

The Anarchist Library  
Anti-Copyright



# Anarchist Counterpublics

Kathy E. Ferguson

Kathy E. Ferguson  
Anarchist Counterpublics  
2010

*New Political Science*, Volume 32, 2010 — Issue 2, Pages 193–214.  
DOI: 10.1080/07393141003722040

**[theanarchistlibrary.org](http://theanarchistlibrary.org)**

2010



For Goldman and Berkman, their ability to draw upon anarchist social imaginaries to locate “the expectations that are normally met” in collective practices was both sustained and compromised by their subaltern position.<sup>112</sup> Their position was compromised because anarchists served as the constitutive Other of proper social order; it was sustained because it was exactly that fracture which anarchists utilized to articulate their critique and to draw suffering or visionary individuals into their circulations of words. Anarchist public-making was dangerous business, and Goldman and Berkman did indeed risk its fate.

## Contents

Abstract . . . . .	5
Introduction . . . . .	5
Why Counterpublics? . . . . .	7
Articulating Publics and Counterpublics . . . . .	9
1. Publics are multiple and fluid . . . . .	14
2. Publics are located in relation to material life spaces	16
3. Publics have their own temporality . . . . .	24
4. Publics are both sites and products of struggle . .	30
5. The absence of a public or counterpublic is dam- aging to human potential . . . . .	31
Prison as Public Space . . . . .	33
Concluding Thoughts . . . . .	39

---

<sup>112</sup> Taylor, “*Modern Social Imaginaries*,” p. 106.

linear, mutually constitutive process? Goldman's and Berkman's public careers presumed the publics they helped articulate. They took the risk of addressing participants outside their immediate circle, engaging the "fruitful perversity" of inviting strangers into a circulatory field that the strangers might well destroy.<sup>109</sup> The unpredictability inherent in public world-making marked both its risks and its possibilities.

Similarly, Taylor's analysis of publics is usefully taxed by the pressure of anarchist examples. Taylor's image of publics is too smooth, its exchanges too conversational, to fully grasp the abiding frictions both within and between contending publics. Taylor emphasizes the commonness of publics, the way people fit together with others, "how things go on between them and their fellows," while in anarchist political spaces the "way things go on" is fraught with danger.<sup>110</sup> Attention to anarchist counterpublics puts pressure on the serenity of Taylor's account, bringing more turbulence into the triangular relation of social imaginaries, political ideologies, and bodily practices. While Warner recognizes the centrality of struggle to the workings of publics, he too sometimes lets the language of commonness dull his attention to the violence that struggle may entail. The instability and risk that Warner appears to regret are the flip side of the possibilities that the anarchists embraced. Warner states:

Publicness is just this space of coming together that discloses itself in interaction. The world of strangers that public discourse makes must be made of further circulation and recharacterization over time; it cannot simply be aggregated from units that I can expect to be similar to mine. I risk its fate.<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p.113.

<sup>110</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 122.

<sup>111</sup> Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," p. 106.

different from the speech of one person to others in ordinary time.”<sup>106</sup> Goldman was often credited with exceptionally moving address, as though she were speaking directly to the listener and not to the crowd. Yet of course it is precisely the capacity to touch and be touched by anarchism that she was putting into circulation. Warner recognizes hybrid forms, such as the speech of itinerant preachers addressing revivals, but rather than pursuing hybridity he insists on a fundamental difference of the two categories of speech, arguing that public speech is essentially circulating while sermons address the private sinner.<sup>107</sup>

Warner’s analysis in this instance is too rigid to fully capture the shifting practices of anarchist publics. Berkman’s and Goldman’s writing blurred distinctions between letters addressed to a specific individual and public speech addressed to the generalized other. Their practices undo clear distinctions between words meant for circulation and those meant only for exchange, as well as between the rhetorical practices of sermons and those of public address. Examining the practices of anarchist counterpublics suggests that hybridity of forms is the rule rather than the exception. Were Warner to focus more on hybridity and process, less on distinctions among categories, he could avoid some of his anxieties about “which came first.” For example, after many pages of insistence that publics are formed “merely” by address, he admits to a “reality” that undermines this appearance: “A public seems to be self-organized by discourse but in fact requires preexisting forms and channels of circulation. It appears to be open to indefinite strangers but in fact selects participants.”<sup>108</sup> Yet this abrupt distinction between how things appear and how they really are would be unneeded, were Warner to give up the search for a founding moment. Why not instead embrace the relations among moments of a dynamic, non-

---

<sup>106</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 83.

<sup>107</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

<sup>108</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p.106.

## Abstract

Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were key figures in the creation of anarchist counterpublics in the US at the turn of the last century. Their work drew together immigrant subcultures, labor activists, progressive liberals, radical women, and international supporters to create a counterpublic within which anarchist ideals could achieve intelligibility. Their public words illuminate the dynamic relationship between the realm of ideas, the social imaginary, and the bodily habitus within which anarchism came to be in the United States. Viewing anarchism as a counterpublic highlights the significance of its temporalities, social locations, and textual practices. At the same time, reconsidering counterpublics in light of anarchist world-making practices suggests a more hybrid, fluid, non-linear conceptualization of radical counterpublics.

## Introduction

From their arrival in the US in the 1880s until their exile in 1919, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman were instrumental in creating vibrant anarchist counterpublics. Goldman was the best-known anarchist in America. Berkman, while less known outside of anarchist circles, was a stalwart figure in radical labor activism. But what does it mean to create and address a radical counterpublic? Who participated in these publics and what modes of constitution and address did they facilitate or require?

This essay looks to the political agitation of Goldman and Berkman to develop an account of anarchist counterpublics in the US at the turn of the last century. Focusing primarily on their journals, with some consideration of lectures, books, and other textual practices, I find an energetic triangle of political ideologies, symbolic communities, and embodied practices out of which anar-

chist counterpublics took shape.<sup>1</sup> Goldman established, edited, and wrote for the monthly journal *Mother Earth*, a pocket-sized publication with a sizeable circulation that ran from 1906 to 1918. Berkman also edited and wrote for *Mother Earth*; subsequently, he put out his own weekly journal *The Blast* (1916–1917) and the remarkable, poignant *Prison Blossoms* during his incarceration.<sup>2</sup> While no doubt some readers were merely curious or even hostile—the government, after all, was a reliable collector of anarchist materials—the readership of the journals also regularly attended and helped organize lectures, participated in protests, and hosted the editors on their cross-country speaking tours. While anarchism is often dismissed with the bromide, “it’s great in theory, but it would never work in practice,” I suggest, on the contrary, that it is in the intense and energetic world of political practice that anarchism’s extraordinary but neglected presence in US politics can best be charted. Of course, there is no hard-and-fast distinction to be drawn between anarchist theory and anarchist practice, since each takes its shape from and helps create the other; yet it is still useful to shift focus away from the arguments anarchists made in order to examine what their anarchism allowed them to accomplish. Accordingly, I am pushing Goldman’s and Berkman’s theories temporarily to the background in order to illuminate the dynamic relationship between the realm of ideas, the social imaginary, and the bodily habitus within which anarchism came to be in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> In 1892 Berkman attempted to kill Henry Clay Frick for ordering assaults on striking steel workers at Carnegie’s mills in Homestead, Pennsylvania. He served 14 years in prison.

