

Dr. Fred Luks

Vienna University of Economics and Business/Competence Center for
Sustainability

Biographical Note

Fred Luks is Head of the Competence Center for Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. He has been involved in sustainability-related research, teaching and management for many years: He was chair of the *Vereinigung für Ökologische Ökonomie*, an association of researchers active in ecological economics. Previously, he has been principal investigator of an interdisciplinary research project, guest professor at the University of Hamburg, and sustainability manager of a large corporation. He is the author of numerous publications on sustainability-related topics, including eight books.

Mag. Georg Drennig

Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna

Biographical Note

Georg Drennig studied North American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, Georgetown University, U.S., and, when he is not doing office or freelance work, is still a PhD candidate in the Advanced Research in Urban Systems program at the University of Duisburg-Essen. His main research interests are spatially-turned Cultural Studies, “stone-kicking-realist” Ecocriticism, and discourses of urbanity in popular culture, including comics. He has published essays on topics ranging from Poison Ivy and urbanity in Batman comics and films, Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*, and Eminem’s rejection of Ruin Porn, to Spike Lee’s *Do the Right Thing* and the WTO riots in Seattle.

Lecture Abstract

“Catastrophe, Utopia, or Enigma? Imagined Futures of (Un)Sustainability”

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The future is shaped by hopes, fears and ideas people have regarding the shape of things to come. It makes a crucial difference for ideas about sustainable development whether the future is imagined as apocalypse, as a story of hope, or as an enigma. The unknown unknown is not only a risk: an awareness of contingency is more productive than the belief that the future is either a paradise or hell. Though North American literature primarily provides imaginaries of either total societal collapse in the wake of environmental disaster or utopias emerging from the ashes, the unknown unknown is by necessity a key feature of fiction. Literature’s freedom or even obligation to playfully navigate scenarios of environmental change and imagine unexpected outcomes can provide a resource for contingency planning. Insights from the study of human reactions to, and preparations for, environmental change can thus be brought into a productive relationship with the study of literary imaginations and their visions of the ecological future.