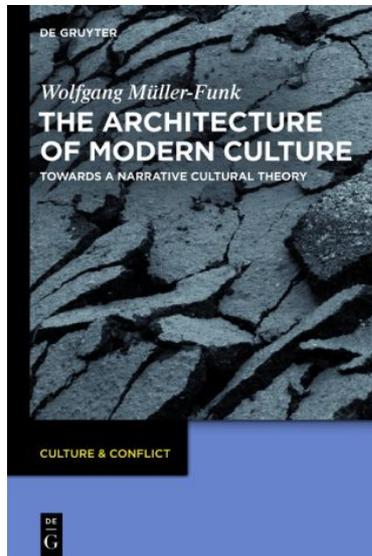


PANEL DISCUSSION

**ARE WE SAWING OFF THE BRANCH WE'RE SITTING ON?**

MONDAY FEB 25, 06:30 PM



**Are we sawing off the branch we're sitting on?**

**The Place of Nature in the Narrative Architecture of Modern Culture**

From the very beginning of modern times, "nature" in all its meanings (land, landscape, resource, physical body, biodiversity, wilderness, as a post-religious topos) has had an important place in the narrative architecture of modernity. Especially since Rousseau it has always been embedded in a central counter-narrative that emerged in contrast to the kernel of Enlightenment and techno-social progress.

It is, to quote Freud's famous book, a symptom of the *discomfort in civilization* (*Unbehagen in der Kultur*). The dramatic subject of this *Romantic* narrative is alienation, alienation from nature and alienation from human *nature*.

Since the ecological turn, nature exists at least in two aesthetic and journalistic versions and formats (in film, literature, photographs, or websites) as niches of a natural paradise on the one hand and as a ruin of nature on the other – the image of devastated nature, the wounds a modern aggressive industrial civilization has created. Quite often it is linked with apocalyptic structures.

Can nature be seen as a limit (as the ecological but also the bioethical discourse suggests) in a globalized culture that has the self-image of overcoming all sorts of borders?

**Wolfgang Müller-Funk** will be joined in the discussion by the co-curator of the Austrian Cultural Forum's new exhibition, *[Un]Natural Limits*, **Arnaud Gerspacher**, Austrian artist **Mathias Kessler**, and NYU Professor for Environmental Studies **Dale Jamieson**. The discussion will be moderated by the Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum, **Andreas Stadler**.

The panel discussion will be preceded by an exhibition walkthrough with Arnaud Gerspacher and Mathias Kessler, at 5:30 PM

This event is presented in cooperation with Deutsches Haus at NYU.

## **ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS**

**Wolfgang Müller-Funk** just published the book *The Architecture of Modern Culture. Towards A Narrative Cultural Theory*. Born in Bremen, Germany and now living in Vienna, Wolfgang Müller-Funk is a cultural theorist and essayist. Since 1993, Müller-Funk has been teaching at the Universities of Vienna and Klagenfurt. From 1998 to 2002 he was a professor of German Studies at the University of Birmingham, and he currently lectures as a professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Vienna.

**Arnaud Gerspacher** is a New York-based writer, researcher, and curator. He is a PhD Candidate in art history at the CUNY Graduate Center, writing a dissertation on animals, posthumanism, and ecology in art. He has worked at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and taught at Brooklyn College and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Alongside Dieter Buchhart, Gerspacher curated the Austrian Cultural Forum's current exhibition, *[Un]Natural Limits*.

For years Austrian-born artist **Mathias Kessler** has been taking a detailed look at today's reality of nature. In his works he touches on the apparent interventions of human culture into nature, and plays with our longing for seemingly untouched nature. In a subtle manner he exposes these human interventions, and in doing so cultivates, creates, and reconstructs nature while pointing out that nature is just another fiction of the 19th and 20th century (- Robert Smithson). At the same time, Kessler investigates the complex relationship between man and nature in the area of tensions between "natura naturans, self-creating nature and natura naturata, created nature.

**Dale Jamieson** is the Director of Environmental Studies at New York University, where he is also Professor of Environmental Studies and Philosophy, and Affiliated Professor of Law. Formerly he was Henry R. Luce Professor in Human Dimensions of Global Change at Carleton College, and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he was the only faculty member to have won both the Dean's award for research in the social sciences and the Chancellor's award for research in the humanities.

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