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Anarchist Printers and Presses

Material Circuits of Politics

Kathy E. Ferguson

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Author Biography

Kathy E. Ferguson teaches political science and women's studies at the University of Hawai'i. Her main research interests are in anarchism, feminist theory, and militarization. Publications include *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011) and "Bringing Gender into the Evangelical-Capitalist Resonance Machine," *Political Theology* 12, no. 2 (2011): 184–94.

I am not insisting that the press–printer relation is the only, or even the best, candidate for this productive political role. There could be many other technologies of radical communities, other lively material sites in which, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth explain, “persistent, repetitious practices of power can simultaneously provide a body (or, better, collectivized bodies) with predicaments and potentials for realizing a world that subsists within and exceeds the horizons and boundaries of the norm.”¹⁰¹ In Occupy Wall Street, for example, the park itself, the creative human microphone, the daily challenges of solving problems in order to go on—these are all creative processes calling assemblages into being and enabling collective projects via shared material practices. Perhaps anarchists working in cyberspace cultivate a comparable, mutually creative and open-ended relation with the tools of their trade. Attending patiently to multidirectional relations among loosely bounded actants can be a way to nurture liveliness in both our theories and our things.

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¹⁰¹ Seigworth and Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 7.

Abstract

Printers and presses were central to the physical and social reproduction of the classical anarchist movement from the Paris Commune to the Second World War. Anarchists produced an environment rich in printed words by creating and circulating hundreds of journals, books, and pamphlets in dozens of languages. While some scholars and activists have examined the content of these publications, little attention has been paid to the printing process, the physical infrastructure and bodily practices producing and circulating this remarkable outpouring of radical public speech. This paper brings the resources of the new materialism into conversation with the networks of anarchist printers and presses. Printers and presses operated as nodal points, horizontal linkages among the objects, persons, desires, and ideas constituting anarchist assemblages. In their publishing practices, anarchists may have implicitly identified a constitutive condition of possibility for the flourishing of radical political communities in our time as well as theirs.

Introduction

Printers and presses were central to the physical and social reproduction of the classical anarchist movement from the Paris Commune to the Second World War.¹ Anarchist communities usually organized around their publications. The technology of publishing required many skilled printers, and commercial print shops often rejected anarchist materials, so the movement needed its own printers and presses. Consequently, printing was one of the most common occupations of anarchists. Anarchists produced an environment rich in printed words by cre-

¹ While publications were central to anarchists around the world, I am focusing here on the U.S. and England.

ating and circulating hundreds of journals, books, pamphlets, leaflets, cards, and posters in dozens of languages. While some scholars and activists have examined the content of these publications, little attention has been paid to the form, the physical infrastructure and bodily practices producing and circulating this remarkable outpouring of radical public speech.

My goal is to bring the resources of the new materialism into conversation with the networks of anarchist printers and presses and with the “old materialism” that has most often been called upon to analyze the printing trades. By “new materialism,” I mean those directions of thought that mute the opposition between life and nonlife in order to theorize things themselves as lively. I propose to encounter the print shops’ physical objects, pungent smells, and laboring bodies as actants that are mutually constitutive of each other and that enable anarchism’s politics. The printers’ swift hands and sharp eyes, and the presses’ mechanical operations and physical components, knit together chains of events in which each element acts upon and is acted upon by others. Printers and presses operated as nodal points, horizontal linkages among the objects, persons, desires, and ideas constituting anarchist assemblages. The printers’ bodies and the printing apparatus were ubiquitous aspects of anarchist organizing, their materiality central to the merger of intellectual and physical labor prized by anarchists in their schools and communities. The printer–press relation, reframed with the conceptual tools of the new materialism, provides a crucial supplement to older materialist analyses in accounting for the remarkable persistence of anarchism in the face of sustained onslaughts by authorities. While the stock image of the bearded, black-clad, bomb-toting anarchist prevails in the public eye, a more representative figure for the classical anarchist movement would be the printer, composing stick in hand, standing in front of the type case, making and being made by the material process for producing and circulating words.

hand but coconstitutive and emergent.⁹⁷ The relation of anarchist presses and printers to the new materialism is not simply an example or a metaphor but a way of engaging the capacities to affect and be affected of which the anarchist assemblages are capable. If, as I am suggesting here, the linkages of press–printer–publication–public were constitutive of anarchist life-worlds, then progressives today could look back toward these relations for inspiration and perhaps even guidance for enabling a better set of future prospects.⁹⁸

Benedict Anderson has taught us that “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”⁹⁹ He 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 of whose identity he has not the slightest notion.”¹⁰⁰ While 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 Anderson’s insights to see that, not just the consumption, but the production of texts also produces communities, and the materiality of bodies and presses participated actively in that production.

⁹⁷ Parikka, *Insect Media*, xxv.

⁹⁸ Here I am breaking with Latour’s argument that we should steer away from the past in order to apprehend our prospects. Instead, I look toward a recovery and rethinking of lost or neglected pasts to find inspiration for our prospects.

⁹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 35–36.

distributors, and readers. Ishill was widely respected in the movement; in his small book on Emma Goldman, he printed a letter she had written him years before, recognizing his “patient and loving labor that has brought forth works of beauty and revolt.”⁹³

Printers were also teachers. Students in the anarchist schools, called Modern Schools, learned typesetting, sometimes writing and printing their own journals. Many of the aging anarchists interviewed by Paul Avrich in the 1960s–1990s had attended the Modern schools, and the practice of setting type was an anchor for their memories. Ray Shedlovsky, later a professional singer, remembered learning from Ishill: “We printed our own magazine. We did everything ourselves—we were gardeners, we were typesetters, we were cooks. We did everything with our own two hands. I remember how I enjoyed setting type.”⁹⁴ Whether surrounded by workers and learners in busy shops and schools, or operating in more solitary circumstances, printers and presses were knitted into productive political networks. The network of the press–printer–publication–reading public is a potent example of Parikka’s confounding of technologies, humanities, and politics: they are “a contraction of forces of the world into specific resonating milieus.”⁹⁵ Their work, as Hoyt concludes about Abate and Galleani, “manages to linger on, whispering to us a century later.”⁹⁶

Anarchism is incomprehensible, I conclude, without bringing to bear the resources of both the old and the new materialisms. Parikka tells us that assemblages are products of “connecting relations”—their elements are not firmly shaped before-

⁹³ Emma Goldman to Joseph Ishill, October 1931, in Ishill, *Emma Goldman: A Challenging Rebel* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Oriole Press, 1957), 6.