<sup>3</sup> I do not have space in this essay to develop their ideas; for a fuller consideration, see my forthcoming book *Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Rowman and Littlefield).

## Concluding Thoughts

The vicissitudes of anarchist activism can provide insights for refining our understanding of counterpublics. For example, Warner dwells persistently on what he takes to be a troubling circularity of publics, the “chicken and egg” problem—the public has to exist in order for us to address it, but it can’t exist until we address it. Yet Warner’s own insights into the temporality, multiplicity, and porosity of publics suggests that he is too rigid in some of his categories, too anxious about an original moment, when his own arguments suggest a focus on connections and processes rather than stable cause and effect relations. Warner rightly points out that publics and counterpublics sustain tensions not attributable to the workings of domination on the oppressed. The search for a better public or counterpublic, while worthwhile, will not resolve these enduring tensions. Our problem isn’t only that some authorities are manipulative (although they are) or use public culture to dominate (although they do); even if we succeed in replacing an oppressive public culture with a more liberated one, Warner insists that there are tensions inherent in any publics, including counterpublics, that exceed containments and defy resolutions.

Yet when Warner sorts his way through different kinds of public speech and writing, he sometimes insists on hard and fast distinctions among registers of address that are better understood as porous and interactive. For example, he contrasts public address with sermons, finding that the latter lack the needed temporality and reflexivity of circulation. A sermon, he insists, may be a kind of public eloquence and may be political, but it is a message delivered from god to sinner and lacks the circulation that constitutes and is constituted by public address. Yet the example of Goldman’s public speaking blurs the distinctions upon which Warner insists. Like the preachers whom Warner describes, Goldman could often “speak with something other than [her] individual voice, and... address the intimate hearer, creating a scene of hearing markedly

sketches the “shop Screw” and “the Trusted Prisoner”; and “G” relates the story of the recent strike in his shop, the men’s demand for clear pump water instead of the liquid mud tapped from the river, and the breaking of the strike by the exile of a score of “rioters” to the dungeon. In the next issue the incident is paralleled with the Pullman Car Strike, and the punished prisoners eulogized for their courageous stand, someone dedicating an ultra-original poem to the “Noble Sons of Eugene Debs.”<sup>102</sup>

More troubles beset their fragile relations: some readers were moved to inaccessible parts of the prison; two contributors died; the route of writing and circulating was in disarray. In the face of persistent obstacles to journal circulation, they decided to write a book. Their public shifted again; confident that a resourceful friend could smuggle the manuscript out of prison, they spoke more to the hypothetical public outside prison gates.<sup>103</sup> Throughout this process, Berkman worked on the materials of confinement to create a counterpublic by, as Warner eloquently explains, “elaborating common worlds, making the transposition from shame to honor, from hiddenness to the exchange of viewpoints with generalized others, in such a way that the disclosure of self partakes of freedom.”<sup>104</sup> Like other prisoners of conscience described by Hauser, Berkman’s prison writings are “an example of the resistance he advocates.”<sup>105</sup> Within the harsh and degrading space of prison, these writings made worlds.

<sup>102</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, p. 283.

<sup>103</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, p. 335.

<sup>104</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 61.

<sup>105</sup> Gerard Hauser, “Prisoners of Conscience and the Counterpublic Sphere of Prison Writing,” in Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer (eds), *Counterpublics and the State* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 51.

## Why Counterpublics?

Nancy Fraser’s influential critique of Jürgen Habermas’s *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) emphasized “a host of competing counterpublics,” rather than a single unified bourgeois public sphere, and sketched the contestatory relations among these “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”<sup>4</sup> Building on Habermas and Fraser, scholars have analyzed a variety of counterpublics, including those organized by women,<sup>5</sup> African Americans,<sup>6</sup> queers,<sup>7</sup> the proletariat,<sup>8</sup> and artists.<sup>9</sup> While Mark Morrison has written a fascinating analysis of Dora Marsden’s anarchist journal *The Freewoman* (later called *The Egoist*) as a

<sup>4</sup> Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25:26 (1990), pp. 61, 67.

<sup>5</sup> Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Mariangela Maguire and Laila Farah Mohtar, “Performance and the Celebration of a Subaltern Counterpublic,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 14:3 (1994), pp. 238–252.

<sup>6</sup> The Black Public Sphere Collective (eds), *The Black Public Sphere* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Melissa Harris-Lacewell, *Barbershops, Bibles, and BET* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael Jeffries, “Do Barbershops Matter? Disaggregating and Demystifying the Black Counterpublic,” paper presented at American Sociological Association annual meeting, Boston, MA (July 31, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience*, trans. Peter Labanyi, Jamie Owen Daniel and Assenka Oksiloff (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Sholette, “Dark Matter—Activist Art and the Counter-Public Sphere,” *InterActivist Info Exchange* <<http://info.interactivist.net/node/1946>> (accessed July 20, 2009).

counterpublic textual space, to my knowledge no one else has applied the fertile concept of counterpublics to anarchism.<sup>10</sup>

In his useful overview of counterpublic literature, Robert Asen asks, “What is counter about counter publics?”<sup>11</sup> Asen identifies “participants’ recognition of exclusion from wider public spheres” and “articulation through alternative discourse practices and norms” as constitutive of their emancipatory potential.<sup>12</sup> Taking Goldman’s and Berkman’s activism as an example, we can both explore and expand Asen’s response. The anarchists certainly understood themselves as largely excluded from hegemonic public spaces, and they developed vigorous discursive arenas to create their own counterpublic spheres. Additionally, they allow us to see the intensely embodied material context within which anarchist ideas emerged and through which they were put into circulation. Both our understandings of anarchism and of counterpublics benefit from their encounter. Bringing the concept of counterpublics to bear on anarchism helps us to see the concrete practices through which this social movement did its work, and to chart the relations it sustained to various audiences and subcultures. Similarly, bringing anarchism into the discussion of counterpublics explores the political potential of activism based more on shared political vision than on prior sexual or racial identities, and highlights the often vicious repressions faced by radical critics. Going beyond the idea of “parallel” publics (Fraser) or “nested” publics (Taylor), anarchist counterpublics embody both directly antagonistic clashes with dominant authorities as well as considerable influence upon those dominant spheres. Anarchist political practices, I argue, both created effective counterpublics

---

<sup>10</sup> Mark Morrisson, “Marketing British Modernism: ‘The Egoist’ and Counter-Public Spheres,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 43:4 (1997), pp. 439–469.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Asen, “Seeking the ‘Counter’ in Counterpublics,” *Communication Theory* 10 (November 2000), p. 426.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Asen, “Seeking the ‘Counter’ in Counterpublics,” *Communication Theory* 10 (November 2000), p. 427.

J. Beatty, union activists from the Knights of Labor who were accused of attempting to poison the food of strike-breakers. For Berkman, their arrival “offers opportunity for propaganda among workers representing the more radical element of American labor.”<sup>100</sup> The contours of the counterpublic shifted again.

