



Book review: *Beyond Molotovs – a visual handbook of anti-authoritarian strategies*

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“Authoritarianism can be defied and defeated: that is the most important lesson of this book” (p. 12). The introductory statement of the handbook *Beyond Molotovs – A Visual Handbook of Anti-Authoritarian Strategies* sets an uplifting tone by asserting the potential to challenge and overcome authoritarianism. Comprising over 300 pages and 50 chapters, the book delves into diverse anti-authoritarian resistance strategies, movements, and struggles worldwide, usually narrated by a person or group involved in them. The content can be navigated in three ways: based on geographic location, in chronological order that follows an “intuitive perception of the relations between the contributions” (p. 18), or through six strategies explained in the introduction. These strategies are as follows: disrupt · retake · transfigure, expose · accuse · remember, subvert · hijack · divert, explore · transcend · desire, sense · convey · assemble, and link · weave · nurture.

Beyond the introduction, the book features four additional texts by Eva von Redecker, Gustavo Robles, Lorena Zárate, and Firoozeh Farvardin, each offering reflective insights and a meta-perspective. These texts differ visually from the other contributions through a different layout. They provide context without intending to limit or diminish the other contributions and offer insights into theoretical ideas by speaking from, for example, a perspective informed by *other* feminisms, referring to feminisms “from marginalized popula-

tions and territories” (p. 286–295) or one that emphasizes the spatial dimensions of the counter-strategies (p. 218–227).

In the introduction, the book identifies a global shift towards authoritarianism and an “authoritarian turn of global capitalism” (p. 15), in which there is a redefinition of power dynamics and methods of exploitation occurring “simultaneously in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres” (p. 14). Throughout the book, the interconnectedness of capitalism with other systems of oppression like racism, colonialism, and patriarchy becomes apparent through the counter-strategies aimed at subverting them. These counter-strategies all engage with the “sensuous, emotional, and aesthetic dimensions” (p. 12), addressing authoritarianism at its visceral and emotional core. What unites these counter-strategies is their “utopian energy” (p. 13) and their celebration of “life over death, connection over individualization, multiplicity over reduction, and chaos over order” (p. 16). They do not seek to maintain the status quo but to transcend it, proposing “different, more just and more democratic ways” of co-existing (p. 12). The strategies for resistance vary widely, from protests aimed at overturning an abortion ban in Poland in 2020, where a red lightning bolt became the symbol in both public and digital spaces (p. 108ff), to collective mental mapping projects in the Philippines involving communities affected by land grabbing (p. 80–85), and to the Zapatista movement in Mexico which utilizes art as a means to resist the capitalist, racist system and to propose alternative ways of coexisting (p. 338–345).

The book presents a collection of possibilities, real(ized) utopias (Wright, 2010), and bold ideas, not all of which succeeded or led to lasting social change. While the counter-strategies are usually place based, the community building, belonging, and solidarity they foster operate across multiple scales and borders. Ultimately, the book can be seen as advocating for global solidarity and resistance, emphasizing the

need for collective efforts to unmask and fight racist, capitalist, colonial, and patriarchal systems of oppression and exploitation.

The contributions in the book are typically four to eight pages long, combining illustrations and shorter texts to convey the main information. Some entries also include references for further reading. The book layout is designed to be visually appealing, showcasing the various counter-strategies in their unique ways through photographs, protest illustrations, comics, visual and textual stories, poems, storytelling, mappings, memes, (counter-)monuments, street renaming, drawings, graffiti, and more. Additionally, the book discusses forms of art that are challenging to depict in book form, such as performances, concerts, chants, sounds, raves, stand-up shows, gatherings, board games, and the use of social media for information and organizing. The introduction describes these different forms of art and art-making as having a transformative impact and the power to touch and affect us (p. 17). Art and art-making are presented, among other means, as ways of bringing people together, providing education, and serving as creative methods of resistance. While not discussed explicitly, the book acknowledges the connection between art and space, recognizing the counter-strategies as inherently spatial practices. Using Mouffe's (2007) words, these practices of artistic activism can be regarded "as counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character" (p. 5). While these interventions may not lead to the end of capitalist hegemony, they are an important dimension of democratic politics (Mouffe, 2007, p. 5) and have the potential to bring about transformative change.

The contributions in the book vary in style. Some are narrative, telling stories or explaining actions or strategies, while others are more like instructions, briefly outlining how something was done and suggesting ways for the reader to do it themselves. It's not a step-by-step guide but rather an account of what worked for the contributors. The texts and images in the book were very moving and emotionally impactful for me. They created connections to other stories outside of the book and reminded me of struggles, activists, and strategies that I encountered while doing research in Detroit a couple of years ago. As philosopher and activist Grace Lee Boggs (Boggs, 2012) put it, "Detroit is a city of Hope rather than a city of Despair" (p. 105) and a place where I, once more, learned about the power of imagination and collectivity. Despite the structural forces of racism and capitalism that have affected the city, its inhabitants have been subverting them – often out of necessity – for decades by creating innovative ways of making a living, nurturing productive, cooperative, and caring selves, and creating hope (Boggs, 2012, p. 105). *Beyond Molotovs*, hence, goes beyond its pages to make connections by weaving together different places, voices, struggles, and histories. The counter-strategies presented vary in

scale and form, some are more visible and tangible and create material outcomes/materialize themselves, while others are small, ephemeral, immaterial, or digital tactics. Often, the body of those resisting plays an important role, for example, as the subject of the struggle, as a sign of resistance, or as a resistant body. While the counter-strategies all have different qualities and targets, they are united by their potential as insurgent strategies and acts of resistance, as reflected in Eva von Redecker's text: "In every moment where authoritarianism's prolongation of past dominion is blocked, the possibility of a different life articulates itself" (p. 100).

Beyond Molotovs presents a comprehensive and visually compelling exploration of diverse anti-authoritarian resistance strategies, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts in unmasking and combating systems of oppression and exploitation. The book is written clearly and engagingly, making it accessible to a wide range of (English-speaking) readers, from academics and activists to those with a general interest in anti-authoritarian strategies – and the digital version of the book is open access. Through its visually appealing layout and the diverse range of counter-strategies, the publication serves as a testament to the transformative power of art and collective resistance, thereby inspiring a call to action.

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