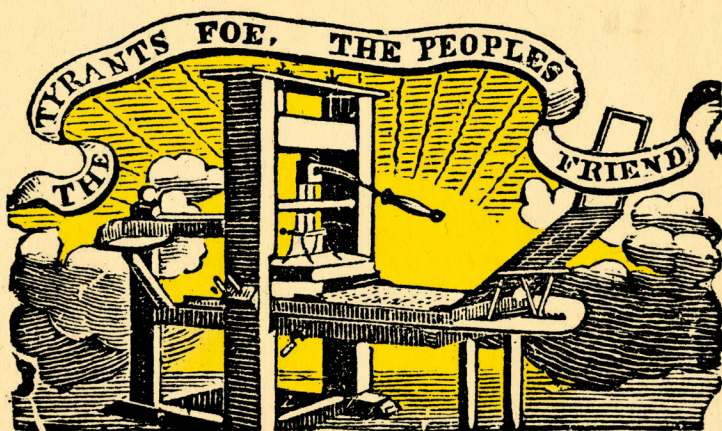


LETTERPRESS REVOLUTION

The Politics of
Anarchist Print Culture

KATHY E. FERGUSON



LETTERPRESS REVOLUTION

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**The Politics of
Anarchist Print Culture**

KATHY E. FERGUSON

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*For Gili, Oren, and Ari, as always
And for the scholars who will be coming*

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PREFACE

In the late 1970s, a small anarchist group called Free Association organized itself in Albany, New York. We wrote and published our own journal, *Mutual Aid Alternatives*. This project was suggested, as I recall, by David Wieck, a senior member of Free Association and a philosophy teacher at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy. He was a longtime anarchist teacher and activist: he had been a conscientious objector during World War II and a member of the editorial board of the anarchist journals *Why?* and *Resistance*. Also part of the group was David Porter, a historian of anarchism who edited an important collection of Emma Goldman's letters on the Spanish Revolution, *Vision on Fire*, and another learned volume on French anarchists' relations to Algerian anticolonial politics, *Eyes to the South*.

Neither I nor, I suspect, the other (then) young members of Free Association had any idea at the time that Wieck and Porter were initiating us into an anarchist practice with a long and vigorous history. Ernesto Longa's monumental annotated guide, *Anarchist Periodicals in English Published in the United States, 1833–1955*, includes publication information on ninety-two of the best-known English-language journals during the period. Many hundreds more were published in other languages and other places during the fertile period of anarchist organizing from the Paris Commune to the Spanish Revolution. American studies scholar Andrew Cornell writes in his history of US anarchism, "Newspapers and journals served as de facto political centers—means of grouping anarchists by language and strategic

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orientation. Publishers of periodicals routinely sponsored lecture series and distributed books and pamphlets by mail. Typically, editors were revered figures who wrote much of the copy and doubled as powerful orators.”¹ Historian Kenyon Zimmer summarizes succinctly, “It would be difficult to overstate the functional importance of newspapers in the anarchist movement.”²

Of course most political movements have their publications, but anarchists were unique. When new socialists came to town, they typically subscribed to the existing high-profile national publications such as *The Masses* (17,000 subscribers), *The Forward* (270,000 subscribers), or *Appeal to Reason* (762,000 subscribers).³ When new anarchists came to town, they started their own journals, as well as exchanging publications with those already in existence. Consequently, even though there were many more people who called themselves socialists in the United States than called themselves anarchists, the anarchist movement gave birth to a remarkable number of publications, each a center of a radical community, usually with a small print run (a few thousand, commonly) but inviting an intense engagement.⁴ Debates over what kind of journal to produce frequently resulted in the creation of a new journal, as Alexander Berkman’s militant labor journal *The Blast* branched off from Emma Goldman’s *Mother Earth* in 1916. Similarly, the then-weekly London journal *Freedom*, after extensive debate in the early 1960s, added a monthly journal, *Anarchy*, to its roster without abandoning its weekly publication.⁵ Journals proliferated because they were vehicles of political self-creation. In his account of late twentieth-century anarchism, John Patten quips, “A Spanish saying goes that if you find two anarchists you’ll also find three newspapers.”⁶ Art historian Patricia Leighton reports that in 1905, “there were 452 separate anarchist publications appearing in France.”⁷ It is unlikely that the writers and producers of the 452nd journal said to themselves, “What France needs is another anarchist journal.” Much more likely, they were driven by their own need to create and to be created by making a journal. Journals did not just report the anarchist movement; they *were*, in large part, the anarchist movement.

Each of those hundreds of publications required one or more printers. Most of the journals were produced on letterpress machines by compositors and press “men” who were part of, or at least sympathetic to, the anarchist movement. While a few journals were printed in job shops (commercial establishments), many more were printed in the living rooms, basements, or out-buildings of the homes, offices, union halls, schools, and community centers of local anarchist groups, often on presses that had been passed

down from one radical establishment to the next, cherished, even treated as something like colleagues in the movement. Local activists, many of whom were not trained printers, often helped in the printing process, as well as the writing, editing, assembling, and delivering of the publications. They often lived and worked in close proximity to the presses. While media theorist Lisa Gitelman, in her analysis of writing machines in Thomas Edison's era, remarks, "the clatter of the printing press [was] outside the experience of most individuals," that would not have been the case for many anarchists.⁸

It is this dynamic, powerful, multidirectional relation of letterpress technology to the printers, the archivists, the writers, and the anarchist movement more generally that interests me here. It was unfortunately not always so: I have come to see the production of *Mutual Aid Alternatives* fifty years ago as a neglected opportunity for political growth. Not only did the younger members of Free Association lack knowledge of the radical print history of anarchism, we also lacked even an iota of interest in how *Mutual Aid Alternatives* was printed. The physical production of the journal seemed both irrelevant and insignificant, compared with the content. There were likely anarchist print shops in existence then, as there are now, but it never occurred to us to seek them out. For young radicals who prided ourselves on dismantling prevailing dualisms and grounding theory in practice, we were dismayingly inattentive to a practice that was right under our noses. Indeed, it could have been right in our hands.

So, with apologies to David Wieck and David Porter for taking so long, this book examines the history of anarchist print culture in the United States and Great Britain to glean insights that can be useful to radical politics today. I aim to take up media theorist Jussi Parikka's challenge to "imagin[e] new histories of the suppressed, neglected and forgotten voices of media history" in order to articulate the political potential in the "regimes of sensation and use" that emerge from the interactive relations of presses, printers, publications, and reading publics.⁹ Parikka finds much of the literature in media archaeology lacking "strong articulation of politics in the context of the techno-epistemological research," and he challenges media archaeologists to combine careful, accurate attention to specific media with greater analysis of circulations of power and expressions of agency.¹⁰ I am also inspired by the story of learning to write a book about a treasured political movement from within the energies and struggles of that movement, as told by feminist writer Kristen Hogan. Her remarkable account of the feminist bookstore movement enacts what she calls "a methodology of learning and of building relationships to interrupt systems of oppression,

not thinking just about my story or this moment, but thinking about the vital life of our interconnected stories and envisioning a just world.”¹¹ The vital life of anarchism’s interconnected stories makes its appearance in printeries and archives, journals and correspondence, skilled bodies, curious and brave ideas. I regret the lost opportunity of participating in the making, not just the writing, of *Mutual Aid Alternatives* because I suspect that a significant source of political energy was lost. Understanding that omission could be key to facilitating its reemergence in the present and the future.

While working in the anarchist collection housed in the Library of Congress a few years ago, I was stunned to come across a copy of our modest little journal. It was included in the materials bequeathed to the library by noted historian of anarchism Paul Avrich. Avrich was the grand old man of anarchist scholarship in the United States. Like the Joseph A. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan, the Joseph Ishill Papers at Harvard, and the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the Paul Avrich Collection reflects a lifetime journey through anarchism. David Wieck, David Porter, and Paul Avrich were of the same generation of radical scholars, the kind with patience, curiosity, and long memories. Their legacies link us, today, with earlier anarchists and the remarkable movement they created. It’s never too late to learn.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The older I get, the longer it takes me to write books. While I'd like to think that I'm getting better at it, I'm certainly not getting faster. Yet that slower pace has allowed me to linger in libraries, archives, printeries, and conversations with friends and colleagues, both old and new.