The little magazine was eventually discontinued because of constant harassment by the warden. But the writers renewed their correspondence when possible and eventually revived *Prison Blossoms*; by that time, the Knights of Labor men had been pardoned, the poet also released, but they recruited others, including more imprisoned strikers from the Duquesne confrontation. Readers, generally drawn from “the more intelligent and trustworthy element,” renewed their “subscriptions” by contributing material, creating an active feedback loop within their public.<sup>101</sup> The public they were creating in prison also contained enemies—the “stools” and “trusties” who worked for the officers and could not be trusted. The process occasionally worked the other way, producing a friendly guard who became an ally. Berkman’s analysis of the authority structure of the prison is part of the hazardous process by which he recruits and produces his public. Berkman writes:

The editorials are short, pithy comments on local events, interspersed with humorous sketches and caricatures of the officials; the balance of the *Blossoms* consists of articles and essays of a more serious character, embracing religion and philosophy, labor and politics, with now and then a personal reminiscence by the “second-story man,” or some sex experience by “Magazine Alvin.” One of the associate editors lampoons “Billy-goat Benny,” the Deputy Warden; “K”

---

<sup>100</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, p. 184.

<sup>101</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, pp. 283–284.

transit, is finally to reach the second contributor, upon whom will devolve the editorial management of the following issue.<sup>96</sup>

He described the contents with pride:

The unique arrangement proves a source of much pleasure and recreation. The little magazine is rich in contents and varied in style. The diversity of handwriting heightens the interest, and stimulates speculation on the personality of our increasing readers-contributors. In the arena of the diminutive publication, there rages the conflict of contending social philosophies; here a political essay rubs elbows with a witty anecdote, and a dissertation on 'The Nature of Things' is interspersed with prison small-talk and personal reminiscence. Flashes of unstudied humor and unconscious rivalry of orthography lend peculiar charm to the unconventional editorials, and waft a breath of Josh Billings<sup>97</sup> into the manuscript pages.<sup>98</sup>

Ironically, Berkman worried about their success—*Zuchthasblüthen* “soon discovers itself a veritable Frankenstein,” as “the popularity of joint editorship is growing at the cost of unity and tendency.”<sup>99</sup> Things were getting out of hand: the little journal was overwhelmed with poetry, lacked sufficient paper, was becoming ideologically dispersed within the counterpulls of multiple micropublics. Berkman, Nold, and Bauer brought in other inmates, including two “Homestead men,” Hugh F. Dempsey and Robert

<sup>96</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs, op. cit.*, pp. 182–183.

<sup>97</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time.

<sup>98</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, p. 183.

<sup>99</sup> Josh Billings was a well-known American humorist of the time, p. 183.

and at the same time reinvented the contours that alternative publics can usefully achieve. By foregrounding the temporal and spatial practices of anarchism, I suggest a more hybrid account of the work of radical counterpublics.

## Articulating Publics and Counterpublics

Michael Warner provides a useful analysis of the circularity and layering of publics: “Publics exist,” he explains, “only by virtue of their imagining.”<sup>13</sup> A speaker or writer needs a preexisting public in order to have someone to address, yet it is the act of addressing that creates the needed public. From, roughly, the Haymarket Riots in 1886 to the post World War I Red Scare, anarchism was an emergent site for this ironic process, shaping a vigorous counterpublic within the US.<sup>14</sup> Grounded largely in the radical immigrant communities on the coasts, while spreading to some “native” (that is, non-immigrant)<sup>15</sup> labor and liberal circles, anarchism exemplified the relationship Warner describes between counterpublics and subcultures:

A counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like. ... [T]his subordinate status does not simply reflect identities formed

<sup>13</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, pp. 56–57.

<sup>14</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup> I am focusing on Goldman’s and Berkman’s work in the United States. For an account of Goldman after 1919, see Alice Wexler, *Emma Goldman in Exile: From the Russian Revolution to the Spanish Civil War* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1989).

elsewhere; participation in such a public is one of the ways by which its members' identities are formed and transformed.<sup>16</sup>

The constitutive relation between immigrant subcultures and anarchist counterpublics is intensified because these communities are largely subaltern, organized by racial/ethnic, religious/cultural, and above all, class stratification to produce, as Dilip Gaonkar suggests, "form[s] of social solidarity" embracing radical social change through "imaginative act[s] of world-making."<sup>17</sup>

Warner sketches three levels of public-ness, each of which is at work in anarchist social imaginaries. First, the public can refer to people in general, gathered up into a collective noun that must be imagined into reality, such as humanity, Christianity, or all residents of a nation. Secondly, "public" can mean a more concrete and located audience, one that can "witness itself in visible space," as in the audience for a theater production, sporting event, or concert.<sup>18</sup> Charles Taylor calls this the "topical common space" because particular people are assembled in a specific place for an identifiable purpose.<sup>19</sup> Warner, however, is primarily concerned with a third sense of public: "the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation."<sup>20</sup> These publics are text-based, either oral or written, and they are "autotelic...[they] exist by virtue of being addressed."<sup>21</sup> Not just a group of people, but a collectivity organized by discourse, textual publics are "capable of being ad-

---

<sup>16</sup> "Native" commonly meant non-immigrant for the anarchists, suggesting both their distance from indigenous people and their absorption in a political world framed by immigration.

<sup>17</sup> Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries," p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 66.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), p. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 66.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

has been sacrilegiously forced to leave its covers, and every evidence of its previous association dexterously removed. The problem threatens to terminate our correspondence, and fills us with dismay.<sup>94</sup>

When a sympathetic inmate secured a large supply of paper, the three comrades expanded their correspondence into a magazine, initially in German and subsequently in English, entitled *Prison Blossoms*. They recruited other writers: an inmate whom they name *Meistersinger* contributed "a rather creditable poem."<sup>95</sup> As they invented their publication, they imagined their counterpublic.

In contrast to the persistent regularity of other anarchist publications, the clandestine collective writing of *Prison Blossoms* struggled forward according to the irregular opportunities of prison time. Within the unforgiving circumstances of incarceration, the anarchists created a clandestine round-robin system of production and circulation in which the readers were also writers:

Soon we plan more pretentious issues: the outward size of the publication is to remain the same, three by five inches, but the number of pages is to be enlarged; each issue to have a different editor, to ensure equality of opportunity; the readers to serve as contributing editors. The appearance of the *Blüthen* [Blossoms] is to be regulated by the time required to complete the circle of readers, whose identity is to be masked with certain initials, to protect them against discovery... [They] are to act, in turn, as editor-in-chief, whose province is to start the *Blüthen* on its way, each reader contributing to the issue till it is returned to the original editor, to enable him to read and comment upon his fellow-contributors. The publication, its contents growing in

---

<sup>94</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*

<sup>95</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

began a vigorous correspondence. Berkman writes: “The presence of my comrades is investing existence with interest and meaning. It has brought to me a breeze from the atmosphere of my former environment; it is stirring the graves, where lie my soul’s dead, into renewed life and hope.”<sup>91</sup> The prisoners exchanged views on aspects of anarchism, at first separated by old disputes, including their loyalty to or bitterness at their anarchist mentor, Johann Most, Berkman’s “shattered idol.”<sup>92</sup> Yet the act of exchanging ideas soon progressed beyond rehashing old arguments. Their surreptitious correspondence was world-making:

The evening hours have ceased to drag: there is pleasure and diversion in the correspondence. The notes have grown into bulky letters, daily cementing our friendship. We compare views, exchange impressions, and discuss prison gossip.... The personal tenor of our correspondence is gradually broadening into the larger scope of socio-political theories, methods of agitation and applied tactics. The discussions, prolonged and often heated, absorb our interest.<sup>93</sup>

The problematic materiality of their communication required extensive attention:

The bulky notes necessitate greater circumspection; the difficulty of procuring writing materials assumes a serious aspect. Every available scrap of paper is exhausted; margins of stray newspapers and magazines have been penciled on, the contents repeatedly erased, and the frayed tatters microscopically covered with ink. Even an occasional fly-leaf from library books

---

<sup>91</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>92</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, pp. 180–182.

