

# **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

been pastoralists we have behaved like a herd of sheep and have needed pastors.” (Flusser 1999: 53)

As political theorist Jane Bennett argues, objects and their networks are imbued with “thing power,” which she describes as cultural forms that not only enhance capacities but also “are themselves material assemblages that *resist*.” (2004: 348). Building on the notion that bodies, not only human bodies but all physical objects, have a propensity to form collectivities which are in themselves sources of power, Bennett captures how in an assemblage, “*objects* appear more vividly as *things*, that is, as entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.” (2004: 351) Building on the “body materialism” of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Irigaray and Butler, Bennett argues for an expanded view to also include how things as bodies are controlled, gendered, sexed, pacified and excited (2004: 348). To highlight this propensity of matter to act, Bennett uses Spinoza to unpack the power of things,

Nature according to Spinoza is a place wherein bodies strive to enhance their power of activity by forging alliances with other bodies in their vicinity (and, in a parallel way, wherein ideas strive to enhance their power of activity by joining up with other ideas. This process or mode-ifying is never under the full control of any one body, for it is always subject to the contingency of aleatory encounters with other modes. (2004: 353)

Thing power is the “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.” (2004: 351)

The relevant point for thinking about thing-power is this: a material body always resides within some assemblage or other, and its thing-power *is a function of that grouping*. A thing has power by virtue of its operating in *conjunction* with other things. (2004: 353f)

To unpack the agency of matter and things, Bennett uses Latour’s concept of things as actants,

Unlike the term ‘actor,’ an actant can be either human or nonhuman: it is that which does something, has sufficient coherence to perform

actions, produce effects, and alter situations. [...] Agency appears to [Latour] as a continuum, as a power differentially expressed by *all* material bodies. (2004: 355)

Objects act on, with or against bodies and intentions, and materializes the social and metaphysical; values, morals, norms and regulations. As Latour highlights, an object like a seatbelt “does not reflect the social. It does more. It transcribes and displaces the contradictory interests of people and things.” (Latour 1992: 153)

Examining the material agency of objects adds to the general methodologies in resistance studies and opens the field to wider explorations of human and non-humans agency, and as I argue, it adds a new perspective to everyday resistance (Scott 1985). Following Flusser (1999), human designs and tools are leverages of power, amplifying the frail and impermanent human body to become “power tools,” that is, material agencies engaged in the realm of social and political powers. As we will see in the case of Yomango, a material perspective can open new dimensions of how humans and objects (or nonhumans) act in concert to open specific possibilities of resistance which point to the material culture of capitalism and everyday consumerism.

## **The participatory power of objects**

So how does power and object interact? As Vinthagen argues, power should not be seen as a totality of domination but always a form of consent-production and “participatory subordination” (2015: 167f). From this perspective, as conceived as well by Gandhi (1970) and Arendt (1970), resistance is not merely a new form of domination or “counter-power,” but the activity that undermines participatory subordination. As Vinthagen argues, “resistance is concerned with breaking up power relations in which humans are made into ‘tools’ for external interests or ‘servants’ in oppressive hierarchies. [...] Power does not primarily emanate from above – on the contrary, it originates from below, through subordinate behaviour.” (2015: 168) Vinthagen continues,

The power-holder himself does not create power; instead it is given to him by others in their daily cooperation and support. The necessary act of choice by the subordinate, the leader’s weakness and the possibilities

of resistance are all manifested in the power-holder's position of dependence. The sort of cooperation that generates power consists of active support, passive acceptance, or unwilling obedience to demands or rules imposed by the power-holder. (Vinthagen 2015: 171)