Allan Antliff, Martyn Everett, Judy Greenway, and Barry Pateman have provided sources, answered questions, and shared enthusiasms about anarchism for many years. I am fortunate to know them. The support of Courtney Berger, my editor at Duke University Press, and the wise and thorough recommendations of two anonymous readers have been extraordinarily helpful.

Through the good graces of weekly meetings of the William Morris Cup Society, Jon Goldberg-Hiller and Noenoe Silva have read chapters and discussed ideas through the pandemic and no doubt beyond. The other William Morris Society, the one in London, allowed me to learn about Morris in his home space and to try my hand at Morris's magnificent 1835 Albion press. My thanks to them both.

Tuti Baker, Jane Bennett, Katie Brennan, Cindy Carson, Carol Cohn, Kitty Cooper, Kennan Ferguson, Steve Ferguson, Jairus Grove, Nicole Grove, Kahala Johnson, Steve Johnson, Ryan Knight, Sankaran Krishna, Lori Jo Marso, James Martel, Annie Menzel, Kevin McCarron, Davide Panagia, Michael Shapiro, Suzanne Tiapula, and Liz Wingrove have generously discussed anarchism and printers with me for many years. I am especially

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grateful to Cindy, Carol, Kitty, Suzanne, and Liz for housing me while I explored archives and printeries near them.

Many letterpress printers have enriched my understanding of their craft. Peter Good, printer of the *Cunningham Amendment* in Bawdeswell, England, opened his home to me, introduced me to other printers, and was unfailingly generous in sharing his knowledge of printing and of anarchism. Others who shared their time, their insights, and their histories include Jules Remedios Faye, Stern and Faye Printers, Mount Vernon, Washington; Nick Loring, the Print Project, Shipley, England; Michael Coughlin, printer and bookmaker, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Rob and Kim Miller, Tribune Showprint, Muncie, Indiana; and the following printers, all in Portland, Oregon: Eric Bagdonas, Stumptown Printers; Joseph Green, Jeff Shay, and Connie Blauwkamp, C. C. Stern Type Foundry; Ali Cat Leeds, Entangled Roots Press; Charles Overbeck, Eberhardt Press; and Ruby Shadburne, Ruby Press. Richard Schofield has been generous in answering printing questions. The Ladies of Letterpress put on a splendid annual conference.

Thanks to Steve Izma for sending me his copy of Charles Overbeck's beautiful book *The Tramp Printers* when I was desperate to see it and couldn't find a copy. Thanks to Duncan Dempster and Anne Bush, colleagues in the Department of Art and Art History at the University of Hawai'i: Duncan explained and demonstrated various presses, while Anne shared her knowledge of William Morris. Thanks to Shaun Slifer for sharing his research on Ross Winn, and Jessica Moran for sharing her research on *The Firebrand*, *Free Society*, *Mother Earth*, and *The Blast*. Thanks to Marcus Rediker for his extraordinary class on writing history from below. Thanks to Markus Faigle for translating Rudolf Rocker's essay on Joseph Ishill into English and for sharing my delight with Rocker's elegant prose. Thanks to Nicole Riché for fascinating conversations about her great aunt, Bertha Johnson. Many, many thanks to students in my anarchism seminars for their curiosity and engagement with ideas.

Robert Helms in Philadelphia has generously shared his comprehensive knowledge of Voltairine de Cleyre, and together we were able to confidently attribute the anonymous social sketch "Between the Living and the Dead" to de Cleyre. It was a delightful surprise to encounter the descendants of Eliezer and Dina Hirschauge: his grandson Orr Hirschauge in Tel Aviv and his son, Orr's father, Menachem Hirschauge, on Kibbutz Ruhama. Their memories of Eliezer and Dina enriched my understanding.

In his history of British anarchism, John Quail writes movingly about his pursuit of anarchist publications, "following fugitive odd copies from

library to library.” Quail marks the feelings of being both overjoyed and overwhelmed “when the raw documentary stuff of history is confronted, [and] a welter of fragments, stories, biographies, movements, concerns and events burst over the historian.”¹ And over the political theorist as well. Many, many thanks go to the librarians, archivists, and local historians whose combination of knowledge, accessibility, and good humor made my research possible: Susan Halpert and Emily Walhout, reference librarians at Houghton Library at Harvard University; Julie Herrada, curator of the Joseph A. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan; Aryn Orwig at the Hillsboro Public Library in Hillsboro, Oregon; Emma Sarconi and AnnaLee Pauls in the Department of Special Collections at Princeton University; Kathy Shoemaker, reference coordinator, Research Services, Rose Library at Emory University; Neil Weijer, curator of the Harold and Mary Jean Hanson Rare Book Collection at the University of Florida; and many librarians at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, the British Library in London, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, the Mile End Library at Queen Mary University of London, and the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. Librarians at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa have found ways to maintain research access during the pandemic. The good folks at the Woodstock Historical Society in upstate New York showed me the site of Holley Cantine’s printery and shared their collection of *Retort*. Mary Rhodes, Matt Rose, and others at the Halsway Manor National Centre for Folk Art, near Taunton, England, shared their records as well as the paintings they hold by Lily and Arthur Gair Wilkinson. Clare Debenham and Ron Marsden, in Manchester, England, allowed me to spend many charmed hours in their collection of anarchist material.

Sister Mary Catherine Perry, Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, in Summit, New Jersey, generously shared her memories of operating Ishill’s press. Kitty Cooper took me to meet Frances Solokov, a.k.a. Vi Subversa of the Poison Girls, in Brighton, and we spent two lovely days learning about the London journal *Freedom* from Frances’s memories. Mary Baldridge shared her memories of Holley Cantine, including his lousy but enthusiastic trombone playing.

My thanks to writers and activists in the Protect Mauna Kea ‘Ohana for permission to use their work: Māhealani Ahia, Emalani Case, Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Kawena‘ulaokālā Kapahua, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Bryan Kamaoli Kuwada, Kamakaoka‘ilima Long, Yvonne Mahelona, Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio, and No‘u Revilla.

As always, sharing life with Gili, Oren, and Ari Ashkenazi is the best thing that ever happened to me. Our beach friends, especially Markus Faigle, Louis Herman, and Jeannette Koijane, join us in weekly Kaimana Beach picnics, Sunday dinners, and holiday gatherings. Weekly dinners with Jairus, Nicole, Oona, and Scout Grove, along with Sandy and Leia, share intellectual, emotional, and culinary sustenance. Beach picnics and meals on the lanai with friends and family have made the pandemic livable.

Lastly, I want to recognize the other scholars of anarchism who gathered at the Labadie Collection to participate in a symposium on Emma Goldman, marking the 150th anniversary of her birth: Ania Aizman, assistant professor of Slavic languages and literatures at the University of Michigan; Tom Goyens, professor of history at Salisbury University; Rachel Hui-Chi Hsu, visiting scholar in the Department of History, Johns Hopkins University; Anna Elena Torres, assistant professor of comparative literature at the University of Chicago; and Kenyon Zimmer, associate professor of history at the University of Texas at Arlington. You are the ones Agnes Inglis was anticipating: you are her scholars who will be coming.

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INTRODUCTION

Anarchist Letters

In a letter dated January 14, 1945, the anarchist letterpress printer Joseph Ishill, from his printery in a lovely wooded area of New Jersey, wrote to the anarchist librarian Agnes Inglis in the archives of the University of Michigan Library:

My mind is full of ideas for the future. I intend to be quite active again after the war. I have too many important items which struggle to be born, or better expressed: to be put in clear print so that others might enjoy reading them. One particular plan I have in mind is to start a periodical devoted exclusively to *letters* only; letters as yet unpublished which are of great historical value to our movement of the past, and which will serve as source material for future historians, biographers, etc. . . . I intend to call this periodical *Life in Letters*, with an appropriate subtitle to follow which would explain the tendencies and aims of such a unique publication. There is room for such an expression and I am the man for it. I do not know why, but that's how it is.¹

This letter is part of a vigorous correspondence between Ishill, widely known as “the anarchist printer,” and Inglis, who organized the Joseph A. Labadie Collection of radical literature at the University of Michigan. While this planned periodical did not materialize, Ishill did succeed in publishing dozens of letters in other collections. He was the printer as well as the editor and sometimes the writer of these publications.

