



Nordamerikastudienprogramm  
Institut für Anglistik, Amerikanistik und Keltologie



## Lecture Series

**"Current Issues in North American Studies and Cultural Studies"  
Summer Term 2011**

# Dr. Hannes Bergthaller

**National Chung-Hsing University, Taichung, Taiwan**

**"Wars on Bugs: Cold War Ecology in the Works of  
Robert Heinlein, William S. Burroughs, and Rachel Carson"**

**Tuesday • 5 July 2011 • 6:00-8:00 pm c.t. • Conference Room, IAAK**

In Robert Heinlein's classic *Starship Troopers* (1959), mankind's war with the "bugs" of Klendathu, a quasi-communist civilization of "arachnids," provides the biological rationale for the political order of the Terran Federation, in which all of civilian life is subordinated to the exigencies of evolutionary struggle and the franchise is tied to military service. Part science fiction novel and part political treatise, *Starship Troopers* is a powerful illustration of the way in which the discourses of ecology and evolutionary biology were imbricated with Cold War rhetoric during this period, constituting in effect a single semantic field. Rachel Carson's excoriations of "the man with the spray-gun" in *Silent Spring* (1962) and the nightmare scenarios of shape-shifters, predatory insect races, and planet-destroying "control addicts" William S. Burroughs laid out in *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964) can be understood as critical responses to Heinlein's biopolitical scenario. They draw on the same figural repertoire, but turn it to very different political ends: Both Carson and Burroughs highlight, in their own distinctive ways, the self-destructive nature of a social order geared towards the total rationalization and control of the "other."

Hannes Bergthaller received his doctorate in American Literature at the University of Bonn and is an associate professor at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Chung-Hsing University in Taichung, Taiwan. His book *Populäre Ökologie*, on the literature and cultural history of the modern environmental movement in the U.S., was published in 2007 with Peter Lang. Among his other publications are articles on the work of Margret Atwood, Toni Morrison, Edgar Allen Poe, Marilynne Robinson, Dr. Seuss, Walt Whitman, as well as the essay collection *Addressing Modernity* on Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems and American Studies (ed. with Carsten Schinko, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011). He is a founding member of the *European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture and the Environment* (EASLCE) as whose vice-president he currently serves, and of ASLE Taiwan. He is also the book review editor of *Ecozon@*, a European online journal for ecocriticism.