CoreDH

Episode 1—Evelyn Gius, DHd

25 July 2022 | [Listen on Soundcloud](#)

Guest: Evelyn Gius, representative of DHd
Hosts: Hannah L. Jacobs (ADHO's Communications Officer), Erdal Ayan and Anna Sofia Lippolis (ADHO's Communications Fellows)

Hannah: Welcome to CoreDH. A podcast that explores the stories and people behind the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations.

Erdal: Hello everybody, this is Erdal Ayan.

Anna Sofia: Hi, this is Anna Sofia Lippolis from the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations, ADHO in short, and welcome to the first episode in our podcast series about the stories of ADHO's core.

Erdal: Today we are hosting Evelyn Gius. She is a professor of [Digital Philology at the Technical University of Darmstadt](#), and representative of [Digital Humanities im deutschsprachigen Raum (DHd)](#). She has been working for the organization as a founding member since 2012. Her research interests revolve around Computational Literary Studies ever since the start of her career. She has got a PhD on a computer assisted narratological analysis of interviews about conflict. She coordinated the project, "[heureCLÉA](#)" on the temporal analysis of prose. She has supported development of the annotation platform [CATMA](#)and has done co-editing with the [Journal of Computational Literary Studies](#).

First of all, Evelyn, thank you for accepting our invitation and welcome to our first episode of our podcast project. These are just a few of your experiences with Digital Humanities among others. Evelyn, we are actually wondering when and how you got involved in Digital Humanities. What was the initial motivation behind your efforts and works in the field of DH?

Evelyn: Yes, well, thanks for inviting me for the very first episode, it's very exciting to be here with you! And it's interesting, it's funny when you said "involved ever since" in Digital Humanities, because that's not what I would think about. When I studied there were no DH studies curricula available yet, or at least at my university, so I think I got involved by chance in Digital Humanities! I studied German Literature, Philosophy and Computer Science and I did work as a student in Natural Language Processing, but then I left University and I started to work in an organization that deals with conflict, which helps people dealing with conflict, and soon after that I decided to get back to university because I wanted to do a PhD on the narrative structure of conflict narration so that was what I took from outside University.

I noticed that you could describe some things that are important for mediation in narrative theory terms, so I wanted to explore that in my PhD, as I was no digital expert in that yet. But

then I worked for Chris Meister at Hamburg University and got in contact with TAT, which is to say the Text Analysis Toolsuite that most people used in the 1990s and we used TAT as well 15 years later in our classes in the years 2004-2005-2006, because we found it was very helpful. However, in order to do that we had to use a DOSS emulation that would make it run on the computers because it was a DOSS-based program. I think we found it quite cool because TAT had a bit of a geeky touch and we decided we had to reimplement this or implement something similar in order to be able to annotate text, and TAT was the broad service of CATMA, the tool I'm still working with. I think that's also the thing that gave my PhD project a completely new spin and I would think that that's the very beginning of my DH involvement because then I started annotating texts in a more computational fashion I would say, so I think that the interdisciplinary nature of my interest in conflict mediation, literary studies theory, and this annotation tool were the things that caught my interest in Digital Humanities and I think the interest is still present and I guess it will stay forever, that's how it feels at the moment.

Anna Sofia: Thank you, that was very interesting. We mentioned DHd and I was wondering where DHd has a place in all of this? Can you tell us more about the history of your organization and why it was created? Why did you take part in a network of DH?

Evelyn: I think the idea of why it was created was that people noticed there were a lot of projects going on in Germany, but also in the German-speaking neighboring regions, and I think the perfect occasion for the foundation of DHd was the international DH 2012 conference that was held in Hamburg. There, the local host Chris Meister together with Peter Wittenberg and Gerhard Lauer had invited people to join an "Unconference", named "DHd Unconference", and during this event there were a lot of discussions about DH. Then also DHd was founded: we had a discussion about this "D" in the end and decided that it's not a regional thing but rather a language-related thing. "D" can stand for "deutsch" or "Deutsche Sprache". So DHd was founded in 2012 at this conference and the first executive board was decided there and that was where it started. Since then it's been very fast growing and I would say many people were waiting for something like that, because the number of the members has been growing fast and keeps on growing so we have quite big conferences at the moment as we tried to extend geographically to all possible German-speaking areas.