As Winner argues (1980: 123), artifacts enact special forms of politics through their “arrangements of power and authority in human associations as well as the activities that take place within those arrangements.” Artifacts distribute agency, allow or refuse access, amplifies or displaces actions. To understand power from this perspective means to seek the mechanisms that facilitate the reproduction of cooperative subordination and obedience, to seek the small everyday components that contribute in a material way to what Foucault calls the “dispositif” or “apparatus” of discipline and control (cf. Agamben 2009, Bussoloni 2010). If, as Sharp also argues, all government is based upon consent (1973: 28), then a material perspective of power needs to examine how everyday objects contributes to align subjects to such subordination. In its transitory form, subordination and obedience is regulated in legal authority and mutual contracts to assume stability. But objects are also used, not least symbolically, to manifest and celebrate subordinate participation and collaborationism, for example getting a golden watch after 25 years of bureaucratic servitude, or a medal for obeying orders to kill the people the state defines as “enemies.” But objects are also more direct manifestations of power as they reproduce obedience and subordination in very tangible ways by sorting and stratifying social processes.

Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed highlights how objects and matter have a certain “orientation” and this quality not only makes the world available to some people and not others, but also aligns the agency and mindset of users and ensures that bodies feel they are “in place” as they align with the suggested orientation (Ahmed 2010: 235). The orientation an object or space suggests is thus no coincidence, but a designed property that aligns bodies, time and emotions to facilitate certain activities while at the same time disqualifying others, not unlike sociologist Madeleine Akrich's notion of object's “script,” which she defines, “like a film script, [by which] technical objects define a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act” (1992: 208).

Some things are within reach, or ready-at-hand, while the orientations make other actions and connections impossible.

What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken. Some objects do not even become objects of perception since the body does not move toward them: they are 'beyond the horizon' of the body, out of reach. Orientations are about the direction we take that puts some things and not others in our reach. (Ahmed 2010: 245)

Some orientations make us subordinate; we seek keys for access or need elevation in order to gain agency and overview. Gates and barriers put bodies in lines and queues, spikes make certain areas impossible to inhabit by homeless people, and corkscrews favor right-handed people in the ability to open wine bottles. If objects are oriented to allow proximity they can "co-incide" with our actions to make certain things happen, while also shaping these endeavors.

Similarly, the orientation of objects also makes history "sediment" in certain patterns (Ahmed 2010: 240f). Not only are some expensive products out of the reach of a poor consumer, or a high shelf unreachable to a short person, but objects oriented towards us meet us half-way: they are available, ergonomic, greeting in the way that their affordances are directing us to align our endeavors together as a unit. By offering themselves half-way, they become more easily accessible, or "user-friendly" to some, while remaining untouchable for others. Through such shared orientations "we inherit proximities." Ahmed argues, "We inherit the nearness of some objects more than others (Ahmed 2010: 248). When we align attention and orientation with objects, they not only await our agency but help amplify and guide the work of the body. In this way, Ahmed's perspective on orientations resonates with that of Vinthagen, where he claims,

When we moderate our behavior to fit a routine or scheme of techniques, we become part of the shaping of power. It does not matter (for power production) if this happens to be what we want to do or if we do it without thinking. Power will be at work anyway, if our action produces subordination. (Vinthagen 2015: 177)

As Sloterdijk has argued, technologies must be seen as instruments which are construed in order to “tame” humans, making them less “feral” (Sloterdijk 2009), a perspective in tune with Flusser’s argument of how “the lever strikes back” on its inventors (Flusser 1999). Yet actions, neither by objects nor by humans, are predetermined by their original intentions. Instead, they are feral in the sense that they continually interfere with each other depending on their proximity and contextual, as well as temporal, re-orientations. Human agency is always aligned through material assemblages, and tracing the material agency or “thing-power” of matter can help us see how objects help orient users towards everyday subordination, but also to better unpack how resistance may act throughout the material and nonhuman world.

### **Introducing a materialist perspective**

As already noted, power is invested in objects, and these objects act on its users with a certain force, beyond their legal or discursive agency; they align, sort and sediment bodies and behaviors (cf. Deleuze 1988). Objects act on us with their own “vibrancy” as Bennett would say (2010), but they also, in a very hands-on way, orient us towards certain possibilities and paths of action. A materialist methodology in resistance studies could involve analyzing how matter continually facilitates and acts to enhance power and enforce subordination.

