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#DH2023

UK DIGITAL COMICS:
PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

CONCEPT AND SCRIPT BY ERNESTO PRIEGO
ILLUSTRATIONS BY FRANCISCO DE LA MORA

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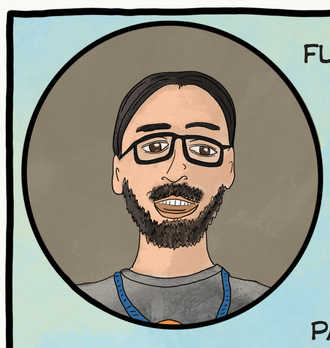
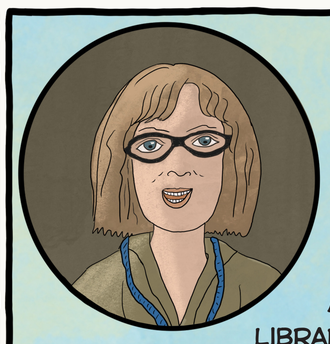


FUNDED BY THE UK ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (AHRC), THIS COLLABORATIVE DOCTORAL PARTNERSHIP (CDP) SOUGHT TO INTEGRATE DIGITAL HUMANITIES AREAS OF INTEREST AND METHODS WITH THOSE OF USER-CENTRED RESEARCH IN ORDER TO OFFER AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A PHD RESEARCHER TO ENGAGE WITH COMICS PUBLISHERS, AS WELL AS READERS, TO GAIN NEW INSIGHTS INTO THE MOTIVATION, METHODS, AND BEHAVIOUR IN CREATING, DISTRIBUTING, COLLECTING, AND READING DIGITAL COMICS...

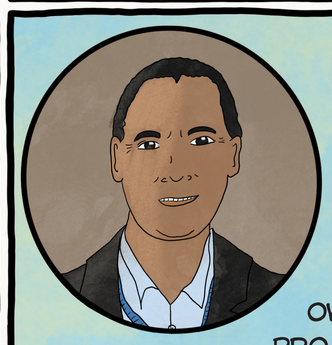
... I TALKED TO MY TEAMMATES ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE COLLABORATING IN THIS PROJECT AND HOW IT RELATED TO ITS TOPIC!



'COLLABORATIVE' SPEAKS TO THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN TWO INSTITUTIONS: CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON AND THE BRITISH LIBRARY. THE POSITIVES INCLUDED A NETWORK OF SUPPORT FROM THE SUPERVISORS AND BEYOND. IT ALSO MEANT BEING ABLE TO DRAW FROM MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXPERTISE. DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HAS CREATED AN ENVIRONMENT OF IMMEDIACY. IN RESEARCH COLLABORATION, FOR INSTANCE WRITING PAPERS, THIS CAN BE A BENEFIT: RESPONSES, FEEDBACK, AND REVISION CAN BE COMMUNICATED QUICKLY...

... THIS IMMEDIACY CAN SOMETIMES MEAN THAT TEXT SOMETIMES IS READ TOO QUICKLY MEANING THAT RESPONSES AND FEEDBACK ARE NOT CONSIDERED!

LARGE SUPERVISORY TEAMS REQUIRE CAREFULLY THOUGHT-OUT COMMUNICATION APPROACHES...



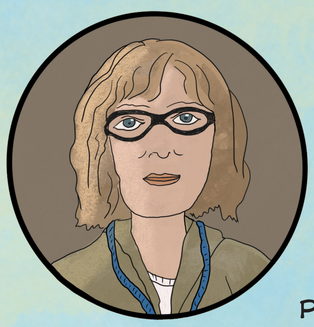
... AS WELL AS THE STUDENT TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE PROJECT AND LEADING ON COMMUNICATION. OUR WORK REVEALED A COMPLEX ECOSYSTEM, AND HIGHLIGHTED THE VALUE OF UNDERSTANDING THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF ENGAGING WITH DIGITAL COMICS. DIGITAL TOOLS DRIVE, ENABLE AND FACILITATE RESEARCH COLLABORATION!

IN PRACTICE, CITY RESEARCHERS HAVE LED ON DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS, MAKING CONTACTS WITH OTHERS INTERESTED IN THE FIELD...

... AND KEEPING US AWARE OF CONFERENCES AND EVENTS WHERE WE CAN LEARN MORE AND SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE. AT THE LIBRARY, WE ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE A PRACTICAL AND POLICY CONTEXT FOR THE RESEARCH, SHARE EXPERIENCE ABOUT HOW WE ARE DEVELOPING OUR COLLECTING, AND PROVIDE ACCESS TO WHAT WE HAVE COLLECTED SO FAR, AS WELL AS SUGGEST CONTACTS FROM OUR OUTREACH AROUND DIGITAL PUBLICATIONS.

AT THE LIBRARY WE NEEDED TO UNDERSTAND HOW TO COLLECT DIGITAL COMICS BETTER, BUT THIS WAS STILL A FAIRLY UNSTRUCTURED NEED. THE COLLABORATION WITH AN ACADEMIC PARTNER MEANT THAT WE COULD WORK TOGETHER TO DEFINE A PART OF THE PROBLEM THAT COULD BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD THROUGH A PHD PROJECT.FOR THE LIBRARY, THE PARTNERSHIP MEANS THAT WE HAVE A STRONG METHODOLOGICAL AND EVIDENCE BASE ON WHICH WE CAN DEVELOP OUR POLICY AND PRACTICE WITH CONFIDENCE...

... IT ALSO MEANS THAT WE ARE ABLE TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT RESEARCH ON DIGITAL COMICS AND IN THE COMICS FIELD MORE GENERALLY!



NOT SURPRISINGLY, COVID AND THE CHANGE TO WORKING PRACTICES THAT ENTAILED WERE A CHALLENGE. TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT FROM BOTH INSTITUTIONS WAS CRITICAL. MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE WILLINGNESS BY ALL TO ACCOMMODATE DIFFERENT WORKING PRACTICES AND HEALTH CONCERNS WENT A LONG WAY TO ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES.

WE'VE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT HOW READERS ENGAGE WITH DIGITAL COMICS. THE UK WEB ARCHIVE WILL HELP US SUPPORT DISCOVERY AND ACCESS TO WEBCOMICS AND IF THE TWO INSTITUTIONS HAD NOT JOINED FORCES NONE OF THIS WOULD'VE BEEN POSSIBLE!

Digital comics as a concept can be hard to communicate. Creating a definition for digital comics, and further, UK digital comics, was an initial challenge that was addressed early on, once the student had started. Sharing and refining this definition by the whole team was important. An early insight, from the interviews with creators and publishers, highlighted the strong links between print and digital in publishing -in many cases, even when comics were being published as digital only, the creator was also envisaging a print publication. Self-publishing has had a significant impact on the way comics are created, produced, and read. The theme of reader behaviour around digital comics was developed further through an extended research project made possible by the AHRC Student Development Fund, focusing on the UK Web Archive.

For full references and to download this poster, please go to https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.22717675

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