Philippe Cordez

Object Studies in Art History

Research Perspectives*

Object Studies in Art History?

What's the point of 'Object Studies in Art History'? The best way to start might be to ask the reverse question: what is the place of art history within object studies? A good introduction to this can be found in *The Object Reader*, edited by the London-based museologist Fiona Candlin and the New York art historian Raiford Guins and published in 2009, which provides a helpful introduction to the engagement with objects in the humanities and social sciences.[1] While this field is by no means new, it has seen significant growth in recent times. The book is first and foremost an anthology, with 28 texts by authors spanning from the first half of the 20th century (such as Marcel Mauss and Walter Benjamin) to more recent approaches to object studies. These texts are accompanied by 25 short essays on individual objects and a handy 'Object Bibliography'. In their introduction, the editors identify four fields in which an object studies approach has been carried out with particular intensity since the 1990s, namely in anthropology and material culture studies, science and technology studies, in the field of technoculture and digital media and in critical theory and philosophy.[2] Though their focus may skew toward the Anglo-Saxon context, one of the book's great achievements is the way it transcends disciplinary boundaries in order to provide an overall perspective of the field. Only then can a diverse, metadisciplinary and reflexive approach be fostered, one which does justice to 'objects' and their role within human life.

But what has been the contribution of art history within these research approaches? This question is particularly pressing, given that, as the editors of the *Reader* point out in their introduction, objects have tended not to be the focus of recent art-historical and visual-

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1 Candlin, Fiona / Guins, Raiford (ed.): *The Object Reader*, London / New York 2009.

2 Candlin, Fiona / Guins, Raiford: Introducing Objects, in: ibid., p. 1–17, here p. 4.

studies scholarship.[3] The reasons for this, according to Candlin and Guins, are threefold: 1) the dominance of post-structuralist theoretical approaches to these fields, which are ultimately inspired by linguistics; 2) a socio-historical focus on the 'context' of artworks – which, as one might infer, shifts the attention from the objects themselves to their settings in a somewhat disconnected way; and 3) the legacy of connoisseurship and formalism, which tend to operate ahistorically and apolitically, harbouring a certain scepticism toward research on non-artistic objects. In response to this situation, *The Object Reader* has a section specifically dedicated to 'The Objecthood of Images', which emphasises that even images can have a material dimension – a fairly modest finding, particularly in comparison with the much more substantial sections on 'Object', 'Thing', 'Object and Agency', 'Object Experience' and 'Leftovers'.

It was against this interdisciplinary backdrop that the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art held its 33rd congress on *The Challenge of the Object* in 2012 at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg. The conference proceedings gather together short essays from almost 400 authors in 20 sections over 1515 pages.[4] While this hefty work is not the focus of the present paper, it offers an excellent point of departure for identifying the recent trends and the perspectives of object studies in art history.

Object Studies & Visual Studies

When I refer to 'object studies in art history' here, I am by no means using an established turn of phrase. In the Nuremberg proceedings, the German term *Objektwissenschaft* is discussed only once, in an essay by the director of the Museum of the University of Tübingen, Ernst Seidl.[5] Seidl draws upon his experience with collections related to the history of science to formulate his thesis that art history is by nature object studies. This assumption is set into contrast to two tendencies: a form of *Bildwissenschaft* ('image studies') which often suppresses the objecthood of images and ignores non-visual objects; and a recurring form of 'animism', which in a somewhat unscientific fashion assigns an agency to images and objects, thus all but declaring them subjects.[6] These are the key points that I would now like to discuss in more depth, beginning with visual studies and its relation to object studies.

3 Ibid., p. 7.

4 Grossmann, G. Ulrich / Krutisch, Petra (ed.): *The Challenge of the Object*, 4 vol., Nuremberg 2014.

5 Seidl, Ernst: Objektwissenschaft: Wissenschaftsrelikte als Quellen einer Kunstgeschichte als Dinggeschichte, in: ibid., p. 417–419.