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Ishill's enthusiastic missive to Inglis brings together three distinct notions of the term *letter*: a printer's sort—that is, a small metal or wooden block carved on one side with the lines, curves, and dots that make up graphic symbols representing sounds in speech, as in the letter *a*; a written communication between people, as in Ishill's letter to Inglis; and a manner of learnedness, as in *arts and letters*. Struggling with dark times, Ishill was nonetheless “full of ideas for the future.” He understood that writing is part of activism, that literary artifacts can “struggle to be born,” and that ideas need to be put into “clear print so that others might enjoy reading them.” He had faith that written correspondence among radicals is “of great historical value to our movement of the past” because it can inform and inspire the present and future. He had sufficient bold humor to assign himself the job: “I am the man for it. I do not know why, but that’s how it is.”

Ishill and Inglis were two of many energetic points of connection among people, places, and things creating the anarchist movement in the United States and Great Britain during its classical era, roughly from 1870 to 1940.² Anarchism is a philosophy and political practice that rejects centralized, hierarchical authority—including states, churches, corporations, patriarchies, and empires—and works to create egalitarian relations in which individuals cultivate their freedom while organizing themselves into voluntary, self-governing communities. It shares with Marxism its historical critique of capitalism but rejects both parliamentary reform and revolutionary political parties that would control the state on behalf of the workers. Anarchism overlaps with feminism in their common investment in intersectional thinking and suspicion of hierarchy, including patriarchal marriage and family; it shares anticolonialism with indigenous political thinking; it places high value on freedom of expression, as do free thinkers and civil libertarians; and it overlaps with radical ecological thinking in developing participatory relationships with other species and the natural world.

From the Paris Commune to the Spanish Revolution, the anarchist movement was one of the strongest movements for radical change in the world. Historian Kenyon Zimmer estimates that there were tens of thousands of anarchists in the United States from the 1880s through World War I, and they “remained a significant—though largely forgotten—element of the American Left up to the Second World War.”³ While reliable estimates of anarchists are difficult to secure, given their lack of a central organization, anarchism was also a robust part of the British Left and was similarly fueled by large numbers of immigrants as well as a significant

domestic contingent. In the exasperated estimate of Marxist historian E. P. Thompson, there was a vexing “rash of Anarchism” throughout England:

In the next few years [after 1891] a rash of Anarchism was to appear in one major city after another. It took all sorts of shapes and colours: there was the sober group around Kropotkin and Edward Carpenter, which published *Freedom*; there was the studious and restrained old friend of Morris, the tailor, James Tochatti, who lived at Carmagnole House, Railway Approach, Hammersmith and who (after 1893) edited *Liberty*; there was the old Autonomie Club, in Windmill Street, where foreign refugees hatched real conspiracies: the Jewish Anarchist Club in Berners Street; the Scandinavian Club, in Rathbone Place; the Christian Anarchists, the Associated Anarchists, the Collectivist Anarchists, Socialist Anarchists, the followers of Albert Tarn and those of Benjamin Tucker. Papers, published on blue paper, red paper, and toilet paper, ranged from the *Anarchist*, *Commonweal*, *Alarm* and *Sheffield Anarchist*, to the *Firebrand*, *Revenge*, *British Nihilist* and Dan Chatterton's *Atheistic Communistic Scorchers*.⁴

While Thompson was irritated by the anarchists' unwillingness to become proper Marxists, in fact anarchists created schools, unions, birth control clinics, libraries, independent communities, and above all publications that had a significant impact on their participants as well as the surrounding society into which their influence seeped. It seems incongruous today, when *anarchy* typically is taken to mean chaos and disorder, yet respected scholars including Benedict Anderson, James Scott, and Catherine Malabou have all paid attention to anarchism's global influence and political promise.⁵

This book investigates anarchist print culture in the English language in the United States and England from the Paris Commune to the Spanish Revolution (roughly 1870–1940), while also consulting contemporary letterpress printers who continue the technologies and politics today. My main argument is this: anarchist print culture thrived through a dynamic combination of media technology, epistolary relations, and radical scholarship. It is gathered together by assemblages of three distinct kinds of letters—graphemes, epistles, and learning—into what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari call a “fragmentary whole.”⁶ Each kind of letter circulates through the anarchist movement, shaping and being shaped by one another. They can be thought of as nodes in anarchist assemblages, relay points opening into sprawling communities of reading and writing that have

characteristic modes of producing, practices of distributing, and habits of consuming written texts. Creating and circulating their publications through a process that directly embodies their ideas—combining physical skill, intellectual insight, artistic creativity, comradely engagement, and egalitarian labor practices—was a powerful source for the political energy sustaining anarchist communities. Radical politics today can learn from earlier anarchist successes in combining material, semiotic, and social relations to build alternative forms of public life.

Studying past anarchist print culture requires a combination of methods. Listening to past anarchist voices detectable in scattered collections of rare publications and correspondence is a project that has taken me to archives in the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. I want to know what their print culture meant to them. Jay Fox, a printer who lived in the anarchist community in Home Colony, Washington, is probably representative of most anarchists when he describes his goal succinctly as “to get our ideas before the public.”⁷ At the same time, I want to take advantage of hindsight to speculate on how our understanding today might usefully exceed theirs without violating it. Certainly, anarchists were devoted to spreading their ideas. Having a press and being a printer were means to that end, a way to be sure of having a voice for anarchist ideals. Yet that does not mean they were *only* a means to an end: there are also immanent political and aesthetic values in anarchist print culture, suggesting intrinsic worth not reducible to achieving an external goal.⁸ The large number of papers is often dismissed as merely a reflection of anarchists’ obdurate factionalism: every tendency needed its own paper so as to tightly control the editorial line. Yet while obduracy and factionalism were never in short supply, I think there was more to it than that—an “underside” of the print culture that has a perhaps unintended but still potentially powerful message for us today. By reverse engineering the anarchist movement, so to speak, filaments of media, genre, and knowledge that lie underarticulated in anarchists’ own self-accounting can become manifest. Toward that end, I’ve also added interviewing to my tool box, because there is a resurgence of the seemingly obsolete medium of letterpress printing today, and these printers’ reflections enrich our understanding of its political potential.⁹

We can think of Ishill, Inglis, and thousands like them who wrote, spoke, and organized anarchism as, in Deleuze and Guattari’s language, key operators and connectors in anarchist assemblages. Assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari tell us, are heterogeneous processes rather than fixed structures. They enable phenomena to emerge, flow, gain or lose momentum, rupture,

transform, or subside. Each node or link connects horizontally to other linguistic, organic, and material sites, “establish[ing] connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”¹⁰ Political theorist Jane Bennett turns to Walt Whitman’s poetry to theorize these flows: “Influx and efflux’ invokes that ubiquitous tendency for outsides to come in, muddy the waters, and exit to partake in new (lively/deathly) waves of encounter. The process might also be called Impression-and-Expression, Digestion-and-Excretion, Immigration-and-Emigration—different names for the in-and-out, the comings and goings, as exteriorities cross (always permeable) borders to become interiorities that soon exude.”¹¹ Assemblages *assemble* us with our companions: we take in, we give out, we dwell in constitutive encounters of various contact zones. We can to some degree cultivate or rebuff contamination from other operators. We are, as Bennett concludes, “continuously subject to influence and still managing to add something to the mix.”¹²

Cultural theorist Manuel DeLanda usefully explores practices of impression and expression within assemblages by focusing on multilevel processes of interaction among “inorganic, organic, and social” elements.¹³ He calls attention to recurrent patterns of repetition and innovation, “*the pattern of recurring links*” issuing in complex feedbacks and feed forwards.¹⁴ These emergent processes are characterized, he argues, by a certain *density* (the presence or absence of connections), *strength* (the frequency and quality of interactions), and *reciprocity* (“symmetry or asymmetry of the obligations”).¹⁵ Assemblages operate as sites of memory and solidarity (which means they can also produce forgetting and disintegration). Assemblage analysis requires a great deal of close-up work: DeLanda insists that to do an assemblage analysis, we have to “giv[e] the details of every mechanism involved.”¹⁶