⁹⁴ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Voices: A Oral History of Anarchism in America* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2005), 234.

⁹⁵ Hoyt, “Carlo Abate, Luigi Galleani,” xiv.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

Research Challenges

Several challenges present themselves to this project. First, there is the difficulty of finding thick descriptions of the work of the anarchist printers, whose labors often went unrecorded. A few of the anarchist printers, including Joseph Ishill (1888–1966) and Jo Labadie (1850–1933), have left substantial correspondence and, in Labadie’s case, a biography by his granddaughter; but these texts focus more on the content of the publications, only incidentally taking up the material process of printing. Ishill established Oriole Press and printed the Stelton Colony journal *The Modern School*, Oscar Wilde’s *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, and over two hundred anarchist books; he also taught printing at the colony’s school. In the 1960s, he was the printer in residence at the University of Florida. Thomas A. La Porte of the University of Michigan Special Collections Library notes that Ishill “has been lauded both by radicals, who recognize him for his efforts in publishing radical materials, and by fine press enthusiasts, who consider him to be one of the finest American printers and typographers of the twentieth century.”² The talented French anarchist wood engraver Louis Moreau illustrated many of Ishill’s exquisite volumes.

Jo Labadie, whose collection of anarchist materials forms the basis of the University of Michigan archive of radical literature bearing his name, was one of the tramp printers who crisscrossed the United States, working as a freelance artisan as well as organizing unions and spreading anarchist practices, before later settling in his hometown of Detroit. Labadie printed a series of labor papers and wrote articles and verse for anarchist journals. He and his colleague Judson Grennell printed more than two hundred thousand pamphlets bringing socialism and

² Introduction, “Joseph Ishill and the Authors and Artists of the Oriole Press,” <http://www.lib.umich.edu/joseph-ishill-authors-artists-oriole-press/>, February 3, 2012 (accessed September 9, 2012).

anarchism (which were often considered interchangeable) to working-class readers.³

A third anarchist printer, Carlo Abate (1860–1941) was a sculptor, printer, and engraver for the militant Italian-language journal *Cronaca Sovversiva*. While making his living as an artist and a teacher in an art school in Barre, Vermont, he created a striking visual repertoire of revolutionary icons for the journal. Andrew Hoyt’s remarkable research on *Cronaca Sovversiva* refers to Abate and Galleani’s collaboration as creating “a transnational culture of insurrection” through the use of text and images. Hoyt concludes, “The two men helped create one of the most visually vibrant and politically radical newspapers of the Italian Left.”⁴

Another source of insight into anarchist printers and presses is the centenary publication of the English anarchist journal *Freedom*. From 1886 to the present, a series of printers including Henry Seymour, Thomas Cantwell, John Turner, Harry Kelly, and Thomas Keell worked in an even greater series of London offices, shops, sheds, and homes to produce the longest-running anarchist journal in the world. Vernon Richards, a writer for *Freedom* in the late twentieth century, notes that recovering the traces of the journal’s printers is a challenge, as “the usual tradition is to relegate the names of publisher and printer to the bottom of the last column on the back page in the smallest possible type.”⁵ Nonetheless, printers and presses leave tracks in publications, letters, and memoirs. Furthermore, contemporary anarchist printers who

³ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist: Joseph A. Labadie and the Labor Movement* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 59. See also Anderson, “American Anarchism: What It Is & What It Is Not,” *the dandelion* 6, no. 22 (March 2000): 1–25.

⁴ Andrew Hoyt, “Carlo Abate, Luigi Galleani, and the Art of the *Cronaca Sovversiva*” (Unpublished paper, Department of American Studies, University of Minnesota, 2011), 8, 23.

⁵ *Freedom: A Hundred Years, October 1886–October 1986* (London: Freedom Press, 1986), 28.

“circuit of communication” did not simply reflect anarchist politics; they produced it, and produced each other, through their vigorous interactions.⁸⁹ There were so many papers, so many printers, that the printer–press relation saturated the anarchist subculture as well as spilling out into larger progressive communities; encounters of presses and their people were nodes in networks out of which anarchist politics and publics emerged. Presses were not usually “elsewhere,” but were located in the basements or backrooms of the offices or homes of their people. For many years, *Freedom* was printed in the basement of its London offices, where American anarchist and printer Harry Kelly recalled “an old world atmosphere about the office and an artistic charm to the people who conduct[ed] the paper.”⁹⁰ Czech anarchist Hippolyte Havel printed the journal *Revolt* in the basement of the Ferrer Center in New York City, which also housed a school, café, theater, library, and art center. Abate probably housed his press in his studio, to stay close to the printing process, and probably made the metal plates himself.⁹¹ Anarchist Holley Cantine printed *Revolt* in a small shed next to his home near Woodstock, New York, much as Peter Good prints *The Cunningham Amendment* in a small print shop behind his home. The Olivetti sisters printed *The Torch* in their father’s home in London.⁹² Each press had quite a few people with whom to collaborate, drawing writers, composers, binders, sellers, and readers together into horizontal chains of associations. Printers who worked in greater isolation, as did Ishill in his shop in Berkeley Heights, New Jersey, nonetheless were nourished by international networks of writers, editors,

⁸⁹ For an interesting discussion of circuits of communication, see Laurel Brake, “Writing, Cultural Production, and the Periodical Press in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Writing and Victorianism*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Essex: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 54–72.

⁹⁰ *Freedom*, 6.

⁹¹ Hoyt, “Carlo Abate, Luigi Galleani,” 10.

⁹² *Freedom*, 5.

that an emergent anarchist group did was usually to launch its own journal, rather than join an existing publication. In New York City between 1878 and 1919, for example, there were at least thirty-eight anarchist publications in circulation. The group who started the thirty-eighth journal did not, I imagine, do so primarily because they judged thirty-seven journals to be an inadequate number; they did it because they themselves wanted/needed to make (and be made by) a journal. Usually, these writers and editors did not turn to a job shop to produce the paper; rather, their printers and presses came from their own ranks. The anarchists did not look at this as unnecessary duplication of a task that could be outsourced; instead, they cherished the interactive process of making and being made by the creative practice of printing. The assemblages of printer–press–publication constitute a diffuse technology of the community, spreading across surfaces, confusing causes and effects, facilitating the emergence of something new.

