

9th International Conference of the Collegium for African American Research Paris, April 06-09, 2011

Université Paris Diderot-Paris 7

Call for Papers (Deadline for the CFP: 5 September 2010)

Black States of Desire: Dispossession, Circulation, Transformation

« If we – and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others – do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. »

(James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 1963)

« a call to action, a call to consciousness. »

(Assotto Saint, *Spells of Voodoo Doll*, 1996)

Bridging the 2009 Conference in Bremen on black epistemologies and struggles, and the 2013 Conference in Atlanta, the 9th International Conference of the Collegium for African American Research will be held in Paris in 2011. Placing the emphasis on the conditions of social transformation in the black world, it will articulate two main axes of analysis and reflection: the intersection of a socioeconomic approach with a multicultural and identity-focused perspective; the relation between theorizing processes and material transformation, between intellectual activity and political action, and between different communities with specific agendas.

The conference will highlight the recognition of the central historical contribution of black feminist studies and movements, notably lesbian, in the American and South African contexts. In both their sought after inclusiveness and productive failures they are exemplary of individual change and collective reformation. This goal, once pursued by Audre Lorde and James Baldwin, and still to be reached, is here emblemized by the figures of desire and the black states. In the wake of Lorde's esthetical and political alliance of the self and the community, of Baldwin's desiring consciousness and ethics of inclusion, desire and the black states are together rich with conscious revolutions to come. They work as immaterial and physical orientations, symbols of shifting identifications, of the diversity of black lived experiences. The black states of desire therefore set out to describe lack turned into impetus and actualization, the movement from what exists to what can be imagined and created, from words to the building stone, from statement to establishment.

In this broad perspective, we invite proposals from scholars in any discipline, but also from intellectual, artistic and cultural conversants, and socioeconomic, political, and institutional actors who aim at anchoring Black studies and creations in a social world to be concretely changed with innovative projects. Without being limited, either in number, scope, nor aims, the desired states of being black that the conference hopes to sketch will be related to the key notions of dispossession, circulation, and transformation. Cardinal poles of the worldwide black experience, they also open up the space for mapping and materializing the much-needed black utopias of the 21st century.

Black islands and alternatives to isolation may be one such. Instrumental in slavery, colonization, and in the shaping of modernity, with its long-ingrained racism, isolation has taken many forms including political subjugation, socioeconomic subordination and de-historicization, as the media coverage of the recent Haitian earthquake has shown. It has overshadowed that Saint-Domingue turned Haiti was the first black republic whose social transformation was spread throughout the worldwide 20th century anti-colonial movements of national liberation, especially African. The sister islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique may represent the Haitian utopia passed on to the black 21st century.

This is what seems to prove the February 2009 Martiniquan Manifest, which, among others, Patrick Chamoiseau and Edouard Glissant signed in the heat of the Guadeloupean collective mobilization. Its key word, poetical and political, is *Lyannaj*, which signifies in Creole dynamic and praxis linking individuals, peoples, communities. This urgent need of linkage has also always been carried through the African American text — from Zora Neale Hurston's polyphonic voices to Toni Morrison's re-membered selves and others, from Richard Wright's political commitments to Melvin Dixon's instruments of love.

In opposition to the further dispossession of the dispossessed, and in order to generate a worldwide community based on solidarity, the circulation of black experiences, past and present, is thus of paramount importance. It also needs to include other islanders, unacknowledged or vanishing, such as Blacks of and in Europe, gays and lesbians in Africa or persons with AIDS, whose fundamental rights are denied. Cut off from the wealth and health of the North, they all call out for justice and, from their specific situations and conditions, for a profound reflection on communities — be they inherited or elective: how do they culturally intersect? How can they be politically articulated?

To reach the necessary coalition-building between black communities, it is necessary to consider the multiple identifications and identities that found them, and the cross-cutting issues that impact them. While revisiting the African American literary esthetics of optics, through which things unseen are made evident, contemporary writers and artists, often activists as well, such as Essex Hemphill, Assotto Saint, or Sapphire, have complied with this double agenda. Their commitment to both art and the world prolongs the organic bond between literature and sociopolitical struggles, while eschewing academic aporias, conceptualizations disconnected from black reality, or, up until recently, the delusions promised by the proclaimed advent of, in the United States, the postrace, and in South Africa, the postcolony.

That is the task of all, and particularly of scholars and actors in the Humanities. If reconnected to the social world, starting with a productive connection between disciplines, to which CAAR has been dedicated since its creation, the call for transformation from worldwide black philosophies, arts and literatures may not remain unanswered. In the spirit of the Black Writers Conference, some fifty years earlier, the 2011 Paris Conference "Black States of Desire: Dispossession, Circulation, Transformation" hopes to offer such a reuniting space.

Abstract submission will start online on July 5. More information can be found at: <http://caar-web.org>