I am not the first to recruit the concepts of assemblage theory to the study of anarchism. Benedict Anderson traces the “vast rhizomal network” of global anarchism from some of its active nodes in the Philippines.¹⁷ Constance Bantman argues that anarchist assemblages were central to the movement’s operation but generally overlooked by both radicals and academics: while anarchists failed to set up an international organization, despite efforts from the 1880s to the 1910s, she documents the “informal militant networks [that] proved far more congenial to anarchist militancy.”¹⁸ Pennsylvania anarchist Bertha Johnson used the language of filaments to express the workings of networks and connectors in anarchist assemblages.¹⁹ A collection of essays on anarchist geographies develops “anarchism as a

transnational movement based on networks and cosmopolite circulations of ideas, publications and militants.”²⁰ In that collection, political scientist Carl Levy calls on “ground-level social history” to understand anarchism because that’s where the action is: “Anarchism became flesh and punched over its weight, through global syndicalism, in counter institutions such as free schools and social centres, and in the tissues of diasporic and immigrant communities.”²¹ In that same collection, historian Andrew Hoyt focuses on interactive networks of relations to sketch an anarchist publication’s transnational reach.²² Latin American studies scholar Kirwin Shaffer’s rich analysis of anarchist networks in the Caribbean recommends developing analyses of the nodes and the relations among them “as thickly and simultaneously as possible.”²³ My goal is to further develop this line of thinking and to portray what DeLanda calls “*the actual mechanisms*” in the “*pattern of recurring links*” in order to theorize the production of the anarchist movement through the assemblages constituting its print culture.²⁴

Given their respective lifetimes of creating, circulating, and preserving anarchist writings, Inglis’s and Ishill’s physical presences and social relationships were essential connectors in anarchist assemblages. Their work, and comparable labors by hundreds or thousands of other similarly situated people, marked particularly dense, strong, and reciprocal nodes within their movement; they were key operators within the anarchist assemblages. Accordingly, in this book, luminaries of the movement such as Peter Kropotkin and Emma Goldman take a back seat, while the political communities that the less well-known members built are featured. Kropotkin and Goldman would have approved of this move, since both of them regularly called attention to the central importance of the movement’s lesser-known participants. In *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, Kropotkin wrote about his work in Siberia: “The constructive work of the unknown masses, which so seldom finds any mention in books, and the importance of that constructive work in the growth of forms of society, fully appeared before my eyes.”²⁵ In a letter to the US anarchist journal *Free Society*, Goldman wrote, “I have long come to the conclusion that it is not through speaking [that] we will ever change conditions; and that those who arrange things, who work quietly, who are ever ready to comfort, to cheer, to urge on, to dissuade, have done more for the cause than speeches or speech making.”²⁶

In his memoirs, English activist George Cores, a shoemaker from Leicester, echoed Kropotkin and Goldman on this score: “Most of the work which was done was due to the activities of workingmen and women, most of whom did not appear as orators or as writers in printed papers” but

who did the necessary work of production, distribution, and organization.²⁷ The famed socialist printer William Morris, beloved by anarchists for his melding of work, craft, and art, similarly acknowledged the work of the rank and file in his poem “All for the Cause”:

Named and nameless all live in us;
one and all they lead us yet.²⁸

To apprehend the anarchist movement *as a movement*, a vital assemblage of open-ended networks that are fluid, dynamic, and entangled requires finding access to the marks and traces that the “named and nameless” leave behind.

Anarchist communities usually organized around their publications, and they needed printers and presses as much as they needed writers, editors, translators, distributors, archivists, and readers. Zimmer has collected publication and circulation information for 274 anarchist publications produced in the United States between 1880 and 1940.²⁹ Hoyt estimates there were as many as 500 anarchist publications in many languages in the United States during roughly the same period.³⁰ Historian Morris Brodie points out that, while the number and circulation of journals decreased in the late 1920s to mid-1930s, they blossomed again in the late 1930s as interest in the Spanish Revolution grew.³¹ The first thing that an emergent anarchist group usually did was launch its own journal, rather than join an existing publication. The nascent FBI, always helpfully on the lookout for radical voices, counted 249 radical periodicals in the United States in 1919. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, in a letter to the US Senate asking for stronger antianarchist legislation, was alarmed at this robust circulation of words: “These newspapers and publications, more than any other one thing, perhaps are responsible for the spread of the Bolshevik, revolutionary, and extreme radical doctrines in this country.”³² In Britain, also, the police and Parliament mobilized to decry anarchist influence and warn of its dangers.³³ The anarchist papers that so alarmed the authorities were available by subscription and could also be accessed in selected taverns, stores, community centers, cafés, and even worksites. In his study of the *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, for example, Jon Bekken found, “Saloons promoted themselves by advertising that they had the latest radical papers from Chicago, Milwaukee and New York for patron’s reading.”³⁴ The Yiddish-language journal studied by Bekken had an impressive circulation of 13,000 copies daily in 1880, rising to 26,980 in 1886.³⁵ Other journals more commonly had circulations of 3,000–5,000 or less, although the sharing of publications among friends, families, and coworkers made their readership substantially larger.

Not just the content of the journals but the printers and presses that made them, and the activists who collected, distributed, and retained them, beckon for attention. Borrowing from cultural theorists Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, we can see anarchism as a kind of undercommons, an example of communities that “study without an end, plan without a pause, rebel without a policy, conserve without a patrimony.”³⁶ Anarchist journals did not simply convey information about their political movement; they created that movement, constituting and expressing anarchist lifeworlds in the process of calling for them. Anderson has taught us that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”³⁷ He famously calls our attention to the role of regularly reading newspapers in creating communities: “The significance of this mass ceremony . . . is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”³⁸ While members of the much smaller reading audience for anarchist publications often knew each other, shared their journals with friends and family, and read them aloud around supper tables, Anderson’s basic point nonetheless applies to the creation of anarchist reading publics. Yet we need to go beyond his argument to see that not just the consumption but the production, circulation, and conservation of texts also produces communities, and the materiality of bodies, presses, and documents participates actively in that production. In their media practices, which gave pride of place to printers, presses, and publications, anarchists may have implicitly identified a constitutive condition of possibility for the flourishing of radical political communities in our time as well as theirs.

Chapter Summaries: Three Kinds of Letters

Each kind of letters—graphemes, epistles, and learning—circulates through the anarchist movement, shaping and being shaped by one another. All three connotations of *letters* are present in the etymology of the term, from the Latin *littera* or *littera*: “C. 1200, ‘graphic symbol, alphabetic sign, written character conveying information about sound in speech,’ from Old French *lettre* ‘character, letter; missive, note,’ in plural, ‘literature, writing, learning’ (to c. Modern French *lettre*), from Latin *littera* (also *littera*) ‘letter of the alphabet’ also ‘an epistle, writing, document; literature, great books;

science, learning, 'a word of uncertain origin."³⁹ All three layers of letters are constituted relationally. They emerge out of prior relations, everchanging material and semiotic flows. We manage the relations by separating and naming the parts (the task of subsequent chapters), but in our political thinking, the relations need to come first. All letters are sites of the entanglement of people, things, and meanings, durable but also fragile. It's not just that they have a lot in common but that they are wound together from the get-go. They can be thought of as different literary artifacts or media practices: physical and linguistic objects and processes that constitute meaning through human connections, material arrangements, and symbolic practices. Their agency—that is, their ability to act and be acted on—is distributive in the sense that it is spread across the surfaces of things, moving in multiple directions, resonating in ways that can make new things happen. They are actants in the sense explored by Bennett: they have the capacity to affect and be affected, to intervene and make a difference.⁴⁰ One does not, strictly speaking, cause another, but they move each other in their collaborations. Literary scholar Laura Hughes neatly expresses the shared liveliness of literary artifacts: "They cross limits between animate and inanimate matter, between archives and authors, between moments of creation and consultation. What is *vivant* about the artifact is not solely the material content, nor any textual content, but the unexpected connections made possible between artifacts, across collections."⁴¹ Each kind of letter is a site of entanglement where patterns of accidental as well as intentional interaction produce emergent effects. Each node, borrowing from Anna Tsing's analysis of a different sort of assemblage, is an "affect-laden knot that packs its own punch."⁴²