Conclusion

At the turn of the last century, fifty-six U.S. cities had socialist mayors, and several states elected socialists to their legislatures and to Congress. Eugene Debs received a million votes for president. The IWW blossomed, as did anarchist schools and colonies. Hundreds of radical periodicals by anarchists, socialists, trade unionists, feminists, and other progressives flourished.

The world of anarchist printers and presses was woven into that place and time. Looking back, it is difficult to grasp an America that routinely elects socialists and cannot, despite extreme official efforts, repress the vigorous anarchist communities that formed around their many hundreds of publications. Anarchist presses, printers, and publications were nodal points in the production of that America. Their contribution to the

still use letterpress or offset technology offer another way into an older but lingering print world.

I am supplementing direct accounts of anarchist printers with stories of other printers from the 1880s–1940s, especially John Hicks’s memoir *The Adventures of a Tramp Printer*. While Hicks was not an anarchist, he was a strong union man who reveled in the skills of his trade. Also, John Howells and Marion Dearman’s *Tramp Printers* collects dozens of personal accounts of printers’ lives. Printer and editor Walker Rumble tells the story of “swifts,” the extraordinarily fast and accurate compositors who competed in the popular printers’ races. I look to the legacy of these printers to widen my account of everyday material practices producing and sustaining anarchist politics.

Second, there is the problem of identifying, without oversimplifying, relevant aspects of the new materialism, which to my knowledge has not yet been put into conversation with the labor of the letterpress printers. In contrast, printers and printing have been the subject of extensive examination from the perspectives of the “old materialism,” meaning Marxist and Marxist-inspired work analyzing the structural conditions of class and gender relations. Ava Baron, Cynthia Cockburn, and Christina Burr, for example, analyze the class, gender, and age divisions among print shop workers to track the relation of labor deskilling to expectations for proper masculinity and adulthood.⁶ These inquiries tell us a great deal about the structure of work, the politics of union organizing, and the relation between production and reproduction in working-class families,

⁶ Ava Baron, “Questions of Gender: Deskillling and Demasculinization in the U.S. Printing Industry, 1830–1915,” *Gender & History* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 178–99; Christina Burr, “Defending ‘The Art Preservative’: Class and Gender Relations in the Printing Trades Unions, 1850–1914,” *Labor/Le Travail* 31 (Spring 1993): 47–73; Ava Baron, “Contested Terrain Revisited: Technology and Gender Definitions of Work in the Printing Industry, 1850–1920,” in *Women, Work, and Technology: Transformations*, ed. Barbara Wright et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 58–83; Cynthia Cockburn, “The Material of Male Power,” *Feminist Review* 9 (October 1981): 41–58.

but they shed less light on the productive power of embodied relations among printers, presses, publications, and reading publics. For these insights, I turn to those arguments within the new materialism that call our attention to the liveliness of things, and the mutually constitutive relations between human and nonhuman entities; these theoretical energies can usefully work together with prior materialisms to expand our ways of understanding radical politics. The new and old materialisms have not yet found their working relationship with one another; perhaps, by putting them both to work in the world of anarchist printing, some fruitful connectors can be explored.

Third, there is the challenge of bringing the historical accounts and the theoretical work together in ways that honor rather than violate their parameters. To this end, I try to avoid the idea that I have theories that I am going to apply to a body of data, like cookie cutters to the waiting dough. This common version of the theory–practice relation—the relation between analysis and evidence, or interpretation and fact—implicitly construes theories as lively while data are either accurate or inaccurate, but always inert. My approach seeks, instead, to stage an encounter⁷ between active chains of practices: claims that can count as facts are always already theoretically framed, and arguments that can compel as theory are always already infused with concrete objects and events. I am not, then, simply applying the new materialism to printers and presses. Instead, I am trying to provoke encounters out of which insights into the production of radical political ideas, practices, and events can emerge. My hunch is that the classical anarchists were onto something when they gave pride of place to printers and presses: they may have implicitly identified a constitutive condition of possibility for the flourishing of radical political communities in our time as well as theirs.

⁷ My thanks to my colleague Michael Shapiro for this felicitous phrase and for countless other insights.

and bottom ... he wasn't just filling up a page, he wanted it to breathe and be readable."⁸⁷ Arrangements of shapes and patterns, text and illustration, colors and tints emerge through engagement. By "re-uniting design and print," Overbeck reflects, "the loop makes things possible."⁸⁸ Proofreading is more than finding and correcting mistakes, because errors are not necessarily identifiable items—they can be problems in the *relations* of the elements. A letter could be clearly printed, for example, but not be square with the letters around it, so it still needs to be changed.

By now, the "old materialist" is probably shaking her head in disbelief at the new. For the old materialists, these arguments risk not just the appearance of foolishness by dabbling in anthropocentrism but also the loss of grounds for collective struggle. What can we make, at this point, of this encounter between old and new materialisms? Anarchism itself, as a project to liberate working people from the tyranny of bosses, states, and their accompanying hierarchies, would make no sense at all absent the framing logic of (some version of) the old materialism. Yet I have tried to show that the constitutive relation of anarchist printers and presses comes into focus more forcefully through the theoretical resources of the new materialism. The relation between them hinges, I think, on the question one seeks to answer. To adequately understand *why* anarchists did what they did, we need the resources of the old materialism, which highlights struggles for human dignity and equality, and accounts for the structural conditions that deny those values to the masses of people. Yet to shift toward a stronger understanding of *how* anarchists did what they did, we benefit from the insights of the new materialism, which helps us grasp how anarchists produced themselves in struggle. The first thing

⁸⁷ Conversation with Charles Overbeck, Eberhardt Press, Portland, OR, August 15, 2013.

⁸⁸ Ibid. See also <http://www.eberhardtpress.org/> (accessed August 25, 2013).

stick-to-itiveness. The sensory draw of the press's ensemble of surfaces, colors, odors, and moving parts may also help account for the remarkable renaissance of letterpress work in recent years.⁸³

Sometimes the work of the printer blurred the distinction between writing text and setting type. Ordinarily, printers set the words written by reporters or editors; an editor with a "good fist" was one whose handwriting was readily decipherable.⁸⁴ But many editors' scrawls required some intervention by the printers, who had to determine what the text *should* say in order to set the type. Further, anarchist printers are usually also writers. When Labadie wrote for the Detroit labor paper *The Socialist*, he and his editor Judson Grennell put out the paper in the evenings and on weekends, after leaving their long day's work at a printing job that paid the bills. "By the light of the kerosene lamp, they stood at a printer's case on the third floor of the Volksblatt building on Farmer Street, writing and typesetting articles simultaneously to save time."⁸⁵ The ability to write an article upside down and backwards suggests a daunting collaboration in the relation of the printer to the press. Writing on a letterpress is not the same as writing with a pen or a computer, where of necessity one produces words and sentences in linear order. For printers, the page is not just a page; it is a series of possible spaces. Ishill, for example, was known for precise layout that "spaces type and creates unusually proportioned margins to emphasize the printed word."⁸⁶ Charles Overbeck at Eberhardt Press draws his inspiration from Ishill, who "always had big margins on the side

⁸³ See American Amateur Press Association, Resources for Letterpress Printers, <http://www.aapainfo.org/lpress.html>, last modified January 11, 2013 (accessed January 23, 2013).

