucker believes in the significance of humanities scholars in the production and interpretation of digitized cultural materials and acknowledges the new insights data mining and distant

---

reading may bring into the humanities, she proposes a very different agenda in the field, questioning the impact of the humanities on the initial formation of the digital environment. Drucker argues that the epistemological foundations of various digital research instruments are “positivistic, strictly quantitative, mechanistic, reductive and literal”, which are fundamentally “at odds with, or even hostile” to the humanistic theoretical frame designed based on the very assumptions that “objects of knowledge can be understood as self-identical, self-evident, ahistorical, and autonomous.”

Specializing in the area of visual epistemology and information studies, Drucker summarizes that “the majority of information graphics [...] are shaped by the disciplines from which they have sprung: statistics, empirical sciences, and business.”

Taken advantage of the “persuasive and seductive rhetorical force of visualization” enforced by realms outside the humanities, Drucker suggests that information graphics have abandoned all critical thought by presenting “what is” only. Instead of voting for a renewal of humanistic methodologies to cooperate with digitalization, Drucker adopts a proactive attitude and directly urges that humanistic values and principles should participate in the design of the digital platforms and protocols in the first place. She writes that:

The challenge is to shift humanistic study from attention to the effects of technology (from readings of social media, games, narrative, personae, digital texts, images, environments), to a humanistically informed theory of the making of technology (a humanistic computing at the level of design, modeling of information architecture, data types, interface, and protocols).

Nevertheless, to solve the epistemic complex by creating new technology is inevitably a much arduous and daunting work, as Masson wraps up her writing in a rather listless tone that “the participants of projects in humanities data research [...] attest to the fact that it is a lot easier to formulate requirements for a truly humanistic data research than to devise the methods and tools that meet them.” However, there are a number of digital humanities projects dedicating to the revision of digital models and software towards the realization of

---

8 Ibid., 85-86.
10 Drucker, “Humanistic Theory and Digital Scholarship”, 86. Drucker uses the visualization of Google Maps as an example in this essay and continues the discussion in later sections, see ibid., 90-91. Drucker has similarly criticizes that some network diagramming and topic modelling tools “just too crude for humanistic work” using Google's n-gram graph as an example in her guest lecture titled “Should Humanists Visualize Knowledge?” at Lehigh University in 2016. See https://vimeo.com/140307034.
11 Ibid., 87.
12 Masson, 35.
humanistic computing. Admitting that “introducing ambiguity at the level of markup was untenable, not merely impractical,” Drucker in her own practices of the research agenda locates her theoretical departure to be the notion of “probability” as she sees the advances in the digital humanities to be “predicting and presenting uncertainty.” Another example is the Cultural Analytics Lab created by media theorist Lev Manovich—a research project uses computational methods to explore the digital artifacts generated from contemporary global culture. The Media History Digital Library project (MHDL) led by film historian Eric Hoyt which my thesis project will soon detailly present has also profoundly contributed to a humanistic engagement with the design level of the database and the digital interface. In summary, although the epistemological complex accompanied with the practices of digital humanities is an unescapable problem for practitioners of the field, scholars are making effort to permeate humanities values in conjunction with the formation of the digital environments.

The second perspective focuses on the empirical practices of the digital humanities. Though the definition of digital humanities as an academic discipline has been continuously formulated by theorists from various fields that relevant discussions have become genre pieces writing, it is the empirical practices that dominantly contribute to the evolvement of the field. I choose to review three introductions of the book series Debates in the Digital Humanities published in 2012, 2016, and 2019 to efficiently get a glimpse of the empirical research attention of the fast growing discipline and examine the research trend of the field.

In the introduction of Debates in the Digital Humanities (2012 edition), editor of the book—English and digital humanities scholar Matthew K. Gold identifies the collection is “not a celebration of the digital humanities but an interrogation of it.” Gold summarizes the various critiques towards the digital humanities (which by then was still not pinpointed as a research field yet) revealed in selected essays that:

14 Ibid., 90. Examples of Drucker’s written/digital projects practicing her agenda are “Subjective Meteorology” and “Wittgenstein’s Gallery”. For details of Drucker’s research projects, see http://www.johannadrucker.net/projects.html.
15 For details of Cultural Analytics Lab, see http://lab.culturalanalytics.info. The methodology proposed by the research team “cultural analytics” has been widely engaged by relevant projects in field; for further delineation of the method, see Lev Manovich, “Cultural Analytics, Social Computing and Digital Humanities,” in The Datafied Society, ed. Mirko Tobias Schäfer and Karin van Es, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 55-68.
16 The notion of “genre pieces” addressing the scholarly writings on the “what” question of the digital humanities was firstly brought up by literature scholar Matthew Kirschenbaum. The notion has been widely quoted among essays by fellow researchers. See Matthew Kirschenbaum, “What Is Digital Humanities and What’s It Doing in English Departments?“ in Debates in the Digital Humanities, ed. Matthew K. Gold, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 3-11.
Several essays in the volume level pointed critiques at DH for a variety of ills: a lack of attention to issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality; a preference for research-driven projects over pedagogical ones; an absence of political commitment; an inadequate level of diversity among its practitioners; an inability to address texts under copyright; and an institutional concentration in well-funded research universities.\footnote{18}

These criticisms notably exposed the intractable barriers problematizing a wider empirical engagement with the digital humanities at that time, whilst they also demonstrated the reflections of the pioneers on predicting and navigating the future directions of the field. Four years later, Gold together with digital humanities scholar Lauren F. Klein edited a second volume of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* and published in a hybrid form of print and digital stream. Having witnessed the embracement of an expanded range of methods and theories that practices under the “big tent” of digital humanities undertook, Gold and Klein enthusiastically note in the introduction of the second volume that, if the first volume marked the “digital humanities moment”, this subsequent collection indicates “the digital humanities, as a field, has arrived.”\footnote{19} Apart from the continuous “interrogation” and critiques of the digital humanities scholarship, the 2016 edition emphasizes works on pedagogy and edits relevant essays in the whole volume using a “baked-in” approach, which integrates the topic into different chapters.\footnote{20} Rather than summarize a variety of drawbacks ongoing practices have posed in the introduction, Gold and Klein specifically highlight the political aspect of the field in the 2016 edition that:

Indeed, *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2016* has a markedly political bent - not only because of the institutional politics associated with the digital humanities as an emerging field. In a year that saw renewed attention to the entrenched nature of state-authorized violence against black bodies at the same time that scholars who spoke out against these and other acts of systemic injustice found job offers revoked, the stakes for a more explicitly political digital humanities have been raised.\footnote{21}

\footnote{18}Ibid.  
\footnote{20}Ibid.  
\footnote{21}Ibid.
We have to say that the editors have sensed the orientation of the field at an early stage. The third edition of *Debates in the Digital Humanities* published this year has noticeably prioritized writings investigative possibilities and constraints political identities bring into the practices of digital humanities. In this newest edition, Gold and Klein have spent pages in their introduction noting the coalition of digital humanists, activists, organizers, and other practitioners who are devoted to the message of *empowerment* in today’s digital discourse. The editors acknowledge that the newly-formed allies and communities are exactly echoing the “new hybrid practitioners: artist-theorists, programming humanists, activist-scholars; theoretical archivists, critical race coders” whom cinema scholar Tara McPherson already called for in her essay included in the first volume of *Debates in the Digital Humanities*. Hence, instead of following the steps of preceding theorists in defending the field to the skeptical outsiders, the recognition of the above “hybrid practitioners” demands an encouragement of an active dialogue inside the sophisticated subfields of digital humanities, as Gold and Klein emphasizes that the newest agenda of digital humanities is “to translate the subtleties of our research to others within the expanded field.” Besides the call for internal collaboration and communication, Gold and Klein also suggest the next phase of the digital humanities should lean towards the work of maintenance rather than an aimless promotion of projects labeled as “innovation”. The editors conclude the introduction of the 2019 edition that:

> We hope that from counting to caretaking, from speculating to building, the digital humanities in 2019 and beyond will continue to offer space to work toward a more hopeful future, one where the shine of innovation gradually gives way to the familiarity of use, the tasks of maintenance, and the stubborn knowledge that there remains much work left to be done.

My review of three introductions of one book series *Debates in the Digital Humanities* stretching over seven years has its limitation in terms of diversity and inclusiveness of the field, but it does offer some insights of the disciplinary trajectory which fortunately could be detected, observed, and interpreted after the empirical practices have undertaken the adequate

---

24 Ibid., xii.
length of time period. Although the research interests of empirical practices can vary a lot depending on the time periods they are carried out, these scholarly works have all acted and been performed in accordance with voices outside the conventional humanities scholarship—whether they are from an interdisciplinary area inside the humanities, or the information technology departments, or even the real world beyond academia. We probably will have to frequently combat with “Frankenstein Complex”—the ever-evolving complex system binding humanities scholars and digitalization, because both conventional and hybrid practitioners of the digital humanities have not yet quitted or reduced the enthusiasm in formulating new agendas of the field. Nevertheless, as Johanna Drucker concludes in her constructive essay that, the challenge for all of us united in the exciting realm of digital humanities, for a long time will be to absorb the theoretical principles of the humanities—“ways of thinking differently, otherwise, specific to the problems and precepts of interpretative knowing—partial, situated, enunciative, subjective, and performative”\(^\text{25}\), and translate those into our production and utilization of the digital scholarship.

### 2.2. The Media History Digital Library (MHDL)

Media History Digital Library (MHDL) was founded by film historian David Pierce in 2009 with the ambition to improve the traditional research landscape that film and media historians had to go through limited numbers of trade papers and fan magazines for materials related to their research questions. In 2011, digital humanities scholar and film historian Eric Hoyt joined the MHDL project and started the website building and digitalization process. In the following three years, Hoyt and his team at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have worked on search engine Lantern (launched in 2013) and Project Arclight (launched in 2015) to make the MHDL’s large-scale collection more user-friendly and analytically. Supported by individual and institutional funding, over two million pages of trade papers and fan magazines no longer subjected to copyright so far have been digitized and openly accessed by the public, inspiring the media history department, professionals from other disciplines, and dedicated film enthusiasts to pose new questions, conduct diverse projects, and produce new knowledge.\(^\text{26}\) Hence, the MHDL project itself is a successful attempt that confronts

\(^{25}\) Drucker, “Humanistic Theory and Digital Scholarship”, 94.

\(^{26}\) The development team has answered the question on the copyright status of the digitized materials on the Lantern website: “To determine which materials are available for digitization, we check the U.S. copyright status of all titles. We reviewed every copyright renewal for serials (magazines) published from 1923 to 1950, and for titles after those dates, we search the copyright records for the status of the major publications published from 1951 to 1963. The copyrights for nearly all of these media industry, fan and technical publications were not renewed, and those pre-1964 works are now in the public domain. See [http://lantern.mediahist.org/about/index](http://lantern.mediahist.org/about/index). The team also notices that the founder of the MHDL David Pierce is the author.
“Frankenstein Complex” by bringing out the advantages of data research to the practices of the general public.

Same as the architecture of a physical archive which is closely linked with certain human intention and purpose, the construction of the MHDL including Lantern and Arclight is designed in accordance with the idea and principles of the development team. The following sections address the research positionality of the team by teasing out the theoretical concern of the project at an early stage of the curation and the later proposed methodological solutions to better analyze the dataset in the humanities. The review of the publications of the development team not only offers insights into the current research landscape but also deeply impacts on the methodological structure and the work efficiency of my own meta-inquiry.

2.2.1. Searchlight Over the Neglected
In an essay published in 2014, lead developer of Lantern Eric Hoyt points out his objective of designing the search engine is to “create a user experience that offers fast, powerful search and a sense of context about the underlying sources.” He admits that the tension between “speed and context” is the major challenge Lantern has to cooperate with. In response to the challenge, Hoyt and his team build Lantern’s search algorithms and indexing structure based on the open-source search engine Solr which is optimized for high volume traffic and capable of performing full-text search. The team divides the pages into unique singular document which is split again into smaller fragments for the quick running of search queries. The team develops the “Read in Context” function re-directing users to browse the search results in an interface similar to a book, which ensures that the interpretation of the accessed data is carried out without losing a contextual dialogue.