Fox and Alldred (2017: 4) argue for three main ontological points in what they call a “new materialism” that brings together “power and resistance, language and knowledge, bodies and subjectivity.” Building on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Haraway (1991), Barad (2007), Latour (2005) and DeLanda (2006), they argue for a materialist perspective that brings forward how,

- the material world and its content are not fixed, stable entities, but relational, uneven, and undergoing constant flux;
- ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ should not be treated as distinct realms, but as parts of a continuum of materiality. The physical and the social both have material effects in an ever-changing world;

- a capacity for ‘agency’ – the actions that produce the social world – extends beyond human actors to the non-human and inanimate. (Fox & Alldred 2017: 4)

As Fox and Alldred posit, this makes materialist methodology primarily seek the connections between relational networks and assemblages of animate and inanimate affects (DeLanda 2006: 4), and how these actors produce social worlds with regards to desires, feelings, and meanings (Braidotti 2000: 159). A key feature in such a perspective is the displacement of privilege from human actors to the surrounding material, natural and social environment (Fox & Alldred 2017: 4f). Thus building on a Marxist materialism, Fox and Alldred argue the new materialists shift the focus towards micro-production, with a focus on ontology (instead of epistemology), to “flat” or “monist” assemblages of forces and actants (instead of top-down hierarchies) and events (rather than pre-determining structures). Positing in a blunt way, the perspective seeks to explain power not as overarching, total, and persistent, but instead power continually needs to reproduce itself in small, recurrent, everyday and collaborative events that utilize human as well as non-human agencies. Rejecting surface/depth dichotomies, such perspective points towards how “everything that goes on in the social and natural world should be judged on its own terms, without recourse to notions of a deeper mechanism or structure” (Fox & Alldred 2017: 14). From the perspective of power and resistance, the main implications of this shift are new openings to affect and attune agency to change the world,

While post-structuralism and social constructivism provided a means to break through top-down, determinist theories of power and social structure, the focus upon textuality, discourses and systems of thought in these approaches tended to create distance between theory and practice, and give the sense that radical, interventionist critiques of inequalities and oppressions were merely further constructions of the social world. The turn to matter offers a re-immersion in the materiality of life and struggle, and a recognition that in a monist world – because there is no ‘other level’ that makes things do what they do – everything is necessarily relational and contextual rather than essential and absolute. (Fox & Alldred 2017: 7f)

Rather than painting broad strokes across the social world, employing large abstractions of “society” or “class,” the new materialists seek the small components, technologies, behaviors and events that make up these larger entities, but the larger parts are also reflected into the components that co-create them (thus suggesting a process-oriented ontology between parts and wholes). Latour, one of the key figures in the shift towards a flat ontology in Actor-Network Theory, argues that “social forces” are not to explain the world, but instead, they are to be explained, that is, the heterogenous elements of various actors and forces which produce social aggregations or assemblages (Latour 2005: 5) It is the aggregation, such as an institution, corporation, nation or social category, that is the outcome of the interactions of various actants, rather than the cause of interactions. The task at hand is to unpack and open such aggregations, for example capitalist social relations, patriarchy or the neoliberal market, to unpack their dynamic workings (Latour 2005: 130f). For example, from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) perspective, we need to trace the many forms by which material components as well as psychological forces amplifies and supports the “micro-fascism” that builds the fascist state from the bottom-up as “everybody wants to be a fascist,” (Guattari 2007) a collaborationist force of power answered by that of the top-down fascist state.

### **Towards a materialist methodology**

This brings us to the issue of methodology, in that it is the micro-politics of human and material components and forces of aggregations that need to be studied, rather than primarily seek their ideologies, aggregations and totalities. Technologies and artifacts play a central part in these human and non-human dynamics, as they materialize social relations and guide the reproduction of social behaviors and relations (Winner 1980, Latour 1991), for example how subway systems shape people’s movement and behavior following certain directions and formations, or how material extensions of ethics, such as the turnstiles in the metro, “remind” me to follow the law (Latour 1992). This materialist approach from Latour resonates well with the micro-politics of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), and their focus on what assemblages *do* or *produce*. Here, bodies and social formations are consequences of affective subjectivizing processes,



specifying, or “territorializing,” the capacities of bodies to form certain assemblages (and not others). Human subjects are controlled and “nudged” in certain ways through designated assemblages, and similarly, subjects try to resist by allying with other material actors. To paraphrase Scott (1998) in his examination of “seeing like a state,” the materialist perspective studies the continuous processes making sure subjects “behave like a state” on an everyday level.

