ROBINSONADES

The (Im)Possibility of Islands and the Phantasm of Insulation

6 ECTS

Seminar: Kulturwissenschaften-/ Literaturwissenschaften-Einführung

Donnerstag, 16.15 - 17.45 Uhr, Course Start: 14.04.2016

We are going to embark on an exploratory voyage into the depths of Daniel Defoe's 1719 novel The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner. This crucial text not only invents its own genre, it also poses fundamental questions concerning the relation of nature/wilderness and culture/civilization. It is both a profound meditation on the 'nature of man' and a formal as well as a social and anthropological experiment. What is culture? How is it made? Is it in danger of being undone? What kinds of literary and cultural techniques are involved in its construction or destruction?

The seminar is designed as a reading course: the overall premise is to slowly read and thoroughly survey the text. Our aim is to fathom its political, scientific, philosophical and poetological implications by approaching our t(r)opic from different directions – in an interdisciplinary fashion – and by consulting thinkers like Karl Marx, Hans Blumenberg, Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze (among others). Although Defoe's novel is the product of a specific historical and geopolitical constellation it is uncannily up to date. From an ecological perspective humanity seems to be stranded on an island of planetary dimensions, struggling to survive. From a political-economical point of view the possibility of islands in a globalized world seems questionable. How can make sense of a fictional desert island in a time when the ideology and practice of insulation take root in the fortified island of Europe, when the fences are built higher every day and shipwrecked refugees drown in the Mediterranean?

Reading: Please buy: Defoe, Daniel, Robinson Crusoe. An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism. Edited by Michael Shinagel. Norton Critical Edition. New York, London: Norton, 1994 (ISBN: 0-393-96452-3, ca. 10 €). All of the other texts will be provided.

Eligibility: Be prepared to read and to participate actively in the discussion.

Extra information on the class: Please sign up by sending an email to mpreuss@europa-uni.de before the semester begins.

Assessments: Essays (creative and academic) and presentation.

Language: English