While the algorithmic base guarantees that users can perform a quick search of the digitalized materials for the results they want, it also requires users to re-evaluate their chosen methods when engaging with the materials. Hoyt agrees with the methodological urgency concerning

of a reference work on copyright and has worked in copyright search for over thirty years, see David Pierce, *Motion Picture Copyrights and Renewals 1950-59* (Milestone, 1989).

27 Eric Hoyt, “Lenses for Lantern: Data Mining, Visualization, and Excavating Film History’s Neglected Sources,” *Film History* 26, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 147.

28 Ibid.

29 Solr is an open source enterprise search platform written in Java and powers some of the most heavily-trafficked sites, including Internet Archive, The Usenet Archive, Homeland Security Digital Library (HSDL). For updated news, resources, latest features, and download of Solr, see [http://lucene.apache.org/solr/](http://lucene.apache.org/solr/).
digitalization which is “to plunge even deeper into the affordances of digital technology” by “combining close reading, archival research, and computational analysis” shall be the best strategy leading towards a rich understanding of the digital collections. The research issue is powerfully highlighted through a study led by Hoyt and his team on the circulation and citation data of trade papers and fan magazines. By cross-comparing results from JSTOR Data for Research (http://dfr.jstor.org) and Lantern, the research team notices that eight magazines digitized in the MHDL have only been cited in one or two JSTOR film studies articles, and seven magazines have not been cited in any film-related articles. It is therefore obvious that film and media research projects tend to reuse the same magazines while neglecting a much wider pool of publications. The infographic created by Hoyt based on the JSTOR citations of each magazine and its calculated size of the cover (see Figure 1) visually justifies the argument in a forceful way. Although the research was conducted only on the JSTOR database and there are scholars putting effort on some minor magazines, the overall trend is clear and calls for attention.

Hoyt has concluded at least six reasons lead to the uneven citation of sources in media history research. Three of them are connected to issues of materiality and research tradition— the lengths and publishing timeframe of the magazines, the cluster of research questions on certain historical periods, and the different publishing orientations of the magazines which are considered by Hoyt to be the most important factor. Nevertheless, Hoyt argues that three other factors— access, reference aids, and tradition should be noted down as most responsible for the unbalanced research phenomenon. What MHDL and Lantern have introduced into the field, therefore, is not merely the digital database constituting of invaluable materials; the project rather makes an urgent proposal calling for research light over sources that have been long neglected or not even known in the film and media discourse.

30 Hoyt, 148.
31 Ibid., 150. The comparison results are based on Hoyt’s project in 2014 when the MHDL has not been widely used yet. Therefore, it would be interesting to have a follow-up research project to study the actual effect of MHDL statistically by investigating the current JSTOR dataset.
32 Ibid., 152.
33 Ibid., 152-153.
34 Ibid.
A VISION TEST FOR FILM STUDIES:
HOW WE SEE TRADE PAPERS & FAN MAGAZINES

Figure 1: “A Vision Test for Film Studies,” Infographic based on JSTOR data, created by Eric Hoyt.35

35 Hoyt, 151.
In a more recent article, Hoyt conveys the message from the developers’ side that much work including digitizing, curating and enabling access is far from complete of the MHDL project, and stresses another layer of the project that the further steps need to start from “shifting our perception about what this work means and why it matters.” He claims two alternatives justifying the meaning aspect that the various digitalization projects can be either consulted by historians as a precondition for analytical works or explored by readers after the encounter of secondary publications. He further argues in a straightforward manner that “rather than framing digitization and curation as activities that are ultimately subordinate to other forms of scholarship, we should understand these practices as valid forms of scholarship in their own right.” I definitely agree with him that not only digitalization but the practices behind such process deserves re-evaluation within the discipline.

Another key programmer of the MHDL project Derek Long in an article explaining the metadata analysis in film history through a detailed case study on the transformation and digitalization of American Film-Index points out the fact that due to the uncountable amount of lost American silent films, filmographies and the metadata contained “might represent the sum of all surviving knowledge about some films.” Long has made an accurate metaphor depicting the significance of filmographic metadata that it “serves as a kind of cultural fossil record, representing thousands of extinct species that we can never see in the flesh.” How to directly generate scholarly arguments of these archaeological pieces instead of simply exhibiting them to meet an established tradition? How can film historians recognize the relations not only within these fossil records but also towards a broader media history discussion? In other words, what may be the matched methodology to better excavate the massive volume of digital materials now available? The following section correspondingly investigate two methods emphasized by the development team that can benefit the mobilization of MHDL’s collections: analytical and interpretive method named Scaled Entity Search (SES), and pedagogical method named Prediction-Observation-Explanation (POE) strategy.

37 Ibid., 357.
38 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
2.2.2. Scaled Entity Search (SES) and POE Strategy

One crucial aspect often neglected by the humanities researchers using digital interfaces is the technical ground the database built upon. To better efficiently analyze large-scale digitalized corpora, increasing developing emphasis has been placed to construct data discovery methods using non-proprietary open-source tools such as topic modeling and network visualization. Because these “unsupervised” methods do not require major hypothesis before the operation, concerns arise that these methods could lead to “black boxes” problems. Consequently, keyword search as a traditional and classic method returns to the data mining practices. Search has functioned as the most familiar method by humanities researchers and the public, which already enables the method to approach a wider user group. Being a “supervised” method, search also largely involves human practice which manifests a certain degree of transparency; the keyword input always indicates the activation of certain human intention regardless of it being realized or not by the human subject self.

However, to match the large-scale digital corpora and the massive volume of informative digits, the conventional keyword search needs a methodological update. In response, The research team of the MHDL proposes a new analytical and interpretive method named Scaled Entity Search (SES) which was presented as a paper at the 2014 IEEE International Conference on Big Data. Although specific knowledge in data science is demanded to fully understand and evaluate the technical method of SES which according to the team is inscribed with a transparent coding principle, the team introduces another straightforward perspective towards SES—the method as an interpretive framework. This perspective is considered by the developers “of prime importance to the full realization of SES as a humanistic method” of big data analysis. The triangulated interpretive framework depicted

---

41 Eric Hoyt, Kit Hughes, Derek Long, Anthony Tran, and Kevin Ponto, “Scaled Entity Search: A method for media historiography and response to critiques of big humanities data research”, in 2014 IEEE International Conference on Big Data (Big Data), IEEE, 2014, 52. The “black box” critique suggests that scholars practicing digital humanities may not completely understand the data processing during the research. Johanna Drucker’s discussion on the epistemological collision that I touch upon in earlier section also belongs to this category of critique. For similar argumentation, see James E. Dobson, “Can an Algorithm be Disturbed? Machine Learning, Intrinsic Criticism, and the Digital Humanities,” College Literature 42, no.4 (2015): 543-564.

42 Although to perform a search requires the participation of keyword input, the algorithms of the search engines remain controversial in the digital humanities. Some researchers have argued that the hidden desires of institutions or the profit-driven of the corporations sometimes win over the academic interests and shape the algorithmic writing of the search engines. For relevant projects, see Lisa Gitelman, “Searching and thinking about searching jstor,” Representations 127, no.1 (Summer 2014):73-82; Frederic Kaplan, “Linguistic capitalism and algorithmic mediation,” Representations 127, no.1 (Summer 2014): 57-63.

43 For complete explanation of the technical method, see Eric Hoyt, Kit Hughes, Derek Long, Anthony Tran, and Kevin Ponto, 53-55.

44 Ibid., 55.
by the team (see Figure 2) aims to “keep SES transparent and self-reflexive”. Apart from critical analysis of the three vertices— the entities, the corpus, and the digital, SES also invites researchers to examine the edges describing the interrelationship between the participants of the framework.

Figure 2. The SES triangle method of interpretation.  

The team provides six packs of research questions at length explaining the information in the triangle. It is noticeable that among over twenty different questions added up from each viewpoint, the team has highlighted issues of human subjectivity through questions concerning both the technical researcher referred as “We” and the user practicing SES referred as “You”. Aside from questions long-existed in the digital humanities regarding

---

45 Eric Hoyt, Kit Hughes, Derek Long, Anthony Tran, and Kevin Ponto, 55.
46 Ibid.
47 The six packs are categorized as the Entities, the Corpus, the Digital, the Entities-Corpus Relationship, The Corpus-Digital Relationship, and The Entities-Digital Relationship.
“your” justification of the selected search entities and corpus, and “our” programming of the corpus and the digital interface, the team also lists a handful of questions demanding an interdisciplinary dialogue between “you” irrespective of “your” search/research background and “us” as the corpus programmers. For instance, one pair of questions under the Entities-Corpus Relationship—“How could you design an entity list that plays to the strengths of the corpus? At the same time, if we only design research questions and entity lists on the basis of what is likely to generate interesting results in the corpus, how does this limit scholarship?” clearly addresses the feasibility of the database from both sides. Another question under the Entities-Digital Relationship requesting alternatives to mitigate problems caused by “your” anticipation beforehand likewise expects “you” to ponder on “your” cognitive understanding of the digital interface.

The development team provides a case study on the MHDL corpus using SES to further demonstrate that SES can better help interpret results, qualify historical claims, provide answers to proposed research questions, trigger sub-questions and produce new knowledge. At the same time, the team also points out three major limitations of SES. First, the obtained raw data results gained via a number of entities potentially need additional tools to translate into readable data; this limitation became the motivation of a follow-up research– project Arclight emphasizing the visualization of the retrieved data. Second, a balance between the increasing quantitative analysis and the pursuit of qualitative productions is yet to be reached in research fields such as textuality and aesthetics. Third, SES can sketch correlations between entities and map a historical trend, but it has drawbacks on assessing the co-location in specific texts. Therefore, the research team reasserts that SES should not be limited as the only analytical tool in the practice of digital humanities and encourages a combination of data mining techniques such as topic modeling and other methods to maintain the self-reflectivity when approaching the obtained data.

Although the team of MHDL has openly welcomed collaboration between their proposed method SES with various applicable projects within the big humanities data research, a large research gap is surprisingly waiting for feedbacks and critical reflection. According to an up-

---

48 Ibid.
49 I choose not to expand the case study of the team due to the coherence and length of this thesis project. Nevertheless, the team has presented a brilliant or even the first case study that test SES on the MHDL’s by then 1.3 million pages digital materials. For details of the case study, see Ibid., 55-58.
50 Ibid., 58.
to-date statistic of the conference paper on IEEE page, a total usage of the paper only counts to 94 since January 2015. The number of citation searched via Google Scholar appears to be even more surprising. Among the nine academic papers written all within a film history discourse, only two are written completely without key members from the development team of MHDL and Arclight. In an excellent case analysis mobilizing the visualization function of Arclight published two years after SES was proposed in 2014, MHDL and Project Arclight’s search index developer Kit Huges has once again underlined the thirst for research collaboration. He stresses that, to fully benefit from the “inhuman amounts of data”, researchers must “push beyond their individual capacities and embrace the collaborative effort at the heart of historiographical endeavor.” Director of MHDL Eric Hoyt similarly admits the somehow difficult empirical practices with the methods. He points out that scholarly collaborations are not seamless transitions compared with the smooth workflows of using Adobe Creative Cloud. Although MHDL and Arclight have received progressive attention from scholars and students of film and media departments during the past five years, an ideal vibrant media history research context is still desperately in need of more empirical practices adopting and reflecting on digital research methods. Retrieving feedback from the humanities researchers—whether their critical investigation ends up in a positive or hesitating position, can be the key to help the development team to improve the existing technical method and other maintenance job of the digital library.