6 On these points, see also Büchsel, Martin: Das Ende der Bildermythologien. Kritische Stimmen zur deutschen Bildwissenschaft, in: *Kunstchronik* 67, no. 7, 2014, p. 335–342, discussing especially Hornuff, Daniel: *Bildwissenschaft im Widerstreit. Belting, Boehm, Bredekamp, Burda*, Munich 2012. In English on 'Bildwissenschaft': Rampley, Matthew: Bildwissenschaft: Theories of the Image in German-Language Scholarship, in: id. et al. (ed.), *Art History and Visual Studies in Europe*, Leiden 2002, p. 119–134.

Object studies and visual studies should be conceived as closely related. The latter carries out interdisciplinary investigations into the being and use of images, and has promoted an expansion of critical attention beyond the confines of 'high art'. However, a visual-studies perspective in art history also causes a significant narrowing of the field of expertise, since art even as defined by the modern, European system of art – from which art history arose – is not confined to images alone. For example, architecture or 'decorative art' pose entirely different questions. If we hold fast to the concept of art and historicise it, as has already been done extensively in art history,[7] then this discipline should deal with everything that is fabricated, in the sense of *ars* – that is, to all categories of artefacts. The visual culture orientation of art history has amplified the traditional dominance of the visual in this discipline. But it needs to be supplemented by, and in dialogue with, an object studies which can help it to achieve a balance.

Visual studies and object studies do not analyse the same genre of things; or rather, they do not approach them in the same manner. Material images are indeed also objects and are treated and preserved as such: stored in museums, examined in laboratories and workshops, conserved and restored, or displayed in galleries, as shown variously in *The Challenge of the Object*. Thus, the *object turn* or *material turn* provides us with an opportunity to redefine and draw connections between a range of specialisations, from the natural sciences to cultural-political approaches. But images do not exist purely in their object character. There are immaterial images that operate in the mind and can also be evoked by language. Conversely, objects can be images, can bear pictures, can have a visual character or an iconic status – although they don't necessarily, and the complexities of objects apart from these image properties are no less important. What is evident is that the relationship between images and objects – much like that of texts and images or of texts and objects – is very rich and merits further consideration.

The Concept of Object

One of art history's central questions concerns the historicity of its objects of research; meaning that the concept of the object also needs to be historicised. It was only around the turn of the 19th century that the term 'object' began to refer to a spatially limited and functionally determined material thing. While it is legitimate today to view and investigate extant or documented artefacts from past centuries as 'objects' – and to apply to this task an 'objective' method, which developed along with the establishment of art history as an academic discipline and conforms to the modern understanding of the

7 See for example the classical study by Kristeller, Paul Oskar: The Modern System of the Arts. A Study in the History of Aesthetics, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12, no. 4, 1951, p. 496–527 and 13, no. 1, 1952, p. 17–46.

object[8] – it remains altogether unclear just what all these 'objects' were before the advent of this term. Therefore, we need to look for alternative concepts of the object. How can these concepts be located and reconstructed through studying either the objects themselves or their representation in images and texts? How were artefacts historically socialised and how did they arrive at their social functions?

'Object' derives from the Latin *obiectum*, a word which was coined in the 13th century in scholastic philosophy, as Florian Wöller explains in this volume. Etymologically,[9] it refers to something which is thrown towards or at a recipient, or more precisely, which affects the human senses. As such, it can refer to specific perceptible properties of a thing, such as colour or smell, as well as to something more abstract but which can likewise become the 'object' of our attention. Commonly paired with 'object' in its modern usage is the 'subject', although the two concepts were not initially regarded as opposites. Medieval authors held various opinions on this point. What is clear, though, is that when we are talking about conceptions of the object, then we are always talking about perception, cognition and ontology – of the perceiver and of that which is perceived. A recent philosophical movement, 'object-oriented ontology', investigates not just the relations between people and objects, but also between objects themselves.[10] Both in its traditional and contemporary strands, the philosophy of objects is thus in no way inferior to the philosophy of images in terms of its complexity and implications. Still, the relationship of this field of enquiry with artefacts remains largely unexplored.

