

Light switches, you know those common small things that decorate your wall, no, not picture frames (digital or analogue that is), no, and not your TV, and no, not that cobweb that you just can't be bothered cleaning up. No, I mean those often plastic or wooden objects, some have a metal skin, others a rubbery one, [l]attish, clinging to the wall, things that seem to make the world a brighter place (oh yeah, sorry – that was cheesy...hmmm.... moving on!) Yes, those little gadgets that we people use rather regularly during a day on this planet. They come in all different variations, sizes, colours, materials, but all serve one main purpose, to let us work and play when the sun is set, a time that is referred to as night (or :the opposite of day) – or on those days when it is just absolutely throwing down with rain and the world is covered in this bleak grey'ness, then we might use them as well. With a flick of a switch we bring light into any space, any too dark office, any bedroom, anywhere we need it, well, with the help of electricians and other professionals that take care of the wiring, but ignoring that, all we have to do is: flick the switch. Although these days a simple switch comes loaded with a vast amount of suggestions, be they positive or negative. Eco-friendly design, sustainability, saving energy and money, convenience and happiness are just a few ideas that come to mind, and there are others. Let's talk green design for a minute, although I won't be spending too much time on this subject as I do believe that certain aspects of certain issues are taken a step or two too far, but back to "being green" and two interesting points for conversation: first of all, we want to save money and consequently energy - or is it the other way around?- whatever the case, they both go hand in hand. Secondly, we don't want to lose the convenience we have grown fond of. Falling over people in the crowded train station after sunset? Coming home to a dark house? Back to candle light? Well?! Didn't think so. So why don't we leave issues like the outlined to the bright minds that are working on such tasks, and getting paid for it, - *a big shout-out to all of you! Keep up the good work* - and move on. Take a look at *Switch Me!* by Josselin Zaïgouche. What do you see? A new way of reducing energy use or a beautifully executed piece of design that

brings a smile to your face? Or even something else? How practical would that switch be? Would you use it? Does it make sense? Or is it all just a game in which we can be certain, that someone will get rather annoyed and frustrated and knocks the board and all the playing figures over? Just like your best friend when you had to play Ludo that one afternoon, when his cousin was over and the street had a power cut and they couldn't find the problem that caused it?? *Oh the irony...*

I actually have a favourite light switch. It lives in my mum's kitchen back in home'land, and everyone who has ever been in that kitchen will know which switch I am talking about – I am certain.

Everything about that switch is wrong. If you had the misfortune of stumbling into the kitchen when it was dark you were in for a treat as the things aren't where you would expect it – located next to the door handle on the wall. Nope, it is actually on the other side and considering it as an inwards opening door, you basically, open the door and either have to close it or walk around it before you can see anything. And even though I considered it a challenge when I was a child, it wasn't always what one needed. When I moved to the UK I came across another kind of light switch: a string. Huh? It hangs from the ceiling in the bathroom and you pull it instead of flicking it. Now what is the point in that? *Sorry, I'm not trying to offend anyone here, hang on...* To me, it is almost as pointless as two taps... or the perfectly formed queue at a bus stop....or the lobster-coloured holiday-makers at the beach... But I guess I'm digging here, I shall leave the stereotypes to one side for now.

Ever counted how often you touch a light switch in a day? A week? A year? Nope, me neither, but I think this would be something to do. You could draw a line of chalk next to the switch in question whenever you touch it, add a bit of prison-cell cheek to your living room or kitchen. And you would find out which switch is operated the most – a switch-spotters dream.

I've recently finished my first "Book of Shadows", a journal in which I sketched all the light switches in my house over the course of two days. I located all the switches

(apart from those stringy versions...) and drew each one several times of them during the forty-eight hour period, ending up with an accurate record switch usage. Apart from sounding slightly obsessive, I created an artefact of human interaction with objects, actions that often fall below our radar, simply because we do them automatically or so often that we have just lost the curiosity of spotting them. As often as we switch the light on, we switch it off (ok, this was kind of obvious...). A ritual that can be funny as much as it can be annoying, as power-saving as much as it can be power-consuming (in mental and physical terms). All those days you leave a light on even when the sun is shining brightly through the window, or the times you walk into a room you tend not to spend much time in and you leave the light on, or the times you walk out of a room and switch the light off, even though there are still people in the same room, now sitting in darkness...all the times you have been told off for leaving the lights on, or switching them off or for not changing a bulb... Considering this small box-like thing on your wall isn't much of a beauty-queen or technological genius, it gets used and abused a lot. I stuck a sticker on the switch in my room back home at my mum's place. This first form of self-expressionistic art-making and personality building may go unnoticed to some people, but why were stickers invented if they weren't meant to be stuck somewhere. Plus, the switches back home look somewhat different to the once I'm encountering around me here in the UK, being slightly bigger and therefore looking rather lonely without any customisation (or at least in my eyes they do). I'm not really sure whether or not my sister stuck something on her switch, I would say yes at the moment, but I might be mistaken. Next time you're in one of those DIY shops, walk over to the light switch section and let the vast product-saturation take over: there are light switches for children's rooms, in pink, green, yellow, blue, with frogs and cars and robots, trains, and planes, strawberries and unicorns and there are wooden ones in birch and chestnut, and cherry and mahogany, there are stainless steel ones and bright fluorescent green ones, there are polished metal and glow-glow-in-the-dark ones that serve as nightlight, there are simple white ones,

plasticity and rubbery, smooth and textured ones, ones that one has to flick and others one has to press, there are ones react to a simple touch, while others have to be turned.... There a gazillion of switches on those shelves and all one has to do is select the *one* that will complete one's life and home.

We have come a long way since 1884 and John Holmes' invention of the said object, many millions of times have our fingers flicked the light switches of this world – the planet will never be dark again – unless we want it to. I'm not trying to say that we should reconsider our everyday engagements with the little light boxes (and in some cases light strings) or should come up with a different solution to those relationships, all I'm writing here is an invitation to let this common object tell you its story sometime in the future. And why not, I'm almost certain they are here to stay.