“[I]f anyone speaks, it gets light”—thus Freud’s well-known quotation of a child frightened of the dark. But what if literature revised this quote and it no longer worded, “if anyone speaks, it gets light,” but rather “if anyone speaks, it gets dark.” How else might Beckett’s voices be heard: “A voice comes to one in the dark. Imagine.” What is it about the figures in Robert Walser’s work that—according to Benjamin—“come out of the night, when it is darkest”? What can it mean when Thomas Bernhard speaks of the fact that “total darkness” prevails in his books? Darkness links questions of mythology, aesthetics, philosophy, and epistemology with considerations on media theory, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial theory. The seminar analyzes literature’s investment in darkness from the perspectives of cultural history and theories of representation. We will discuss acts of creation and decreation, force, thinking, madness, figures of alterity, perception, literary chiaroscuro, scenographies of darkness, dark spaces, dark times, apocalypse now, and dark comedy. By creating from darkness, literature itself goes dark. The seminar will therefore also analyze what writing darkness means with a view to the (precarious) status of literature, or in other words: how literature operates in the mode of Auslöschung (Bernhard). Taught in German.
Pressed by contemporary ruthlessness we want to learn from philosophy, literature, film and the arts how to configure the tyrannical temptations of the human frame. The marginalization of Plato's "democratic soul" will lead an investigation into patriarchal crime scenes double-headed by Freud and the Ancients in their effort to manage human waywardness, sadistic excess, incessant trespass and violent slams. Sacher-Masoch, Melanie Klein and Werner Herzog's thinking of the "bad object" destructive drives, masochist politics, and the premises of reparative justice will power our discussions of lawless abandon. Above all, participants will be supplied with materials for their projects and intellectually-pitched aspirations. Taught in English.