<sup>93</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

dressed and capable of action.”<sup>22</sup> Textual publics cohere with Taylor’s metatopical space, one that “knits a plurality of spaces into one larger space of nonassembly.”<sup>23</sup> Text-based publics extend beyond friends to include strangers, combine both personal and impersonal modes of address, work on a temporal rhythm of publication, and help constitute a life world by circulating among readers/listeners whose attention is constitutive of “the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse.”<sup>24</sup>

Goldman’s and Berkman’s publics illustrate the intertwining of these three levels of publicity. At the grandest level, they imagined “the People,” “the masses,” “the workers,” or “the oppressed” as their audience and their potential comrades. Struggle over the meaning of the multitude occupied them throughout their lives, yet they never ceased to negotiate some relationship with humanity itself. Yet, as a practical matter, there must be mailing lists, lecture halls, bookstores, and other locations for distribution of texts so that this imaginary audience, the People, can be addressed. So the most general level of public within which anarchists circulated their words still bore a *de facto* relation to identifiable geographic areas and social groupings.

At Warner’s second level, Goldman’s extensive audiences for her lectures and speeches constituted something like a theatrical public, a crowd that could know itself by shared attendance at a public event. By my estimate, Goldman gave over 10,000 speeches during her political career. Like William Jennings Bryant and other successful turn-of-the-century orators, her lectures drew thousands of listeners, combining political education, organizing, and entertainment. Goldman estimated that, during the years of touring in the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she spoke to 50,000–75,000

---

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 90.

people annually.<sup>25</sup> Her lectures were often sites where the emergent anarchist counterpublic rubbed shoulders with other political dispositions, inciting conversations among radicals and liberals over shared agendas such as freedom of speech or access to birth control. Also a respected lecturer, Berkman's public-creating skills were strongest in militant labor circles, while Goldman's topical publics brought radical and liberal audiences together to experience the possibilities of coalition.

At the third level, the one that most concerns Warner, the anarchists spoke into existence the counterpublic to which they addressed themselves. Their addressees were to some extent projections, "always yet to be realized."<sup>26</sup> Their anarchist counterpublic included friends, acquaintances, and identifiable groups (such as militant unions, alternative theatre companies, anarchist colonies, radical educators, and civil libertarians) while extending further into the realm of strangers and operating under the surveillance of the authorities. Goldman and Berkman maintained offices (which were periodically raided by the police), kept subscriber lists (sometimes confiscated), corresponded with readers who invited the anarchists to lecture in their communities (frequently prohibited by local authorities), and set up talks at which copies of *Mother Earth*, *The Blast*, and other anarchist publications would be available for purchase (when not seized and destroyed). Always there was an excess of possible readers, a combination of known individuals and groups along with a yet-to-be tapped reservoir of potential members and an alert constituency of enemies.

Taking Goldman and Berkman as the lens through which to examine the workings of counterpublics, the distinctions that Warner draws recede in significance while the interactions among the levels stand out. Goldman and Berkman addressed the broadest possi-

---

<sup>25</sup> Peter Glassgold (ed.), *Anarchy! An Anthology of Emma Goldman's Mother Earth* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2001), p. xxvi.

<sup>26</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 73.

contact with comrades and sustained her participation in making anarchist worlds.

## Prison as Public Space

While prison, as Gramsci observed, is a poor place to write, Berkman's prison writings offer a condensed site for analyzing the complex struggle to create a counterpublic by addressing it. When Berkman first entered prison, he found the People sorely lacking. The young anarchist expressed near comic disappointment in his fellow inmates for their lack of class nobility or revolutionary consciousness: "they do not belong to the People, to whose service my life is consecrated."<sup>87</sup> Yet over time he moves from pity and condescension to intimacy and love: "Daily association dispels the myth of the 'species' and reveals the individual. Growing intimacy discovers the humanity beneath the fibers coarsened by lack of opportunity, and brutalized by misery and fear."<sup>88</sup> His apocalyptic revolutionary expectations were mediated by the daunting circumstances of long imprisonment. In a December 1901 letter to Goldman he reflected on their former thinking, when "wisdom [was] dear at the price of enthusiasm" and "our eyes were riveted upon the Dawn."<sup>89</sup> Yet it was not his revolutionary commitments that changed. At the end of his prison term, he still believed: "On the wings of an all-absorbing love I hastened to join the struggle of the oppressed people."<sup>90</sup> Rather, it was his understanding of the complex human beings who might come to participate in anarchist publics that underwent thoughtful, painful rethinking.

Berkman's prison writing began with letters. When fellow anarchists Carl Nold and Henry Bauer joined Berkman in prison, they

---

<sup>87</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, p. 140.

<sup>88</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

<sup>89</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 421.

<sup>90</sup> Berkman, *Prison Memoirs*, *op. cit.*, p. 482.

While a common way to imagine public speech is the metaphor of conversation, Warner points out that public words involve much more than the back-and-forth of dialogue: the utterances and responses of public address are located in “potentially infinite axes of citation and characterization.”<sup>83</sup> The metaphor of conversation suggests that first you have two speakers, then they talk to one another. The analogy is too tame and stable for the open-endedness and multi-layeredness of publics, too much about persuasion and argument, not enough about the world-making expressivity of calling worlds into being through imaginative speech.

The utter tenacity and indefatigability of Goldman’s and Berkman’s struggles can be understood as an unflagging commitment to anarchist world-making. Berkman lovingly characterized the circulation of prison letters as “a fresh mountain streamlet joyfully rippling through a stagnant swamp.”<sup>84</sup> The anarchists wrote and spoke themselves into collective life, and when they could not imagine addressing a public capable of comprehending them, they despaired. Berkman committed suicide in 1936 when the toll of imprisonment and exile, compounded by illness and the withering of anarchist counterpublics, produced what Warner aptly characterizes as “political depressiveness, a blockage in activity and optimism, a disintegration of politics toward isolation, frustration, anomie, forgetfulness.”<sup>85</sup> Goldman believed that, had Berkman comprehended the robust anarchist possibilities of the Spanish revolution, “he would have made an effort to continue living ... the chance to serve our Spanish comrades in their gallant fight would have strengthened his hold on life.”<sup>86</sup> While Goldman also suffered in exile, her prodigious letter-writing maintained her

---

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>84</sup> Alexander Berkman, *Prison Memoirs of an Anarchist* (New York: New York Review of Books, 1999), p. 179.

<sup>85</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 70.

<sup>86</sup> Goldman’s 1937 introduction in Alexander Berkman, *What Is Anarchism?* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), p. xi.

ble public, which they imagined as The People, even as they came to doubt the masses’ capacity to “wake up.” The anarchists directly addressed the third level, the textual counterpublic, in their indefatigable production and circulation of written words. Candace Falk notes that there was “a strong written and oral tradition among anarchists.”<sup>27</sup> These traditions included a well developed material circuitry by which texts were produced and distributed, social conditions of access were facilitated, terms of intelligibility were made available, and practices of “genre, idiolect, style, address, and so on” were articulated and contested.<sup>28</sup> Both writers flourished in part because a vigorous “culture of circulation” already existed, yet they also helped to materialize that culture by the act of addressing it. They used the second level of public, the physical assembling of an audience for a public event, as a vehicle to draw more of the masses into the circle of comrades: that is, the second kind of public constituted their opportunity to recruit from the first level, the broader public, into the third, the focused textual counterpublic.