The 'thing' also needs to be incorporated into the discussion; a concept which refers originally to an assembly (the old Germanic *Thing*), and at the same time to that which stands out or comes to mind, and must therefore be negotiated in this assembly. 'Object' and 'thing' offer complementary routes of approach to the same matter. The 'thing' does not refer to sensuous perception, but rather to the matter at hand in a more immediate sense. As such, it falls in no small way into the domain of politics, which is concerned with the lives of people and how they interact with one another and the world. Against the backdrop of this idea of a precondition of social life through things (German: *Bedingung*), two major fields of research open up in relation to artefacts which are of political relevance for object studies in art history. The first concerns postcolonialism: if art history wishes to address situations beyond the sphere of European influence in a responsible manner, then it is urgently necessary to become conscious of the specificity of 'Western' conceptions of art, and therefore to intensify the interrogation and cultural relativisation of concepts

8 Daston, Lorraine / Galison, Peter: *Objectivity*, New York 2007; Zimmermann, Anja: *Ästhetik der Objektivität. Genese und Funktion eines wissenschaftlichen und künstlerischen Stils im 19. Jahrhundert*, Bielefeld 2009.

9 In etymological matters, I am referring to Rey, Alain (ed.): *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* [1992], revised edition, 3 vol., Paris 2007.

10 See, for example, Harman, Graham: *The Quadruple Object*, Winchester / Washington, D.C. 2011; Latour, Bruno: *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* [2012], Cambridge 2013.

of the image and, even more so, of the object. Significant steps have been made toward this end in the sections "The Object as Subject" and "Missing Links: Object Manipulation In (Post)Colonial Context" in *The Challenge of the Object*.[11] Both sections interrogate alternatives to the modern conception of the object and its implications in a variety of situations. This field of enquiry directly impacts museums as cultural-political institutions,[12] and inflects topics such as the memory of slavery, in which people were treated as objects.[13] The second controversial area of investigation which art history has until now largely neglected, is that of political ecology: if artefacts are investigated with reference to all their associated cultural imaginaries and social implications, then the leitmotifs of the exploitation of natural resources can more effectively be addressed.[14]

A factual exploration of the social and political relevance of objects can be impeded by that animistic tendency in the humanities and social sciences which Ernst Seidl addressed in *The Challenge of the Object*. So often, references have been made to the 'agency' (Gell) of objects, or their function as *'actants'* (Latour), with the aim of ascribing independent activity to them and a subsequent power over people. Though this is indeed a widespread belief that must be understood and historicised in its various forms, it is in no way a scientific finding. Alfred Gell (1945–1997) was a British social anthropologist, while Bruno Latour (born 1947) initially rose to prominence as a sociologist of scientific knowledge. Both of these scholars have researched, although from slightly different points of view, the central role ascribed to objects in human societies.[15] They were interested in the concrete ways that humans delegate or externalise active properties onto or into objects – that is, in the complex material and cognitive entanglements between humans and diverse forms of 'non-humans' – rather than necessarily in the independent agency of objects, as a cursory reading might suggest. Both Gell and Latour can be included within the anthropology of techniques, a dynamic field of research that – given its tendency to investigate the material and symbolic questions of the making and encountering of objects, albeit according to its own particular intellectual traditions and lines of enquiry – is particularly relevant and promising for art history as a history of both *ars* and *techné*.[16]

11 Grossmann / Krutisch 2014 (see note 4), p. 263–338 and 501–578.

12 On this, see: Cordez, Philippe: Entre histoire de l'art et anthropologie: objets et musées, in: Dufrêne, Thierry / Taylor, Anne-Christine (ed.), *Histoire de l'art et anthropologie*, 2009, http://actesbranly.revues.org/199 (last accessed 21 August 2017).

13 On slavery in the perspective of art-historical object studies: Cordez, Philippe: Ebenholz-Sklaven. Zum Mobiliar Andrea Brustolons für Pietro Venier (Venice, 1706), in: *Kritische Berichte* 41, no. 3, 2013, p. 24–41.

14 On the 13th-century interpretation of the tooth of the narwhal as the horn of the unicorn and its enduring consequences on narwhal hunting in the Arctic: id.: Materielle Metonymie: Thomas von Cantimpré und das erste Horn des Einhorns, in: *Bildwelten des Wissens. Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch für Bildkritik* 9, no. 1, 2012 (= *Präparate*), p. 85–92.

