

Women and objects (EUGESTA Conference, Basel, 9-11 October 2017)

‘Things’ have, in recent years, garnered ever-increasing attention from the likes of cultural and literary theorists, as well as from sociologists and anthropologists. Things function as a means for every type of communication, as modes of memory, as gifts establishing bonds and gifts creating dependency, as marks of power. It no longer suffices to say, they’ve been exhaustively examined, when we’ve only considered their symbolic function. Things possess rather their own agenda, generating action, stories, discourses; they have a ‘social life.’ Since Arjun Appadurai’s seminal study *The Social Life of Things* (1986), we’ve inquired into the actual efficacy of ‘Objects.’

The forthcoming conference draws on this research but follows its own objectives. We should not only examine those objects, which are present, but also investigate where they are lacking: who cannot use them or from whom they’re being kept. It’s also necessary to discover new objects that have flown under the research radar until now. A gender-specific interrogation will color all these inquiries. It’s obvious that objects, rather than standing outside a gender-specific context, actually shape it. With this in mind, particular attention will be paid to the heretofore idea of the female body as an ‘object of desire.’ Peter Brooks, in his book *Body Work* (1993), identifies the (female) body—among other objects of desire—as the focal point for textual and image production. The question, which interests us here, concerns the items connected to this desire. Namely, it’s not about the primary forms of desire, which focus on the female and male bodies and which have been thoroughly examined, rather it’s about the relationships to things that generate tales and discourses. Is there a discourse concerning the loss of objects, their devaluation, their translation or new interpretation?

Weapons, textiles, jars, writing utensils, ‘books,’ badges, trinkets and jewelry—we want to take them all into account. But what escapes us? How can we explain these ‘blind spots’ in the history of scholarship? We want to survey well-known objects along with those newly rediscovered and those ‘found’ in a gender-connoted space. The inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the conference should consequently inform the individual contribution.