

Remote Control (Object Lessons)

By Caetlin Benson-Allott

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Object Lessons is a series of short, beautifully designed books about the hidden lives of ordinary things.

While we all use remote controls, we understand little about their history or their impact on our daily lives. Caetlin Benson-Allot looks back on the remote control's material and cultural history to explain how such an innocuous media accessory has changed the way we occupy our houses, interact with our families, and experience the world. From the first wired radio remotes of the 1920s to infrared universal remotes, from the homemade TV controllers to the Apple Remote, remote controls shape our media devices and how we live with them.

Object Lessons is published in partnership with an essay series in the The Atlantic.

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Editorial Review

Review

"The remote control encourages us to take it for granted. It's ubiquitous but easy to misplace. An essential convenience but still an overly complicated nuisance. But in this compelling history, Caetlin Benson-Allott places remote controls at the center of our media universe, demonstrating how profoundly these devices shape contemporary media practices and our everyday lives. You'll never surf the same way again." ?*Jason Mittell, Professor of Film & Media Culture, Middlebury College, USA, and author of Television and American Culture*

"While promising control, the remote often fails to recognize commands or deliver our desires. Caetlin Benson-Allott shows how the history of the remote, including its affordances and burdensome proliferations, can help us better understand contemporary media technologies." ?*Michele White, Associate Professor of Communication, Tulane University, USA, and author of Buy It Now: Lessons from eBay*

"The Object Lessons series achieves something very close to magic: the books take ordinary?even banal?objects and animate them with a rich history of invention, political struggle, science, and popular mythology. Filled with fascinating details and conveyed in sharp, accessible prose, the books make the everyday world come to life. Be warned: once you've read a few of these, you'll start walking around your house, picking up random objects, and musing aloud: 'I wonder what the story is behind this thing?'"?*Steven Johnson, best-selling author of How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made the Modern World*

"The Object Lessons project, edited by game theory legend Ian Bogost and cultural studies academic Christopher Schaberg, commissions short essays and small, beautiful books about everyday objects from shipping containers to toast. *The Atlantic* hosts a collection of "mini object-lessons", brief essays that take a deeper look at things we generally only glance upon ('Is bread toast only insofar as a human toaster perceives it to be "done?" Is bread toast when it reaches some specific level of nonenzymatic browning?'). More substantive is Bloomsbury's collection of small, gorgeously designed books that delve into their subjects in much more depth." *?Cory Doctorow, Boing Boing*

About the Author

Caetlin Benson-Allott is Associate Professor of English at Georgetown University, USA. She is the author of *Killer Tapes and Shattered Screens: Video Spectatorship from VHS to File Sharing* (University of California Press, 2013) and of a column on film and new media in *Film Quarterly*.

Users Review

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David Barthel:

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