15 See their texts in Candlin / Guins 2009 (see note 1), p. 153–164 and 208–254.

16 On this, see Cordez, Philippe: Werkzeuge und Instrumente in Kunstgeschichte und Technikanthropologie, in: id. / Krüger, Matthias (ed.), *Werkzeuge und Instrumente*, Berlin 2012, p. 1–19. (French version: Histoire de l'art et anthropologie des techniques: objets, processus, représentations,

Precisely because the sensual properties of objects are often neglected in the broad field of 'material studies', the expertise of art history in understanding manufactured forms, their functions in the production of meaning, the conditions of their production and their histories gives it the potential to make a major contribution to an interdisciplinary object studies.[17] Yet, the pre-existing analytical repertoire and even the vocabulary of art history in relation to objects remains largely insufficient. For this reason, the two following studies focus on particularly complex objects in order to identify recurring phenomena especially relevant to an art-historical approach. These also relate to the issues I have just mentioned, including the aspect of agency and animism, and advocate for a productive partnership of object and visual studies. Both objects are from Europe, but fall outside of the art historical canon; they are separated from one another by a period of five centuries.

A Butterfly Reliquary

This small reliquary (figs. 1 and 2) was most likely produced between 1325 and 1335 in Paris and today is part of the Regensburg Cathedral treasury.[18] In a number of ways, it enters into a mimetic relation with a butterfly. Its silhouette and dimensions (with a five-centimetre wingspan) replicate those of the insect. The remaining formal characteristics of the animal's body, though, are not reproduced in those of the object, which is flat and features right-angled edges. But its surface is adorned with a layer of translucent enamel on chased, reflective silver, evoking the colours and the refractive effects of the scaled wings of the butterfly, with irregular dots and fields of green, blue, red and yellow. This enamel technique – developed toward the end of the 13th century in Tuscany – had been introduced to Paris only a few years earlier. Here, the use of this novel technique to represent butterfly wings constitutes a visual commentary on its optical effect.[19]

in: *Techniques & Culture*, in print). I am mainly indebted to the anthropology of techniques as it developed in France since the 20th century. On its differences to English-speaking studies, see Coupaye, Ludovic / Douny, Laurence: Dans la Trajectoire des Choses. Comparaison des approches francophones et anglophones contemporaines en anthropologie des techniques, in: *Techniques & Culture* 52–53, 2009, p. 12–39. See also the contribution by Ludovic Coupaye in this volume.

17 See also Yonan, Michael: Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies, in: *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 18, no. 2, 2011, p. 232–248, here p. 244.

18 Kunstsammlungen des Bistums Regensburg (D 1994/1). Gaborit-Chopin, Danielle (ed.): *L'art au temps des rois maudits: Philippe le Bel et ses fils. 1285–1328*, exh. catal. Paris, Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris 1998, no. 153, p. 233–234. See also Tammen, Silke: Bild und Heil am Körper: Reliquiaranhänger, in: Marek, Kristin / Schulz, Martin (ed.), *Kanon Kunstgeschichte: Einführung in Werke, Methoden und Epochen*, 4 vol., Paderborn 2015, vol. 1: *Mittelalter*, p. 299–322, here p. 300–307. On relics and reliquaries, see Cordez, Philippe: Die Reliquien, ein Forschungsfeld: Traditionslinien und neue Erkundungen, in: *Kunstchronik* 60, no. 7, 2007, p. 271–282.

19 See also the archival evidence of a golden goblet with images of butterflies, possibly also in translucent enamel, which was bought in 1306/1307 for Philip IV of France: Gaborit-Chopin,

1 Butterfly reliquary (front), Paris, circa 1325–1335, Regensburg, Kunstsammlungen des Bistums Regensburg

2 Butterfly reliquary (back, enclosing panel missing)

In the middle of this small, enamelled surface, Christ on the Cross, set against a sky-blue background, is positioned between Mary and John. The line of the horizon coincides with the line of separation between the butterfly's fore- and hindwings. Under the cruci-

Danielle: L'orfèvrerie émaillée à Paris vers 1300, in: *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques. Moyen Âge, Renaissance, Temps modernes* 27, 1999, p. 81–101, here p. 98.