The discussion on the optimization of utilizing MHDL shall now be continued by directing towards one alternative method regarding its pedagogical practices, that is the Prediction- Observation-Explanation (POE) strategy which in fact has been widely applied in scientific research for over two decades. Hoyt introduced the POE strategy into the humanities research when his team launched project Arclight in 2015. The strategy requires the students to make predictions, observe an experiment, evaluate the outcomes comparing with their

54 Hoyt, “Curating, Coding, Writing: Expanded Forms of Scholarly Production”, 347.
55 POE as a constructivist teaching strategy was developed by science educationist Richard White and Richard Gunstone in 1992. See Richard Thomas White and Richard F. Gunstone, *Probing understanding* (Falmer, 1992), 44-64.
initial predictions, and explore the reasons and causes behind the experiment. Students adopting POE are invited to research in a real-time context constructed by themselves, which enhances their self-reflection of the appropriateness of the existing ideas and beliefs. In his post published on the Arclight website, Hoyt acknowledges the theoretical challenge when implementing POE in a historical context by making a metaphor of a pedagogical scene taking place in a history classroom. The students can have their own predictions when facing questions raised by the teacher, such as “what happened next?”, yet the revealed “fixed” answers from the side of the instructor will probably be underpinned as “the authority on the historical record”, resulting in a reduction of assumptions and arguments which are necessary components contributing to the historical narrative dynamic.56 Arclight is thus designed to visualize searching experiences cooperated with MHDL’s search engine Lantern with the aim to foster an active media history learning environment which can be effectively integrated with POE. The generated graphics have offered users an opportunity to inspect, observe, and analyze trends in film and media history.57 It also functions as an entry point towards the underlying digital archive MHDL by inviting users to click on the graphics and browse through the correspond Lantern page.

In summary, the POE strategy is a user-friendly method that can be applied at the initial stage when consulting MHDL through its matched visual project Arclight. Hoyt notes that any explanation and analysis grounded in the non-argumentative line graphs should be further tested through POEPOE or POEPOEPOE strategy.58 Apart from suggesting additional reference of primary sources not indexed within Lantern, Hoyt again brings up the SES method proposed by his team and stresses once again its value during further stages of the research. Therefore, project Arclight and MHDL have extended the close reading tradition in the humanities by encouraging the distant reading of many texts at a large scale with POE and SES as their methodological back-up.

In 2016, the open access e-book The Arclight Guidebook edited by digital humanities scholar Charles R. Acland and Eric Hoyt was available on the Arclight website. The book includes a number of self-reflective case studies using digital humanities methods. Reflective essay

57 Ibid. It is interesting to notice that project Arclight was inspired by Twitter analytics as Hoyt put forward in a question form that: “If researchers can use Twitter analytics to study trends in discussions of contemporary media, then what if we treated historic trade papers and fan magazines like a giant Twitter stream and explored trends in film and media history?”
58 Ibid.
being an academic writing form, as Hoyt argues in his own included piece, has its unique strengths for being “personal and conversational” and the authors are “permitted, even expected, to raise questions that go unanswered”; but he also points out one limitation of the form being “quite insular” as the writers are analyzing themselves instead of “turning our [the researchers’] analysis to questions that go beyond the traditions and idiosyncrasies of academic disciplines.” Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that the main research goal of most self-reflective essays of the book and not to forget my own thesis project identifies, is to confront various emerging digital methods and try to understand the research complex between digitalization and media history research in a contemporary context. I believe that in order to overcome the complex towards the utilization of digital methods which I contextualize as “Frankenstein Complex”, more experiences of the digital phenomena—meaning more methodological reflections, shall be welcomed and discussed both inside and beyond the humanities discipline to maintain the humanistic scholarship in a digital age.

2.3. Theoretical Framework of the Meta-Inquiry

This section starts my meta-inquiry on classic horror cinema with the aim to experience media history research in a digital environment. “Human experiences” as a subject is the sharing research highlight of both digital humanities and horror studies. The experience is the reflective behavior of one’s lived body, thus a group of experiences creates an intersubjective pattern from the lens of phenomenology. Why we are troubled and skeptical towards information technology while digitalization brings us all this convenience? Why we experience empathy instead of fear towards the monster on screen? These seemingly irrelevant questions all touch upon the enigma of human mind apprehending something non-human from the viewpoint of “human”. Although the theoretical discussion of horror cinema serves the meta-inquiry, the framework is helpful to answer the main research questions of the thesis, especially when data practices have already raised concerns that we might be creating machine learning “monster”.

Previous studies on horror—whether the word is defined as a purely philosophical concept, or a psychological emotion, or as a film genre, all include examples of horror films somewhere in the analysis. Literature on “horror” thus forms a theoretical labyrinth with various entries one can choose, which problematizes specific inquiries on horror cinema. Indeed, horror as a genre may offer film scholars a textual entry towards a collection of films, but the attempt to apply generalized theories concluded from chosen film examples to a broader “horror cinema” without a careful demarcation will unavoidably be problematic. “The film is not scary at all!” may be a common response to films labeled “horror” without meeting audiences’ expectation of being “frightened”. It can be contemporary audiences watching some William Castle productions in the 1960s with joy and laughter, or slasher film buffs criticizing recent psychological horror such as *The Babadook* (Jennifer Kent, 2014) and *The Witch* (Robert Eggers, 2015) being too quiet and tiresome. In her guidebook of horror studies, horror film scholar Brigid Cherry immediately points out in the introduction that “genre” is a tricky concept to use. She concludes four reasons why the concept faces debates—the everlasting timespan of cinematic horror history, the constant evolving of productions belong to the assumed genre, the large number of national cinemas contributed to the genre and the on-going genre hybridization. Although thematic variations within horror cinema continue to problematize the notion of “horror genre”, studies on cinematic emotions and affect of horror emerged in the 1990s have justified the common research ground which enhances the formation of horror genre is necessary for research purposes.

To avoid a loosely investigation, I structure the theoretical review into three sub-sections: an analysis of monster cinema based on cognitive theories, a phenomenological delineation of horror emotion, and a specific inquiry on horror cinema opened up by feminism and queer scholarship. It is worth mentioning before the discussion that, although I favor phenomenology in this specific project, I have no intention to oppose the cognitivist research agenda which, as a matter of fact, is one of the most comprehensive frameworks developed in

---

61. It is also interesting to note that queer author Jeanette Winterson’s latest novel *Frankissstein: A Love Story* is a playful reanimation of Mary Shelly’s original novel and themed to be a transgender love fiction in an AI age, which is more than relevant to my meta-inquiry on queer orientation within the classic horror context. See Jeanette Winterson, *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (London: Penguin Random House, 2019).
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid., 95. Cherry refer to Stephen Neale’s arguments on the horror genre that, “it is important to contextualize the development of horror as a subject for study within film theory.” Considering the research aim of the case study is to address classic horror cinema through my chosen lens of phenomenology and sexuality which will be expanded in the following section, I decide to not go in detail of various psychoanalytical analysis especially feminist readings in the discourse because the “female” identity addressed in these works could be problematic and irrelevant if I intend to get closer to the actual experiences of audiences during the classic horror era.
the field, especially its critiques towards classic horror productions which have offered valuable complementary perspectives to the ongoing phenomenological reading of horror.

2.3.1. A Cognitive Approach to Monster

Theories on horror developed by cognitivists most notably Noël Carroll in his book *The Philosophy of Horror* have aroused intensive debates with psychoanalytical film theories, yet the cognitive approaches offered inspiring theoretical model specifically for studying classic Hollywood horror.\(^{64}\) Carroll suggests that a work of horror must have or suggest a *monster*, by which he specifically means a monstrous entity unknown or unreal to the viewers yet still have horrific affect on them.\(^{65}\) Although film theorists have raised doubts that Carroll’s notion of “art-horror” tends to be under-inclusive, classical monsters including Dracula, the Wolfman, and Frankenstein’s monster fit into the “art-horror” discourse perfectly. Carroll describes the monsters contextualized in the horror narrative to be “impure and unclean”, etching “fear and disgust” on the characters’ perception.\(^{66}\) These two central emotions in Carroll’s philosophical enunciation of horror cannot be completely replaced with the psychoanalytical notion of “abjection”\(^{67}\) brought up by feminist film scholar Barbara Creed because the disgust, according to Carroll, comes from “interstitiality” or “categorical contradictoriness” of the monster instead of abjection.\(^{68}\) Accordingly, Carroll answers the question *why* certain emotions (fear and disgust) are activated in horror cinema from a cognitive perspective that the identification of such emotions initiates from an object instead of occurring as an unconscious experience. The character-identification model is thus rejected in Carroll’s account because the symmetrical feature of “identification” is most of the time asymmetrical between the spectators and characters; we are not duplicating the psychological state of the characters, but rather “assimilating” a particular situation that grants us access to the characters’ perspectives on a cognitive level.\(^{69}\)

The above arguments are logically complete and can be seen as an alternative *explanation* of the occurrence of emotions during a horror movie-going scene. However, the unsettled aspect of Carroll’s theory lies rather in his *description* of the emotion. His assumptions to answer

\(^{64}\) Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (London: Routledge, 1990), 12.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 27-30.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 23.
\(^{68}\) Carroll, 43.
\(^{69}\) Ibid., 95-96.
another question—how does the audience make sense of horror fails to acknowledge the variety of experiences of the horror film viewers. Carroll states that even though the emotion of art-horror is “a determining feature for identifying membership in the genre”, emotion is “not our absolutely primary aim in consuming horror fictions”; He further argues that “art-horror is the price we are willing to pay for the revelation of that which is impossible and unknown, of that which violates our conceptual schema.” Therefore, Carroll simplifies the emotion of horror-going to our “curiosity” towards the unknown, and monsters function as “a perfect vehicle” for this collective curious emotion. This description might work well in a historical context where the fascination of technology be regarded as “unreal” for the public, which can inspire specific reconstruction of classic horror history; but it obviously underestimates the pleasure of watching a horror film, resulting in the theory insufficient to answer why do audiences living outside the specific historical context can still enjoy the horror films. In his essay continuing the trend of approaching horror films cognitively, philosophy scholar Aaron Smuts sets off the discussion by elucidating the focus of analytic-cognitivist tradition being “live problems”, that analytic philosophy underlines “clarity of thought and rigorous argumentation” instead of textual interpretation, which makes the research style possibly “a logic-chopping legalistic philosophy of no clear relevance to larger human concerns.” Smuts in his writing indirectly admits that a precise characterization or definition of the “monster” originates in Carroll’s theory to cooperate with the expansion of the horror genre is a challenging task. A cognitive approach to “monster” does give us some reasonable explanations of the horror emotion, but in order to better grasp that sensuous complex experienced by the spectators to the monster—whatever that entity might be, it is necessary to consider a phenomenological approach to try unlocking the how question.

2.3.2. A Phenomenology of Horror Emotion

A basic understanding of phenomenology is that it focuses on lived-body experience. Applied in film studies, as film scholar Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich suggest in their introductory essay, film phenomenology can be defined in a broad or a narrow sense. Studies fall into the broad definition conceptualize film as a philosophical subject and

---

70 Carroll, 186.
71 Ibid., 182.
73 Ibid., 6.
examine the term phenomenologically based on theories derived from phenomenologists namely Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The narrow definition is an attempt that either emphasizing “the film-as-intentional-object” or “the viewer-as-experiencing-subject.” Therefore, film phenomenology endows relevant studies with a wide degree of both generality and specificity that celebrates the openness of each and every human experience connected to film; in fact, film theorists such as Vivian Sobchack has claimed that film has the ability to “make manifest” some characteristics of humans experience, thus enhancing a resemblance between film and phenomenology itself.