Erdal: Evelyn, you have already mentioned many activities that you are holding in scope of your organization DHd. Now, what kinds of activities, training, publications does DHd support for the candidates or potential members of your organization?

Evelyn: I think probably the most relevant thing is this conference that I already named. We normally do an annual conference in Spring, starting with this in 2014 in Passau and lately we had 700 or 600 participants so it was quite big. This year, we postponed the conference to 2022 because of Covid, but the community has organized a virtual conference that included activities throughout the year so there were opening weeks in March and closing weeks in September, and there were a lot of other activities organized around that. There were also activities that would more or less be covered in the conference that included teaching, workshops, and other things. That's one of the big things that DHd organizes or supports.

The other is of course that we also have Special Interest Groups at the moment, we have 14 of them and the 15th is already been founded at this moment: they cover a lot of topics like infrastructure or research on software engineering, or, to name other few, DH theory or empowerment in DH, so we encourage people to organize in these interest groups and we also have some funding for the activities.

I think one could say there are a lot of activities in the DH field of the German-speaking regions that are started while involved in DHd and also many of the currently offered DH courses, so the possibility to study DH in universities, I think many of them rooted in these SIGs that have been formed to discuss curriculum for the DH. Another thing is that we have a journal together with the The Marbach Weimar Wolfenbüttel Research Association (MWW), DHd publishes a peer reviewed journal for Digital Humanities that I think it's quite important for the German-speaking regions, the [Journal of Computational Literary Studies](#), and also, beyond that: they also accept articles in English. We also engaged in a process of national research infrastructure which is a big initiative that's been funded, starting from the German funding agency, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and lately we do not act there as one of the project leaders but we try to engage in the government structures of the initiative that has been formed there, provide a forum for looking at the needs for the DH and also the humanities from a more general point. Finally, for what concerns DHd, we have a [homepage](#) where one can get information about DH activities, we have project presentations there, links to our SIGs and their activities and also the possibilities to study DH in the german-speaking regions.

Anna: Yes, I think it's great that this is the demonstration of how DH can be so pervasive, because of their interdisciplinarity,. And it's also great there are a lot of DH local and not so local networks that collaborate together. It's a great way to foster collaboration. Talking about the present still and now DHd was lately accepted as a Constituent Organization (CO) in ADHO: how has working in your organization with ADHO has impacted the understanding of DH and all your work in the present or even in the past?

Evelyn: First I would say that working with an organization like DHd is something that I would recommend to everybody: it's an opportunity to look at the field in a possibly comprehensive manner that goes beyond your own in most of the cases very small and specialized and precise view of the field. It includes meeting a lot of people that you would not typically meet if you stayed in your defined professional field, also because typically DH is much more than the things one does because it's a very broad field I think. And additionally, the executive board of DHd is a group of people I learned a lot from and the views I appreciate it's the DHd perspective but also looking more towards Europe and the international perspective.

We have always been involved in EADH and we have joined ADHO recently which is really great and I'm representing DHd in the CO board of ADHO: again, I had the opportunity to discuss things with my international colleagues which is very inspiring because first, I appreciate that people there are extremely encouraging and friendly, and my impression is that they managed to create an extremely proactive atmosphere regardless the different types of discussed cultures that are represented there and the fact that sometimes different assessments of different issues. It's also really nice to see it and it's a perfect place to learn about academic culture in other parts of the world and use the opportunity to reflect on one's own culture and one's own habits and you see how other people do it. And maybe a more

specific example on certain issues is content-related issues are more present if you do that, for ex the fact that the pedagogical part of DH I think it's much more present and grown in other regions of the world than in the German regions so it's really nice to see that. Another thing that struck me since the first DH conference I went to, the DH 2009 at the university of Maryland, I admired the open mindedness of the community there, people are really open, really helpful and from a German literature perspective not stiff at all: it's really nice to communicate with those people.

Erdal: Evelyn let's get a little bit deeper into your own projects. We said at the beginning you coordinated a research project called "heureCLÉA", which sounds like a very relevant topic to talk about. Can you give us more information about this project?