Goldman’s unique epistolary writing style exemplified a mixing of personal with impersonal forms of address. She wrote over 200,000 letters during her lifetime, and her letters were often the basis for her speeches, essays, books, and subsequent letters.<sup>29</sup> A letter, of course, is addressed to someone in particular, a known correspondent-in-the-flesh. Sometimes she sent carbon copies of her letters, which could be pamphlet-sized epistles (especially those to Berkman) to other correspondents, then built on the themes of letters addressed to a particular person to create an

---

<sup>27</sup> Candace Falk, “Forging Her Place: An Introduction,” in Falk, Barry Pateman, and Jessica Moran (eds), *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, vol. I, *Made for America, 1890–1901* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Drinnon and Anna Maria Drinnon (eds), *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman* (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. xiv.

impersonal document addressed to strangers. Berkman's prison letters similarly, albeit on a much smaller scale, segued into the journal *Prison Blossoms*, invoking a radical prison micropublic. While Warner insists on a distinction between "an implied addressee of rhetoric and a targeted public of circulation," the anarchists' mixed genres suggest more intimate linkages among these relations.<sup>30</sup> Warner maintains "that publics are different from persons, that the address of public rhetoric is never going to be the same as address to actual persons."<sup>31</sup> Yet, the epistolary style bleeds between personal and impersonal and in the process knits together modes of address to particular others with those to a generalized public.

For purposes of my explorations of anarchist counterpublics, the following aspects are particularly relevant: publics are multiple, temporal sites of struggle, anchored in concrete material spaces, and capable of enhancing the lives of their participants through the world-making practices of political struggle. In the next sections, I chart some of the key ingredients of anarchist political worlds to show *how* they worked as counterpublics. Bringing the analytic energy of counterpublics to anarchism does more than describe the same phenomena in different language; it forces fresh aspects of anarchism to the fore, compelling new insights. In the final section, I use these insights to put pressure on Warner's and Taylor's analyses, expanding them to be more capacious with regard to anarchist worlds.

## 1. Publics are multiple and fluid

They are "potentially infinite in number" and composed of multiple, interactive layers.<sup>32</sup> Gerard Hauser offers the image of

---

<sup>30</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 72.

<sup>31</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), p. 90.

anti-anarchist laws. When Goldman and Berkman were arrested on June 15, 1917, the day the Espionage Act passed, *The Blast* ceased publication. *Mother Earth*, in the hands of Stella Cominsky and Fitzi Fitzgerald, struggled on until August 1917, publishing vivid accounts of Goldman's and Berkman's trial; after closure, it was resurrected for six months as the smaller *Mother Earth Bulletin*, again confiscated by authorities (this time for publishing an account of the lynching of 13 black soldiers at an army base in Texas), and followed yet again by a brief underground newsletter, *Instead of a Magazine*. In July 1918, with Goldman and Berkman in prison, federal agents raided Fitzgerald's apartment in Greenwich Village, closed down the newsletter and the Mother Earth Book Shop, and circulated the names of 8,000 subscribers to federal intelligence agencies. A series of nationwide arrests followed: thousands of people were seized, often held incommunicado for weeks, and charged with vague crimes; few were convicted, but about 800 "undesirable aliens" were eventually deported, Berkman and Goldman among them. Until the end, official persecution by the authorities immediately became grist for subsequent publications: trial transcripts and letters from prison, along with accounts of arrests and confiscations, were featured in subsequent issues, in a persistent ballet of circulations, seizures, and counter circulations of words.

## 5. The absence of a public or counterpublic is damaging to human potential

Publics, Warner insists, are world-making. To address a public is to be motivated by the relationships such address enables, to participate in the constitution of a formative social imaginary. The poetics of public discourse is performative. Its speeches and performances "try to specify in advance, in countless highly condensed ways, the lifeworld of its circulation."<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 114.

#### 4. Publics are both sites and products of struggle

Publics always have histories in which the “preconditions of [their] intelligibility” are produced and contested; at the same time, publics exceed and confound their own enabling circumstances and maintain an ambiguous relation to conscious political action.<sup>78</sup> Warner notes that “when people address publics, they engage in struggles—at varying levels of salience to consciousness, from calculated tactic to mute cognitive noise—over the conditions that bring them together as a public.”<sup>79</sup> Yet the conditions of struggle are not fully within the domain of conscious reflection. They also operate metapragmatically, within “the very notion of a public or by the medium through which a public comes into being.”<sup>80</sup>

In Goldman’s and Berkman’s worlds, the conditions of struggle were frequently overt and continuous. One of anarchism’s many ironies is that this fiercely independent counterpublic could not help but be formed, in Craig Calhoun’s words, “by struggle against the dominant organization of others.”<sup>81</sup> State and capitalist authorities identified Goldman and Berkman as public enemies. They were viewed as the terrorists of their time, minor participants in a series of assassinations and attempted assassinations that by World War I had targeted 15 heads of state.

While government harassment probably contributed to the mystique surrounding the journal, it also hampered its public-making endeavors. The police seized radical literature when they arrested radicals. The Post Office frequently delayed circulation or confiscated issues altogether. The US Post Office confiscated the June and August 1917, issues of *Mother Earth* because the journal’s opposition to conscription was defined as espionage under the era’s

<sup>78</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 9.

<sup>79</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>80</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>81</sup> Craig Calhoun, “Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), p. 162.

a reticulate structure of discursive sites, a network of emergent processes.<sup>33</sup> Warner elaborates:

No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium. All are insufficient to create the kind of reflexivity that we call a public, since a public is understood to be an ongoing space of encounter for discourse. Not texts themselves create publics, but the concatenation of texts through time.<sup>34</sup>

A “concatenation of texts” is a good description of the radical émigré communities of New York City. Goldman has often been heralded as “ahead of her time,” but in fact she was very much *of* her time, an active node in networks of textual reflexivity by which anarchism constituted itself in discourse and institutions. In 1919 Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, making his case to the Senate for even more stringent anti-red laws, helpfully cataloged the available radical publications into 222 in foreign languages, 105 in English, 144 published in foreign countries and distributed in the US, and “hundreds of books, pamphlets, and other publications which also receive wide circulation.”<sup>35</sup> Well-known journals included the Italian-language *Cronaca Sovversiva (Subversive Chronicle)* edited by Luigi Galleani; Benjamin Tucker’s *Liberty*; *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, edited by two of the Haymarket martyrs; *Regeneración*, a Spanish-language paper edited by Mexican revolutionary Ricardo Flores Magón; Johann Most’s *Freiheit*; and the long-running Yiddish-language paper *Freie Arbeiter Stimme*

<sup>33</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice, Letter from the Attorney General (November 17, 1919) 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, Senate Doc No. 153 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 11.

(*Free Voice of Labor*). Texts circulated in nearly every European and many Asian languages and, eventually, in English.

