Since antiquity, accounts of narrative theory have emphasized the role of the first few pages of a literary work, the exordium, for capturing readers’ interest and transporting them into the story world. Zooming in on narrative beginnings by means of a formalization and quantification of “narrative vividness”, this talk presents the results of a scaled digital analysis of a specialized corpus of German literary prose. By contrast to “distant reading” a “scaled reading” operates on smaller selected text samples, promising a more integrated perspective on the quantitative results.

The corpus was extracted from a reference corpus of German, the German Text Archive (DTA), consisting of 35 text fragments from Modernism and Realism (e.g., Lou Andreas-Salomé, Juliane Déry, Franz Kafka, Theodor Fontane, Karl May, Arthur Schnitzler, and Johanna Spyri). The main marker of narrative vividness examined is metaphor, manually identified by means of an empirically validated identification procedure. Secondary markers are readability scores (e.g., length of words and sentences) and part of speech tags (word classes), both of which are automatically identified with high accuracy. Statistical analyses show significant differences in use of vividness markers across texts, and in part also for author gender and narrative genre; closer inspection reveals that metaphor is used for distinct local purposes, among which the dynamic description of static situations. Interlacing distant and close reading combines the strengths of quantitative and hermeneutic accounts – allowing precise observations about vividness markers within narrative strategies.

February 27, 2017, 12:30 pm*
West Seminar Room (2nd floor West Building), IAS

J. Berenike Herrmann is a scholar of digital literary stylistics and cognitive stylistics applied to German and English discourse. Her research is at the interface between text mining and psychological approaches. She is currently leading a project that builds annotated digital corpora for analysis of the characteristic features of literary style of the 19th and 20th Century. Another current project of hers is analyzing metaphor in German fiction, which involves transforming MIPVU, a reliable metaphor identification method, for application to German. Berenike has published several books, such as Metaphor in Academic Discourse (LOT dissertation series, 2013), A Method for Linguistic Metaphor Identification: From MIP to MIPVU (John Benjamins, 2010, with G. Steen et al.), the edited volume Metaphor in Specialist Discourse (John Benjamins, 2015, with T. Berber Sardinha), and, most lately, a special issue on Transdisciplinary Approaches to Literature and Empathy (Scientific Study of Literature, 2016, with P. Sopcak and M. Salgaro), as well as several academic papers on digital and cognitive stylistics.

*You may bring your own lunch or purchase lunch at the Institute’s Dinning Hall from 12:00 noon. Please RSVP by email to mtuya@ias.edu.