⁸⁴ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 25.

⁸⁵ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 51.

⁸⁶ Dorothea H. Wingert, "Gems of Printing Yield Fame, Not Fortune, for Typographer in Berkeley Heights," *the dandelion* 5: 20 (1985–1987): 19.

Anarchist Assemblages

Anarchist publications were the heart of anarchist communities. In his informative dissertation, "The Whole World is our Country," Kenyon Zimmer gives publication information and circulation figures, ranging from a few hundred to thirty thousand copies, for seventy-nine anarchist journals produced in the United States from 1880 to 1940.⁸ For many other journals, only traces remain; the nascent FBI counted 249 radical periodicals in the United States in 1919. A. Mitchell Palmer, in a letter to the U.S. Senate asking for stronger anti-anarchist 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."⁹ The papers were available by subscription and could also be accessed in selected taverns, stores, even worksites. In his study of the *Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 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."¹⁰ To take just one example, the Yiddish-language journal studied by Bekken had a circulation of 13,000 copies daily in 1880, rising to 26,980 in 1886.¹¹ Zimmer concludes, "It would be difficult to overstate the functional importance of newspapers in the anarchist movement."¹² While fully agreeing with

⁸ Kenyon Zimmer, "The Whole World Is Our Country": Immigration and Anarchism in the United States, 1885–1940" (doctoral dissertation, Department of History, University of Pittsburgh, 2010), Appendix A, pp. 480–84.

⁹ "Investigation Activities of the Department of Justice," Letter from the Attorney General, November 17, 1919, 66th Congress, 1st Session, Senate, doc no. 153 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), 12.

¹⁰ Jon Bekken, "The First Anarchist Daily Newspaper: *The Chicagoer Arbeiter-Zeitung*," *Anarchist Studies* 3, no. 1 (1995): 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 11

¹² Zimmer, "The Whole World Is Our Country," 11.

Zimmer's conclusion, I want to encourage a parallel line of inquiry: not just the newspapers, but the printers and the presses that made them, require our attention. The papers were not simply passive vehicles for circulating ideas created elsewhere; the papers themselves were a happening of anarchism.¹³

While many skilled printers bemoaned the coming of the linotype and other automations as destroying both a trade and a way of life, in fact the practice of printing changed little, and then slowly, from the time of Gutenberg's intervention to the post-World War II era. True, the major newspapers were quick to move to linotype following Ottmar Mergenthaler's remarkable invention in 1886. This change understandably alarmed printers. John Hicks, in his autobiography of his days as a tramp printer, laments the typesetting machine for displacing the printer, comparing the effect of the typesetting machine on printers to that of barbed wire's invention on the cowboy.¹⁴ While printers' fears were not misplaced—Horace Greeley's paper, the *New York Tribune*, replaced more than one hundred hand compositors with a mere twenty-eight linotype operators—the printer–press relation hung on.¹⁵ In the more

¹³ In an earlier work, I explored anarchist papers and printers as part of the anarchist *habitus*, the life space within which anarchism came to be. See *Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011), pp. 99–107. Here, I tighten my focus on the material practices of the skilled bodies and durable machines operating within that *habitus*.

¹⁴ John Edward Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer, 1880–1890* (Kansas City, MO: Midamericana Press, 1950), 110. Hicks pays scant attention to the ideological perspective of the scores of papers for which he worked, although printers in general were a left-of-center bunch with strong union ties.

¹⁵ John Howells and Marion Dearman, "The Second Revolution: Linotype," in *Tramp Printers* (Pacific Grove, CA: Discovery Press, 1996), para 5, <http://www.discoverypress.com/trampweb/hist4.html> (accessed January 22, 2013).

sense to posit the press as having an inner world to which I can gain access, in any but the most poetic and fanciful of ways, but I am confident that the press–printer relation is a two-way street. Printer's sorts can be, for example, corralled and organized in their cases, poised for use; they can congregate in the tramp printer's bag or cupped hand, a badge of identity and labor militancy; they can bang noisily onto a bar, claiming a place for the printer in the premises and securing him/her a drink. The printer is shaped by engagement with the machine as she or he participates in the ecology of the press. As Good remarks, "You have to understand the time of letterpress. It has its own duration, its own rhythm." The printer has to attend to the point at hand, as well as the immediate context and the larger context, taking steps, adjusting, moving forward. Good continues, "The machine is giving something. If I'm doing it wrong, it fights back." On the other hand, when the process goes smoothly, all its elements coming together, "the press did a good job that day."⁸¹

The centrality and vitality of the printer–press relation in anarchist communities may help to explain anarchists' remarkable persistence, in the face of continuous harassment, assault, arrest, and deportation. *Freedom*, for example, was raided four times during World War I, the authorities confiscating the forms, sorts, type cases, and crucial machine parts as well as the publications.⁸² Each time the journal was back in production immediately. Usually, anarchists' perseverance in the face of relentless suppression is explained by reference to their psychological determination and ideological resolve. While many anarchists possessed both determination and resolve in abundance, the constitutive relations of presses to people can help us understand *how* they came to have such

⁸¹ Conversation with Peter Good, Baldeswell, England, November 14, 2012.

⁸² *Freedom*, 7.

material to the frame—these could take on the grace of song or dance, the press a partner in the performance.