Texts always happen in spaces. Popular theater productions and weekly lectures were robust sites for the circulation of texts: not only were spoken texts produced in these spaces, and specific self-recognizing publics constituted by attendance, but books, pamphlets, and journals were often sold there as well. Salons, homes, cafés, editorial offices, community centers, pubs, union halls, free schools, court rooms, and art exhibits were sites for the “concatenation of texts” through time. The hundreds of radical publications that so worried Attorney General Palmer, while concentrated in the New York area, were not limited to the east coast: Robert Reitzel edited the successful German-language literary weekly *Der arme Teufel* (*The Poor Devil*) in Detroit; Paris, Illinois, was the home of *The Truth Seeker*, the oldest freethinker publication in the world; Moses and Lillian Harman edited the weekly sex radical publication *Lucifer, the Lightbearer* in Valley Falls, Kansas. Goldman and Berkman raised money for anarchist journals like *Free Society* and *The Firebrand* as well as their own publications. Their dense network of citational references and social encounters took place within a horizon of intelligibility whose modes of articulation, address, and consumption made anarchism thinkable.

## 2. Publics are located in relation to material life spaces

While counterpublics are not the same as subcultures, the former must have a constitutive link to the latter. A subculture both makes and is made by its counterpublics. Life spaces have certain characteristic elements that are formative for publics. Warner explains:

To address a public or to think of oneself as belonging to a public is to be a certain kind of person, to inhabit

Goldman was a master at anarchist time: she regularly identified the opportunities and worked to produce the memorial services, annual dinners, commemorative marches, and other “discursive forms, practices, and artifacts” that, as Gaonkar and Povinelli explain, “carry out their routine ideological labor of constituting subjects who could be summoned in the name of a public or a people.”<sup>73</sup> These events, repeated through dogged insistence and the continuous re-telling of anarchist counter-histories, produced a lively literature of protest, which in turn was the vehicle for reinforcing the counter-memories, in a continuous chain of circulations. Additionally, each node in the temporal chain was a fund-raising opportunity. For example, it was Goldman’s idea to organize annual commemorations of Ferrer’s death across the US to remind people of the outrage against a man widely seen as “a martyr of free thought, done to death by a vindictive clericalism in league with a reactionary state.”<sup>74</sup> Anarchists were joined by liberals, socialists, and people of many progressive strains to condemn the execution of another Socrates. Jack London recalled, “It were as if New England had, in the twentieth century, resumed her ancient practice of burning witches.”<sup>75</sup> By 1910, 25 cities had memorial gatherings for Ferrer; the largest, in New City, brought 5000 people to Cooper Union “to pay tribute to the Spanish martyr.”<sup>76</sup> At these events, organizers raised funds to support what eventually became a network of 22 Modern Schools across the US, a fitting commemoration for a teacher whose last words, when facing the firing squad, were “Long live the Modern School.”<sup>77</sup> These temporal practices cemented a cadence of ritual memory sustaining public affect.

---

<sup>73</sup> Gaonkar and Povinelli, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 389.

<sup>74</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, p. 30.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>76</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

<sup>77</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, *op. cit.*

*Mother Earth* relied on certain practices of reflexivity to generate the needed ongoing feedback loops. Short, punchy articles were accompanied by activist reports and scornful (but carefully calibrated) defiance of Comstock laws and other vehicles of censorship. Readers' relations to other readers were coordinated through ongoing debates, letters and responses, and appeals for funds and support. A regular feature called "Comments and Observations" offered "brief, occasionally humorous news items, miniature editorials, and follow-ups relating to previous issues of the magazine—a kind of anarchist 'Talk of the Town.'" <sup>71</sup> Ongoing attention to subsequent journal issues was cultivated by serial publication of some of the longer works. Cover art by Robert Minor, Jules-Félix Granjouan, Adolf Wolff, Man Ray, and Manuel Komroff cultivated readers' attention. <sup>72</sup> Chatty announcements and advertisements notified readers of anarchist activities and events, such as the opening of anarchist bookstores; upcoming masquerade balls, dances, and parties (usually fundraisers); lectures, mass meetings, and commemorations of landmark anarchist events; and other anarchist publications made available through the Mother Earth Publishing Association. The journal's temporal rhythms and self-reflexive circuits were constitutive of anarchism's intelligibility.

Another temporal source of meaning for anarchist counterpublics was the ritual recognition of key historical events. The executions of the Haymarket martyrs in 1887, Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer in 1909, and Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 were fertile moments of international protest and collective anger; the annual remembrance of these deaths produced a regular periodicity shaping the social imaginary. Similarly, the anniversaries of outrages against labor—Homestead, Ludlow, and Hazelton—were occasions to organize time in ways that made "we" possible.

---

<sup>71</sup> Glassgold, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. xvii.

<sup>72</sup> Glassgold, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

a certain kind of social world, to have at one's disposal certain media and genres, to be motivated by a certain normative horizon, and to speak within a certain language ideology. <sup>36</sup>

This "kind of person" taps the prevailing construction of subject positions and identity practices within a particular counterpublic. The "social world" flags the habitus, "the conventions by which we experience, as though naturally, our own bodies and movement in the space of the world." <sup>37</sup> The last three characteristics in Warner's list constitute the anarchist social imaginary: "media and genres" indicate the salient forms of articulation and communication constituting the available interpretive practices. "Normative horizon" taps the cultural, religious, and political values formative within communities, and "language ideology" gets at the discursive universe of intelligibility by which ideas can be enunciated and solutions to problems formulated.

On one level, the life space within which Goldman participated in anarchist counterpublics was her own immigrant Jewish female body, a physical site so improbable for public discourse that it was heavily scrutinized by incredulous observers. Newspaper accounts of Goldman's speeches frequently began with the observation that she was "clean." Nelly Bly's sympathetic interview with Goldman on the front page of the *New York World* noted that Goldman "loves her bath." <sup>38</sup> The press was obsessed with the details of her physical appearance, commenting extensively on her wardrobe, and in her youth continuously surprised at her "good looks." <sup>39</sup> Later representations of Goldman portrayed her as big, rawboned, loud, crude, and mannish. Yet Goldman was less than five feet tall, with a slender build in her youth, becoming matronly as she aged. She dressed

---

<sup>36</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p.10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>38</sup> Falk, "Forging Her Place," p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

stylishly; in one memorable letter to her niece Stella Cominsky, she carefully specified the hat, gloves and collars she needed in order to properly dress for her release from prison.<sup>40</sup> While no doubt personal vanity was one consideration, Goldman was well aware of the anxieties her public presence evoked. She spoke in public; she smoked cigars; she declined to participate in the conjugal domestic family; she talked authoritatively about politics, religion, and sex. She negotiated a thicket of heteronormative expectations about bodies and publics, upsetting persistent stereotypes about unwashed immigrants, dirty Jews, and mannish unwomen.

