

Call for Papers: “The evidence of things not seen” – Queering Europe with James Baldwin

Conference, 22-23 February 2018

Interdisciplinary Center for Gender Studies ICFG, University of Bern

Organization:

- Tina Büchler, ICFG
- Noémi Michel, Université de Genève
- Jovita dos Santos Pinto, ICFG
- Patricia Purtschert, ICFG

James Baldwin’s work is preeminent in discussions around race in the US.¹ Baldwin’s writing, his persona as well as his public speeches, interviews and discussions have been rediscovered, rediffused and revived with the formation of the Black Lives Matter Movement, through Queer of Color Theory and activism, in the critical and artistic writing of Ta-Nehisi Coates and Clara Rankine, by the Oscar nominated film “I am not your Negro”, and not least within Baldwin studies themselves, as the collected works, anthologies and journals of recent years show. They jointly refer to the pertinence of his analysis of race as a persistent structuring category in neoliberal times, to the aesthetics and eloquence of his writings, as well as to its reverberations for queer-intersectional political activisms and academic approaches.

This renewed reception of Baldwin has also touched continental Europe. Baldwin has long been regarded as an African American in exile, whose primary concern with race was about the US. However, a growing scholarly body of critical race, queer and intersectionality studies have questioned the idea of Europe’s white innocence, and asked for the ongoing effects of its colonial legacy, especially for Europeans of Color. In the context of these new developments, the focus on Baldwin’s work has shifted to the question how Baldwin’s writing about Europe and his artistic vision in general, “formed and informed by a black queer imaginative capacity”¹, can also be used for insight into racial relations in Europe. Moreover, the circulation of films, interviews and texts from and of Baldwin on social media, have given James Baldwin a new topicality within intersectionally formed movements of People of Color, who fight deadly racist structures, racial and sexual profiling, mass-incarcerations

¹ Maxwell, William J. (2016): “Born-Again, Seen-Again James Baldwin: Post-Post-racial Criticism and the Literary History of Black Lives Matter”, *American Literary History* 28 (4).

within the asylum industrial complex, exclusion from residential rights, citizenship, and the reverberations of everyday racism.

The conference aims to bring together scholars, artists and activists drawing on James Baldwin to engage with and question racial relations in the spatio-temporal formations condensed in, but not limited to the geographical space of Europe. We thus welcome papers that explore interventions that -critically- refer to Europe, without necessarily ‘stemming’ from its geographical spaces. We want to discuss this renewed interest in Baldwin’s work, the trajectory of this reception as well as the theoretical and political resonance his writing has had for and within these spatio-temporal formations. We will do so from a decolonial queer-feminist perspective, asking about the points of connection, but also the boundedness of his vision, and the delimitations this brings about, especially the theoretical and representational absences in Baldwin’ work with regard to the positionality of Black women and lesbians, and for things unseen or overseen by Baldwin himself.

We are very pleased to have been able to engage Paola Bacchetta (Associate Professor of Gender and Women’s Studies at UC Berkeley) as a keynote speaker. She will also participate at a screening of “I Am Not Your Negro” and a following discussion under the title: “Stranger in The Village” – James Baldwin and Trans-Atlantic Relations on Race, on 19 February in Zurich. Participants of the conference are welcome to join.

The conference seeks contributions that speak to one or more of the following agendas, that:

- reflect the pertinence of Baldwin’s body of work on race beyond the US context and the translatability of it especially for Europe: Where does his work allow to look at Europe differently, and where are its delimitations to think Queer of Color beyond a male-centered gaze?;
- consider Baldwin’s inquiry of a post-/colonial Europe within his imaginary as a black queer man. We especially welcome contributions that engage with his work on a Black and People of Color presence, also beyond the African and US-American diaspora in France;
- engage with the reverberations of his text “Stranger in the Village” on the Swiss town Leukerbad, for postcolonial Switzerland and beyond;
- engage with Baldwin’s trajectory as a black queer person living in Europe;
- consider the genealogy of the reception of James Baldwin’s work in Europe with regard to a European racialization.

Deadline for submission of abstracts (500 words): 1 December 2017, 5pm.
Send to: Jovita dos Santos Pinto, jovita.dossantos-pinto@izfg.unibe.ch

Please note: Travel fees for participants cannot be covered by the organizers.