The task of a materialist method used in resistance studies thus begins to open up and examine the many interacting parts within the assemblages that produce or contribute to participatory subordination; how the various parts and forces act upon each other and amplify or enforce certain forms of *doings*. As humans, we often misconceive our rational power over objects, Bennett suggests, and instead we are much more controlled by them than we think. What we can do in our everyday environment is facilitated and controlled by tools, vehicles, roads and power-grids, the form and voltage in electrical outlets, or which doors we can open or not. But humans are also manipulated in the subtlest ways, and with agency that overpowers human will. In a playful example, Bennett points towards how even the smallest potato-chip has the power to conquer the most stubborn will (2010: 40f).

Fox and Alldred (2017: 23ff) suggest a set of points as departure for a new materialist perspective. First; focus on matter, second; explore what matter does, not what it is, third; make sure human agency is not privileged, forth; take into account that thoughts, memories, desires and emotions have material effects, and finally; examine how material forces act locally. While this may sound simple enough, a challenge from a classic humanist perspective is not to fall into the trap of imagining the human purposes and intentions of action to take the forefront, but rather take into account the material recalcitrance, that is, that matter itself is resistant to the human will and skills. Matter does not simply follow the commands of human agency, but materials are stubborn and recalcitrant and the skill to shape them is always a form of manipulation (to be “crafty” is an affirmation of the artisan as cunning and manipulative). As anthropologist Tim Ingold has pointed out, human agents have a tendency to favor a “hylomorphic” viewpoint, that ideas spring forth from our mind (often ready-made and finished) and we then simply

implement these into the world (Ingold 2013: 25f). For example, we imagine we will build a chair, “see” the chair to our inner vision, and then simply build it. Rather, our ideas of the chair is shaped by our knowledge of the material, *what wood can do*, and similarly, we need to struggle with the material in the process of making an order to give it a shape that is only vaguely similar to what we may have imagined.

This recalcitrance of matter also offers a perspective on the study of aligned resistance between humans and non-humans, such as the tools and materials mobilized during resistant activities. Material agencies are used to align action with the goal of the activist and support of their cause, but materials, objects and tools may need manipulation to address the issues at hand.

Let us draw an example: one type of materiality is mobilized in the metal chains of a tree-hugger to challenge the muscle power of the authorities. Another materiality is used in the pink wool yarn of a knit-in craftivist making a “pussy-hat” for a women’s march. Both activists use material components in their action that both have great symbolic value, yet also employ these beyond the use of words or signs trying to convince other human minds of their views. The materials *literally tie together* their actions to others and towards their cause. On a materialist continuum between the two, the chains take on a high material form of stability and resistance to force, whereas the yarn is softer yet may require more agile fingers to knit, which in turn give shape to knitting-groups and skill-shares in yarn stores. Both ends of the continuum use materiality to mobilize and also orient bodies in alignment in ways that amplify (or in some cases even move beyond) discursive messages in protest lists, slogans or painted signs. Both chains and yarn align and orient bodies and practices with the means and ends of the protest; they are materials that *do things* in the assemblage with people and other materials, they act locally and even beyond the initial scope of the users.

It is easy to think firstly on the human agency of the tree-hugger or of the knitting protester, and focus on their dedication, resoluteness and behavior in their challenge of ideologies or other people (such as police). But the task for a materialist perspective is not to favor the spiritual strength of the resisting subject, which partly was the perspective favored by Gandhi in his focus on the spiritual training of Satyagraha and

the activist's "strength to suffer." (Gandhi 1998: 17) Instead, using the materialist perspective may help reveal how affinity is not only created between human actors, but also *in, through, and with* non-human actants. It is assemblages like these we need to unpack: how do parts of the assemblage support, multiply, and act together as a unit?