Berkman's embodied presence in public life was less remarked upon than Goldman's, both because he was a man and because he was not a celebrity as Goldman became. Yet his personal demeanor and presentation, like hers always punctiliously respectable, took their significance from the larger space of embodied danger in which the two anarchists lived. Anarchist spaces were filled with violence. Everywhere that Goldman and Berkman traveled, they spoke and worked with people who were shot, clubbed, and trampled by public and private security forces during strikes and other protests. Between 1877 and 1903, state and federal troops were sent 500 times to put down strikes.<sup>41</sup> Equally violent were the private security forces. Corporations raised "powerful private armies that often operated outside the law" while detective agencies provided strikebreakers, armed guards, and labor spies.<sup>42</sup> Politically active radicals in the US during this volatile time could not take for granted that they would be physically safe; their bodies were not secure. Additionally, routine arrests, constant official harassment, ever-present and potentially fatal danger

---

<sup>40</sup> Drinnon and Drinnon, *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Falk, "Forging Her Place," pp. 19–20.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 4.

fired back their volleys of words and evaded capture in order to carry on again tomorrow. Recalling her days printing *Frayhayt* illegally and distributing it clandestinely, Sonya Deanin remembered, "It was holy work, you know, to distribute our literature, to spread the word."<sup>68</sup> Others used similar spiritual language to speak of the struggle to produce the printed word: Bronka Greenberg, one of four young people who ran an underground press in Warsaw in the 1930s, remembered, "The press was our most treasured possession. It must be kept safe at all costs." Working in isolation and secrecy, they printed a few hundred copies, distributed them immediately, and then returned to their disguised print shop to do it again. Greenberg recalled, "It was sacred work."<sup>69</sup>

Anarchist schools taught printing, passing the crucial skills of circulation to subsequent generations. Anarchist cultures of circulation were further enhanced by vigorous grassroots commitments to translation. There were several anarchist bookstores and numerous booksellers.

Multilingual anarchist communities made each others' writings available through creative labors of circulation, which are also labors of production. The interlocking networks of printers, translators, and booksellers helped sustain the "ongoing life" of anarchist publics. Warner explains,

It's the way texts circulate, and become the basis for further representations, that convinces us that publics have activity and duration. A text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time, and because this can only be confirmed through an intertextual environment of citation and implication, all publics are intertextual, even intergeneric.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>68</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, *op. cit.*, p. 336.

<sup>69</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, *op. cit.*, p. 465.

<sup>70</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 97.

related” so that the form of circulation both conveys and conducts social life.<sup>63</sup>

The flow and the form came together in the person and the machine of the anarchist printer. The materiality of the printers’ skilled laboring bodies and the presses’ irreplaceable mechanical productions held pride of place in anarchist communities. Along with garment work, printing was one of the most common trades of anarchists, especially among the Jews. Joseph Ishill, widely known as “the anarchist printer,” operated the Berkeley Heights Press for more than 40 years, producing approximately 250 books and pamphlets “whose publication through the usual commercial channels was unfeasible.”<sup>64</sup> Ishill was a crucial link in the political economy of circulation, selecting texts by major anarchist thinkers, lovingly printing them with the greatest artistry, and adorning them with woodcuts and engravings by well-known artists.<sup>65</sup> Joseph Labadie, founder of the Labadie Collection of radical literature at the University of Michigan, was a well-known anarchist printer, as was his son Laurance, who inherited his father’s small hand press and his passion for anarchism.<sup>66</sup> Berkman himself was a printer. Pedro Esteve, a leader among the Spanish anarchists in the US, was a printer in Tampa and set type for *La Question Sociale* in Paterson.<sup>67</sup>

The role of the printer was respected, even revered, within anarchist publics. Regardless of their professed atheism, anarchists were people of the book. The printers’ labors sometimes resembled a guerrilla war on hegemony; outnumbered and on the run, they

---

<sup>63</sup> Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, “Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition,” *Public Culture* 15:3 (2003), p. 387.

<sup>64</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, (2006), p. 257.

<sup>65</sup> Ishill became the printer in residence for the University of Florida in 1964. Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, op. cit., p. 259.

<sup>66</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, op. cit., p. 398.

of spies and provocateurs—such conditions created a painfully disruptive personal and symbolic space while putting a high premium on friendship and loyalty. This level of violence strains yet also intensifies the social imaginary: it fractures and at the same time binds the implicit understandings that enable common practices.

Beyond the immediate space of their own embodiment, Berkman and Goldman participated in multiple loosely affiliated, overlapping groupings, including the following:

a. Eastern European, Italian, and Jewish immigrants

Until 1893, Goldman spoke and wrote mostly in German, Russian, and Yiddish to “the formidable immigrant non-English-speaking subculture,” and in many cities she gave two sets of lectures, one “English,” the other “Jewish.” While Goldman became a household name in America, the immigrant Left remained “her loyal audience and refuge.”<sup>43</sup> Although Berkman’s formative 14 years in prison severed him from the Lower East Side, he nonetheless wrote his prison letters and journal first in German, later switching to English to broaden circulation. Both anarchists developed ties to the militant Italian anarchist communities and worked in exile for the release of Sacco and Vanzetti. They worked with immigrant organizations sponsoring speeches, organizing demonstrations, establishing schools, publishing pamphlets, papers and newsletters, and in myriad other ways put texts into circulation among immigrant workers.

b. Progressive labor organizations and individuals

In 1894, while Berkman was in prison, Goldman began to criticize the “flamboyant insularity” of the radical immigrant subpublics and began lecturing in English to wider

---

<sup>43</sup> Falk “Forging Her Place”, p. 21.

audiences.<sup>44</sup> She found support for her campaign to reduce Berkman's prison sentence in the United Mine Workers of America. She made common cause with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), who fought for free speech because it was an organizing issue for labor. Even more so than Goldman, Berkman remained focused on labor: he participated in radical labor actions in California, organized the unemployed in New York, and supported striking miners in Ludlow, Colorado.<sup>45</sup> Both Goldman and Berkman moved toward syndicalism as the economic underpinning of anarchism, looking to labor and the general strike as agents and vehicles of social change.

c. Radical women. (*including many from the other four categories in this list*)

Candace Falk observes that Goldman addressed “a growing movement of women drawn to but often not completely satisfied with suffrage solutions.”<sup>46</sup> Goldman spoke to The Women's National Liberal Union; The Ladies Liberal League in Philadelphia, organized by anarchists Voltairine de Cleyre and Natasha Notkin; and women's clubs and congresses in the US and Europe. Both *The Blast* and *Mother Earth* supported the movement to wrest information about birth control from the forbidden category of “obscenity” and make it widely available to women, stressing the constituent connections between women's reproductive unfreedom, on the one hand, and the interests of the capitalists in producing docile workers and the state in growing cannon fodder for future wars, on the other. The anarchist movement, like the IWW, was generally hospitable to women, many

<sup>44</sup> Falk *op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>45</sup> Barry Pateman, “Introduction,” in Alexander Berkman, *What Is Anarchism?* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), pp. iv–v.

<sup>46</sup> Falk, “Forging Her Place,” p. 29.

*Mother Earth* were a happening of anarchism. The reliable punctuality of circulation was crucial to the shared sense of participating in discussion “unfolding in a sphere of activity.”<sup>59</sup> The temporality of a textual public is “not timeless,” Warner explains, and “not without issue”—“the more punctual and abbreviated the circulation, and the more discourse indexes the punctuality of its own circulation, the closer a public stands to politics.”<sup>60</sup> In this light, it is understandable that the creators of struggling anarchist publications would insist on frequent and regular appearance. Anarchism is often understood primarily in psychological terms, as the offspring of well-meaning dreamers or driven fanatics; shifting attention to the temporal rhythms of publications calls on us to ask less about anarchists' motivations and more about what they were able to accomplish. The circulation itself is an active part of the process, not the “inert opposite” of the writing.<sup>61</sup> Of the 60 anarchist and other progressive publications documented by the editors of the *Emma Goldman Papers* and by historian Paul Avrich, 28 were weeklies, 19 were monthlies, six were semi-monthly, three were dailies, two were biweekly, and only two were variable.<sup>62</sup> Journals' frequency and regularity are not simply traits of instrumental delivery vehicles for a politics that happens elsewhere—they *are* the politics, part of the ongoing production of public temporality. As Gaonkar and Povinelli explain, the “flows and forms are integrally

<sup>59</sup> Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, p. 96.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>61</sup> Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, “Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity,” *Public Culture* 14:1 (2002), p. 192.