Although the definition of film phenomenology remains unsolved and waits for further exploration, the notion of “doing phenomenology” clearly requires that relevant research should have the focus on the experience. In the case of horror cinema which gathers a diverse collection of film experiences that cannot possibly be explained through a cognitive unity, phenomenology as a methodological lens can make us better see the sensuous complex. What phenomenology illuminates in terms of the writing of film theories is that the writing should try to embrace the literal language we (the audiences) use to describe and experience films. In fact, the Latin origin of horror “horrere” and its adjective “horrificus” have the meaning of making the hair stand on end, which directly addresses horror as a sensual experience instead of an abstract depiction. Film scholar Julian Hanich has dedicated such phenomenological approach in his book Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers after noticing the astounding lack of studies on cinema of fear. Hanich points out the interpretive methods are still preferred by the discipline which is in search for “meaning” and “politics of representation”, resulting in “the experiential level of frightening films” being largely overlooked. He defends the importance of taking first-person accounts in the horror discourse, stressing that the research interest of phenomenology is not “particular cases”, but the “types of experience”. Acknowledging the complexity of defining emotions since names

---

75 Considering the scope and general aim of this thesis project, I have mainly consulted secondary publications referring works of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and I admit my current digest of the two philosophers is far from satisfaction. The two secondary publications I referred when trying to approach Husserl’s phenomenology are Allan Casebier, Film and Phenomenology: Towards a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation (Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sarah, Ahmed, Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

76 Ferencz-Platz and Julian Hanich, 14.

77 See Vivian Sobchack, “Phenomenology”, in The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film. (New York: Routledge, 2009): 435-445. Due to the research scope of the project, I have referred only a few general essays and chapters on film and phenomenology written by Vivian Sobchack, but her works certainly deserve much more in-depth reading and reflection for my potential projects in the future.

78 Julian Hanich, Cinematic Emotion in Horror Films and Thrillers: The Aesthetic Paradox of Pleasurable Fear (Taylor & Francis, 2010), 16.

79 Ibid., 41.
of the emotion can vary much depending on the individual philosophical or psychological position, Hanich nevertheless provides a comprehensive theory on the specific emotion *fear* based on a phenomenological observation, that the cinematic fear is individuated “not only according to their appraised intentional objects (we not only think emotions) but also according to their lived-body, temporal and intersubjective phenomenology (we also *experience* emotions)”, and then categorizes cinematic fear into five predominant versions-direct horror, suggested horror, cinematic shock, cinematic dread, and cinematic terror.80 He also stresses the identicality of these five types is neither in terms of intentionality or experience only but constituted through five intertwining components—intentionality, appraisal, action tendency, physiological change, and phenomenological experience.81 We can never truly express our precise feelings because of the defective nature of language itself, yet a nuanced vocabulary as Hanich categorizes does help us at least grasp, investigate and reflect on different experiences that used to be mistakenly approached as a singular object.82

Although Hanich situates the embodied viewer within “the spatial and social surroundings of a specific site of exhibition” which could be followed as one of the fundamental principles of film phenomenology, his argument that it is only through the surroundings of the “multiplex cinema” that horror film can “reveal their full aesthetic potential” underestimates the experiential affect reinforced through other technological forms dedicated to cinematic immersion.83 But the argument is still likely valid if locating a specific historical period of horror film-going experience. In other words, even though phenomenology as a method can largely inspire new perspectives in horror film discourse on behalf of the audience, to achieve the goal of *describing* cinematic horror still requires the involvement of empirical studies on spectatorship. In his essay *Horror Reception/Audiences*, horror film scholar Matt Hills discusses the conceptual distinction between “reception” and “audience” to further delimits studies on film spectators. He concludes that works on reception studies typically examine “Hollywood machineries of marketing” to reconstruct the meaning-making process of the

80 Hanich, 19.  
81 Ibid., 19-21.  
82 What I suggest as “the defective nature” of language here is in echo with the concept “language-game” developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, who rejected a corresponding relation between language and reality. The philosophical works of Wittgenstein on language and logic has profoundly influenced my own re-direction of academic path from literature and linguistic studies to film studies; I was somehow unsatisfied with the capacity of literal language when it comes to a sincere enunciation and exchange of meaning, and became more interested and believed in the connotative film language. For further inquiry on Wittgenstein, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigation* (Blackwell Publishing, 1953); Anat Biletzki and Anat Matar, “Ludwig wittgenstein,” 2002, [https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/](https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/wittgenstein/).  
83 Hanich, 18. Aside from experimental technologies in current industry such as VR and interactive films, Hanich’s discussion also neglects a daily scenario that one watches horror films at night alone at home, which resembles or even intensifies the immersive “multiplex cinema” experience without being in an actual cinema.
cinematic text, audiences studies try to answer “what texts mean for their viewers/fans.” Both reception studies and audience studies can be conducted empirically by consulting archival sources, and thanks to the development of several digital archive projects including the MHDIL, primary materials can now be approached in an ever-convenient research environment, bringing in more samples available to a phenomenological description of media history landscape. However, the massive volume of data and the methodology chosen to approach the database also problematize the theorization process as I have discussed in previous sections in this chapter. Hence, it is important to review the criterions that can help us extract inspiring phenomenological writings from casual descriptions of subjectivist experiences. Hanich concludes two standards for reference on this issue. First, from the readers’ perspective, the phenomenological description should have something of surprise and novelty; second and more crucially, the analysis should evoke a reflection among others. Vivian Sobchack similarly also stresses the recognition of good phenomenology that:

The proof of an adequate phenomenological description, then, is not whether or not the reader has actually had—or even is in sympathy with—the meaning and value of an experience as described—but whether or not the description is resonant and the experience’s structure sufficiently comprehensible to a reader who might ‘possibly’ inhabit it (even if in a differently inflected or valued way).

According to these two criterions, it is not surprised then to notice an intertwining theoretical bonding between film phenomenology and queer or feminist theory. Such connection can be interpreted from two aspects specifically within horror film studies. Firstly, although a number of queer and feminist critiques emerging from the 1990s on horror spectatorship have their theoretical back up in psychoanalysis—mainly theories founded by Sigmund Freud not to be mistaken as phenomenology per se, it is not contradictory to conduct research reviewing these theories through a phenomenological lens, that is a review of the experience of queer and feminist theorists when producing their arguments on horror films. Second, the sharing analytical attention of on lived-body experience has manifested the practicality of a merge

85 Hanich, 45.
87 For a comprehensive reviews on spectatorship theories, see Jan Campbell, Film and Cinema Spectatorship: Melodrama and Mimesis (Polity, 2005).
between queer or feminist theories with phenomenology, which does have been theoretically tested by a few scholars from different disciplines such as feminist and queer studies scholar Sara Ahmed and philosopher Johanna Oksala. Hence, we have good reason to expect and believe a more precise description built upon a more coherent phenomenology from a contemporary viewpoint of horror spectatorship will be launched and applied into the discourse.

2.3.3. Orientation, Queerness, and Monsters Rebound

If the main objective of queer phenomenology or feminist phenomenology is to propose a model that describes how the bodies are experienced in the time-space they inhabited, an application between these theories and the horror spectatorship discourse requires us to recognize the “bodies”– the audiences in a relevant horror movie-going public sphere. As addressed in previous sections, instead of asking why phenomenological methods should be emphasized in horror film studies, a more urgent research question would be, how can we go through countless individual movie-going experiences which not even translatable into literal languages but still draw a thick phenomenological analysis of these experiences?

Feminist and queer studies scholar Sarah Ahmed in her book Queer Phenomenology offers an alternative to the question. She pinpoints the experience to be “orientations” or “become oriented”, which perfectly delineates the theoretical attention from body as a noun towards bodily practice as a verb, thus underlining the fluidity of diverse intellectual and political facets tangled in queer studies and phenomenology. To open up her theoretical reflection on orientation, Ahmed sets off her analysis from disorientation that questions the familiarity of the world. As she puts it, our familiarity is “shaped by the ‘feel’ of space or by how spaces ‘impress’ upon bodies”, instead of already “in” the world.88 The description “being familiar” of an event is not normative as long as a group of individuals sense unfamiliarity, which lead to negotiation between what is familiar and unfamiliar that challenges the norms. The activity of the negotiation can be read as an act of orientation. Recalling Husserl’s table and the movement centered around the table, Ahmed reaffirms the crucial relation between action and space, that action depends on our habitual behavior with objects. Our bodies as residents of the space have been given the horizon on what objects can be reached, yet the limitation of

the horizon is already pre-determined by our orientation, that is our habitual actions of the bodies in the world.⁹⁹ Reflected on the very term “sexual orientation” in her second chapter of the book, Ahmed points out the “directionality” of the phrase helps the translation of a yet-to-be-formed identity that can challenge the habitual rigid world normalized in straight lines. She argues, “it is not simply the object that determines the ‘direction’ of one’s desire; rather the direction one takes makes some others available as objects to be desired.”⁹⁰ What Ahmed implies here is that the repetition of bodily actions is still essentially subjective or “between the lines” even though these repetitive practices are confronting a normative habitual environment of which the shape has been formed due to the majority of practices being intelligible straight lines. Queer phenomenology therefore manifests its research position to be an orientation featured with queer and oblique lines with the aim to reorient and disturb existing conventions.

Ahmed’s original use of phenomenology has extended the classic philosophical framework and inspired theoretical dialogues with issues on gender, sexuality, and race. Returning to the horror film discourse where phenomenology so far only has been systematically applied as a method when addressing emotional experiences as Julian Hanich dedicates in his book, I suggest that a phenomenological approach derived from a contemporary context proposed by scholars including Sarah Ahmed can be introduced to renovate and expand some of the queer and feminist works on horror films written in the late 1990s. I select two landmark publications on gender and sexuality in horror films to exemplify such predictable theoretical conjunction: Attack of the Leading Ladies by Rhona J. Berenstein published in 1996, and Monsters in the Closet by Harry M. Benshoff published in 1997. I choose these two books because both authors have applied textual and historical analysis to a classic horror industry, and they all have taken a theoretical approach less beholden to Freudian psychoanalysis than the predecessors in the field including Carol J. Clover and Barbara Creed.⁹¹

Berenstein’s study is an intensive investigation of female fear in classic horror cinema with a designated period between 1931 and 1936. Through the lenses of gender and sexuality—of which the theories Berenstein referred to including works from gender theorist Judith Butler,
feminist film theorists Linda Williams and performance scholar Jill Dolan, Berenstein puts forward a theory of spectatorship as “a mode of performance, specifically, spectatorship-as-drag”, which transforms the viewing to be a social activity where established gender roles “get displayed”.92 Her theoretical model is launched to meet the demand for a nuanced and more fluid theory to address the recognizable confusion of on-screen sexual and gender identities in classic horror. The meaning of drag as a model is expanded by Berenstein to be “a more general performative paradigm”, including the terms masquerade and transvestitism.93 The authenticity of both the spectatorial identification and the viewing experiences in classic horror cinema are thus being questioned by the framework of drag, which makes the genre situate in a space preoccupied with theatrical masks. Berenstein’s model suggests that classic horror as a genre has invented a space which invited the spectators to play safely inside, a notion which she derives from feminist film scholar Judith Mayne’s argument of cinema being the “safe zone”, as Mayne writes that:

Film theory has been so bound by the heterosexual symmetry that supposedly governs Hollywood cinema that it has ignored the possibility, for instance, that one of the distinct pleasures of the cinema may well be a “safe zone” in which homosexual as well as heterosexual desires can be fantasized and acted out.94

The spectatorship-as-drag model as clarified by Berenstein is not to promote a sharing performance of spectatorship in classic horror cinema, but rather to point out that the viewing could be an identification against oneself. Grounded in a research tradition combining textual and historical analysis which involves a close reading of primary publicity materials including posters and media reviews, Berenstein’s study points out classic horror cinema was an ideal space for performative practices of both socially constructed gender roles and safely displayed gender-bending behaviors. It is interesting to note that Berenstein often uses the verb “invite” to depict the relationship between the spectators and classic horror cinema as if the spectators do gather in the specific movie theatre to perform a specific action designed by that theatrical space. It is natural to connect the sexual and gender dynamics surrounding

---

93 Ibid., 39.
classic horror movie-going scene described in Berenstein’s model with the space-action model Sarah Ahmed comments on queer phenomenology. Spectatorship-as-drag thus could alternatively be conceptualized as a spectatorial “disorientation”, which is an action disordering gender identification extracted by storylines and publicity materials.