There may of course also be many cases of material resistance which involve various forms of creation of representative or symbolic elements, intersecting with the very material agency of the objects. This may be everything from the building of demonstration puppets, creation of symbols and flags, to interventions on systemic levels, such as hacking of computer networks or the forgery of passports. So the study of material affinity is not meant to undermine the symbolic or systemic practices of other forms of resistance, but to complement the study by "flattening" the perspective between various elements and actants in resisting assemblages: that symbols, behaviors, discourses, laws, and agencies act on the same plane, and "ideology" or "the State" are not primary actors or explanations of power. But this does not entail all forms of resistance is equal in effort, agency, symbolic or strategic power. A protester chaining him- or herself to just any tree is not as effective as one climbing the tree at a strategic point refusing access for the forest harvesters. Similarly, the political and human effects are very different between forging passports for refugees rather than counterfeiting tickets to Disneyland. A "flat" perspective on such practices does not equate their agencies or political effects. Used in a systemic and strategic manner, where humans and non-humans act in unison towards a common goal, material disruptions can be part of a strategic campaign for liberation. What we in everyday language call "power tools" reveal how power is projected through our everyday tools, objects and action spaces as real "thing-power" in Bennett's sense, and they also orient us in alignment with the agency that is considered legitimate and lawful. The manipulation or "hacking" of everyday tools and objects exposes what is considered a misuse or resistant practice, from the DIY practice of making moonshine with local potatoes, to producing lock-picking tools or file-sharing, and all the way to large scale strategic actions such as Gandhi's salt march (von Busch 2009, 2017).

As outlined above, a material perspective can make us see affinities and alignments between humans and nonhumans in assemblages that

resist “participatory subordination.” The studies of resistance practices could gain a lot from a wider perspective of how actors and actants are mobilized in various forms of activism. We will examine such example in the Yomango cookie-box handbag.

## **The Yomango handbag as power-tool**

The Spanish Yomango “movement” uses an explicit rhetoric of commodity “liberation” and promoted tactics for upending the commodity economy that resonates with resistance and direct action. Yet their approach is not about refusal or asceticism, but setting the system of consumerism against itself. They may agree with Debord that consumerism is a “spectacle” (Debord 1994) that has also turned protest into an aesthetic lifestyle, yet what Yomango does is turn the lifestyle back onto itself and channel it into direct action. In the end, their approach seems to dissolve the demarcation between the very acts of consumption and resistance.

The first Yomango projects took off in 2002, although the ideas that formed Yomango had been in circulation before, not least that of Abbie Hoffman’s *Steal this book* (1971), but also the protests around the G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001 (Yomango 2008). The group sprung out of the Spanish collective Las Agencias, “The Agencies,” an informally-structured collective of artists and anti-corporate activists based primarily in Barcelona (Juris 2005; 2008). As a label for action, rather than a strict group, Yomango allowed freedom to whoever adopted its brand, and the right to adjust its image. Some of its memes are still circulating around the internet, but the group froze its main website in 2007 and went into hibernation.

Yomango calls itself a counter-lifestyle movement critically commenting on the role consumerism plays in contemporary society and in practices of identity formation. The name is a fusion of the clothing company Mango and the Spanish slang “mangar” [to steal], but as they argue,

We did not talk about mangar, but yomangar, in order to differentiate it from the simple act of ‘stealing’ or shoplifting’... The spirit of Yomango is not a consumerist one, and the act of magic that takes place in a Yomango moment of liberation (the magic of making things disappear

and reappear) escapes the legal-illegal dichotomy. (Yomango 2008)

According to Yomango, in a consumerist culture, stealing is a form of civil disobedience, but they argue this form of action must take the shape of a brand and lifestyle more than a classical organized political movement. They support a “lifestyle [that] consists of shoplifting as a form of social disobedience and direct action against multinational corporations (Smith & Topham 2005: 36).

