GSAH | Friedrich Dürrenmatt Guest Professorship

Humanity and Diversity
A morning for doctoral students and interested parties with Nell Zink

9 December 2022, 10:15–13:00, Mittelstrasse 43
Moderation: Prof. Dr. Oliver Lubrich, Universität Bern
Those who write about animals are warned against anthropomorphizing them. Yet we are also discouraged from torturing them—that is, we grant them rights analogous to those enjoyed by certain lucky humans. Arguably, animals even enjoy a privileged position: Lacking moral agency, there is nothing they can do to deserve suffering. What does it mean to humanize a subject, and is it always to the subject’s advantage? Current discourse wrestles with issues of cultural hegemony, diversity and appropriation that can greatly complicate novelists’ lives. How can polyphony and difference be reconciled with universalistic conceptions of human (or, perhaps more accurately, animal) rights?

Building on her novel *Mislaid* (Fourth Estate) Nell Zink invites all interested parties to a lively exchange on these pressing questions.

Longlisted for the National Book Award, the novel was one of the New York Times’ “100 Notable Books” of 2015.

Recommended reading:
in German: Virginia, Rowohlt, 2019.

In the autumn semester of 2022, Nell Zink holds the Friedrich Dürrenmatt Guest Professorship for World Literature at the University of Bern. The California-born writer is teaching a course at the Faculty of Humanities for one semester and work with undergraduate and doctoral students. In her novel *The Wallcreeper* (2014, German title “Der Mauerläufer”), Nell Zink tells the story of an American couple in Switzerland. In it, Zink describes the federal city of Bern, with the many international professionals it has attracted, in very contrasting terms within a few lines:

*Berne lived turned inward on itself. But it wasn't self-sufficient; it was more like a tumor with blood vessels to supply everything it needed: capital, expats, immigrants, stone, cement, paper, ink, clay, paint. No, not a tumor. A flower with roots stretching to the horizon, sucking in nutrients, but not just a single flower: a bed of mixed perennials. [...] Continuity of an aesthetic that had become an aesthetic of continuity. That was Berne.*