fied body, the trunk of the insect is depicted in the form of an annulated worm. This characterisation of the body of the butterfly corresponds to the information provided by the encyclopaedist Thomas Cantimpratensis, who wrote in his *Liber de natura rerum* of 1244 that *papiliones […] vermes volantes sunt* (butterflies are flying worms).[20] The cross itself is depicted on the reliquary with strips of silver, though the horizontal beam merges with the top edge of the wings, where the hands of Christ are nailed, so that the opening of his arms on the cross coincides with that of the butterfly's wings, with Mary and John bearing witness to this event. Today, an enclosing panel on the back, on which the relics might have been identified with inscriptions, appears to be missing; this offers a view inside the object. Separated by metal dividers and sealed in wax, fragments of various substances including pieces of bone are housed in thirteen compartments. In the central, cross-shaped compartment are slivers of wood, almost certainly to be understood as relics of the Cross. As such, the depiction of the Crucifixion on the front correlates to the identity of this invisible main relic, while the image of the worm as well as the form and the appearance of the butterfly create a connection between the metamorphosis of the animal and the double nature of the Son of God – and between his sacrifice and the consequent redemption of mankind. Not long before this, between 1307 and 1321, Dante Alighieri had depicted a similar notion of transformation in his *Divina Commedia*, in which the souls in Purgatory are referred to as worms, anticipating their later transformation into angelic butterflies: "noi siam vermi / nati a formar l'angelica farfalla".[21]

The butterfly reliquary, however, should not only be understood as an object of devotion, but also as a piece of jewellery, or *joyau*, which in French has referred (since the 12th century) to an object of joy *(joie*) and of play (*jeu*).[22] It was intended to be worn, which produced other levels of meaning related to the behaviour of butterflies. Since butterflies mostly frequent blossoms – *maxime floribus innituntur*, as Thomas Cantimpratensis goes on to write – the potential wearer of the pendant takes on the role of the blossom. But the butterfly only stays there briefly, meaning that the full glory of its unfurled wings only remains visible for a moment. In the case of the reliquary, this momentary effect is replicated in the restricted joy of a viewer who would like to be able to admire the object moving on the body of the person across from them and the miniature scene on it for just a bit longer – a fleeting image that is analogous, even for enlightened individuals, to the divine vision being referenced in the object. Perhaps this is also indicated by the particularly distinctive eyes of the butterfly reliquary. Even more conspicuous are the large antennae,

20 Thomas Cantimpratensis, *Liber de natura rerum*, l. 9, cap. 31, ed. Helmut Boese, vol. 1 (no further vol. published), Berlin / New York 1973, p. 306.

21 "We are born as worms / though able to transform into angelic butterflies." Alighieri, Dante: *Divina Commedia*, *Purgatorio*, canto 10, v. 124–125, trans. by Joan Hollander, introd. and notes by Robert Hollander, New York 2004, p. 218–219.

22 In relation to this topic, see also the enamelled game scenes in the same technique on an ewer in the Nationalmuseet in Copenhagen, Paris, circa 1320–1330: Fliegel, Stephen N. / Gertsman, Elina: *Myth and Mystique. Cleveland's Gothic Table Fountain*, exh. catal. Cleveland, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland 2016, no. 6, p. 112–115 (Rachel McNellis).

which, slightly asymmetrical, curl towards the wings to form two eyelets through which a string could be threaded. Their ringed structure is an actual characteristic that increases the surface area of the living animal's sensory appendages. Here, they have two white pearls on their ends; natural products whose formation typically allegorised the virginity of Mary,[23] and which as such were very well suited to representing the sensory organs of this Christological piece of jewellery. Here the object ceases to be about mere vision, and instead alludes materially to the event of the Incarnation – an allusion that is compounded by the presence of relics inside the reliquary as well as by its intended function, to be worn on the body.

The butterfly likely originated in a courtly context. For a good three generations it might have been gifted and inherited, traversing Europe, before being ultimately – and this is the only thing we know for sure – sealed along with its leather case in the head of a southern German wooden sculpture of the crucified Christ, made around the year 1400. Relic niches in such sculptures are not rare; here, the unusual butterfly form of the small reliquary presumably made its enclosure also seem like a logical act, if it was interpreted as a promise of redemption for the dying Christ. It wasn't until its discovery in 1989 in Regensburg that the butterfly was once again freed from this hiding place.