Chapter 1 examines the work of presses and printers. Interactions among the sorts (little blocks of type inscribed with letters or other shapes, including blanks), paper, ink, the press itself, and the body, mind, and heart of the printer, as well as the work of the writer, editor, and the larger environment, all fold together to create the culture of printedness in anarchism. Sorts can be thought of as grammatical or compositional as well as material—they are the alphabetic characters that represent in written form the sounds of spoken language, carved onto a wood or lead block. Sorts have to be gathered, organized, and applied with ink onto a surface to constitute printing. The face is the raised letter, punctuation mark, fleuron (small image separating entries in a text), or colophon (printer's emblem) on one side of the sort. The sorts are organized in large subdivided boxes called type cases. Standing in front of the type case, the compositor assembles the sorts on the composing

stick, upside down and backward, using blank slugs and leads to properly justify each line. The composed lines of type are deposited on a galley, a shallow tray with one open side. When the galley is filled, a proof is pulled, proofread, corrected, then locked into place and sent to the pressroom for production. The final step is to put the publication together in the bindery.

Anarchist presses were often located in the homes, editorial offices, or community centers of the movement, so the sights, smells, and sounds of printing were part of ordinary life. Presses were often passed down from one publication to another. In designing and producing texts, printers brought together art and craft, mental and manual labor, individual skill and collective self-organization of labor. The best-known of the printers were formally trained in their craft and were nearly always loyal union members. Others volunteered and learned on the job. Printers and presses participated in assemblages of brains, bodies, and machines that generated the energy needed to make anarchism happen. As with their schools, unions, bookstores, and independent communities, anarchist publications practiced what they preached: creating the society for which they longed through the process of calling for it.

Chapter 2 investigates epistolary practices among anarchists, concentrating on exchanges among those who print, write, and archive anarchist material. Just as many anarchists were global travelers, they were also global epistolarians, generating and maintaining webs of relationships that built their movement. Correspondence, usually moving between two persons, is a collaborative affair, as each correspondent's expectations and contributions shape those of the other correspondent. In the dynamic narrative life of vigorous correspondence, the writer and the receiver continually change places, negotiating gaps in time and space, expressing themselves, and gaining impressions from the exchange. In archived collections of correspondence, researchers become external readers who are brought into the flow and can gather elements into unexpected patterns through the expanded temporality of the archive.

The liveliness of the exchanges does not end when the publications or correspondence is initially distributed. The anarchist movement cherished its writings and took steps to share and preserve them, to retain them for the future and to ensure that anarchist histories would not be written primarily by their enemies. The tradition of anarchist libraries is global, including collections in Argentina, Canada, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and many other countries. Historian Jessica Moran notes that these voluntary institutions are not minor clerical

operations or vanity projects but rather are “sites of resistance, consciously made.”⁴³ Historian Marianne Enckell cleverly coins the term “anarchive” to talk about these typically self-financed collections that operate with voluntary labor: “There are perhaps more archivists at heart among the Anarchists than in the great institutions.”⁴⁴ Anarchives are also spaces for conversation among anarchists and other radicals, who connect to each other and to their radical past, and who anticipate a radical future, by moving among the collection’s artifacts and by making their appearances among them. Each item, each encounter, lights up the webs of association within which they emerge. The constant flow of scholars through the holdings opens up the trajectories and connects the relay points in fresh ways. Anarchism’s reading publics were also participants in, rather than passive recipients of, the movement’s print culture: readers wrote letters, poems, and essays; exchanged publications among themselves; and preserved their collections for unknown futures.

Chapter 3 examines practices of radical study in anarchist publications. Adapting the analysis of the Black undercommons by Harney and Moten, I look at anarchists as a kind of “fugitive public” engaged in creating knowledge outside the usual purview of educational institutions.⁴⁵ They created an anarchist undercommons, a world in which domination and hierarchy made no sense. Chapter 3 addresses the intellectual and political content of the publications and their likely lines of reception with readers. Sometimes writers and editors addressed current struggles, keeping readers abreast of strikes and rebellions, or disputes with social democrats, communists, liberals, spiritualists, suffragists, or other political groups with whom anarchists quarreled. Sometimes past moments of insurrection, especially the Paris Commune and the Haymarket events, were revisited. Frequently journals republished classic works by respected writers, especially Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, or Leo Tolstoy, often in serial form, encouraging readers to return again and again to pick up the threads and participate in the unfolding of their movement’s big ideas. Inspirational poems, exchanges with readers, announcements of events and other publications, and reports of local activities stimulated readers’ investments in the energies and identities of the movement.

In addition, some anarchist writers, nearly all women, developed creative mixed genres of writing to invite readers into a radical thought-space. For example, “social sketches” are short writings combining elements of a short story, including characters, setting, and drama, with the lively images and evocative language of a poem.⁴⁶ Think pieces are short writings that combine

elements of an essay and a letter, directly addressing readers about a shared problem that requires their collective attention. These writings are generally less invested in instructing readers and more intent on drawing them into a reflective space. They are anarchistic not just in their content but in the manner of their engagement with readers.

Chapter 4 concludes the book by reversing the old stereotype of anarchism as a nice idea in theory but one that could never work in practice. Instead, I suggest the opposite: the theory needs some work, but the practices have much to offer. Chapter 4 turns to new materialism and intersectionality, especially Black history and theory, to expand classical anarchism's theoretical reach while invoking three recent or current political movements to illustrate the continuing vitality of its practices.

While Harney and Moten's account of Black radical study inspires my analysis of anarchism's creation of knowledge, the conceptual proximity of the two fugitive publics, Black and anarchist, raises some questions that are uncomfortable for anarchism. The main figures in classical anarchism have often been called out for their lack of attention to Blackness; as African American literary scholar Marquis Bey states succinctly in *Anarcho-Blackness*, they "didn't really talk about Blackness, were not really concerned with Blackness, didn't bring Blackness to bear on their thinking, and didn't think that Blackness's specificity demanded attention."⁴⁷ While charting Black anarchism or anarcho-Blackness is far beyond the scope of this book, strengthening anarchist theory requires understanding how anarchism's historical neglect of Blackness came to be and how it did its work in the journals I am investigating. How could a political theory and movement that was ruthlessly critical of all power relations nonetheless fail to analyze relations between Black and White people as a specific vector of power? In chapter 4, I consider four possible explanations for anarchism's analytic failure regarding the politics of the color line. First, the Left's widespread tendency to fold all exploitation into the category of "wage slaves" developed no language to analyze the lives and legacies of actual slaves. Second, a lack of historical curiosity framed racism more as a psychological prejudice than a social structure and process emergent over time. Third, the priority anarchists gave to writing may have caused them to overlook other forms of expression. And fourth, anarchists may have prematurely dismissed Black politics as too reformist, too Christian, or not sufficiently revolutionary. Realizing anarchism's promise of vigorous intersectional thinking requires careful attention to how this silence around Blackness was produced and how it can be contested.

New materialist thinking about lively matter enables my analysis of presses and printers, missives and correspondents, publications and readers. In light of the importance of doing and making things together in shared physical space in the classical anarchist movement, I conclude that contemporary political movements could benefit from enhancing the shared materiality of their politics. Chapter 4 looks at three current or recent movements that have a strong element of “thing power”⁴⁸—the agency of food and foodshares in the global antimilitarist movement Food Not Bombs; of an encampment and repurposed road for the Native Hawaiian movement Protect Maunakea ‘Ohana; and of books, bookshelves, and booklists in the feminist bookstore movement. Each of these activist examples suggests an empowerment that comes from working closely with nonhuman things as actants, capable of affecting and being affected within relationships.

How Do Letters Act?