Evelyn: Yeah, "heureCLÉA" was a project that was trying to combine hermeneutic understanding of texts with annotation basically, so I think that's the core interest of my DH research to combine annotation and methodology. In most cases with a narrative theory aspect in it, so for example at the moment I'm involved in a bunch of projects that work on the segmentation of prose texts in order to find solutions for automatically detect segments in those texts that can be then used in further analysis, for example if you know which things are in prose texts it's much easier to do it also for automatic analysis of characters in those texts. My interest is to do something that could be seen as a pipeline for narrative analysis, starting with segmentation of texts that fits narrative theory principles. And generally I think in my case it's typically annotation that helps one understand sth about concepts one is working with and has also in most cases to go towards the automation of these concepts but it's not necessary to do so: I think that also the very operationalization of narrative theory content is very helpful and it's why DH is so important to me because it gives me an opportunity to test these theories when I annotate things and see whether I can automate them or even without automatic them see where I can get people to annotate it in the same way, see how inter-annotator agreement develops and I think it's a possibility of understanding things on its own. It's not necessarily to have it in DH but it's very specific and very much fostered in the DH. My research is about trying to implement concepts of narrative theory in order to understand more about text but also to automate things to a certain extent.

Erdal: It sounds like you're going to continue with your future projects. Do you have any other projects you would like to mention?

Evelyn: One thing that is developing now is "Evaluating Events in Narrative Theory" and we are noticing that automating narrativity is helpful and interesting to combine with other aspects or specific pieces of texts. For example, at the moment we are working on the question of how we could analyze conflicts in texts (prose texts, literary texts) and see how this relates to the representation of narrativity in the text. I hope that's going to someday be a big project to work on conflict representation, types of conflicts and these things in literary texts.

Erdal: As it always happens there are problems and challenges. Did you face any challenges while creating your projects or getting into the DH community?

Evelyn: Yeah. I think in the DH community that was not a problem at all, because as I said before, people are really open to new things so it's rather easy to compare to traditional humanities. Maybe this has changed but maybe not. When I entered DH it was like this, I hope it's still like this.

Nevertheless, there are challenges. For example, I do a lot of annotation work as I already said and you have a problem that you keep on annotating, annotating, annotating, and you don't know if it's helpful what you're doing or if there are some errors that perpetuate throughout the work. And you keep on annotating or have other people annotate texts and in the end it may not been or been the work that you wanted to do, so its something probably typical for more computational or quantitative DH that you never know before whether you'll be successful, even though I think there is a certain mindset that is slowly developing that also says not being successful is also something that could be helpful because you can understand some things from that.

I still think this is a challenge, both in terms of being able to get funding because it's difficult to argue for these large projects or long projects if you cannot provide proof for their working, but also in terms of dealing with the problems that come along with not having answers that you wanted to have or in the direction that you want to go: much more difficult to understand what's going on if you do things at a such large scale.

Anna: I just wanted to make a super small comment: we could go on forever, but it's very interesting that you talked both about failure and not knowing what the path will bring about because I think this is a fundamental part of research. I think this is good, in a sense, and of course a big part of the work is also trying to find the most correct methodology and writing grant proposals, and this is because maybe DH still haven't had much of an institutional recognition yet but I think we are going towards that direction, especially with these networks and different ideas arising outside the academic setting. This is really important.

Thank you for your participation and your insightful answers, if you enjoyed this episode and you'd like to help support the podcast, please share it with others and post about it on social media. To catch all the latest from ADHO, you can follow us on Facebook and on Twitter @ADHOrg - Thanks for listening, and see you next time!

Erdal: thank you Evelyn and thank you for the contribution to our first episode!

Evelyn: Thanks for inviting me!

Hannah: This podcast was a production from ADHO: ADHO promotes digital research and teaching across arts and humanities disciplines. We act as a community based advisory force and support excellence and research, publication, collaboration and training. Learn more by visiting adho.org.

Resources

Evelyn's homepage at TU Darmstadt:
https://www.linglit.tu-darmstadt.de/institutlinglit/mitarbeitende/gius/index.en.jsp

DHd Homepage: https://dig-hum.de/

Evelyn's projects:
CATMA: https://catma.de/
heureCLÉA: https://heureclea.de/
EvENT: https://dfg-spp-cls.github.io/projects_en/2020/01/24/TP-EvENT/
Journal of Computational Literary Studies: https://jcls.io/
forTEXT: https://fortext.net/