**PALMER — DH Experience**

<4 figures batched together>

***DH Experience***

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Despite the hope that digital humanities is necessarily collaborative, multidisciplinary, and multilingual, plenty of global DH efforts operate without recognition. What projects and centres exist around the world that don’t make it to conferences? And what tools can we use to discover and connect global DH projects?

Last year, we developed *DH Experience*, a cooperative serious board game inspired by Matt Leacock’s *Pandemic* (2008), with the intent of promoting and modelling the global, interdisciplinary, and collaborative character of the digital humanities. With the input of Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH), we have created a new version of the game that has players play with real-life DH centres and projects. Like GO::DH’s Around DH in 80 Days project—the main source for representative global DH efforts used in the board game—*DH Experience* is intended to be a tool for discovery, highlighting worldwide DH research. In this poster presentation, we will

• Introduce the game, demonstrating gameplay and how it relates to the global, collaborative experience of DH.

• Talk about the testing and reception of the game.

• Describe GO::DH’s contribution to the *DH Experience* project.

• Introduce the new, global, reality-based version of the game.

**The Game**

*DH Experience* is a cooperative board game where players take on the roles of DH researchers and professionals racing to complete projects as a group before a window of opportunity passes. Players gather data from a nodal world-map board and contribute that data to a set of available projects while the game itself provides opposition by unpredictably changing the availability of those projects. The object is for the players (as a group) to complete more projects (though not all projects are weighted equally) than those that ‘fall off’ the board as game turns pass. The main challenge of the game lies in determining the most efficient way to use each player’s location, data, special resources, and their role’s skills to tackle projects at the right moments.

*DH Experience* was initially developed as we were experimenting with visual workflow metaphors. Some of the prototypes we developed (Frizzera et al., 2013) suggested board game spaces, so we decided to experiment with board games as a form of workflow that could be tested in play. The board game let us play with paper prototypes before developing a general workflow editor for the Web, which has now been prototyped under the name Wrkflux (https://github.com/lucaju/Wrkflux). The game, however took on a life of its own as we tested it and imagined it for other uses.



Figure 1. Sample of board and the cards used in the first version of the game.

In the presentation, we will demonstrate how the game works and provide copies of the rules, board, and cards needed for participants to play.

**Testing and Reception**

Once the initial rounds of developer ‘balance testing’ were concluded, we engaged in several rounds of play-testing involving both volunteer DH research colleagues and acquaintances who had no connection to DH but are experienced board game players. Footage of a play session is available at http://hucodev.artsrn.ualberta.ca/jmontagu/dh\_exp/(along with PDFs of the materials needed to play yourself). Although expectations were low among almost all parties, both groups reported greatly enjoying the game experience; researchers, regardless of their love of games, are keen on the narrative. Game players, regardless of their research experience, appear to enjoy the game balance and cooperative mechanics. Researchers were able to provide valuable feedback regarding the nature of the research experience, as measured against what the game provided (skill ideas, special-ability card ideas, etc.). Gamers provided valuable game balance and playability feedback (how many cards in the timeline, how quickly resources should appear, etc.).

*DH Experience* has also been formally presented at conferences to get feedback from the game studies community: the 2014Canadian Game Studies Association conference at Brock University and Replaying Japan 2014at the University of Alberta. On both occasions, every copy of the game was quickly snapped up by interested DH practitioners after the presentation. Informal presentations at DH 2014 in Lausanne had similar results, suggesting that the level of interest was sufficient to redevelop the game with real centres and projects. At that point we partnered with GO::DH.

**GO::DH’s Around DH in 80 Days Project and *DH Experience***

Global Outlook::Digital Humanities (GO::DH) is a Special Interest Group (SIG) of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organisations (ADHO). Its purpose is to help break down barriers that hinder communication and collaboration among researchers and students of the digital arts, humanities, and cultural heritage sectors across political, economic, and regional boundaries.

The origins of GO::DH lie in Melissa Terras’ infographic ‘Quantifying the Digital Humanities’ (http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dh/2012/01/20/infographic-quantifying-digitalhumanities/). This contained a map showing the distribution of physical centres in the digital humanities (as defined by members of ADHO communities) across the globe. Its most striking feature, however, were the absences: apart from a thin band of centres across the Northern Hemisphere and in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, the majority of the world appeared as ‘empty space’; while digital work in the humanities was being conducted by researchers, teachers, and scholars in these areas, it remained, for the most part, invisible to researchers in the Global North associated with the largest international digital humanities societies and organisations. There was a literal disconnect between researchers in these (largely mid- and low-income economic) regions and those appearing on the map (for the most part found in high-income regions): the researchers were simply not part of the same digital, academic, and social networks.

The GO::DH approach to breaking down these barriers is extremely practical: the organization develops complementary strengths, interests, abilities, and experiences of its membership through special projects, events, activities, and publicity. Its core activities are discovery, community-building, research, and advocacy. It helps its members learn more about digital work in the arts, humanities, and cultural heritage sectors; it acts to foster collaboration and cooperation across regions and economies; it coordinates research on and in support of the use of technology in these areas across the globe; and it advocates for a global perspective on work in this sector.

One major example of this approach is the Around DH in 80 Days project, led by GO::DH’s founding vice chair Alex Gil. Around DH is an online project intended to foster discovery of current DH projects from around the world, beginning as a (still open) collaborative spreadsheet of DH projects populated by volunteers suggesting different projects by region. Eighty projects were featured—one per day—at www.arounddh.org, with introductory summaries of the projects edited by a team of editors from around the world. All the projects are displayed as nodes on an interactive map.

**The New Game**

The new incarnation of *DH Experience* builds on GO::DH’s Around DH in 80 Days project. To transform *DH Experience*’s hypothetical projects and centres into real ones, we used the Around DH master list, and we anticipate using similar means to keep the game up to date. Using GO::DH’s list of global DH centres, we modified the first design of the board to feature broader geographic regions as spaces, rather than just significant urban areas. A modular deck of cards highlights participating DH centres. Similarly, we updated the project cards to feature actual DH work being performed around the world. With these changes, *DH Experience* can be used to explore the global and collaborative nature of DH through a board game. It now introduces players to some of the main global actors within DH. Like Around DH in 80 Days, the game can serve as an introduction to the global scope of DH research—a tool for mutual discovery.

While the game is played physically, it exists and is distributed as a freely printable document on the Web, allowing us and others to adapt the board and cards easily, should other centres or projects request to be represented in the game. More to the point, we believe that some of what makes the game engaging is the iterative redesign of the game, whether changing the board, rules, or cards. For this reason we maintain the game as a living document, updating the components to highlight new projects and centres by request.

**Conclusion**

Why a board game? As discussed above, the initial reason was experimentation with workflow as a way of representing information. Games offer ‘players continual opportunities to learn, solve problems, and become more skilled. That is, indeed, what makes [. . .] games fun’ (Gee, 2005, 29). Games for us offer a way of testing interface ideas (while having fun). We think of play as a method for producing new knowledge (Thomas and Brown, 2007), and game design as part of research play. This poster presentation will include reflections on game design as an iterative method for the digital humanities.

Finally, we understand that designed gameplay—especially gameplay modelling life—comes laden with our own assumptions and limited perspectives. Far from intending to reify these assumptions, we instead hope to offer this game as a provocation or a starting point to ask more questions of the intersection between games and scholarship. Are there models of DH research that this game occludes? Where are the points of friction between simulation and elegant, engaging gameplay? What other mechanics, modes of play, or entire games could the DH theme support?

**References**

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