A Steam Locomotive Coffee Machine

Despite all their differences, the "cafetière-locomotive" – or steam locomotive coffee machine – which Jean-Baptiste Toselli patented on 12 November 1861 in Paris[24] (fig. 3) exhibits a number of properties comparable to those in the butterfly reliquary. Here as well, these phenomena provide an excellent example of the relevance of an art-historical approach to objects and their social functions. Across both cases, there are three overarching processes at work: first of all, the socialisation of substances and techniques by way of their creative presentation and contextualisation in objects (relics and translucent enamel; coffee and steam machine); secondly, the animation (the flight of the butterfly; the rolling of the locomotive), which in both cases does not occur in an animist fashion, but rather through formal and material references that stimulate the imagination as well as through gestures, with the latter also being inspired by the object;

23 See Fricke, Beate: Matter and Meaning of Mother of Pearl: The Origins of Allegory in the Spheres of Things, in: Kumler, Aden / Lakey, Christopher (ed.), *Res et significatio: The Material Sense of Things in the Middle Ages* (= *Gesta* 51, no. 1, 2012), p. 35–53, here p. 45–46.

24 See Bramah, Edward / Bramah, Joan: *Coffee Makers: Three Hundred Years of Art and Design*, London 1989, p. 104–109; Maltoni, Enrico / Carli, Mauro: *Coffee Makers: Macchine da Caffè*, Verucchio 2013, p. 178–185. Wagenmann and Böttger had already produced a steam locomotive coffee machine in Vienna in 1839: cf. Werner, Thomas (ed.): *Das k.k. National-Fabriksprodukten-Kabinett: Technik und Design des Biedermeier*, Munich 1995, Frontispice.

3 Jean-Baptiste Toselli, Steam Locomotive Coffee Machine, Paris, after 1861, Binasco, Museo della macchina per caffè

resulting thirdly in the artistic representation of abstract ideas that are made present in the objects (virginity, incarnation and salvation; energy, efficiency and progress).

A set of technical instructions produced by Toselli explains how the machine's coffee-making process worked. The body of the machine was made up of two chambers, which in the more expensive model were made of painted porcelain, but were otherwise of metal. The water was poured into the rear chamber via a funnel, while the coffee powder was inserted into the chimney of the front chamber. A simple mechanism in the frame caused the water chamber to sag slightly when full, which held open the lid of the ignited burner underneath, heating the water. When the water reached its boiling point and started to evaporate, the internal pressure in the boiler increased and the locomotive began to whistle. A little tap on top was then twisted shut. The hot water would now shoot up through the transparent glass pipe to the upper opening of the chimney, before flowing back down where it would saturate the coffee powder. In order to avoid a possible explosion, excess steam was released through a safety valve at the lower end of the pipe. The now empty water tank moved back to its original position, causing the flame to be extinguished by the internal mechanism. The cooling process then produced a drop in pressure which exerted a suction effect on the contents of the chimney chamber via the glass pipe. Since there was a metal filter attached to the end of the glass pipe in this chamber, only the coffee infusion returned into the first chamber, leaving behind the coffee grinds. A repe-

tition of the entire procedure could intensify the flavour, before the finished beverage was then transported via another pipe, running discreetly beneath the chimney chamber up to the tap on the front of the locomotive, through which it could finally be served.

As early as 1862, just months after the patent was secured, an advertisement appeared in a publication about the production of liqueur, and provides hints as to the reception of the *cafetière-locomotive* in the mind of its inventor:

> "[The] inventor, Mr. J.-B. Toselli, has found for the delicious product of Yemen, the moka, a device which augments its delicacy and compliments yet further its precious qualities: it is the *Locomotive Coffee Machine*, patented in France and abroad. With the help of this inexplosive coffee machine, the coffee is made with the speed which steam is able to impart upon all agents for whom it comprises life. It circulates around the table, from one guest to another, taking with it, in a graceful tender, the sugar and the cigars. Public demonstrations on Thursdays, from 10 to 11."[25]