<sup>62</sup> See the “Directory of Periodicals” in Falk, Pateman, and Moran, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 563–569; vol. II, pp. 549–554; and vol. III, forthcoming. My thanks to the editors for generously sharing the Directory for volume III. See also “List of Periodicals” in Avrich, *Anarchist Voices*, pp. 529–534.

flagging efforts were made to constitute and sustain anarchist public spaces.

### 3. Publics have their own temporality

Warner calls our attention to “a temporality of circulation,” “a regular flow of discourse” that organizes time, as time organizes it: “Public discourse is contemporary, and it is oriented to the future; the contemporaneity and the futurity in question are those of its own circulation.”<sup>56</sup> He emphasizes the importance of “newsletters and other temporally structured forms oriented to their own circulation” in forming textual publics.<sup>57</sup> Usually, in studying anarchist publications, the controversial content of the material stands out; but Warner calls our attention to the temporal regularity and common calendar of publications—not so much what was said, but the pace and timing with which discourse was put into circulation. Anarchists cultivated a remarkable proclivity toward regular, clearly dated publications. In the case of *Mother Earth*, Goldman’s annual lecture tours were part of the regularity of the cycle of monthly publication. Goldman reported back from the field, informing readers about anarchist activities in other regions. Her animated field reports served as radical travelogues for readers unable to visit other regions, building geographic familiarity that helped people imagine themselves as part of a larger anarchist landscape.<sup>58</sup>

*Mother Earth* regularly marked the anarchist counterpublic by producing it in discourse. No wonder, then, that Goldman and Berkman struggled so hard to maintain the journal despite scarce resources and government harassment: it was not simply that anarchism happened elsewhere and *Mother Earth* reported it, but that the acts of writing, soliciting, editing, producing, and circulating

<sup>56</sup> Warner, *Public and Counterpublics*, p. 94.

<sup>57</sup> Warner, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

<sup>58</sup> Falk, “Raising Her Voices: An Introduction,” in Falk, Pateman, and Moran, vol. II, pp. 48–49.

of whom were successful orators, organizers, and writers. While Goldman and a few others are often portrayed as the archetypal activists of the first wave of feminism, an extensive, diffuse web of radical women helped to form, and were in turn formed by, anarchist and related radical publics.

#### d. “Native” liberals

It was a source of much contention in the anarchist movement, particularly with Berkman, when Goldman began participating in non-immigrant, English-speaking liberal political circles, the groups Falk characterizes as “the lively edge of the liberal reform mainstream.”<sup>47</sup> While Berkman and others feared that Goldman was diluting anarchism’s radical edge, she was also expanding its public presence. Goldman spoke to the Liberal Clubs, which “adhered to free thought principles and focused especially on protesting the role of organized religion in state affairs.”<sup>48</sup> She forged a friendship with young Roger Baldwin and contributed to the organization of the Free Speech League and the American Civil Liberties Union.<sup>49</sup> She addressed Single Tax clubs, Freethinkers, Social Science Clubs, philosophical societies, church congregations, and literary societies.

While Berkman was less enthusiastic than Goldman about allying with liberals, he nonetheless worked closely, as did Goldman, with the Ferrer Association and the Modern School movement, one of the key opportunities for linking

<sup>47</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

<sup>48</sup> “Directory of Organizations,” in Falk, Pateman, and Moran, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, p. 572.

<sup>49</sup> See “Directory of Organizations,” in Candace Falk, Barry Pateman, and Jessica Moran (eds), *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years*, vol. II, *Making Speech Free, 1902–1909* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 557–558.

anti-authoritarian middle class liberals with immigrant, working-class radicals.<sup>50</sup> Goldman looked for pregnant intersections, where partial interests converged, and built on them. She “crossed over” to speak with groups who often viewed anarchists as the lunatic fringe, yet entertained some partial convergence with anarchist ideas, especially ideas about free speech, birth control, and other individualistic causes which did not necessarily require a critique of capitalism. By 1906, when *Mother Earth* made its debut, this successful anarchist journal reached a broad left/liberal audience of as many as 10,000 readers.<sup>51</sup> By pushing these audiences to consider a more fully radical critique of existing institutions, and to embrace anarchism’s vision of social transformation, Goldman’s coalition politics connected anarchist counterpublics with more conventional life spaces.

e. Progressive international audiences

Goldman assumed the role of “anarchist emissary,” contributing to the creation of international counterpublics by reporting back to America about European activism, and vice versa.<sup>52</sup> She brought foreign anarchists to visit the US, setting up speaking tours for British anarchist John Turner and Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. Her labor helped create “an informal pan-national exchange.”<sup>53</sup> In her campaign to reduce Berkman’s prison sentence, she internationalized the protests, drawing support from England, Scotland, France, Germany, Russia, and Austria. Both *The Blast* and *Mother Earth* carried news of rebellious politics

---

<sup>50</sup> Paul Avrich, *The Modern School Movement: Anarchism and Education in the United States* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2006), pp. 42–52.

<sup>51</sup> Glassgold, *Anarchy!*, p. xxii.

<sup>52</sup> Falk, “Forging Her Place,” p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> Falk, *op. cit.*

around the world, linking radical labor, education, and anti-colonial struggles. The global anarchist counterpublic also tapped the single tax movement in Scotland, England, and Germany; anarchist individuals and groups in Asia and South America (who often translated Goldman’s essays); and anti-war activism around the world.

f. Unique anarchist spaces

Ironically, given the common equation of anarchism with chaos, anarchists have an impressive record of creating separate institutions run on libertarian principles. This form of direct action creates an example of the new, free society within the belly of the old. Berkman, Goldman, and other anarchists were the main force behind the Modern School movement, an international effort to create non-authoritarian and joyous learning environments based on the educational philosophy of martyred Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer.<sup>54</sup> The schools also served as evening schools for adults and as community centers; the most famous, the Ferrer Center in New York City, was a vibrant source of anarchist art, drama, and literature until forced to close in 1918.<sup>55</sup> Several anarchist “colonies”—intentional anarchist communities—flourished in the US, notably at Stelton, NJ, Mohegan, NY, and Home, WA. *Mother Earth* and *The Blast* carried regular announcements of meetings of radical libraries, current events circles, dances, concerts, dinners, and other events at which audiences were assembled, anarchist texts were put into circulation, and un-

---

<sup>54</sup> While the movement had its greatest success in the US, numerous Modern Schools were created in Spain before state suppression closed them down; schools were also founded in Brazil, Argentina, China, Japan, and Europe. Nearly all of the former students of the Modern Schools interviewed by Paul Avrich in *Anarchist Voices: An Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005) had strong positive memories of their early anarchist educations.

<sup>55</sup> Avrich, *The Modern School Movement*, p. 272.