

OBJECTS OF CONVERSION IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE
UCLA, LOS ANGELES, FEBRUARY 15-17, 2018
CALL FOR PROPOSALS



Can objects convert?

Exploring the relationship between objects and conversion can usefully complicate the usual distinctions between subjects and objects. From sacramental materials to holy wells, human hands to books, new kinds of food and drink to precious metals and forms of currency, objects can both convert and be converted, tangling any linear chain of causality. Objects are also purposes, inviting us to ask not only the how but also the why of conversions.

The “Objects of Conversion” conference aims to bring together specialists from a variety of fields in the humanities -- and perhaps also the social sciences and religious institutions -- to discuss these questions in the context of early modern Europe. Accusations of idolatry haunted the participation of objects in transformative worship, as accusations of apostasy haunted religious conversions. Theology thus provided the core vocabulary for issues of conversion in many other areas. How did early modern developments in natural history shape the way people understood their environments -- their power over external objects, and vice versa -- and hence their own subjectivities? How did changing understandings of cognition (including embodied and extended cognition) and virtue (as both physical and spiritually manifested) shape interactions between

humans and nonhumans? What confessional and political implications did these changing interactions entail? And what can we learn from them as we wrestle with the dangerous energies of religious conflict in the 21st century?

The conference will feature a keynote by Joe Moshenska (Cambridge), “Dolls and Idols: Iconoclasm as Child’s Play in the Early Modern World,” an “object lessons” session in which participants share and discuss an “object of conversion” (or an image of one), and another on “objects of faith,” among other areas of concern.

Two “objects of conversion” seminars, directed respectively by Carla Nappi (University of British Columbia) and Paul Yachnin (McGill) will afford members of the conference, especially early-career scholars, an opportunity to share their work-in-progress within their seminars and also with the conference participants. Modest financial support will be available for graduate students and under-employed scholars.

Proposals, including the title of the proposed presentation or work-in-progress essay, a short abstract (approximately 250 words), and also a CV will be welcome until December 15 at conversions@mcgill.ca. We will be pleased to respond to proposals by the start of January.

Members of the Early Modern Conversions Project can apply to the Collaboration Fund (<http://earlymodernconversions.com/projectadmin/collaboration-fund/>) for travel subventions.

The Objects of Conversion Conference is a collaboration of the Early Modern Conversions Project (headquartered at McGill University) and the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at UCLA.