When Bogost argues that the new materialism investigates “the world that sat unconsidered ... because few have bothered to linger,” I suspect that he overplays his hand—printers, I suggest, have already at least partially blazed that trail.⁷⁶ Presses, I speculate, lend themselves to the curiosity of new materialists because printers have already led the way. Through their material practices, printers have moved (and perhaps can help us to move) in the direction Latour recommends: “a much more material, much more mundane, much more immanent, much more realistic, much more embodied definition of the material world.”⁷⁷ All printers, I imagine, participated in brain–body–machine assemblages, but those assemblages would probably have been more intense and extensive in anarchist communities, where the press, the printers, and the publications were vital to the politics that held them together. Presses were connectors in anarchist assemblages; they were participants in the “powers of self-organization and creative transformation” that allowed anarchism to be.⁷⁸ Anarchist confederations, I imagine, consisted largely of presses and their people, each efficacious for the others, carrying “the power to make a difference that calls for response.”⁷⁹ The moments resonate among their elements; everything adjusts. “The press mesmerizes,” comments contemporary printer Allan Runfeldt.⁸⁰ I doubt that it makes

⁷⁶ Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 1, 34. While I credit Bogost’s call to philosophers to do “carpentry,” that is, to make things as part of doing philosophy, my argument is that anarchist printers and presses have already been making-things-as-thinking. Rather than encouraging philosophers to get their hands dirty (also a good idea), I’m listening to and watching presses and their printers in an effort to enter that world as best I can.

⁷⁷ Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” 484.

⁷⁸ Protevi, *Political Affect*, 12.

⁷⁹ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 32.

⁸⁰ See Fiona Otway, *Kiss the Paper*, www.fionaotway.com (accessed September 9, 2012).

remote areas and among the smaller publications, the linotype was not widely utilized until well into the twentieth century.¹⁶

Anarchists and other radicals predictably had less money to spend on new technology, and thus were more likely to stick with the older machines, even after the new became available. For example, printer Jay Fox originally issued the journal *The Agitator* in 1910–1912 from the anarchist colony of Home, Washington, on a press used by Ezra Haywood to publish *The Word* from 1872 to 1893.¹⁷ In 1906, Jo Labadie bought an old press, a Washington jobber, upon which he and his wife Sophie printed unique small books of Labadie’s poetry. The press was older than he was (he was fifty-six).¹⁸ *Freedom* was published on a series of cobbled-together presses, including the “already legendary handpress” previously used for German anarchist Johann Most’s journal *Freiheit*; after serving *Freedom* for thirty years, the press was purchased by anarchist Lilian Wolfe for the Whiteway Colony to provide printing lessons for the children at the colony’s school.¹⁹ For many years, *Freedom* was printed on an old Oscillator press from the 1820s; lacking both power and automatic sheet delivery, the press required three people to operate. Harry Kelly recalled, “Two or three of the men alternated in turning the crank, I fed the press, and Miss Davies, wearing always black gloves, hat and veil, took the sheets off as they were printed.”²⁰ The components of the printing press

¹⁶ From FRITZ1 in conversation on Briar Press website “Linotype vs. handset ID?” <http://www.briarpress.org/29099> (accessed August 26, 2012). See also Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 125.

¹⁷ Charles Pierce Le Warne, *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885–1915* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 208. The precise dates of publication of *The Word* were 1872–1890 and 1892–1893; publication was interrupted by the two years Haywood spent in prison after his conviction for sending obscene material (in this case, discussions of love, sexuality, and marriage) through the mail.

¹⁸ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 212.

¹⁹ “Freedom: People and Places,” in *Freedom: A Hundred Years*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

were the tools of trade for the printers, both those attached to a single publication in a specific town or city and the itinerant printers who wandered across and even between countries in search of work.²¹ To build a case for the centrality of presses and printers to the anarchist movement, close attention to the specific movements of objects and bodies is necessary.

There are three major steps in the letterpress process: composing, printing, and binding. At the center of the printer's art is the *sort*, the small wooden or metal block with a letter or other signifier on it. The *face* is the raised letter or figure on one side of the sort. The sorts were stored in large segmented boxes called *typecases*, separating the letters, the upper-case and lower-case versions of the letters, and the styles of font. The *composing stick* is the hand-held rectangular container in which the sorts are initially assembled, upside down and backwards. The compositor holds the stick in one hand and selects type from the case with the other, using blank slugs and leads to properly justify each line. Once the stick is filled, the composed line of type is transferred to a *galley*, a flat three-sided tray. When the galley is filled, a proof is pulled and proofread, then returned to the compositor who corrects errors using a pointed steel tool called a *bodkin*. The type is then placed in a metal frame, a *chase*, and locked into place by filling the spare space in the chase with wooden blocks, called *furniture*. The *quoin* (pronounced *coin*) is the corkscrew-looking object that expands the blocks to hold the job in place. The completed form is then sent to the pressroom for production, and finally the papers are assembled in the bindery.²²

²¹ Walker Rumble, "From the Shop Floor to the Show: Joseph W. McCann, Typesetting Races, and Expressive Work in 19th Century America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 32, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 89.

²² My thanks to Duncan Dempster, Art Department, University of Hawai'i, for his explanation and demonstration of various presses (August 26, 2012). See also Burr, "Defending 'The Art Preservative,'" 51–52.

printers and presses, in that the person handling the objects is a hand compositor, composing bodies of text into relation with other bodies to create more powerful bodies.⁷¹

Recalling the artistic performance of a skilled printer, Hicks says that he "played tunes as he handled planer, mallet, and shooting stick, plugged a dutchman here and there in poorly-space ads." Skilled printers could play the presses as though they were musical instruments, gracefully holding the composing stick, selecting the sorts one-by-one, and manipulating the rule to set type. Eric Bagdonas at Stumptown Printers recalled a visitor observing that Bagdonas's press had become an extension of his body.⁷² Ali Cat Leeds at Entangled Roots Press similarly recalled a friend who said, "You look like you are dancing." Leeds reflected, "I wasn't dancing to the music; I was dancing to the press."⁷³ Describing another printer's skill, Hicks likened it to sign language: "When he hit the case, stick in hand, his movements were something like deaf-and-dumb signs in the air, but a steady, sure motion that never permitted him to miss a letter. It was like clockwork."⁷⁴ Reporting on a race among compositors in Boston in 1886, the local papers reported that the winner, George Graham, possessed a "smooth grace" and "beautiful motion," even that "he seems to be touching the type with the tips of his fingers."⁷⁵ The manipulation of the sorts, the organization of sorts onto composing sticks, the transfer of the

⁷¹ I am paraphrasing Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 257.

⁷² Conversation with Eric Bagdonas, Stumptown Printers, Portland, OR, August 19, 2013. See also <http://www.stumptownprinters.com/> (accessed August 25, 2013).

⁷³ Conversation with Ali Cat Leeds, Entangled Roots Press, Portland, OR, August 14, 2013. See also <http://incendiarymediums.wordpress.com/artist-bio/> (accessed August 25, 2013).