Yomango believes in a multitude of practices of resistance, and as they argue “As a good brand, Yomango is in competition with other great brands, never with practices of protest” (Yomango 2008). The act of shoplifting is rephrased from the distinction of legality/illegality to instead address the foundations of consumerist society,

Yomango’s message is not ‘legalise shoplifting’, but rather: ‘shoplifting exists, and it is neither an individual psychical perturbation, nor some sort of pseudo-kleptomania; we have to make it visible and turn it into a message, a story, a moment of reappropriation of those things that publicity is always promising, but never delivers’. (Yomango 2008)

The failure of the consumerist economy to offer a true freedom, channelling all available pleasures through a commodity economy, produces social vulnerability and exclusion. As Yomango sees it, they distribute both methods and accessories to assist a fairer distribution of agency and access to these pleasures. And in their own wording they see themselves primarily as liberators;

YOMANGO liberates objects and liberates your desire. It liberates your desire which is trapped within objects which are trapped inside large shopping malls, the same place where yourself are trapped. YOMANGO is a pact between co-prisoners. (Yomango 2004: 152)

Shoplifting is in this sense an act of shared self-fulfilment and creativity, and as Yomango sees it, a more truthful form of lifestyle than brands can offer,

The de-purchasing of consumer goods is promoted by YOMANGO as a “style” that goes beyond one season and has more to do with social

engineering than fashion design. [...] The hole left by tearing the locks off becomes a logo in its own right, a symbol of coherence to YOMANGO values. (Smith & Topham 2005: 36)

Clothes at Mango may be cheap, but Yomango addresses not the price of clothes, but the distribution of agency and creativity and how subjects are oriented under the reign of consumption, “creativity may be expensive when we buy it, but it is actually quite cheap when we sell it to big business! [...] it reduces ‘creativity’ to the use of the credit card.” (Yomango 2008) The real theft is appropriation, keeping people in precocity and psychological blackmail. The issue with consumerism is for Yomango not a question of good or bad consumerism, but exposing our dependencies to these systems,

We know how hard it is today to distinguish between good and bad chains... This is why Yomango makes no distinction among chains: what it expects is, precisely, that we don’t allow them to become natural to us, but confront their existence and break with all our chains. (Yomango 2008)

As has been argued elsewhere, Yomango can be seen as an example of a “hacking” of consumerism, that is, they combine direct DIY and hands-on engagements with systemic interventions into the “operating system” of consumption and capitalism (cf. Critical Art Ensemble 1996, von Busch 2008). Yet, of course, the practice of Yomango opens for many crucial questions too. Not least the ethical and constructive aspects of their tactics of stealing, and similarly, one can argue that their focus on commodities hampers as much as promotes liberation, as this focus still preserves the primacy of value production with the producer over the consumer, thus furthering subordination (in Vinthagen’s sense). By producing itself as a brand Yomango does not “reveal” the system as much as it opens instances to engage the logic of consumerism in a hands-on way, that is, to touch and intervene into the foundation of consumerism itself: in the acts of appropriation, ownership and the demarcation between inclusion and exclusion. But in order to open this space for questioning and working together as co-prisoners, both commodities and consumers, the desire and magic of commodities are offered an intimate space: a surveillance-safe hand bag.



Image: Yomango cookie-box handbag

The cookie box handbag of Yomango is a simple accessory; a metal cookie-box (for Danish cookies or similar) equipped with a shoulder strap, and possibly some decorations. With its metal casing, the box becomes a Faraday-box, and thus blocks out the alarm tags inside. The cookie-box offers an unsurveilled space for the possibility of stealing. The box is a manifestation of critical thought, but as Yomango argues, it is “also a practical way of thinking; creative, disrespectful, with a taste for rupture.” (Yomango 2008) In this way, the handbag is a materialization of the Yomango ideas and a symbolic signifier for their actions. But the bag is also more than that in a very material sense.