What is being praised here is modernity in the service of bourgeois luxury. 'Moka' was the Red Sea harbour in Yemen, *al-Mukhā*, which in the 17th and 18th centuries had monopolised the global trade in coffee beans. In Toselli's time, the city was under British occupation, and was already in decline, but the name *moka* was still synonymous with coffee itself, and had an exotic flavour. Public coffee houses had sprung up in European cities as early as the 17th century (in Paris from 1672), but the beverage only began to be privately prepared and consumed a few decades before Toselli invented his device. The substance was even further refined by Mr. Toselli's whistling, steaming, tilting miniature locomotive, transferring the water to and fro, as was emphasised in the advertisement with such enthusiasm. But that wasn't all: the advertisement also underlined the safety and the "speed which steam is able to impart upon all 'agents' for whom it comprises life", and goes on to suggest that the machine circulates around the table as if on its own, even bringing the astounded guest sugar and cigars in its "graceful tender".

This invention was most likely referencing the kind of table automata which had already garnered attention in the 16th century, for example, in the form of ships laden with cargos of spices. Toselli's bourgeois clientele could thus harken back to the bygone royal pomp of the Ancien Regime. At the same time, it allowed them to participate in the rapid modernisation which was taking place under Napoleon III, in which the development of the railway network was making crucial progress. In 1850, the emperor himself had opened the new *Gare de l'Est* in Paris, which needed to be expanded already by 1854. Not far from there was the Faubourg Saint-Martin, where, according to the 1862 advertise-

25 "[L']inventeur, M. J.-B. Toselli, a trouvé pour le délicieux produit de l'Yémen, le moka, un appareil qui augmente sa délicatesse et flatte encore ses précieuses qualités: c'est la Cafetière-locomotive, brevetée en France et à l'Étranger. À l'aide de cette cafetière inexplosible, le café se fait avec la rapidité que la vapeur sait imprimer à tous les agents dont elle est la vie. Elle circule autour de la table, d'un convive à l'autre, emportant avec elle, dans un gracieux tender, le sucre et les cigares. Expériences publiques le jeudi, de 10 à 11 heures". Tondeur, Charles: *Fabrication des liqueurs sans alambic ni aucun autre appareil de distillation*, Paris 1862, p. 115.

ment, Toselli owned a showroom in which the functioning of the steam locomotive coffee machine was displayed to the public. With such a device, it was possible to elegantly display the modern efficiency and economic and social promises of the Second French Empire right on one's own table. Or rather, they could be enjoyed at the end of the meal under the command of the head of the household, who in doing so proved himself to be *au fait* with all the latest developments. But this was also more than a mere illustration of contemporary technology and politics. The coffee was to be consumed while it was still hot, allowing its invigorating effect to set in on the household's guests.

The symbolic and material connections of coffee culture with the railway, which produced the idea of a steam locomotive coffee machine, would go on to have great success in the 20th century. And so it was that the expression *caffé espresso* emerged in 1906 – referring to the *express trains* that only stopped at major stations – before, in 1933, Alfonso Bialetti went on to patent his now ubiquitous *caffettiera* under the name *Moka Express*.[26] Retaining this symbolic reference to the steam train, every cup of 'espresso' thus points to the idea that drinkers will get quickly on their way.

Object Fantasies and Object Studies in Art History

A butterfly serving as a reliquary or a steam locomotive filling a coffee cup are 'Object Fantasies' made reality – sensory perceptions of object properties that have been cognitively interpreted and artistically recombined into new objects; material creations that refer to a range of experiences and perceptions as well as images and meanings, and in turn produce new connections between them. Ludovic Coupaye puts it another way in his conclusive chapter, in terms of new contexts, processes and presences. Studying object fantasies and their realisations shows how people have dealt with sensual object properties; it reveals the active, creative exploration of objecthood, both in the perception and use of existing objects and in the conception and realisation of new ones. How does this creative activity happen, what are its various forms, its social, historical, psychological or philosophical dimensions? These are the overarching questions of object studies in art history. It allows us to call upon diverse and expansive traditions of research, while also making significant contributions both within art history and in the broader humanities and social sciences. It is the aim of the new book series to contribute to this development.

26 On this, see Schnapp, Jeffrey T.: The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminum, in: Brown, Bill (ed.), *Things* (= *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1, 2001), p. 244–269, particularly p. 250.