⁷⁴ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 14, 7, 76, 13.

⁷⁵ Rumble, "Showdown," 621.

the course of events.”⁶⁶ Actants are efficacious; they do things. While Coole and Frost position the new materialism as a critique of discourse analysis, the new materialism shares what one might call a methodological attitude with its postmodern compatriots: both are, as Foucault characterizes genealogy, “grey, meticulous, and patiently documentary.”⁶⁷ The new materialism, Bennett tells us, needs “a cultivated, patient, sensory attentiveness to nonhuman forces operating outside and inside the human body.”⁶⁸ Foucault’s and Bennett’s invocation of patient attention to detail, like Parikka’s encouragement “to acknowledge the specificity of the material,” encourage me to pursue glimpses of actants in the world of anarchist printers.⁶⁹

The new materialism does not replace the old, but leaves room for it while directing attention to a different register of human relations with the other-than-human world. This register Bennett calls “thing power”—“the strange ability of ordinary, man-made items to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of independence or aliveness, constituting the outside of our own experience.” This is not the same as adding spirit to matter, but rather is tracing the affect of materiality. Assemblages, new materialists stress, include the non-human and the non-sentient in their capacities to affect and be affected, their complex feedback loops and their deep grounding as well as their capacity to surprise their participants. Assemblages emerge in the in-between, “through events in which both the subject and the object are formed” and “bodies are continuously articulated with their outsides.”⁷⁰ Again, this perspective seems particularly appropriate to bring to the study of

⁶⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, viii.

⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, and Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139.

⁶⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xiv.

⁶⁹ Parikka, *Insect Media*, xxii.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, xxii, xxiv.

The letter m, the widest in the alphabet, gave rise to the *em* unit of typographic measurement. Pieces of metal the size of the letter m are called *em quadrats* or simply *quads*.²³ Em spacing was important to printers because it was the base of wages. The total amount of type set during the work period was called the printer’s “string.”²⁴ For printers working at the morning daily papers, Labadie’s biography recounts, work started around noon. First came “throwing in the case,” that is, returning the type set the previous day into the wooden cases. Around 4:00 p.m., the printers began composition, and they worked until midnight or after, often twelve-hour days in poorly lit, smelly shops.²⁵ The work required precision, attention to detail, the ability to read and assemble text upside-down and right-to-left, and the ability to calculate the printer’s point system of measurement. Cynthia Cockburn further specifies the aesthetic and physical requirements:

[The printer] had to have a sense of design and spacing to enable him to create a graphic whole of the printed page, which he secured through the manipulation of the assembled type, illustrative blocks and lead spacing pieces. The whole he then locked up in a form weighing 50 pounds or more. This he would lift and move to the proofing press or bring back to the stone for the distribution of used type. He thus required a degree of strength and stamina, a strong wrist, and, for standing long hours at the case, a sturdy spine and good legs.²⁶

The work was exacting. Many printers shared the health problems faced by Labadie, due to long hours in poorly ventilated shops, breathing hot air carrying poison from the lead

²³ Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 90.

²⁴ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 16.

²⁵ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 36–37.

²⁶ Cockburn, “The Material of Male Power,” 44.

type. The “foul air in printing plants” lead to high rates of tuberculosis among printers.²⁷

A good printer, by Hicks’s recollection, could earn between fifteen and twenty-six dollars for a sixty-hour week.²⁸ Inept typesetters, called “territorial printers” or “blacksmiths,” were slower and less accurate, and thus earned less.²⁹ Women printers, no matter how fast and accurate they were, typically earned less, unless/until they joined union shops. The best printers could enhance their pay by entering the popular printing races that were organized on shop floors and places of public entertainment. Printer and editor Walker Rumble writes that these races were part of “working class ‘saloon society’” and allowed for displays of talent, gambling, drinking, and the “creation of celebrity.”³⁰ By 1885, the International Typographical Union (ITU) “had published a codified set of racing rules.”³¹ Printers all over the East Coast organized matches. For example, in 1885 Bill Barnes from the *New York World* and Joe McCann from the *New York Herald* raced for four hours. McCann won, even though Barnes’s motion was described by onlookers as “free and graceful” while McCann was “stiff.”³² The prize was \$500, an eye-catching opportunity for printers who, at the top of the profession, earned about \$30/week.³³ Fast printers were called “swifts” or “speedburners,” and, in addition to winning substantial prizes, became celebrities. Outstanding printer George Arensberg of the *New York Times*, for instance, earned the nickname

²⁷ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 188, 156.

²⁸ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 25, 225.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 16, 21.

³⁰ Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 87, 88.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

³² *Ibid.*, 87.

³³ Walker Rumble, “A Showdown of ‘Swifts’: Women Composers, Dime Museums, and the Boston Typesetting Races of 1886,” *The New England Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (December, 1998): 617, 618.

this liveliness as “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”⁶¹ Diana Coole and Samantha Frost call us with some urgency to acknowledge the “restlessness and intransigence” of physical objects; they ask, “How could we ignore the power of matter and the ways it materializes in our ordinary experiences or fail to acknowledge the primacy of matter in our theories?”⁶² Jussi Parikka leads us through intersections of insects and media, both acting as “carriers of intensities (potentials) and modes of aesthetic, political, economic, and technological thought.”⁶³ Bill Brown encourages us to discern the fleeting latency and excess in everyday matter that distinguishes flat objects from vital things: “We look through objects ... we catch a glimpse of things.”⁶⁴ Claiming that “everything exists equally,” Ian Bogost proposes one of the strongest versions of an “object-oriented ontology” that “puts *things* at the center of being.”⁶⁵

The new materialism calls on minoritarian resources in the history of Western thought—Lucretius, Epicurus, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, Latour, Deleuze, and Guatarri, and others—to repartition the sensible and create space to think materiality as vital. With Latour, Bennett theorizes things as actants; an actant, she tells us, “has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter

⁶¹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), viii.

⁶² Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, “Introducing the New Materialisms,” in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics*, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost (Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1.

⁶³ Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xiii.

⁶⁴ Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Autumn 2001): 4.

⁶⁵ Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology or What It’s Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 6.

mental and manual labor that anarchists have always praised. His or her work expresses the principle of “transparency of operation” that dismantles the hierarchy of boss and worker by making the labor process available to everyone.⁵⁸ The anarchists’ ability to create their publications through a process that directly embodies their ideas—combining mental and manual work, valuing physical prowess, intellectual insight, and artistic creativity—was and is a source for the political energy sustaining anarchist communities. As with their schools and independent colonies, anarchist publications could practice what they preached, creating the society for which they longed through the process of calling for it.

