

GSAH | Friedrich Dürrenmatt
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The Horizontal Vertigo

On being lost in Mexico City and other narrative cartographies

An afternoon for doctoral students and interested parties with
Juan Villoro

02.12.2025, 1.15pm–4.00pm

Moderation: Prof. Dr. Oliver Lubrich, University of Bern



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2 December 2025

1.15pm–4.00pm (incl.
break)

Room: University of Bern,
Mittelstrasse 43, Room tba

1 ECTS

Language: English (input) /
English, German
(discussion)

Registration until 25
November 2025 via KSL and
E-Mail to

melanie.sampayo@unibe.ch

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Victor Hugo attempted to read Paris as a book carved in stone, while Walter Benjamin invited us to lose ourselves in its streets as flâneurs, as if we were passing through a forest. Mexico City presents us with different challenges when we try to interpret it. Its defining characteristic is getting lost. This workshop aims to offer a narrative cartography as a heuristic way of reading places. Using the example of Mexico City's space, we want to approach the apparent chaos of a megalopolis. Its chaos is not a product of improvisation: it has a secret logic that only literature uncovers.

Beyond the example of Mexico City, we will collectively ask ourselves in a second step:

- Which narrative methods allow us to use "being lost" itself as a research method?
- How does being tied to a specific location change the way we think about literature, but also about method and research?
- What is a narrative cartography capable of deciphering?

— Juan Villoro

Juan Villoro, born in Mexico City, studied sociology in East Berlin and worked as a cultural attaché for his country. In addition to his literary work, he has taught at Princeton, Yale and Stanford Universities and at the New Journalist Foundation. Villoro writes a column for the Mexican newspaper Reforma. As a writer and public intellectual, he repeatedly addresses the question of how literature can respond to social upheaval and what role linguistic form plays in this.

Preparatory reading (will be made available to participants):

Villoro Juan. *El vértigo horizontal* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2019. English translation: *Horizontal Vertigo: A City Called Mexico*, Knopf, 2021)

The following excerpts: "Memory Atlas", pages 29-36. (The representation of the urban space).

"La Independencia, S. A. de C. V.", pages 51-53. (Mexican hybrid identity).

"Oblivion", pages 57-60 (A personal discovery of the urban territory).

"Street Children", pages 77-97. (A survey on the dreadful situation of homeless children).

"How does the City decorate itself", pages 203-214. (Accidental aesthetics of the city).

"A Car on the Pyramid", pages 221-225. (Modern incarnation of ancient prophecies).

"The Disappearance of the Sky", pages 276-280. (Urban ecocide).

"The Earthquake", pages 324-340. (The telluric challenges that reshape our destiny).