Harry M. Benshoff expands Berenstein’s study from classic horror to an up-to-date theorization of the consistent appearance of “monster queer” in horror films. Benshoff points out that immediately in his study that the actual interaction between the spectators and the narrative patterns of horror genre system is the key to unlock the queer pleasures of horror cinema. In doing so, apart from the audience-centered viewing experiences and marketing strategies Berenstein focuses on, the cinematic apparatus in Benshoff’s discussion also includes dimensions that are film-centered for instance the production, the characters and mise-en-scène. Different from the performative lens Berenstein uses in her study, Benshoff mainly takes a social-cultural framework based on arguments of a number of cultural theorists including Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall. Correspondingly, he takes a social history approach when searching for factors that possibly contribute to the queer viewing of horror cinema and provides at least four different ways: identifiable gay and/or lesbian characters in the film, gay or lesbian crews of the film (whether the film has homosexual characters or not), the use of connotation and subtexts, and the “gay-dar” of the queer spectators. Queer readings of horror film themselves, according to Benshoff, have become the reincarnation of queerness in popular culture; the complexity and fluidity of queerness are therefore situated in a constant circulation through the monster figure and “his/her relation to normality”. Queer spectators become the active members negotiating the criterions defining familiarity and unfamiliarity of classic horror experiences. An alternative phenomenological description (based on Ahmed’s work) of Benshoff’s socio-cultural model on horror cinema, therefore, could be enunciated as the orientation of horror spectators (in their specific socio-cultural context) to the object “monster queer” placed in a habitual world where the same socio-cultural context is already oriented.

One theoretical challenge remains when approaching classic horror movie-going experience phenomenologically is the limited reachable “experience” scholars can turn to. There can

---

96 Ibid., 13-15.
97 Ibid., 15.
never be enough primary archival materials to uncover the full history and the materials one chooses to consult further narrowed down the range of the experience. Berenstein in her study has acknowledged such problem and noted that we cannot fully measure to what degree spectatorial identification in horror films are ideologically progressive outside the *safe* cinematic apparatus. To solve the theoretical obstacle, either we continue the conventional research path following a close reading tradition, engaging more practitioners to discover and analyze materials, thus potentially approaching to a better phenomenological description of classic horror cinema; or, we can search for methodology creating paths for a distant reading approach— a method not usually adopted by film historians, that allows us to rethink the identities of classic horror cinema (masculinity, femininity, or queerness) directly through the lens of (feminist or queer) phenomenology by a detection of the analyzable *orientational* pattern.
3. DATA MINING CLASSIC MONSTER CINEMA, QUEERLY

Previously, I have discussed different theoretical takings of the horror genre, pointing out the phenomenological lens which focuses on the experiences of spectators can be the key to unlock the paradoxical filmic pleasure. I have also underlined that the scholarly reading of the horror psyche has a tendency to be dominant by theories emerged from the 1990s; it was during the same period that queer and feminist theories entered the horror discourse. Most queer or feminist readings of the horror genre have justified their conclusions through historical studies supported by an investigation over primary materials and relevant sociological research findings, and have adopted empowering methods to form their argumentation either literally or visually. Nevertheless, these “new perspectives” within horror studies can be problematic for a few reasons. First, a phenomenological description of horror history cannot be precisely achieved, since the research subject belongs to a historical context and their experiences cannot be experienced again by another person at another time. The notion of “spectators” thus remains a conceptual complex consisting of the ideal metaphysical figure involved in film experiences and the real audiences watching a film. Second, the selection process of archival materials mostly remains unexplained. Most queer or feminist scholars published their work before the invasion of digitalization in the humanities, indicating that visits to physical archives and institutions were counted in a large part of the methodology. It has also resulted in that previous publications thrive on a limited number of primary sources as I have reflected in Chapter two.

Therefore, my initial search entry for the meta-inquiry is to try depicting horror movie-going scene in a specific historical period with the back-up of digitalized materials available on MHDL. I was seeking to collect counter-examples contesting the ideal model of “monsters in the closet” even though I agree that the metaphor is fully reasonable from a queer perspective. I delimited the search subject to be Frankenstein by James Whale because

---

98 The first time I encountered the queer explanation of Frankenstein was when I watched The Celluloid Closet (Rob Epstein, Jeffrey Friedman, 1996) and saw the montage between Frankenstein’s monster and other LGBT films to suggest the persecuted gay characters. Based on AIDS activist Vito Russo’s book of the same title published in 1981, the film is considered as landmark not only in queer cinema but also in a broader historical context regarding queer activism. See Vito Russo, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies (New York: Harper and Row, 1987); Richard Dyer, The Culture of Queers (Routledge, 2005).
conventionally it is more likely to get the materials closer to what I have in mind if the keywords are more specific. Inspired by the questions Robert C. Allen posed in social film history writing, 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 between 1929 (the appearance of first relevant material) to 1934 (before the release of Brides of Frankenstein). The design of the search entities also echoed the various aspects revealing the interaction between the spectators and the horror narratives that Harry M. Benshoff in his study on queerness in classic horror has unfolded. In summary, my initial search activity followed the close reading tradition in film studies, that is by inputting objective entities constituting a specific historical scenario to potentially search for evidence or counterevidence that may interpret or interrupt the extant hermeneutic model.

However, the actual search practices following the above categories ran into three main obstacles. First, the structuring of searching order and the cataloging of results remained unsatisfied. Although by demarcating both the entities and the time period, the number of the returned results has already cut down to a few hundred, to go through the retrieved data systematically without dwelling upon some anecdotes written at the corner of some paper let alone all the one-line release entries was hardly realistic. Second, the search was conducted by searching words, instead of images, yet most recognizable results I may treat as valuable for the research were images such as posters, photos of the stars or the settings. The previous designed order of searching was therefore easily interrupted and the whole search became a loose hunting process. Finally and most importantly, I realized that my positionality has actively engaged with the searching process. Even though I chose to deliberately avoid inputting keywords too abstract and subjective with the purpose of getting a larger sample of materials from the whole MHDL corpus, I was still easily attached to results depicting specific subjects including censorship, audience advisory, and female spectators, bringing in back the argumentation of researches on gender, sexuality, and spectatorship in classic horror.

99 Obviously, if I would like to search for specific information related to the 1931 film version of Frankenstein on Google, I would type in keywords as precise as possible, for instance, “Frankenstein James Whale 1931” instead of typing vague entities that point to a wide range of results such as “monster cinema” or “Frankenstein”.
cinema. If I continued the planned path of material collection, certainly I would encounter additional texts or images similar with what has already been included in others’ publications; but the methodology closes the research loop by offering predictable answers as if being in a conventional history classroom. My seemingly reasonable design of searching entities fails to digitally write social history because it does not take advantage of the database in a digital sense.

Reflecting on particular readings on MHDL as I have examined in the previous chapter, it is obvious that the methodology suggested by MHDL developers has been completely ignored during my initial encounter with the digital archive. Apart from coding a convenient search engine for millions of data on media history, what MHDL and Arclight aim to bring to the research field is the methodology matched with the big data corpus. Truly, the entry point of projects in the humanities is often set as minor as possible and seldom has a project started with a large quantitative overview. My planned methods “search” and close reading of specific subjects are the exact conventions Arclight and MHDL trying to challenge. In adjusting to the digital methods, I redirected the methods to be Scaled Entity Search (SES) and distant reading. Acknowledged my own positionality as a queer person mobilizing the database concerning classical horror history, and collaborated with more up-to-date publications on queer phenomenology, I revised the search keywords from a list of actual entities by adding ambiguous and abstract terms including monster and queer. The list welcomed for further modification alongside the practice of the meta-inquiry. I expanded the research subject from one singular film to the monster genre and reformulated the research question to be: What is the trend of the representation of queerness within classical monster cinema based on a large scale of materials? What further interpretations can we draw from the trend? Are they corresponding or contradictory with previous theories? Can we approach classic horror experience through a phenomenological lens, without letting our own existing knowledge of the field overshadow the designated research subject?

3.1. Framing the Search Entities

Previous film theorists and historians following the close reading tradition have argued that the portrait of monsters in classic Hollywood horror shares an intimate relationship with the queer community of the time, although the exact mechanism of the formulation of that image-spectator relation remains problematic and can be explained via different theories
depending on the research position. Recalling the POE strategy as a research method, what the above research background has performed can be seen as a prediction that vaguely extracts some pattern of the discourse of queerness in classic horror. I will follow this prediction in this meta-inquiry but switch my method to a distant reading mode; I will start the analysis from a general pattern reading based on the graphics generated through project Arclight. In order to approach the discourse systematically and lead to a better convincing and justifiable explanation during further stages of the project, before we move on to the observation of the pattern that Arclight returns, it is worthwhile to note down the two parameters used in the meta-inquiry: the x-axis (a delineation of time) and the key search entities.

The searching period is delineated to be from 1929 to 1949 for mainly two reasons. First is regarding the reformulation of the research question. The meta-inquiry initially planned to center around the horror-going culture of one film *Frankenstein* and I accordingly limited the searching period from 1931 (the release of) to 1934 (one year before the release of *Bride of Frankenstein*). With the intervene and recognition of my research positionality, to research only one film in the monster franchise apparently could not satisfy a good queer phenomenology of the classic horror movie-going scene. As the investigation shifted towards a broader complex between queer culture and the classic monster productions, the searching period has been correspondingly expanded as two decades covered by classic Hollywood horror culture, offering a reasonable distance that could produce some graphic patterns. With a reference to the filmography publication *Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films, 1931-1946* written by Michael Brunas, John Brunas and Tom Weaver, I slightly expanded the time period to 1929-1949 for a better observation of the trend before the occurrence of the horror-going scene and the recession of the monster franchise. Another reason for the expansion of time considered is due to the interface of Arclight and MHDL. Having particular searching objectives when mobilizing the MHDL, for instance, to find specific materials about a specific film or figure, is completely doable but can also be extremely difficult.101 To take full advantage of the interpretive method SES in face of a massive volume database, especially to thoroughly capitalize on the visualizing strengths of Arclight, requires

---

101 During my previous research using MHDL that I was searching for specific results regarding a film or an actor, the problem was that MHDL would return results precisely matched what was in the search box. This could make searching for films with little previous knowledge of the films or the films being unidentified to be a challenging task. Another problem is that although image materials tend to be more easily recognized by users, and often they might lead to key discoveries of the search; yet images themselves are not searchable based on the current version of MHDL’s interface.
an engagement with a relevant time period of scale, at least during the first stage of the research.

The key search entities selected are “monster”, “queer”, “production code” with a complementary list comprising names of the films and directors when performing a closer investigation based on the distant reading. Instead of the generic description “horror”, I choose the word “monster” because it is an identified sub-genre of horror cinema and has been scholarly acknowledged as a keyword in the discourse. Meanwhile, to improve the precision and readability of the visual pattern Arclight returns after diving into two million pages stored in MHDL’s corpus, selecting a linguistic subset with fewer volume of the retrieved data can helpfully avoid excessive results irrelevant with the research context, which also explains my choice of searching “queer” instead of “gay” (see Figure 3 and 4), although both “queer” and “gay” belonged to the homosexual lexicon during the delegated period.

The third keyword “production code” implies the Motion Picture Production Code or the Hays Code adopted by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) in 1930 and became pronounced in 1934 via the Production Code Administration’s Seal of Approval provision. The exact effects of censorship on classical Hollywood cinema have

---

102 Apart from works of Noël Carroll, Harry M. Benshoff, and Rhona J. Berenstein addressed in Chapter two, historian David J. Skal suggests four primary icons in American horror film history to be “Dracula, the human vampire; the composite, walking-dead creation of Frankenstein; the werewolfish duality of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde; and perhaps most disturbing, the freak from a nightmare sideshow.” See David J. Skal, The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror, revised edition, (New York: Faber and Faber, 2001), 19.

