

Contemporary history and history of art conference

Université Paris-Sorbonne 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> June 2016

## **“Decapitalisations”**

### **Contestations, exiles, transfers, bicephaly...capital cities**

Call for papers

Comue Sorbonne Universités/ FAPERJ

Centre d’histoire du XIXe siècle - Centre André Chastel

#### **Academic committee:**

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The progressive establishment of national sovereignty and the separation of powers throughout the course of the nineteenth century redefines the issue of the “dual body” of sovereign power. Sovereignty is temporarily personified by one or several persons, while simultaneously remaining a part of the institutions which signify continuity and permanence, and confer upon the city in which they are located, the status of political capital. These capitals therefore cease to be itinerant, become fixed in certain urban spaces and assume a considerable *de facto* importance, which enforces strategic and symbolic interest and provokes a variety of contestations.

The “capitalness” of a city may then be challenged by a military occupation (Lisbon 1807-1811, Paris 1940-1944), by a revolution (Versailles/Paris 1789, Rio de Janeiro/Lisbon 1820, Paris/Versailles 1871), by the state of international relations (Jerusalem/Tel Aviv, Berlin/Bonn), or by civil wars which bring into play cities where other competitive or

dissident powers take up residence (London, Brazzaville, Algiers). Capital status may also be contested by means of political decisions which result in transferring power to another centre (Istanbul/Ankara, Rio de Janeiro/Brasilia, Abidjan/Yamoussoukro, Lagos/Abuja, Melbourne/Canberra, Calcutta/New Delhi) or in the sharing of sovereign functions between multiple urban sites (Pretoria/Cape Town), by alternating between a summer and a winter capital (Rio de Janeiro/Petropolis, Cairo/Alexandria, Hanoi/Dalat), or by centres which emerge as cultural capitals which are distinct from the political capital. Independence and the emergence of new states provide an opportunity for debate about the choice of a national capital, which can be a source of civil war (Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro). The construction of federal or supranational political systems also implies the emergence of new centres, which may complement or rival the existing capital (the concept of the “federal district”, Ottawa, Brasilia, Brussels).

Universal exhibitions, particularly those in the nineteenth century have played an important part in the process of “decapitalisation” or internationalisation of “capitalness”. For the organising countries it was a matter of constructing the cultural attraction of their own artistic and industrial productions into something tangible. With the creation of the title of the European Capital of Culture in 1985, the concept of “cultural capital” was redefined: it is no longer a national body which defines its own “capitalness”, but a separate commission which assigns and shares between European countries this label of attractiveness. It is necessary to examine the different forms of deterritorialisation and denationalisation, as well as the redefinition of the connection between politics and culture.

We must also consider the resilience of those capitals that lose their status yet retain a certain aura of capital. How does a city survive this political and administrative downgrading? What is the cultural impact of the loss of political “capitalness”. What role do historical capitals (Istanbul, Persepolis, Delhi/New Delhi) play in relation to capitals that boast their modernity? How are the transfers structured? How does the diplomatic community follow these changes? How does international recognition influence the persistency, or lack thereof, of “capitalness”?

The three day conference will be devoted to examining the fate of those capitals that have been temporarily or permanently stripped of their status, alternative or provisional capitals (Bordeaux, London, Brazzaville, Algiers), and mobile forms of sovereignty, as well as the endurance of “capitalness”, from a historical and history of art point of view. This meeting is based on the project “Capital Cities: from Nations to Globalization, 19<sup>th</sup> c – 21<sup>st</sup> c.”, co-financed by the Communauté d’universités et d’établissements (COMUE) Sorbonne-

Universités and the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (FAPERJ). It brings together history of art historians and historians from the Centre de Recherche en histoire du XIXe siècle and a range of institutions from the state of Rio de Janeiro (Brasil) on the subject of the tensions which arise between political and cultural “capitalness”. For this reason, the examples of Paris and Rio de Janeiro will be given priority, but comparisons with other spaces will serve to expand and enrich discussions.

**Submissions should take the form of a short abstract (5-10 lines) and should be sent to [armelle.enders@paris-sorbonne.fr](mailto:armelle.enders@paris-sorbonne.fr) before the 15<sup>th</sup> December.**