

Resistant Materialities and Power Tools: Dynamics of Power and Resistance in Everyday Consumerism

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Abstract

In an everyday perspective of resistance, there is a tendency to favor human action and agency, both in the exercise of power or in the acts of resistance. The aim of this study is to examine material agency in everyday power-dynamics and to open a methodology of resistance studies in the realm of physical objects, designs and materials. In correlation to a “new materialist” perspective on power, resistance works to build affinity between humans and nonhuman agency and disrupt materially-supported subordination. In this study, a materialist methodology is introduced, with examples of how consumer objects are transformed to interfere with consumer relationships to become tools for cultivating resistant capabilities. As a case, the study examines a handbag made from a cookie box, produced by the Spanish activist “movement” Yomango, where the material properties of the metal box are mobilized to become active in the resistance. From a materialist perspective, the handbag becomes more than a symbolic prop for human-led activists and joins the ranks of co-resistors.

Unpacking power tools

Objects have power. They add leverage to our bodies, as the design of objects is always a form of cunning, a way to trick gravity or forces of nature in order to enhance human capacities to act (Flusser 1999: 19). The lever is a primordial design, enhancing human agency beyond the mere properties of the physical body. But simultaneously, we also align our actions with our designs, in ways that make our bodies turn into levers: our arms become levers and we become extensions of the tools we use. Just like we are the herder of our sheep, we organize socially in ways that submit us to our ideas of agency, and thus “since we have