With its material agency to offer an unsurveilled space for carrying goods, the Yomango bag not only comes to symbolize a possibility for resistance against surveillance and regimes of ownership and control, but it also presents the user such a space in the highest material sense. The bag leverages the materiality of the everyday objects, the metal cookie box, with the popularity of the handbags as an object of desire as well as consumption, and transforms it into an object which allows it to bypass alarm systems; a resistance it-bag that may house a desirable designer

it-bag, if the user so desires. The bag goes beyond symbolizing and communicating the opportunity for disobedience, but also acts materially to offer a room for disobedience and defiance of the alarm system. The bag acts subtly on the minds of the user and audience, or the surveilling environment, as it neither aims to convince the observer or user, nor affects or sabotages the alarm system. Rather, the materiality itself displaces the surveillance of the alarm and in a way also mirrors it back, revealing how alarms take for granted that inside every consumer there is a potential little thief wanting to spring into action. By highlighting how alarms are ubiquitous in our everyday shopping environment, the very act of carrying an unsurveilled space to possibly enact theft is a provocation in itself. The assemblage of bag and faraday box offers room for new forms of action which merges artistic, symbolic and practical forms of resistance. The bag collapses tensions between lifestyle and resistance to lifestyle, surveillance and non-surveillance, symbolism and material mobilization exactly by its material form and design, and it does so by not explicitly saying so but by doing it.

## Discussion

The case of the Yomango cookie box handbag offers a glimpse of a material perspective on resistance, or how strategies of resistance can mobilize nonhuman actors and “thing-power” in order to strengthen and expand their impact. Yomango may be playful, but their use of material props as an integral part of their everyday resistance echoes the active part of the salt in Gandhi’s salt Satyagraha of 1930. And just like Gandhi’s practice, their target is the interface of power that resides in everyday practices such as eating and consuming, or our everyday cognition of where power is and how it acts upon us and through us in our “participatory subordination.”

Sociologist Franck Cochoy uses the term “equipped cognition” to show how an object, such as a shopping basket or bag, modulates our cognition but also “modifies consumer’s calculations” (2008: 15). For Cochoy, the shopping cart is a typical example of such modification as its mobile space produces not only an effortless amplification of the shopper’s carrying capability, but also, by stacking up on goods, makes it hard to regret or undo an object’s place in the cart once it is inside. Indeed,



returning a product on the shelf would make the consumer “assume the cognitive dissonance of contradicting already made decisions,” thus leading the consumer to keep adding more things to the cart (2008: 20). The cart as a device thus modifies consumer cognition as “the shopping cart implicitly leads its pusher to become a shopper.” Cochoy continues, “if the consumer thinks she may come out of the shop without a purchase, why then should she take a huge cart?” (2008: 20)

As Cochoy also highlights, the cart acts as a buffer to create within it “a short moment of abundance and pause in calculation,” that makes consumer choices appear free (*gratis*) until reaching the moment of judgment at the cash register. “Prices are forgotten in the literal sense, since price labels remain stuck on the shelves.” (Cochoy 2008: 20) The cart thus produces a certain cognitive and “calculative space,” or rather a space of “de-calculation” as it substitutes budgetary constraints with volumetric ones (2008: 21).

In the case of the cookie-box, the bag also modifies the user’s “equipped cognition,” and this modulation of cognition happens on several levels at once: an ethical (“is it right to steal as I have an unsurveilled space to house the goods?”) as well as a calculative level (“will these goods fit into the box?”), and mixing it with the calculation of resistant action (“what is the rationale, symbolism and impact of my action, versus, is it worth the risk of getting caught?”). These considerations are brought about by the very opportunity offered materially by the Faraday-box of the cookie bag. The material aspect opens new vistas for action as well as calculations about their impact and effect, which may even be contradicting other forms of action and symbolism. That is, the box opens a space for dissent and radical questioning of the basis of the “participatory subordination” that is consumerism, simply by offering the *unsurveilled possibility* of theft in high-surveillance environments such as fashion stores.

