

Fellows



Alys George

Fulbright/IFK_Junior Fellow

Duration of fellowship

01. October 2005 bis 30. June 2006

Alys George

PROJECT TITLE

Toward a Language of Images: Literature and Visual Culture in fin-de-siècle Vienna

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

We often assume that the ways in which artists express themselves are, in large measure, determined by the formal limits of their respective media. It seems logical that composers use the aural medium of music, photographers the visual medium of film, and writers the verbal medium of language. But what happens when artists and the cultures in which they create begin to question the tenability of the medium itself? How do works of art reflect the changing social value of particular media? This project focuses on the period between the turn of the twentieth century and the end of the First World War in Vienna, where the rift between language – the writer's medium – and lived experience seems to have become irremediable. Viennese authors shared with many of their European counterparts the endemic sense that the impressions of modern life could no longer be adequately captured in the inherited language and literary forms. In their search to make potent again the petrified language of their fathers, many Viennese writers turned to intermediality, combining traditional forms of literature (such as drama, poetry, and prose), which rely on language to transmit meaning, with visual media (including silent film, photography, and painting), which employ non-linguistic, visual signifiers to construct meaning. They looked to other media, in art critic Clement Greenberg's words, to "expand the expressive resources of the medium, not in order to express ideas and notions, but to express with greater immediacy sensations, the irreducible elements of experience." This interdisciplinary reassessment of the paradigms of literary modernism in Vienna seeks to highlight intermedial experimentation in literature as a key formal aspect of Viennese modernism that has been overlooked in critical scholarship. Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, Peter Altenberg, and Oskar Kokoschka, and other early twentieth-century Viennese authors were confronted with a changing media-technological landscape in which the visual began taking precedence over the verbal. They consequently developed innovative formal approaches to literature that probed the conventional boundaries between print and visual media. Drawing on discourses from literary studies, art history, film and media theory, and cultural studies, the project maps an increasing interest in "optical" modes of expression and asserts that literary intermediality not only developed in response to the growing significance of visuality and a perceived "crisis of language" around 1900, but also anticipated creative techniques that would later be put into practice by avant-garde and postmodern artists.

CV

B.A.

Publications

Erk Grimm, *Semiopolis: Prosa der Moderne und Nachmoderne im Zeichen der Stadt*, *German Studies Review*, March 2005 (Book Review); Eavan Boland, *After Every War: Twentieth-Century Women Poets*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2004 (Sole Translation & Language Consultant).