103 Benshoff 47. For additional scholarly survey on the homosexual lexicon during the time period, see George Chauncey, Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of a Gay Male World, 1890-1940 (Hachette UK, 2008), 12-23.
aroused various debates among film historians. Narrow down to the Code’s connection with classic horror cinema, Berenstein in her study suggests that the self-censorship tactic raised alongside the evolving effectiveness of the Code (both before and after the Code was in effect) influenced the horror genre’s representational function of violence and romance, as the “implying versus representing elements” of the narrative “satisfied censors” and “heightened the risqué connotations of monstrous attack”, thus resulting in a conflation between violence and romance that “hidden from direct view.” Consequently, the relation between the attacker (monster) and the victim regardless of the character’s gender and the plot design could be speculated by spectators from different perspectives; it can be either sexual or violent, or it can be a compound formed by both elements. Whilst the narrative complex in classic horror shadowed by the Code invites everyone to decode, as Benshoff points out, the homosexual men and women would find it easier to read the queer experience onscreen due to “their already disenfranchised location outside of the dominant culture, or their practice at leading ‘double’ lives”. After the rigid enforcement of the Code in 1934, “openly (or more broadly connotated) homosexual characters were banished from the screen… homosexual characters ‘officially’ ceased to exist in the manifest world of cinematic representation, banished to the shadowy realms of inference and implication.” as a result, the onscreen queer representatives have been gradually exceeded by the offscreen queer readership in terms of “the work and sensibilities of the queer men and women who created the texts”. Such tendency has been once again reinforced through queer scholarship including the studies of Berenstein and Benshoff sharing similar research positionality as queer scholars/spectators retaking classic horror cinema as counter voices towards the long-held heterocentric film analysis. In short, searching “production code” on MHDL is with the expectation to decode the unspeakable or unseen correlation between queer community and monster productions of the time through a macrolevel inquiry of the database comprised of a variety of trade papers and fan magazines.

Moreover, Arclight also allows for a demarcated search by filtering journals, which leads me to perform a further search of the same entities in Motion Picture Herald- the trade paper


105 Berenstein, 83.

106 Benshoff, 37.

107 Ibid., 35.

108 Ibid., 36.
facing both exhibitors and distributors centered around the publisher Martin Quigley. As the co-author of the Code, a prominent Catholic layman, and an important figure influencing the publishing landscape of trade papers, Quigley actively and skillfully mediated between Hollywood’s different ingredients with the hope to promote a moral system based on Catholicism through film exhibition. The scaled search of Motion Picture Herald thus can form a supplementary material in explaining the retrieved graphic pattern.

To conclude, I will run the designed search entities “monster”, “queer”, and “production code” within 1929-1949 through project Arclight, with a further search filtered with Motion Picture Herald. The filmography Universal Horrors serves as a main back-up cataloging material for approaching the illustrated time nodes. The interpretation and explanation will be in conjunction with Benshoff’s arguments on his “monster queer” model. The data mining of classic horror aims to provide an observable orientational pattern of the “monster queer” model mainly through a distant lens, and it will be supported by a close reading of the digitalized materials available through the MHDL on some of the distinguished time nodes.

3.2. Distant Reading: Monster, Queer, the Production Code

The graphic result generated by project Arclight (see Figure 5) illustrates the search results of “monster”, “queer”, and “production code” from 1929 to 1949 in the entire journal collections available via MHDL. The line graph reveals a number of interesting trends that can lead to research questions worth further exploration. I will structure my observation from two perspectives. Firstly, let us only focus on the monster-queer relation. It is clear that the number of “monster” appeared in the 1940s has hugely exceeded its average figure during the 1930s. “Queer”, however, only has its peak frequency in 1930, before the monster franchise opens the curtain by Dracula in 1931. The results show a similar occurrence of the two entities during the late 30s (1936-1938), a down period for Universal Studio that only five horror productions were made. Before 1936, there is a more noticeable numerical contrast between the pair that fewer “monster” juxtaposes with more “queer” in the database; the only counter node happens in 1932 when horror triumph was made by Dracula and Frankenstein

109 The five films are The Invisible Ray (Lambert Hillyer, 1936); Dracula’s Daughter (Lambert Hillyer, 1936); Night Key (Lloyd Corrigan, 1937); The Black Doll (Otis Garrett, 1938); The Missing Guest (John Rawlins, 1938). See Michael Brunas, John Brunas and Tom Weaver, Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films, 1931-1946 (McFarland, 2011).
that the subsequent monster productions gained immediate publicity on trade papers. During the 1940s, “monster” excessively overwhelms the data of “queer”, which can be potentially explained by the merge of horror genre with mystery and thriller, Universal Studio’s devotion to other series in the 1940s, the relation between World War II and “treatment” of homosexuality; I will come back to relevant interpretation in the next section.

![Figure 5. Search results of the designed entities in the entire MHDL’s digitalized journals.](image)

Secondly, we can read “production code” as a parameter to the monster-queer pair. While the appearance of “monster” and “queer” apparently does not indicate an exact semantic match of the entities, that among the retrieved results “monster” indicates only as monster in horror cinema and “queer” is directly or implicitly signifying queer sexuality, the search activity does not exclude the existence of the above ideal meaning pair formulated from the position of the researcher either. Therefore, as I have noted down in the previous section, “production code” being a phrase owning almost a determined meaning within the research historical context is crucial for this data mining project. As we can see from the graph, the Code had its attention during the early 1930s and went into enforcement from 1934 till later of the decade, which statistically proves Berenstein’s arguments on the mild censorship earlier in the classic horror era. There was a gradual reduction during the 1940s (WWII period) and it was until 1946 that the Code struggled again for attention in the film business. Despite the numerical
results seem to be incomparable between “queer” and “production code”, the graph reveals the two entities share an exact same paced variation tendency started from 1934. In terms of “monster” and “production code”, however, the line graph reveals that the two entities have three opposite variation period over the two decades designated, that are 1932-1934, 1939-1940, and 1943-1946.

Moving closer from the first step of our distant reading and aligning with the suggested POEPOE strategy when using Arclight, I filtered the results to be only within *Motion Picture Herald* to get alternative or corresponding pattern compared to the entire MHDL corpus. The trade paper is available from 1931-1956 in MHDL’s digitalized collection and it occupies the majority of the searching results by entering and browsing some of the pages linked with the time nodes. The visual graphic (see Figure 6) shows the search results of the same entities within the same designated period in the digitized *Motion Picture Herald* collections available via MHDL. Generally, we may not tell much differences between the two figures. The three opposite variation period between “monster” and “production code” based on a larger corpus is still valid in this supplementary search, but the consistency between “queer” and “production code” is not in complete accordance, which could be the result of an unmatched semantic algorithmic process noted earlier.

![Figure 6. Search results of the designed entities in Motion Picture Herald.](projectarclight.org)
Nevertheless, there are two notable features worth reconsideration after a closer observation of the visual graph based on results in *Motion Picture Herald*. First, the monster-queer relation with a more steady floating frequency before 1936 in Figure 5 is instead replaced by a visibly jagged pattern when limiting the search corpus to be *Motion Picture Herald*. Second, the retrieved data of “monster” during the 1930s are surprisingly low in numbers especially considering the 1930s was still the highlight of classic Hollywood horror. One possible reason is again connected with the research positionality that what I assumed to be the keyword “monster” that addresses the figurative deviation actually was not entirely identifiable to be the word for depicting classic horror. If we search for specific names that can to some extent filter results, for example, I tested the almost irreplaceable name in the horror franchise “Frankenstein” (see Figure 7), the retrieved data prominently increases during the 1930s. But inputting specific name entities, for instance “Frankenstein”, also can be problematic because a precise search often means an exclusion of materials under the umbrella of conceptual terminologies, which is contradictory with the intended trend-centered SES method especially in case of this meta-inquiry that a better phenomenological description of the horror discourse within specific historical period instead of one singular film is in concern.

Figure 7. Search with an added entity “Frankenstein”.
I have outlined some of the preliminary observed patterns according to the line graphs provided. 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. Here, the positionality of the researcher not only plays a role in the action of searching but also directly participates in interpreting. As Eric Hoyt writes when the team launched Arclight that “the line graphs in Arclight are not arguments. They are simply visualizations of how many MHDL pages a given term appears in per year”,\(^{110}\) Another person may come out with different patterns from my observational depiction facing the same line graphs because our research questions, research objectives, disciplinary backgrounds, and many other variables can all be different and interfere our reading of the underlying texts.

I do confront “Frankenstein Complex” at this stage of the meta-inquiry. I am aware that the above depictions of the line charts require a greater investment to meet the accuracy of the retrieved results which can hopefully lead to a justifiable explanation of my version of the graphic pattern. What I finch from is the plain fact that research questions in horror film studies being the subset of film studies whose universal set still widely acknowledged to be the humanities, cannot be deducted to an applicable formula; applications in the digital humanities, on the other hand, warmly generate observable and even calculable datasets that encrypted cultural materials. I fear my operation of the overwhelming volume of data will contain a glitch that is detected and overturned by other theoretical models in the field, but such fear seems gratuitous as the formation of the humanities has determined the field is built upon contentions.

In case of this meta-inquiry, project Arclight and the MHDL certainly can be utilized to illustrate a trend of the representation of queerness within classic monster cinema, as long as the search entities are reasonably designed, and there are adequate subjective practices of mobilizing the digital interfaces to ensure a large sample of observed patterns that can lead to contentions of all thoughts. Considering the research scope of the thesis project, I will further present the encounter of “Frankenstein Complex” when entering the explainable stage by diving into one pattern as an example, that is the excessive amounts of “monster” relative to the figures of “queer” and “production code. I will explain this most distinguished pattern by

\(^{110}\) Hoyt, “Teaching with Arclight and POE”.
performing a cross-examination of primary materials indexed in within MHDL’s search engine Lantern and secondary publications both in horror history writing and monster queer discourse.

3.3. Orientation of Classic Horror and Queer Spectatorship

Horror in the 1940s is rarely brought up in a scholarly discussion but rather widely considered as a tail-end of the 1930s production. However, the data of “monster” appeared in the MHDL corpus is distinguishable from other entities. One direct answer for such phenomenon can be found when referring to filmography *Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films, 1931-1946*, that the amount of horror productions in the 1940s simply exceeds the previous decade; from the titles of horror films in the 1940s, we can immediately notice that Universal Studio at the time was devoted to promoting the genealogy and hybridization of the once-appealing monsters during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{111} Here, I would like to borrow the defining term *orientation* underlined by Sara Ahmed in her clarification of queer phenomenology and Berenstein’s study on gender and sexuality in horror of the 1930s, to further extend the discussion on the overlooked 1940s classic horror through the lens of queer spectatorship. I suggest that the *orientation* of classic horror towards mysteries and thrillers in the 1940s has accelerated the performative queer spectatorship—“spectatorship-as-normal”, developed from Berenstein’s model that “spectatorship-as-drag” in the 1930s. Nonetheless, the suggested model is by no means a definitive explanation of the line pattern; it is a scholarly evaluation of the observation grounded in this specific meta-inquiry that has its limitation on sources and materials, but still with the prospect to crave an alternative in approaching film history.

The orientation of classic horror, to put it another way, is the thematic change pattern of classic horror specifically the monster franchise over the 1930s and 1940s. The definition of genre especially in terms of horror cinema, as I have touched upon in the previous chapter, is itself problematic. In his article on horror productions of the 1940s, horror film historian Mark Jancovich directly refutes claims about determined characteristics of a genre. Instead, he argues that it is essential “to concentrate… on historically specific definitions of genre—

\textsuperscript{111} Referring *Universal Horrors: The Studio’s Classic Films, 1931-1946*, 25 films were made during the 1930s while 60 films were made during the 1940s. To list a few titles featuring the genealogy and hybridization of monsters among the 1940s horror productions: *Man Made Monster* (George Waggner, 1941); *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (Roy Williams Neill, 1943); *House of Frankenstein* (Erle C. Kenton, 1944); *House of Horrors* (Jean Yarbrough, 1946).
reconstruct how genres are understood in specific periods rather than to retrospectively impose later definitions back onto earlier periods, or vice versa.”  

