

Interview with
Gil Bartholeyns and Manuel Charpy

L'ÉTRANGE ET FOLLE AVENTURE DU
GRILLE-PAIN, DE LA MACHINE À
COUDRE ET DES GENS QUI S'EN
SERVENT

This interview was carried out by AOC
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AVENTURE DU GRILLE-PAIN, DE LA MACHINE À COUDRE
ET DES GENS QUI S'EN SERVENT
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What is the book's point of departure?

There were several points of departure: our respective work on the everyday, the uses of images and objects like clothing, as well as our work on houses and the body in different periods. Approaches effectively adjacent to masterpieces and heroic innovations. With more of a focus on appropriation and on the 'little' things, on the *longue durée* and on the systems of thought related to practices. The publishers Éditions Premier Parallèle created the series "The Life of Things" in partnership with Techniques & Culture (Technologies and Culture), a journal of which one of us is co-editor in chief. This is what gave us the idea of writing about the joys and the impudence of technologies, the comfort and the intimacy. We also wrote about gender issues relating to household appliances (the French word for which—*electroménager*—emerged in the 1930s), to objects like the sewing machine, and about the watch (with its mechanical time) in colonial contexts.

How did you go about writing the book?

Our editor Amélie Petit intuitively insisted that we deal with objects. We had the material but ended up returning to the sources, to discuss cases in greater depth. Concretely, we had many discussions about lines of force, narrative arcs. Finally, based on what we were respectively familiar with—nineteenth century photography, contemporary retro—we ended up writing for each other. With the framing by one and examples by the other, a lot of back and forth on modifications, a text was finally created that was shared through and through. It was also a reflexive history of when and how the everyday and ordinary uses came to be considered worthy of interest by historians, anthropologists. Not always presenting a transparent narrative, but showing that "technology" and everydayness have also been widely supported, criticized, staged at times, for political ends.

How is this book relevant today?

Every household has, on an average, a hundred odd devices, roughly half a ton's worth. They are perfectly familiar to us and are, therefore, often invisible. The historical perspective enables a return to the initial trials and errors, to the evolution of usage. The machines do not always serve as intended, they are diverted to other ends, they accumulate, sometimes pathologically. These are the things that remain unseen if one focuses on innovations and major energy networks. We have tried to defamiliarize the

everyday environment. For instance, by re-opening, as it were, the toaster, a veritable black box that one uses without knowing how it works, which is one definition of magic. The hidden technology belongs to the fabulous. There is only a certain price to be paid, namely inaccessibility and a feeling of dispossession. This book is a sort of manual without precepts, on the unthought and the double-edged genius of a technological mode of life that was really initiated in the 19th century— in particular with electricity—by a fantastical but already restless imagination.