How do these three connotations of the word *letters*—graphemes, correspondence, and radical study—work together within the context of anarchist print culture? Assemblage encounters are indeterminate, so there is no fully predictable interaction that is on call, yet there are possibilities that emerge within their entanglements. The *letters* Ishill set on his composing stick, the *letters* he exchanged with other anarchists and printers, and his scholarly attainments as a *man of letters* connect in three ways.

Creativity

First, letters are sites of creativity, where political energies interact with one another. They host an excess of unruly possibilities over any particular realizations. Political theorist William Connolly explores the ways that creativity exceeds our intentions while animating our desires: “When creative freedom is under way in an unsettled context we may find ourselves *allowing* or *encouraging* a new thought, desire, or strategy to crystalize out of the confusion and nest of proto-thoughts that precede it. An agent, individual or collective, can help to open the portals of creativity, but it cannot will that which is creative to come into being by intending the result before it arrives. Real creativity is thus tinged with uncertainty and mystery.”⁴⁹ Each kind of letter—print blocks for the physical production of text; correspondence with comrades; and radical scholarship—draws on past

practices without being controlled by them or necessarily destined toward a fixed end. Connolly calls this uncertainty “a fecund zone of indiscernibility” in which liminal contacts among elements and spontaneous incursions in untried directions invite something fresh and new to be born.⁵⁰

When Ishill wrote to his friend Rudolf Rocker, a bookbinder by trade who became one of the leading intellectuals of the anarchist movement, about his exciting plan for a bibliography of Rocker’s work, he was making plans for that which could never be fully planned because the doing of the work generated unexpected gaps and invited new twists that rebounded back on the actors and the materials. Ishill wrote to Rocker,

My own idea is a bit more interesting and quite original for up to now no one has attempted such a plan, though I must admit that such a form is by far more complicated, both typographically as well as editorially, and yet I hope it will present itself more satisfactorily, both to the eye and mind. How can I explain this to you in a few words what I mean by a *new form*!—for typographically speaking it is quite an intricate job in the arrangement of various sizes of types and characters, which will play an important role throughout, not to mention spacings. To appreciate such a style or form one will have to see it first when it is finally put into print.⁵¹

Ishill understood himself to be reaching for something that had no obvious precursors: “No one has attempted such a plan.” He recognized that the creation of the typography and the content was daunting, and he fumbled to find a way to express his plan: “How can I explain this to you in a few words what I mean by a *new form*!” He was aware that the book itself is an actant in the process, a participant that engages them rather than passively receiving their attention: he hoped it would “present itself more satisfactorily, both to the eye and mind,” which meant that it may also fail to do so. And the whole thing was not fully available yet to Rocker or to Ishill, because “to appreciate such a style or form one will have to see it first when it is finally put into print.”

Chicago anarchist Lizzie Holmes was similarly insistent that the movement flourished best when she and her comrades cultivated creativity, not just devotion to preexisting ideas. Recognizing that anarchists tend to reiterate their main principles over and over, she asks for more: “Why not wonder a little of what we are going to think, when we are free to think whatever we wish?”⁵² Holmes is calling on anarchists to create themselves. The work of the anarchist undercommons, to return to Harney and Moten’s small book,

is never finished because desire is situated and emergent. As Jack Halberstam writes in the introductory chapter of *The Undercommons*, the current system “limits our ability to find each other, to see beyond it and to access the places that we know lie outside its walls.” We cannot now articulate a specific agenda for a better society because the process of making change will alter our vision: “We will inevitably see more and see differently and feel a new sense of wanting and being and becoming.”⁵³

Creative thinking, Connolly rightly insists, depends on “delicate imbalances” among material, semiotic, and social forces where the given is always potentially interruptible by the strange.⁵⁴ The combined familiarity and newness that printers may find in setting type and orchestrating ink with paper; that correspondents may find in writing themselves to their comrades; and that writers may find when they organize available ideas, images, and feelings into texts to publish in the movement’s many outlets: these, Connolly notes, “stretch and enliven the *receptive side* of our engagements.”⁵⁵ Holmes and Ishill embedded themselves in what Halberstam calls “the with and for” of anarchism to express and be impressed by its creative flows.⁵⁶

Resonance

Second, the three types of letters resonate with one another, distributing their agency and receptivity horizontally among press technologies, epistolary relations, and knowledge productions. None of them can be said to cause another in a one-way sense—it would be foolish to suggest that printing or corresponding or writing caused people to become anarchists, or that a person’s prior anarchism caused them to become printers, correspondents, or writers—but the energetic interrelations among presses, missives, and knowledge practices create expressive spaces where anarchism can happen. There is no clear starting point: printers, correspondents, and writers are always in the midst of things. There are no dependent or independent variables: all the elements are potentially salient with regard to one another. Changes in any one of the nodes can oscillate within others, touch their elements, surge into their interactions in unexpected ways.

Resonance among distinct yet related ideas, affects, beings, and things enables an understanding of agency as distributive, as enmeshed in organic, semiotic, and material tangles.⁵⁷ Relations may resonate lightly on some levels and vigorously on others, as appears to be the case with, to take one example, the interactions between Ishill and Thomas Keell, a legendary English printer and editor of the London journal *Freedom*. In some of

Ishill's correspondence with other printers, the writers share experiences and insights about printing, but the available letters between Ishill and Keell say relatively little about printing or presses. Instead, they focus more on distributing the printed material. The two men exchanged many, many publications. Ishill sent Keell the US journal *Road to Freedom*, published in the anarchist community in Stelton, New Jersey, as well as many of his Oriole Press publications. Keell reciprocated with numerous British publications, including *Freedom*. The relentless incursions of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s instigated even more effort toward the publication and exchange of anarchist writings, in an attempt to stay a step ahead of the people who were burning books. In a March 21, 1934, letter to Ishill, Keell lamented the dearth of production of anarchist books in Europe, Alexander Berkman's *Now and After* being the last one. He indicated that historian Max Nettlau's work had been published in Germany, but "all their stock [was] destroyed by the Nazis."⁵⁸ When Ishill learned in an August 3, 1938, letter from Lilian Wolfe, Keell's partner, that Keell had died, Ishill and Wolfe continued their exchange of publications, persisting in spreading the effects of their relationships between themselves and the other anarchists who visited their shops and partook of their libraries.⁵⁹

Following the specific surges, retreats, and interminglings within particular relations is necessary for identifying key operators in anarchist assemblages. Calibrating their density, strength, and reciprocity, as DeLanda urges, also entails attending to our own interventions, as our accounts have some sort of impact on that which is already underway. As Bennett explains, we should always expect our "rough schemas" of resonance to surprise us, because "phases overlap, repeat with a difference, arise out of turn, and form feedback loops that confound attempts to identify a clean sequence of cause and effect."⁶⁰ Some of these interactive energies are more problematic than others. The prevailing image of anarchists in the broader public view, from the Haymarket explosion to the Black Lives Matter protests, is steeped in violence. Of course, the authorities exaggerate and sensationalize this reputation and often invent it out of whole cloth while masking the much greater state and corporate violence against workers and protesters. Yet taking resonance seriously suggests the anarchists bear some responsibility for the images and affects that their publications and speeches put into circulation. For example, the Vermont- and Massachusetts-based journal *Cronaca Sovversiva* excelled at stirring readers' outrage and desire for revenge, feelings that propelled anarchist attentats: editor Luigi Galleani

regularly enthused, “Against violence, violence!”⁶¹ The Chicago *Alarm* and the New York *Freiheit*, among others, engaged in what *The Masses* writer Floyd Dell called “bomb-talking,” perhaps mostly to attract attention and cultivate a radical persona.⁶² Certainly, most anarchists did not engage in violence, and in fact opposed reckless calls for destruction because they brought down the full force of the authorities on their movement and on the Left in general.⁶³ Yet regular calls for “propaganda of the deed” to overthrow the oppressors are not innocent of the ensuing violence they might provoke. Unlike Galleani, Emma Goldman, publisher of the New York-based journal *Mother Earth*, excelled at calibrating the line between sympathizing with the avengers of the people—historian Paul Avrich once remarked that “she never met a bomber she didn’t like”—and putting into circulation calls for vengeance that could resonate in ultimately destructive ways.⁶⁴ Anarchist assemblages, like all assemblages, are not single, consistent plateaus but, as Bennett explains, “living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within.”⁶⁵ The confounding energies are not external to the assemblages but are part of the circuits of operation producing tensions and contradictions as well as affinities within the movement.

