

**OBJECTS OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION:  
Using Material Culture as Source for an  
Environmental and Consumption-Oriented  
History of Technology**



*Das  
Kleinod  
der  
Hausfrau*

**Miele**

*Combineette*

*Deutsches Museum, Kerschensteiner Kolleg, February 4-5, 2010*

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# OBJECTS OF ENERGY CONSUMPTION:

## Using Material Culture as Source for an Environmental and Consumption-Oriented History of Technology

February 4 – 5, 2010  
Deutsches Museum, Kerschensteiner Kolleg  
Museumsinsel 1, 80538 München

### The Project

The research project „Objects of Energy Consumption“ – a joint venture of the Deutsches Museum and the Central Institute for the History of Technology at TU Munich and funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research – analyzes the history of energy consumption in the private household from a consumption perspective. Based on the examination of household appliances used in food preparation, heating, lighting and personal hygiene and building on concepts and methods of technology studies as well as museum and material culture studies, it analyzes the complicated sets of relationships and interdependencies that led to a high energy consumption in private households.

In order to understand how energy is consumed through the use of domestic appliances, we interpret the objects as culturally charged artifacts to which cultural, social and political meanings aside their basic technical functions are ascribed and which are to be deciphered by the users in the domestication process. While previous studies have concentrated on the role of household technology in negotiating the relationship between production and consumption, politics and technology, public and private as well as the construction of gender, the aspect of energy consumption has scarcely been touched upon. Similarly, research projects on the mechanization of the private household have rarely used technical artifacts as the source and starting point of their analysis.

In this project, various research questions will be approached from a combined perspective of technological, environmental, gender, consumption and museum history. Based on an enlarged semiotic approach, the object-centered analysis puts the materiality of things to the forefront and regards household appliances as materialized culture.

For further information, visit <http://www.energiekonsum.mwn.de>.

### The Workshop

The project's first workshop is meant to provide a theoretical and methodological basis for the research program by debating questions and problems in the analysis of (technological) material culture and by interlinking material culture studies on the one hand with consumption, gender and environmental history on the other hand. Based on an interdisciplinary perspective, both well-tried and new methods shall be critically examined. The workshop is aimed at developing new ways of integrative object analysis applied to household technology, paying attention both to the symbolism of things and their materiality.

Prime concern of the workshop is the exploration of a method of analysis that does justice both to the “brute intransigence of matter” as well as the “plasticity of meaning, bound to specific times and places” (Lorraine Daston). How can we utilize technical artifacts as sources for a user-focused history of technology? How can we re-contextualize, decode and interpret the sphere of activity shared by technical appliance and human actor? Which insights are to be expected from a study of the materiality of things and what role do object-ensembles and their spatial arrangement in bathrooms, kitchens or exhibitions play? How do we ‘read’ technical artifacts as references of material culture, ascribed behavioral assignments and gender roles without falling back on an essentialized and deterministic view on technology? What can an object-centered approach to domestic appliances tell us about the rise of energy consumption in private homes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the development of an environmental conscience?

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# PROGRAM

THURSDAY, 4 February 2010

**1:00 – 1:15 pm:** Welcome and Introduction  
(Helmuth Trischler, Deutsches Museum/Karin Zachmann, TU Munich)

## **Section I: Studying (Technical) Material Culture – Theoretical, Methodological and Practical Considerations**

Chair: Martina Heßler (Hamburg University)

**1:15 – 2:00 pm** Victor Buchli (University College London):  
*Material Culture, Materiality and Substance*

**2:00 – 2:45 pm** Wolfgang Ruppert (University of the Arts, Berlin):  
*Object History as Empirical Cultural History*

**2.45 – 3.30 pm** Peter-Paul Verbeek (University of Twente, Enschede):  
*Designing Behavior: Some Reflections on the Strategies and Ethics of Behavior-Influencing Technology*

**3:30 – 4:00 pm** Coffee Break

**4:00 – 4:45 pm** Lydia Martens (Keele University, Keele/Staffordshire):  
*Mundane Consumption: Gender, Domestic Life and the Normalization of a Consumer Attitude in Post-War Affluent Societies*

**4:45 – 5:30 pm** Gudrun M. König (TU Dortmund):  
*The Veto of Things*

**5:30 – 6:00 pm** Summary and Discussion

**7.00 pm** Dinner at “Kleine Schmausefalle”, Mariahilfplatz 4, 81541 München

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## FRIDAY, 5 February 2010

### **Section II: Energy, Consumption and Environment**

Chair: Bernard Finn (Smithsonian Institution)

- 8:30 – 9:15 am** Grégoire Wallenborn (Free University of Bruxelles):  
*Where Is the Environment? Visibility and Invisibility of Energy Consumption*
- 9:15 – 10:00 am** Kirsten Gram-Hanssen (Aalborg University):  
*Household Energy Consumption and Technology Appropriation in a Historic Light*
- 10:00 – 10:30 am** Coffee Break

### **Section III: Reports – Research in Progress**

Chair: Thomas Hengartner (Hamburg University)

- 10:30 – 11:15 am** Monika Röther (RWTH Aachen):  
*The Radiogram and its Development from the Euphonious Altar of the Home to an Outmoded Appliance*
- 11:15 – 12:00 pm** Barbara Schmucki (University of York):  
*“Ladies were becoming more venturesome in getting on and off the tram cars”: Tracing the Users of Large Technical Objects*
- 12:00 – 1:00 pm** Lunch at the Museum Restaurant
- 1:00 – 1:45 pm** Nina Möllers (Deutsches Museum):  
*Decoding Exhibitions: Theoretical Approaches to the Museum as Mediator of Technology*
- 1:45 – 2:30 pm** Nina Lorkowski (TU Munich):  
*White Goods, the Body and Filthiness: The Interdependencies of Electrification and Personal Hygiene*
- 2:30 – 3:15 pm** Sophie Gerber (TU Munich):  
*How to Construct the Green-Minded User: Mediating Kitchen Appliances and Sustainability in the 1980s*
- 3:15 – 3:45 pm** Concluding Discussion
- 4:00 – 6:00 pm** Academic Advisory Board Meeting

Organization: Prof. Helmuth Trischler, Prof. Karin Zachmann, Dr. Nina Möllers, MMag. phil. Sophie Gerber, Nina Lorkowski, M.A., Stefan Beierlein, Laure Philippon

Information and Registration: Dr. Nina Möllers  
Forschungsinstitut  
Deutsches Museum  
Museumsinsel 1  
80538 München  
Germany  
Tel.: +49 (0)89-2179-543  
Fax: +49 (0)89-2179-239  
[n.moellers@deutsches-museum.de](mailto:n.moellers@deutsches-museum.de)  
<http://www.energiekonsum.mwn.de>

Deutsches Museum 

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