One of the reasons Hollywood horror films were changing their images during the 1940s is because of the still-in-effect Production Code. Studios would have less trouble with censorship if the project was classified as “mystery” instead of “horror”. Another term “thriller”, according to Jancovich, similarly had different meaning during the 1940s that it was directly associated with “chiller” and assumed targeting spectators to be “thriller seeker”. The classic horror during the 1940s as a collection of films could then be taken as a hybrid cinematic being, wearing various adjectives masking the horror that depicted the phenomenological emotion of the industry back then. Zooming in to some nodes in the line graph from the late 1930s to earlier 1940s indexed by Lantern with materials containing “monster”, illustrations and texts exemplifying the hybrid visualization of the horror can easily be extracted.

Figure 8. Advertising pages for The Hound of the Baskervilles (Sidney Lanfield, 1939).

---


113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., 245-246.

115 Motion Picture Herald, (March 18, 1939), 36-37.
Visual materials, for instance the four-page campaign of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Sidney Lanfield, 1939) (see Figure 8, the two-page with “monster”) clearly presents a mixture of cinematic aesthetics between mystery— the gloomy purplish landscape surrounding the sketchy figures, horror— the red paw prints from the “unholy monster”, and drama— a seemingly united heterosexual pair. Reviews on monster films in the 1940s also shared a similar hybrid feature in their choices of words. Showmen’s review on Universal’s *The Mummy’s Tomb* (Harold Young, 1942) wrote, “Universal with this latest spine-chilling melodrama insures its reputation of leadership in the horror-drama field”, which used a typical review language tying up the violence and romantic in horror cinema and adding some thriller-chiller lexicon. Through securing both graphical and literal language in publicity materials that allow the monsters in pair with a wider cinematic vocabulary, horror films in the 1940s with low budgets potentially and intentionally gained a profitable market.

Apart from renovating the image summarizing horror productions in the 1940s, the orientation of classic horror is also connected with a nuanced design of the monsters. Benshoff in his discussion on “monster queer” in the 1940s points out that Universal monsters at that time have set up several houses together, indicating a “humanistic depiction” of the monsters “bringing of the queer force into the realm of the hegemonic sphere”, and the queer couples “became increasingly domesticated”. The transition resembles a curing process of the queer, and both Jancovich and Benshoff have noted down the association between the horror film, the psychology, and the war in the 1940s. Dividing the connection to two periods, Jancovich with the perspective of a general spectator (without the lens of gender and sexuality) writes that:

> In the early 1940s, psychological films were associated with fantasy and their psychological materials were often dismissed as simply unconvincing explanations for the preposterous behavior of their characters… However, by the mid-1940s, as psychology gained prestige through its use with veterans of the war, psychology and realism became associated in new ways. No longer was psychology associated with fantasy but came to signify realism, a process that was consolidated by their shared interest in handling repressed or taboo materials in order to diagnose problems.  

---

116 *Motion Picture Herald*, (October 24, 1942), 970.
117 Benshoff, 89-90.
118 Jancovich, 252.
Jancovich also sharply notes that arguments linking the lack of interest in horror during the 1940s with the war itself—the war meant the monsters were no longer symbols of terror and people were tired of the real horrors of the time, need to be further tested because the highpoint of horror productions “seems to coincide” with the wartime.\textsuperscript{119} His claim turns out to be the most noticeable feature of my Arclight line graph, which directly challenges the assumed connection between the horror cinema and the war.

Benshoff’s study on horror cinema sharing the same historical context takes the lens of sexuality. Accordingly, he considers the social background towards homosexuality in the first place when structuring argumentation. With a reference to publications on history and sociology and the collaboration with queer film theorist Richard Dyer’s notion on the mobilization of war, Benshoff highlights the identification of individuals as homosexual during the wartime.\textsuperscript{120} Through the lens of queer sexuality, Benshoff stresses that the growing number of mad-doctor/scientist themed horror films in the 1940s have monsters that “either ‘real-life’ or fantastic, might be understood, if not cured, by way of psychological methodology”\textsuperscript{121}, and this notion on medicalization and homosexuality was deeply in connection with “Armed Forces’ decision to have psychiatrists attempt to detect and discharge homosexuals from their ranks”, although such attempts “regularly failed” as many gay men and lesbians found their places in the army in some ways.\textsuperscript{122} Benshoff argues that such institutional regulations may paradoxically evoke the awareness of queer identity in a larger context, and in fact, secret societies of the queer community did commonly exist during the time.\textsuperscript{123} Benshoff’s case studies on horror films produced by Val Lewton at RKO between 1942 and 1946 further exemplify the unity of queer spectatorship and the “monster queer” model which was under \textit{treatment} of the period. With distinct keywords contained, performing a further search via MHDL based on some of the indexing information in Benshoff’s discussion would optimistically lead to exciting materials articulating inspiring new research topics.

As the pattern showing the excessive number of “monster” is observed based on a distant reading of the line graph including both the 1930s and the 1940s, besides a close reading of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Jancovich, 252.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Benshoff, 82, 98.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 99, 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 99.
\end{itemize}
the productions during the 1940s, I also step back and start a data mining of another parameter—“production code” whose lifespan was incidentally almost twenty years, to better apprehend the orientation of classic horror since it is the Code instead of other terminology founded in secondary materials in this search experiment that partakes our reading of the line graph. The line graph displays an increasing pattern of “production code” between 1944 and 1946, contrasting the decline of “monster” during the same period. In March 1944, William H. Hays was re-elected president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), and the newly elected board revealed some of the statistics concerning the self-regulations of the industry (see Figure 9) in one article published in The Exhibitor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Number of Feature Pictures Approved by the Production Code Administration from 1935 to 1944, inclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Produced by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. (Member Companies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non Member Companies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reissues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following tables show a breakdown of the types and kinds of feature-length films approved in 1944, as compared to those approved in 1943: (The following table is abridged)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melodrama</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drama</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9. Statistical materials included in the annual Hays report.124

The above extracts have valuably pictured the motion picture industry from the viewpoint of the regulators. We can see that, rather than regulating domestic film productions, the number of approved feature pictures from foreign companies was in a decreasing pattern by Production Code Administration, indicating the administration was oriented towards a degree of politicization when approaching the end of the wartime.125 We can also notice from the

---

124 “Will H. Hays Re-elected MPPDA President; Reveals Statistics on Trade’s Self-Regulation”, in The Exhibitor, (April 4, 1945), 7.
125 When browsing results of “Production Code” in 1946, I encountered a number of results containing the news about Production Code Administrator Joseph I. Breen’s visit to England and requested to discuss Production Code problems and political censorship in the United States. In one short piece, the author put forward a rather ironic question on Breen’s London visit that, “Has Hollywood one production code for its own output and a much stricter one for England’s [and presumably any other country’s]?” Another news appeared in Motion Picture Daily could be read as a respond to the question that, “British producers recognizing the value of using the PCA’s services are also increasingly submitting scripts of pictures destined for ultimate release in the United States.” In the same volume, I also noticed a short addressing Breen’s meeting with the international committee of the AMPP composed of foreign managers of the major studios “in a discussion of international problems”. Results alike could be interpreted that the Code’s Americanized political identity was reinforced through its cultural influence overseas. More materials and secondary sources shall be consulted to confirm my argument. For more materials, see “Breen En Route To England as Code Emissary”, in Motion Picture Herald, (July 13, 1946), 14; Peter Burnup, “Breen Talks and British Listen”, in Motion Picture Herald, (July 20, 1946), 26; Red Kann, “On the March”, in Motion Picture Herald, (August 10, 1946), 16; “68 Used PCA,” in Motion Picture Daily (March 21, 1946), 7; “AMPP Coast Meeting On Foreign Problems”, in Motion Picture Daily (February 28, 1946).
numerical comparison between the “types and kinds” of films that, the once focal point of the censorship had now be categorized among the “miscellaneous”, proving the assumption that horror in the 1940s has an orientation towards heterogeneity and hybridity to ensure the genre could survive the unstable industry.

If we go deeper into the dataset highlighted with “production code” during the late 1940s-as the Code soon met its twentieth anniversary, and browse through the few pages of Lantern’s results, we can soon identify both the justification from the institutions and the counter-voices from the film practitioners. Results from Motion Picture Herald, of which the editor-in-chief and publisher Martin Quigley as the co-author of the Code, interestingly reveals an appealing attitude to the Code for its definitive influence on the film industry. In an article correcting the misunderstanding that the Code “having been introduced by the National Legion of Decency”, the author Daniel A. Lord, S.J. clearly wanted to draw a demarcation line between the Code and the Catholic Church with a strong claim that, “The first [the Code] is a product of the industry by the industry and for the industry; the second [the Legion of Decency] was a project of the Catholic Church.”126 By wiping away the religious involvement, the article plainly tried to justify the benefit of the Code from an institutional perspective that “the box office, the disappearance of the threat of national censorship, the fact that it was no longer necessary to chop, trim, and cut film at the demand of local censorship boards”, which obviously neglected the Code’s lethal impact on the narrative content of cinema as an expressive art form.127 Statements likewise could be quickly located by searching “production code” within the same digitalized collection of Motion Picture Herald, for instance, in one article similarly supported the Code’s benefit to the industry at large, the author wrote that “it [The Code] is the one satisfactory method which the industry has been able to evolve. It operating history down through the years has demonstrated efficiency”128; and it is no surprise to encounter the trade paper titling “To Enforce Code Rigidly” by quoting Eric A. Johnston– the president of the Motion Picture Association on this issue that “the motion picture Production Code is an adequate code and will be rigidly enforced in such a manner that local censor bottleneck will be eliminated.”129

127 Ibid.
129 Washington Bureau, “To Enforce Code Rigidly; Breen To Visit Rank, Says Johnston”, in Motion Picture Herald, (May 18, 1946), 21.
Results from a broader selection of the journal corpus, however, will lead us towards some counter opinions on the Code. An article in *Motion Picture Daily* (whose editor-in-chief was interestingly also Martin Quigley) quoted producer David O. Selznick’s discussion of the Code that, “I believe that it is in need of revision, not drastic revision, but there is no reason why we should be governed today by a code written 20 years ago. Our standards need not be tighter than those of children’s magazines.”

We can even detect more underlying dissatisfaction if switching to materials centering around film practitioners. For instance, Harold J. Salemson wrote a seven-page article questioning the rigid moral standards of the Code and its failure on regulating certain offensive subjects from the viewpoint of a screenwriter. He argued that:

> The public knows what to understand, and need not dot the i’s that were left undotted. Where, on the other hand, does the trend in American films lead us? To the point where, instead of stating or suggesting that sex has reared its ugly head, we must now on the contrary use every form of evidence to probe that we DON’T mean that, that what we are portraying is purity – and still, in spite of all the evidence adduced, it is becoming increasingly hard to convince the public that purity is intended. Because Joe Ticketbuyer is already three steps into the bedroom.