Collaboration

Third, the three types of letters enable and reflect collaborations among participants, creating communities that combine material, social, and semiotic actors. Connolly explores the sparks of creativity that can fly when people, objects, and thoughts come forth together, “*in the rush of desire forward to consolidation in action.*”⁶⁶ Of course collaborations can fail or go awry, but they also have the unpredictable capacity to generate something new. Connolly continues, “When we participate in a creative initiative and when we respond to a creative initiative from elsewhere that jostles received assumptions, *we both change the world and become otherwise than ourselves to a large or small degree.* That is the creative potential lodged between the open logic of identity and the evolution of circumstances with which it is entangled. A creative act, even though it may backfire, is an uncanny power that helps to bind us to the vitality of existence itself.... Freedom: to be and to become otherwise than we are.”⁶⁷ Surging forward to become otherwise can be a community-creating process. The tactile and kinesthetic practices of printing, the interpersonal exchange of correspondence, and

the larger counterpublic world of writing, circulating, and preserving texts: all are entangled in the surging forward that creates and sustains bonds to cohere a movement over time.

Anarchists excelled at creating practical vehicles for enhancing creative collective life. In his rich analysis of German anarchism in New York in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, *Beer and Revolution*, historian Tom Goyens charts the anarchists' joyous network of dances, picnics, socials, clubs, and other celebratory opportunities. Goyens calls it "picnic culture."⁶⁸ It could also be called theater culture, café culture, poetry culture, periodical culture, pamphlet culture, or tavern culture. In the 1930s, New York anarchist Sidney Solomon similarly relished the vigor of anarchism's collaborations: "It was writing and working, it was personal involvement, it was hitchhiking and travel, it was organizing and demonstrating—it was all the energies of our youth."⁶⁹

Of course, the networks were not always successful, and the relations did not always cohere. Anarchists' correspondence is full of complaints and regrets that not enough comrades shared the work. Bohemian writer and editor Hippolyte Havel, speaking to the 1925 anarchist conference in Stelton, New Jersey, about future directions for the journal *Road to Freedom*, complained, "The work always goes to a few comrades. It is always the few who carry on the movement. It is only camouflage of a movement."⁷⁰ Keell similarly lamented to Ishill in a letter of January 17, 1928, that attendance at meetings in London was poor and there was little enthusiasm for the work of putting out *Freedom*.⁷¹ Yet the connectivity made available at the annual conferences in Stelton, the regular exchange of letters between Keell and Ishill, and countless other sites for issuing and receiving these regrets were, ironically, a bulwark against them: they generated some needed connective energies to address the lack. Keell concluded with determination, "But we shall not let Anarchist ideas be entirely lost in this country."⁷² At that, they were successful.

Yet not all the collaborations were welcome: the very openness and receptivity to new participants that allowed anarchists to invite their audience in also enabled the persistent and disruptive presence of spies and informants. Recall Bennett's comment that assemblages do their work "despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within."⁷³ Anarchist assemblages could be confounded from within by the disabling betrayals of informants. E. P. Thompson reports in his magisterial history of the English working class that anarchist groups were "deeply penetrated by spies."⁷⁴ Infiltration by agents provocateur was sufficiently common that British writer G. K. Chesterton's 1908 novel *The Man Who Was Thursday*

imagined an anarchist group in London in which every single member turned out to be an undercover police officer.⁷⁵ Veteran anarchists developed skills to identify interlopers, but they were not always successful: Goldman was devastated that she welcomed the son of her friend Gertie Vose, an anarchist from Home Colony in Washington State, into the *Mother Earth* circle, only to later find that he informed to the police on their work for the labor men Matthew Schmidt and David Kaplan.⁷⁶ Flows of anarchist assemblages can displace as well as create.

Conclusion

Creativity, resonance, and collaboration are more useful ways to understand the significance of anarchism as a movement than are conventional notions of strict causality. It seriously underestimates the importance of anarchism to count only those individuals who at any given time called themselves anarchists and participated directly in the anarchist movement. Anarchism spread along the surface of communities, moving along their capillaries, circulating within their discourses. Printers who weren't anarchists were drawn into the circles of craftsmanship and artistry that Morris, Ishill, Joseph Labadie, and other exemplary anarchist printers inspired. Correspondents who weren't anarchists exchanged letters with Ishill, Goldman, Rocker, and Inglis, among others, widening the circuits touched by anarchist epistolaries. Readers who weren't anarchists were drawn to anarchist publications, venturing outside their comfort zones and perhaps carrying fresh ideas back with them. Historian Constance Bantman's accounts of French anarchists in London around the turn of the twentieth century, for example, note that leading figures such as Kropotkin, Louise Michel (a leader of the Paris Commune), Augustin Hamon (editor of *L'Humanité nouvelle*), Jean Grave (editor of several influential journals, including *Les Temps Nouveaux*), and Charles Malato (respected writer for numerous journals) were highly regarded outside anarchist circles and thus able "to mobilise some non-anarchist acquaintances in support of the cause."⁷⁷ Similar resonance is suggested in the subscription list for Goldman's journal *Mother Earth*, which included civil libertarian Roger Baldwin, feminists Alice Stone Blackwell and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and socialist Helen Keller. These allies could be pressed into service on specific occasions, such as the campaign to protect Goldman's comrade Alexander Berkman from extradition to California in 1917, where he would have faced the death penalty for his work

on behalf of labor leader Thomas Mooney, falsely convicted for the 1916 San Francisco Preparedness Day bombing; or the struggle to free antiwar protesters after World War I; or the campaign to allow Goldman back into the United States in 1934. Anarchism enabled a resonance that exceeded its specific parts, an interactive energy that touched many relationships and shaped many events.

It is possible to think of these letter effects separately, but they always work together: creativity/resonance/collaboration. The fertile relations knitting together letterpress printing, epistolary relations, and radical scholarship in the anarchist undercommons may help us today as we face problems that were already familiar to Ishill and Inglis: failing democracies, rising fascism, brutal inequalities, continuous war. In his 1933 anthology *Free Vistas*, Ishill decries the “national megalomania” growing around him and puts his hope not in “the cultivation of ‘isms’” but in an aesthetic politics of resistance: “Now more than ever is it necessary to weave the fine fibers of sensitive and sympathetic mentality in an ever increasing circumference to hold delicately and tenderly an ailing universe. Dark forces are abroad.”⁷⁸ Ishill could have been speaking of our time as well as his own.

My exploration of the anarchist movement of the past raises a critical issue for radicals today: if letterpress printing, epistolary relations, and radical scholarship played the role I am suggesting in creating and sustaining the anarchist movement, then contemporary activists need comparably lively sites in which material, social, and semiotic practices come together to generate worlds. I am not insisting that the relations among printers, presses, publications, and readers are the only candidates for this productive role. There could be other material technologies engaged with semiotic practices and social relations within radical communities. Anarchism’s vibrant history leads me to conclude that we need to make things together, to express as well as be impressed by our relationships with things.

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INTRODUCTION

NOTES

Preface

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- 1 Cornell, *Unruly Equality*, 26.
- 2 Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 11.
- 3 Flores, “Socialist Newspapers and Periodicals.”
- 4 For data on Socialist Party members and voters in the United States, see “Socialist Party of America.” For data on anarchist publications, see Zimmer, “American Anarchist Periodical Circulation Data.”
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- 9 Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?*, 39, 70.

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- 10 Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?*, 73.
- 11 Hogan, *Feminist Bookstore Movement*, 178.

Acknowledgments

- 1 Quail, *Slow Burning Fuse*, xiv, xv.