New Materialism

Using language that maps beautifully onto the world of the letterpress printers, Bruno Latour directs us toward “compositionism” of the human and the nonhuman, in which “consequences overflow their causes, and this overflow has to be respected everywhere, in every domain, in every discipline, and for every type of entity.”⁵⁹ John Protevi addresses the capacity of material systems to self-organize, a particularly apt concept to bring to anarchism, which relies for its success on the self-organizing potential of humans. This self-organizing process operates through “a direct linkage of the social and the somatic,” Protevi argues, so that material flows, affective relations, and sense-making practices inform and reinform one another in complex feedback loops.⁶⁰ Jane Bennett explains

⁵⁸ Colin Ward, *The Self-Employed Society*, http://www.theyliewedie.org/ressources/biblio/en/Ward_Colin_-_A_SELF-employed_society.html (accessed September 9, 2012).

⁵⁹ Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 484.

⁶⁰ John Protevi, *Political Affect: Connecting the Social and the Somatic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xi.

The Velocipede.³⁴ While printers’ labor was “exacting and nerve-wracking” work, it was also respected and could be exhilarating.³⁵

Tramping was a kind of second apprenticeship into the trade. “In those days,” Hicks recalls, “a printer was not a printer—his education was not considered complete—until he had done some wandering. It was the day of the tramp printer.”³⁶ In the early 1890s, printers’ union records indicate that two-thirds of the cards issued annually were travel cards.³⁷ Unions supported the arrangement; Rumble notes, “Printing unions everywhere sponsored migration as a means of regulating workforce and wages.”³⁸ Tramp printers often turned down regular employment to wander. Young itinerant printers were called “gay cats.” The stay-at-homes were called “home guards,” and their rootedness was often subsequent to a period of travel: “When a printer had finished his term of apprenticeship, he was told to get out and learn something. The style was different in each town and there was much to learn. He took to the road in order to broaden himself mentally and efficiently, or to see the country.” Tramp printers often cultivated particular styles: some dressed in sartorial splendor, sporting top hat, formal coat, gloves and cane, while others, such as the famed Missouri River Pirates, were known for their shabby dress as well as their formidable expertise as they tramped the Missouri River valley.³⁹ Within anarchist communities, printers of both the rooted and the traveling variety were highly respected, but within the larger society

³⁴ Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 88, 90.

³⁵ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁷ Jules Tygiel, “Tramping Artisans: Carpenters in Industrial America, 1880–90,” in *Walking to Work: Tramps in America, 1790–1935*, ed. Eric H. Monkkonen (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 92.

³⁸ Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 89.

³⁹ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 30, 21, 116; see also Howells and Dearman’s chapter on the Missouri River pirates.

the tramp printers were the “bad boys” of the profession: heavy drinking and gambling, illegal riding of the rails, along with regular visits to brothels, seem to have been the rule. Tramp printers often carried a bag of type blocks (sorts), a composing stick, and/or a rule with them. These mobile markers established the individual as part of the general circulation of itinerant printers. The tramp printers frequently skirted the law, often traveling “a couple of inches ahead of the village constable.” Some of the sleazier hotels, rooming houses, and saloons catered to tramp printers; wanderers lacking the price of a bed often slept on the floor of the printing establishment, newspapers for mattresses, and were given “the customary coin for breakfast” by the editor, so the hungry printer could eat before returning to set type. Barbershops often had bathrooms attached, where itinerant printers could leave their laundry on Saturday, have a bath for twenty-five cents, and “be ready for another week.” Word-of-mouth among printers spread the news about receptive establishments. At John Hakle’s saloon at Fourth and Ohio streets in Terre Haute, Indiana, Hicks recalls, “it was only necessary to lay a printer’s rule on the bar to get a drink.” Jack O’Brien’s basement joint in Chicago permitted Hicks to sleep on the pool table, with the proviso that he relocate under the table if a customer wanted to play. Such places were “known from coast to coast” by tramp printers. Word of such establishments constituted part of the effective networks connecting the wandering printers. Despite their rowdiness, tramp printers were valued by newspapermen who needed help getting out their papers. New or growing towns often sought printers to set up a press and publicize the community. Print shops kept record books where tramp printers wrote their names, where they came

salon.”⁵⁵ However, for the numerous, small and hardy periodicals published by the anarchists, the time of giants persevered and may be making a comeback today. For the anarchist printers, I speculate that the shop floor and the studio were much the same, and the union never much absent. Labadie’s granddaughter recalls that, in his 70s, at their home called Bubbling Waters, Jo Labadie “reveled in the painstaking process of running the century-old press by foot power, plucking the type, letter by letter from a font drawer, setting a single page at a time because of a shortage of type.”⁵⁶ Her grandfather had a lot in common with Peter Good, a contemporary anarchist printer in Norwich, England, who still sets his journal *The Cunningham Amendment* on a hand press. Good views the press, and his relation to the press, as part of his anarchism. The press, he says, is “free.” He is “not dependent on big corporate suppliers or technicians to fix computers.” Things last: “just about everything here is built to last decades and decades.” The persistence through time of the sorts, composing sticks, rulers, and frames acts on Good as he acts on them: they connect him to radical history in tangible ways. Good remarks, about operating the press,

Although it’s very structured, there is a tremendous amount of freedom... Each impression you pull is unique. It changes ever so slightly, miniscule[ly]. It constantly requires labor... It constantly requires adjustment. There’s not that many people you can go to on the outside ... you have to deal with it yourself.⁵⁷

The printer composing on the press the words he has composed on paper, or in his head, embodies the integration of

⁵⁵ Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 100.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 243.

⁵⁷ “The Anarchist Printer,” [u-tube.com/watch?v=gFZk_wOevc8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gFZk_wOevc8) (accessed September 11, 2012).

surfaces.” Metal plates were often used as well, especially for mastheads and other headings put to repeated long-term use. Abate specialized in portraits of anarchist heroes and sketches of anarchist events for the pages of Galleani’s journal. Abate’s style refused to mimic his competitor, the new photographic process, and instead retained his own visual syntax, “composed of white-line engraving techniques.” During this time, the struggle between wood engraving and photography was a labor issue; photography hid labor behind the seemingly unmediated image, while wood engraving displayed the process of labor within the product. Abate both literally and virtually signed his work; as Hoyt remarks, Abate “wanted his hand to be seen.” Abate’s prints were much more than decoration; Hoyt shows they were “a tool for imaginatively connecting the reader to inspiring historic figures, thus facilitating the formation of a historic narrative based on a subversive identity as opposed to national citizenship or ethnic heritage.”⁵³ Abate used lines to highlight an anarchist martyr’s brooding eyes, distinctive profile, or fiery spirit. Readers often cut out the images and saved them, displaying them in their homes. The prints, created by an engraver who left his mark on the pictures that then left their mark on the readers, were nodal points in an assemblage linking printer, reader and tools in a revolutionary world.