As Latour has pointed out, everyday matter and technologies shape our behavior and ethical considerations (2002). The unsurveilled abyss inside the box is a space that reorients the moral calculations of agency and is thus *inside ethics*, in a sense that aligns with the perspective of Crary (2016), that is, it is a dark room, it puts light on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and demands a re-evaluation of moral judgment. In the case of Yomango’s box, it requires us to reexamine the relationships

between creativity, consumerism and resistance. Extrapolating further on Winner's (1980) idea that artifacts have their own politics, and agency towards politics, the box contributes to breaking the "human monopoly of agency," in resonance with Hans Habers' critique of the humanist focus in the ethics of technology (Habers 2005: 259). As Verbeek points out, "Moral action is *a practice* in which humans and nonhumans are integrally connected, generate moral questions, and help to answer them." (Verbeek 2011: 38) Not only is the bag part of the action and its effects, it also becomes part in the ethical considerations of its activities and alliances.

As opposed to the "totalitarian" regime of consumerism (Lipovetsky 1994), which reproduces consumer behavior as the most "user-friendly" mode of engagement, a box like Yomango's opens a room for thinking, thus challenging the "banality" of user-friendliness and habitual lifestyle consumption. Indeed, in a culture which refuses the consumer a room or moment to think, the bag is a materialization of resistance which is not only discursive or bound to action itself; it is in its protected space, which offers room for both stealing and not stealing. It offers materially a *capacity* to choose, a micro-freedom beyond the governmentality of the panoptic surveillance of the alarm systems, and under a regime of big data calculations gives the user a little "room of one's own." Where a shop alarm act as a material agency of surveillance which "orients" us in specific ethical ways (if not enforced by high-pitched noise), the box allows for an unsurveilled pocket wherein the choice between obeying or not obeying (steal or not steal) becomes a materialization of ethics. As the alarm systems "reminds" me to be a lawful citizen, the bag allows room for what James Scott (2012) has called "anarchist calisthenics," that is, in a very everyday situation I can choose to steal or not steal, which means I am called upon to judge and evaluate my own ethics. Scott gives the example of jaywalking or not, depending on the cultural context or if there are young children watching. The contextual judgment calls forth a quick evaluation, but also prepares the subject before more serious ethical situations. As Scott puts it,

One day you will be called upon to break a big law in the name of justice and rationality. Everything will depend on it. You have to be

ready. How are you going to prepare for that day when it really matters? You have to stay 'in shape' so that when the big day comes you will be ready. What you need is 'anarchist calisthenics.' Every day or so break some trivial law that makes no sense, even if it's only jaywalking. Use your own head to judge whether a law is just or reasonable. That way, you'll keep trim; and when the big day comes, you'll be ready. (Scott 2012: 4f)

The shoplifting of Yomango may not be a challenge towards the "big law in the name of justice," but it offers the user a small quotidian reflection on which situations it would be justified to challenge participatory submission in the realm of lifestyle consumerism. In its most rudimentary form, the Yomango handbag is a gym for "anarchist calisthenics."

Yomango proposes and supports a carnival of desire rather than strict fashion asceticism or a "critical" revelation of consumer hegemony; the cookie-box offers a material space to both celebrate desire as well as questioning the everyday ethics of consumer participatory submission. In the material qualities of the cookie box bag, Yomango assigns a material space to manifest an ethical space beyond the regime of surveillance in which true and unbound desire can grow forth.

Dare to desire: YOMANGO is your style: risky, innovative. It is the articulate proliferation of creative gestures. YOMANGO is not about theft, it's about magic, about the liberation of desire and intelligence crystallized in the "things" offered for sale. If YOMANGO has a politics, it is the politics of happiness, of putting the body first. Be happy, insultingly happy. YOMANGO: feel pretty! (Yomango 2006)

It is not only the user who shall feel happy, but also the spectators of the cute cookie box bag. It is a symbol of a consumerist anarchist vision; a free ethical space, built in the shell of the old, amongst the crumbs of plenty. It is an artistic, performative, symbolic, and materialist form of resistance, and perhaps most poignantly, done with a lot of wit. It can be all at once. And this is just as Yomango would have it. Or as they say; *You want it? You got it!*

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