Salemson evidently pointed out the gap between the film practitioners and the actual audiences’ understanding of what should be moral or not. His article also indirectly revealed that films did not meet the requirements of the Code would possibly have a large audience group, denoting a potential existence of independent cinema at its earlier stage. In fact, I do come across some traces of this assumption when going through the results of “production code”; in a short passage titled “Atrocity Film Code Seal is Delayed”, the author summarized that although the film *Atrocities* “consisting of documentary material obtained from Russia and captured German newsreels” lacked a Production Code Administration seal, the producer

---

130 “SIMPP Aims for Independent Status, D. O. Selznick Says”, in *Motion Picture Daily*, (May 18, 1945), 10. It requires further investigation to explain the ambiguous attitude of Selznick or editor-in-chief Martin Quigley towards the Code. I discovered one piece titled “Selznick Lauds Production Code” among search results from *Motion Picture Herald*. In the short article, the author pointed out Selznick’s “two separate references to the instrumentality”, firstly quoted Selznick’s word that “Foreign producers have no Code to restrict them in their choice of subject matter, […] and they therefore can present some material we cannot. This may give them some advantage in those areas,” and then quoted Selznick’s answer when asked whether he still felt the Code should be revised that “I have no quarrel with the Code. There’s more advantage than disadvantage in it. […] While it’s doubtless true that essential morals don’t change, still there are changes in customs and circumstances which ought to be taken into consideration.” The words of the producer quoted in the article seem to be reluctant with the laudatory tone suggested by the title. See Hollywood Bureau, “Selznick Lauds Production Code”, in *Motion Picture Herald*, (June 22, 1946), 33.

Irvin Shapiro “would begin selling the picture to independent theatres”.\textsuperscript{132} It is natural to recall Benshoff’s discussion on secret societies of queer spectators, that if horror films in the 1940s surpassing the Code have left traces in that historical context, it is reasonable to suggest that certain independent cinema houses at the time might be considered the gathering table for queer orientations, since cinema being both an ordinary entertainment location and a dark performative space is the perfect choice for hiding, waiting, and resisting. Of course, it requires further re-designed searches in MHDL to effectively obtain fresh and useful data that can make the assumption more valid if put it in a film historical context.

In summary, the excessive amount of “monster” compared with “queer” and “production code” retrieved from MHDL corpus during the mid-1940s in my recognition of the pattern is the results of classic horror’s orientation towards \textit{standardization}.\textsuperscript{133} In terms of genre and aesthetics, classic horror started its visual and linguistic collaboration with mystery and thriller, gaining not only a profitable market but a survival opportunity for the horror spirits as well. In terms of themes and characters, classic monsters updated their portrait to be an entity that can be approached through psychology and medication, and could be cured (at a certain price). While these forces have oriented the “monster” towards a “normalized” direction, horror in the 1940s wearing a normalized mask at the same time embraced its highpoint as it passed the Code and selection from the audience. The relation between the increasing awareness of queer identity and the paradoxical yet understandable tightened regulations during World War II has impacted on the forming of secret societies and groups of the queer community. In case of horror cinema of the time, queer spectatorship could be interpreted as “spectatorship-as-normal”, that queer audiences gathered in specific cinematic space (cinema as a safe/secret space) with other viewers performing a noticeable message-exchange, yet only with people of similar identities who inhabited in the apparatus. This suggested interpretation was first brought up by queer film theorists in the 1990s and has been continuously developed since then. While infusing new perspectives into the classic film scholarship, these film scholars usually identified their research positionality as \textit{queer} also encourage an orientation of alternative cinema scholarship by challenging the conventional heterocentric film history writing. What Arclight and MHDL have contributed

\textsuperscript{132} “Atrocity Film Code Seal is Delayed”, in \textit{Motion Picture Daily}, (May 3, 1945), 2.
\textsuperscript{133} Here, the “standardization” underlines the classic horror cinema orientated to an industrialized production regarding its aesthetics, characters, and marketing strategies. The other term I use- “normalization”, is to emphasis the “curing” process of queer characters on screen and the underground queer audiences suggested by Benshoff’s “monster queer” model. Nevertheless, more archival materials and scholarly research are in need to support the validity of the “spectatorship-as-normal” model.
in this explanation of the pattern, therefore, is more than the abundant materials available and the visual interface to cooperate with; the mobilization of these digital sources is constantly reminding the users of their positionality to the entities, the corpus, and even an urgency to orient an *unconventional* search to help the users confront the habitual scholarship in the film history research.

### 3.4. Suggestions of Further Research

Considering the objective and the scope of the meta-inquiry, the visual trend I choose to focus on and the analysis I present have certain limitations. Therefore, I would like to briefly offer three suggestions for further research projects following my current search threads in the queerness of classic horror cinema that can benefit from the mobilization of digital archives and digital methods.

First, we can follow the lead of the Production Code to further examine the relation between censorship of classic horror cinema and the queer spectatorship in respond. This is the research direction where I took a pause. By introducing gender and sexuality into the horror film discourse with the support of physical archival research, film scholars including Rhona J. Berenstein and Harry M. Benshoff have already released the cinematic monsters from the closet. While relevant scholarship continues to contribute to a queer reading of the horror films, we are able to approach the closet queer audience during the golden decades of classic horror and have dialogue with them through the MHDL interface. The trend of the Code has already indicated an orientation of the motion picture industry, and it is feasible to follow some leads Benshoff has pointed out in his research to track specific entities such as movie theaters, exhibitors, and administrators to complete his model of “monster queer” positivistically and empirically.

Second, the distant reading and the suggested data mining techniques make it possible for carrying out research on a phenomenology of cinematic emotions of the audience. The once unreachable *experiences* of spectators can at least partly be approached via the MHDL corpus, especially recalling the initial objective of project Arclight is to imitate the hashtag trend reading of Twitter. In order to reconstruct the movie-going *experiences*, the search entities can be the cinematic emotions Julian Hanich proposes in his analysis: “shock”, “dread”, and “terror”, or referring to the genre confusion brought up by Mark Jancovich:
“thriller”, “horror”, “chiller”, and “mystery”. Of course, the design of the search entities and the interpretations of the visualized pattern Arclight sends back can vary a lot depending on one’s research positionality, but that diversity is exactly in demand to enrich the current underdeveloped experiences with horror cinema.

Third, we can perform searches on classic horror cinema within a chosen digitalized collections that have been neglected in current film history studies. I have addressed Eric Hoyt’s discussion on the limitation of current scholarly reference on film archival materials in chapter two. My meta-inquiry has demonstrated that Lantern and Arclight both have the function of searching the designed entitles in a filtered MHDL corpus, although I have not performed a close examination of the returned results among the minor materials as my research objective is to theorize the orientation of classic horror cinema based on a distant reading of the visualization. Reflecting on the various components that contribute to the consistent horror community, it will definitely lead to some exciting discoveries on horror cinema history once we dive deeper into the neglected collections in the discourse available via the MHDL such as the “Global Cinema Collections”, and the “Government and Law Collections”.

134 “Global Cinema Collection” contains film journals from France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and two Spanish language publications. It could be inspiring to check these collections for research projects on classic horror cinema and world cinema. For details of “Global Cinema Collection”, see http://vsrv01.medialibraryproject.org/globalcinema/index.html; The “Government and Law Collection” contains “transcripts, decisions, and proceedings that chart the interplay between Hollywood, politics, and law”. The collection certainly valuable for further research on the relation between classic horror cinema and censorship. For details of “Government and Law Collection”, see http://vsrv01.medialibraryproject.org/government/index.html.
4. FINAL DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to explore the potentials digital humanities infuse with the research landscape of cinema studies. I use the term “Frankenstein Complex” to denote the epistemological collision and empirical challenges in the humanities scholarship when utilizing digital materials with digital methods. My theoretical investigation of the current debates in the field of digital humanities was structured according to these two perspectives to the complex. On issues of epistemology, visual theorist Johanna Drucker has proposed a constructive yet provoking agenda that encourages principles of the humanities to directly engage with the design level of the digital environment. On empirical practices of the digital humanities, the three introductions of the series Debates in the Digital Humanities published in 2012, 2016, and 2019 have revealed some insight regarding the trending discourse. In spite of the varieties and diversities relevant research projects can have, they all feature a strong sense of collaboration especially with inquiries on pedagogy and political identities as the edition approaching the very moment we are in now. The fact that data and digits are and will be in an augmented movement determines that practitioners of the field have to confront the “Frankenstein Complex”—the puzzling yet strong complexity binding the humanities and digitalization.

In order to thoroughly engage with such complex, I have conducted a meta-inquiry on classic horror cinema using data mining techniques on the specific digital example provided by the Media History Digital Library (MHDL). The methodology of the meta-inquiry, namely the Scaled Entity Search (SES) and POE strategy suggested by the MHDL development team, directly challenges the close reading tradition in cinema studies by primarily processing the retrieved digital materials through a distancing lens. The design of the search entities and the research questions of the meta-study has been repetitively adjusted along with the reflection of my positionality as a film researcher and individual media user. Instead of searching for specific terms such as film titles or names of the crew, to truly take advantage of the visual trend project Arclight returns after instantly searching over two million pages of the MHDL requires the search to be redirected towards broader industry-related entities. Consequently, my research attention to one specific film Frankenstein was expanded towards a wider classic monster cinema to hopefully extract some trends of that film history. Meanwhile, as a cis female queer cinephile of classic horror, my underlying research interest in queer
spectatorship manifests itself during my initial loosely search in the MHDL and gradually directs my ordered re-search of the digital corpus.

To respond to the research question outlined in the introduction chapter regarding whether or not new knowledge on classic horror cinema can emerge in the practices of digital methods, I believe the meta-inquiry has provided a positive answer. I suggest that the MHDL and project Arclight make it feasible to renovate queer analysis on horror discourse initiated during the 1990s including works of Rhona J. Berenstein and Harry M. Benshoff by adding the lens of phenomenology, specifically the notion of “orientation” proposed by performance scholar Sara Ahmed in her conceptualization of queer phenomenology. The analyzable orientational pattern Arclight displays allows me as a researcher/user to directly engage with the trend of monster cinema based on a massive scale of materials. In my data mining process of classic horror in a delineated period from 1929 to 1949, I suggest that the excessive amounts of “monster” compared with “queer” and “production code” retrieved from MHDL corpus during the mid-1940s in my recognition of the pattern can be interpreted as classic horror’s orientation towards standardization. Queer spectatorship of horror productions of the time can accordingly be read as an orientation from the “spectatorship-as-drag” model proposed by Berenstein towards a “spectatorship-as-normal” pattern cued in Benshoff’s analysis of “monster queer”.

The meta-inquiry ends with a few suggestions pointing out directions further research of the horror history discourse can follow when mobilizing digital archival resources. These suggestions have reassessed the definition of “search” activity within the MHDL by critically engaging with different facets of the horror discourse, encouraging a repetitive re-search strategy to take full advantage of the digital corpus conditioned by its interface, the search entities, and the empirical moves of the users. The development team of the MHDL and project Arclight has put large effort in maintaining an entanglement between the humanistic principles with the technological base the digital interface built upon, and their research outputs on curation of the digital environment deserve to be recognized as valid forms of scholarship, which the team is continuously calling for academic collaboration. Indeed, the collaborative and collective scholarship within the humanities is far from a benignant state compared to other disciplines especially the sciences. Media theorist Dave Parry in his essay has pointed out such liminal feature on a digital humanism that, “the real transformation will come, or not come, based on the way the academy, and even humanists, transform the nature
of scholarship based on the digital and, more importantly, comes to terms with the way the digital transforms what it means to have a humanism.\(^{135}\) A wider scope of practitioners in terms of both academic interests and individual identities are in demand to maintain a truly diverse and interactive media history research landscape.

REFERENCES

Materials from MHDL
The Exhibitor, Nov 1944-May 1945, Philadelphia Edition
Motion Picture Daily, Apr-Jun 1945
Motion Picture Daily, Jan-Mar 1946
Motion Picture Herald, 1939
Motion Picture Herald, 1946
The Screen Writer, Jun 1945-May 1946

Filmography
The Babadook (Jennifer Kent, 2014)
Bride of Frankenstein (James Whale, 1935)
Dracula (Drácula, George Melford, 1931)
Dracula (Tod Browning, 1931)
Frankenstein (James Whale, 1931)
The Hound of the Baskervilles (Sidney Lanfield, 1939)
The Mummy’s Tomb (Harold Young, 1942)
The VVitch (Robert Eggers, 2015)
Bibliography


Hoyt, Eric. “Lenses for Lantern: Data Mining, Visualization, and Excavating Film History's Neglected Sources.” *Film History*, 26, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 146-168.