Historian Alexander Lawson, in his study of compositors, calls the period between the Civil War and the turn of the century a “time of giants” because it was “the last time journeymen had control of their craft.”⁵⁴ The linotype, in his view, was radically changing the printers’ workplace, “replacing speed and skill with taste and refinement, and shifting as well the locus of power and prestige from shop floor and union to studio and

⁵³ Hoyt, “Carlo Abate, Luigi Galleani,” 4n4, 9n15, 13, 15, 16–17.

⁵⁴ Alexander Lawson, *The Compositor as Artist, Craftsman, and Tradesman* (Athens, GA: Press of the Nightowl, 1990), quoted in Rumble, “From the Shop Floor,” 100.

from, and where they were going so the circulating printers could keep track of one another.⁴⁰

Printers were generally a well-read and well-informed crowd. Of course, they had to be literate to do their work. Beyond that, they were often self-educated in the classics as well as attentive to current events. Jo Labadie was deeply influenced by Mill, Emerson, and Thoreau, as well as the standard anarchist writers.⁴¹ Hicks recalls many of his colleagues quoting Shakespeare, Lincoln, Twain, Edgar Allen Poe, George Eliot, and the Bible. One itinerant printer quoted Rousseau about the virtues of traveling on foot.⁴² Articulate and urbane, or rough and reckless, printers were among the intellectuals and adventurers of the working class; their way of life provided a way for workers to be poor with style.

Printers were union men. I am going with the familiar appellation “union *men*” because, while there were a substantial number of women printers, women’s entry into the trade and the unions was uneven and highly contested. Labadie was an early organizer of the Knights of Labor, which his granddaughter characterizes as “a sort of underground workingmen’s college” rather than a practical union.⁴³ Most printers joined the International Typographical Union (ITU), the oldest craft organization in the United States; especially for the tramp printers, “the only certain and indispensable possession was the journeyman’s card.”⁴⁴ The *Typographical Journal* in 1889 noted, “there are more typographical unions who owe their inception to the proselytizing efforts of the tramp than to ... all other causes

⁴⁰ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 12, 176, 28, 107, 172, 175, 42, 17, 216.

⁴¹ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 38.

⁴² Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 13, 161, 36.

⁴³ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 24.

⁴⁴ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 110.

combined.”⁴⁵ Young Jo Labadie faithfully joined the typographical union in each city he visited, considering his dues “the best investment I ever made.” His union card “entitled him to assistance in finding a bed, a meal, and a job as soon as he arrived” in a new city.⁴⁶ A printer carrying a union card was a “square man.” Hicks, whose colorful remembrances rarely comment directly on the politics of printers or periodicals, notes matter-of-factly, “A square man then was what in this day and age would be designated as a radical.” When the union printers went on strike, it was a “square man walkout.” Scabs were “rats” or “new hands,” and were none-too-gently ushered out of town.⁴⁷

In the more conservative parts of the country, ITU meetings were held in secret, “for any kind of organization of workmen was frowned upon.” Union men had to keep their affiliation secret, and the handling of sorts was the secret code: “We square men had a sign by which we knew each other. If a true brother came to my case, ostensibly to borrow sorts, and idly let a few lower-case ‘i’s’ sift through his fingers, I would let some lower-case ‘k’s’ sift through my fingers. Thus we would understand each other without need of conversation.” Printers often called upon a vivid sensory language to describe their work: tramping was sometimes called “sniffing the trail of printer’s ink.” The smell coded both the labor and the organization of labor: Hicks recounts a printer who “claimed he could smell a print shop a mile away: that anyone who couldn’t wasn’t a good union man.”⁴⁸

Sometimes union locals owned the presses. In Chicago, for example, the Social Democratic Cooperative Printing Society, made up of members of the Socialist Party, the anarchist Inter-

⁴⁵ *Typographical Journal* (Washington, DC: Communications Workers of America, July 15, 1889): 6, quoted in Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 38.

⁴⁶ Anderson, *All-American Anarchist*, 38.

⁴⁷ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 200, 279.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149, 157, 51, 13.

national Working People’s Association, and local Typographia 9, owned the facility that printed *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Local 9 both represented the paper’s production workers and held forty-seven shares in the press. Additionally, five of the eight Cooperative directors were required to be members of the union.⁴⁹ Some printing operations made do with small hand presses, while others had larger presses powered by foot pedal or other creative means. The Platen press, made by Chandler and Price around 1910–1920, is a one-person press operated by foot pedal. Hicks also mentions an Adams Press, powered by a shaggy pony walking round and round, turning a flywheel, as in old grain mills.⁵⁰ Recalling his days as a tramp printer, Otto Boutin similarly recounts one press turned by a mule and another powered by a boy furiously pedaling a bicycle.⁵¹ A tramp printer named Dixie told of one remarkable press in a small Arkansas town that was powered by a big buck sheep who, on command, butted two slabs of wood together to press the type against the paper. The editor praised the sheep, which ran to the print shack when summoned and enthusiastically rammed the equipment, but lamented, “Buck’s a mite heavy for light forms such as dodgers and bill heads.”⁵²

Carlo Abate was the printmaker for Luigi Galleani’s insurrectionary anarchist paper *Cronaca Sovversiva* (*Subversive Chronicle*) from 1903 to 1918. The paper was printed in a shop organized by the International Workers of the World (IWW). A professional sculptor, Abate’s labor further crossed the already porous distinction between work and art that characterized the printer’s world. The woodblocks used in engraving were also letterpress plates and “could be locked up with type on any kind of press that printed from raised

⁴⁹ Bekken, “The First Anarchist Daily Newspaper,” 5–9.

⁵⁰ Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 175–76.

⁵¹ Otto J. Boutin, *A Catfish in the Bodoni* (St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1970), 2, 3.

⁵² Hicks, *Adventures of a Tramp Printer*, 130.