Introduction

- 1 Ishill to Inglis, January 14, 1945, 1, Agnes Inglis Papers, Box 10, Joseph A. Labadie Collection (emphasis in original).
- 2 In *Kropotkin: Reviewing the Classical Anarchist Tradition*, Ruth Kinna points out the problems of using the familiar categories of classical or first-wave anarchism, followed by second-wave anarchism in the 1960s and third-wave anarchism since the 1990s. I share her concern about the self-fulfilling prophecies built into progress narratives: If a movement “develops” from simpler to more complex or weaker to stronger ideas, then why bother to read the earlier figures? You already know they have been superseded. Yet I need recognizable language to mark the historical era stretching from around 1870 to around 1940, so in that sense I am calling this era “classical.”
- 3 Zimmer, *Immigrants against the State*, 1. Barry Pateman from the Kate Sharpley Library points out that these statistics may be unreliable because governments often exaggerate radical threats in order to justify police budgets and legitimize repression (personal communication, June 23, 2021). Zimmer’s estimate may be a bit high, but there is good reason to think that anarchism was more widespread and influential than established histories usually recognize.
- 4 Thompson, *William Morris*, 589.
- 5 Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags*; James Scott, *Two Cheers for Anarchism*; Swain et al., *Unchaining Solidarity*.
- 6 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 16.
- 7 Fox, “Propaganda Again,” 7.
- 8 In his analysis of Italian-language periodicals in the United States, historian of anarchism Davide Turcato states, “An anarchist periodical was never an end in itself, but was always instrumental to a larger project of dissemination of political ideas” (“Other Nation,” 44). I respectfully suggest that there was more to it than that. A number of other scholars have developed larger accounts of anarchist print culture. Jennifer Guglielmo suggests, in her detailed historical ethnography of Italian American anarchist communities in *Living the Revolution*, that the journals were elements in a

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network of community relationships, not just a means to an end but also an end in themselves. In *Immigrants against the State*, Zimmer similarly includes creating transnational communities and sustaining collective identities along with transmitting anarchism's message as part of the functional importance of the journals. Christopher Castañeda and Montse Feu argue, with regard to Spanish-language anarchist communities, that "Spanish-speaking people widely dispersed over time and space found solidarity and maintained their radical culture through print communication and organizing" ("Introduction," 26). James Yeoman summarizes the early publications of Spanish anarchists: "Not simply a repository of information, but the symbolic and material site where numerous, dynamic elements of anarchism converged" (*Print Culture*, 40). Reflecting on the impact of the paratextual notes in most journals, including letters, announcements, and subscriptions, Constance Bantman comments, "These notes delineate a social history of anarchist politics, and show the periodicals' organizing role as platforms for information exchange, publicizing activist undertakings, and building unity" ("Jean Grave," 472).

- 9 I located letterpress printers to interview by searching the internet, by attending letterpress conferences, and by word of mouth. I am also indebted to Chris Fritton's charming book *The Itinerant Printer: Modern Adventures in Tramping* (N.P.: Chris Fritton, 2018).
- 10 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 7.
- 11 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, x.
- 12 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, xiii.
- 13 DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 4.
- 14 DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 56 (italics in original).
- 15 DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 56–57.
- 16 DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 32.
- 17 Anderson, *Under Three Flags*, 4.
- 18 Bantman, *French Anarchists in London*, 159.
- 19 Johnson to Inglis, July 5, 1935, 1, Agnes Inglis Papers, Box 11, Labadie Collection.
- 20 Ferretti et al., introduction to *Historical Geographies*, 1–2.
- 21 Levy, "Anarchists and the City," 8.
- 22 Hoyt, "Uncovering and Understanding," 29.
- 23 Shaffer, *Anarchists of the Caribbean*, 23.
- 24 DeLanda, *New Philosophy of Society*, 56, 31 (italics in original).
- 25 Kropotkin, *Memoirs of a Revolutionist*, 216.
- 26 Goldman, "Letter from Emma Goldman," 4. Goldman is speaking of Agnes Davies, a London activist who helped put out *Freedom*, and Harry Kelly, a printer from Missouri who was part of the Mother Earth group, the Freedom group, and the Modern School movement.

- 27 Cores, *Personal Recollections*, 6.
- 28 William Morris, *Collected Works*, 185.
- 29 Zimmer, "American Anarchist Periodical Circulation Data, 1880–1940."
- 30 Hoyt, "Inky Protest," 36. Numbers vary for several reasons: publications often changed names, were suppressed and subsequently reestablished, or have been lost.
- 31 Brodie, "Rebel Youths," 5.
- 32 US Department of Justice, *Investigation Activities*, 12.
- 33 Shpayer-Makov, "Anarchism."
- 34 Bekken, "First Anarchist Daily Newspaper," 10.
- 35 Bekken, "First Anarchist Daily Newspaper," 11.
- 36 Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 67.
- 37 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
- 38 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.
- 39 *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "letter"; Lexico, s.v. "letter."
- 40 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9.
- 41 Hughes, "Library of Jacques Derrida," 403 (italics in original).
- 42 Tsing, *Mushroom*, 52.
- 43 Moran, "To Spread the Revolution."
- 44 Enckell, "School and the Barricade," 14.
- 45 Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*, 61.
- 46 Pakieser, *I Belong Only to Myself*, 10–11.
- 47 Bey, *Anarcho-Blackness*, 11.
- 48 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2–6.
- 49 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 75 (italics in original).
- 50 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 76.
- 51 Ishill to Rocker, [month illegible], 1944, 1–2, Rudolf Rocker Papers, File 123, International Institute of Social History (emphasis in original).
- 52 Holmes, "Mental Barriers," 1.
- 53 Halberstam, "Wild Beyond," 6.
- 54 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 205–6n9.
- 55 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 205–6n9 (italics in original).
- 56 Halberstam, "Wild Beyond," 11.
- 57 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 20–24.
- 58 Keell to Ishill, March 21, 1934, 2, Joseph Ishill Papers, Box 4, Houghton Library.
- 59 Wolfe to Ishill, August 3, 1938, 1, Joseph Ishill Papers, Box 4, Houghton Library.
- 60 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, 8.
- 61 Senta, *Luigi Galleani*, 145

- 62 Nelson, “*Arbeiterpresse und Arbeiterbewegung*,” 87. See also Laura Greenwood, “Book-Anarchists.”
- 63 See Barton, “Global War on Anarchism.”
- 64 Barry Pateman, then associate director of the Emma Goldman Papers Project, shared this anecdote with me on March 8, 2008.
- 65 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.
- 66 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 74 (italics in original).
- 67 Connolly, *Fragility of Things*, 79 (italics in original).
- 68 Goyens, *Beer and Revolution*.
- 69 Brodie, “Rebel Youths,” 10–11. See also Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, 452.
- 70 Havel, *Proletarian Days*, 357.
- 71 Keell to Ishill, January 17, 1928, 1, Joseph Ishill Papers, Box 4, Houghton Library.
- 72 Keell to Ishill, January 17, 1928, 2, Joseph Ishill Papers, Box 4, Houghton Library.
- 73 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23.
- 74 Thompson, *Making*, 589.
- 75 Chesterton, *Man Who Was Thursday*.
- 76 Goldman, *Living My Life*, vol. 2, 550–52.
- 77 Bantman, *French Anarchists in London*, 192.
- 78 Ishill, *Free Vistas*, no. 2, 1–2.

1. Printers and Presses

- 1 Ishill, *Havelock Ellis*, 14–15.
- 2 Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 194–95.
- 3 I borrow this phrase from John L. Walters’s introduction to Kitching, *A–Z of Letterpress*, 7.
- 4 Rancière, *Aisthesis*, 138.
- 5 Deleuze and Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, 51.
- 6 Rancière, *Aisthesis*, xvi.
- 7 See appendix A for a list of anarchist printers I have assembled to date. My hunch is that there were many more anarchist printers active in the United States and Britain (not to mention the rest of the world) from 1870 to 1940, but many of them are commonly referred to in publications and correspondence as editors or publishers rather than as printers. Editor and printer Jay Fox said of his work that “a fellow has to be everything from the ‘printer’s devil’ to the editor-in-chief.” Fox to Labadie, May 4, 1911, 1, Joseph A. Labadie Papers, Box 3, Joseph A. Labadie Collection. It takes a lot of archival digging to identify the printers.