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Anarchism and Culture, 1840–1939
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If this confluence of anarchism with the avant-gardes was fruitful, it was not always harmonious. While fascinated with the writings of Bakunin, Kropotkin, and Landauer, Hugo Ball expressed skepticism toward their ideals, and others resisted demands for a "committed" art, insisting on the autonomy of the artist from audience demands. For their part, anarchists such as Bernard Lazare excoriated what they saw as the egoistic excesses of "decadent" art, regarding it as irrelevant to working-class concerns. Where most anarchists favored the "social art" aesthetics of Proudhon, Kropotkin, and Tolstoy, avant-gardists tended to favor Max Stirner's individualism, as reflected in the title given by Dora Marsden to the American modernist journal, *The Egoist*.

SEE ALSO: Anarchism and Education ; Dada ; Guerilla Theater ; Landauer, Gustav (1870–1919) ; Proudhon, Pierre Joseph (1809–1865)

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Anarchism has traditionally laid great emphasis on the construction of a "counterculture" – a sphere of imagery, symbolism, and sensory experience imbued with its own emancipatory values. In this respect, it does not differ essentially from other social movements with vastly different aims. More unique is the tendency of anarchist culture to blur distinctions between the *creation* and *reception* of culture as well as between the *ideal* and the *real* in representation.

These tendencies are present from the first phase of the modern anarchist movement, when Pierre Joseph Proudhon argued for the abolition of distinctions between artistic industrial creation. This meant refusing the romantic notion of the artist as solitary genius, apart from and above society. At the same time, Proudhon wanted an art that would refuse to accommodate itself to the social status quo either in the manner of religious art, which averted its eyes from injustice in the world to contemplate divine ideals, or in the manner of a superficial realism that does not look beyond the misery of the present. A revolutionary art, Proudhon argued, would evoke the processes of movement and transformation inherent to life, suggesting the potential for the ideal that is dormant within the real. Conversely, this art would undercut the claim of "the real" to be the entire "truth." One face of anarchist art, thus, was constructive, utopian, gesturing from the real toward the ideal; the other was deconstructive and iconoclastic. The visual art produced by anarchists from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries bears traces of both impulses.

Anarchist literary styles developed similarly. In France, writers such as Jules Vallès, Émile Pouget, and Henry Poulaille developed "proletarian" forms of writing that blurred genres, travestied norms of polite discourse, and emphasized the energy and directness of speech, while novelists like Octave Mirbeau made the "decadent" style into a powerful critique of capitalism, the state, and religion. In Spain, meanwhile, Federica Montseny pioneered forms of mass literature – two large, successful series, *La Novela Ideal* and *La Nov-*

ela Libre – aimed at incarnating anarchist ideals in "exemplary" working-class heroes and heroines, inviting readers to imagine the possibility of their own self-liberation. Chinese anarchists such as Shifu, in association with the broader New Culture movement, promoted the social novel, as exemplified by Ba Jin's famous *Torrent* trilogy (1931–40), emphasizing moral comment (*xungu xue*) and logic (*lunli xue*) as well as style (*zishi xue*). Meanwhile, American anarchist poets such as the Italian American Arturo Giovanniti, French American Voltairine de Cleyre, Irish-born Lola Ridge, and Russian-Jewish David Edelstadt championed an overtly committed poetry, written in a way that was accessible to every worker. This ideal of proletarian poetry reached perhaps its greatest extension during the Spanish Civil War, when an estimated 15–20,000 poems were published, over half of the approximately 5,000 authors of which were anarchists.

It was drama that best spread radical thought. Indeed, so strong was the work of Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) on anarchist culture worldwide that for a time "Ibsenism" was synonymous with anarchist drama. In Germany the working-class subjects of Gerhard Hauptmann's plays found favor among some anarchists, but Gustav Landauer, among others, was critical of their tendency to make the miseries of capitalism seem natural and inevitable, obscuring the potential for the ideal by excessive fidelity to the real. Institutions such as the Neue Freie Volksbühne of Berlin performed politically charged drama by playwrights such as Ernst Toller, Erich Mühsam, and Georg Kaiser. Italian immigrant anarchists in Argentina and Brazil around the beginning of the twentieth century established popular theater as a means of "consciousness-raising" and "contestation," a tradition continued by Chilean anarchists through the 1930s. In the United States, where German immigrants flocked to productions of August Spies' agitational play *Die Nihilisten* as early as 1882, the Wobblies also developed the stage as a means of agitation in such productions as the Paterson Strike Pageant in 1913. Before their suppression

by the communist government, Moscow's anarchist clubs hosted theaters as well as libraries and poetry circles. In Spain anarchist theater companies began presenting works by Teresa Claramunt and Felipe Cortiella alongside Ibsen's and Mirbeau's in the 1890s, and during the Spanish Civil War troops were regaled by traveling "anarchist vaudeville" shows.

Anarchists had fewer opportunities in cinema, a more expensive art form, which they regarded as especially prone to capitalist exploitation. However, as early as 1913 anarchists in Paris created a cooperative for film production and distribution, the Cinéma du Peuple. One of its first filmmakers, the Catalan anarchist Armand Guerra (aka José Maria Estivalis Calvo), went on to produce films under the aegis of the Spanish anarchist movement. The journalist Mateo Santos produced numerous documentaries, while directors such as Antonio Sau, Valentín R. González, and Fernando Mignoni made fictional melodramas, comedies, and musicals.

Alongside these attempts to form a proletarian counterculture, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw numerous engagements between the anarchist movement and the avant-garde of the art world. By the time of World War I almost every avant-garde movement had embraced anarchist ideas: Expressionism, Symbolism, Cubism, Dada, Futurism, and Constructivism reflected anarchist influence, and artists as disparate as Wassily Kandinsky, Oscar Wilde, Ezra Pound, Dziga Vertov, Pio Baroja, José Martinez Ruiz ("Azorín"), Man Ray, Franz Kafka, Jean Cocteau, Antonin Artaud, Luis Buñuel, Ramon Sender, and Alexander Rodchenko expressed affinity with the anarchist movements of the time. Nor was this fusion confined to Europe and America: in early 1920s Japan, for instance, a Futurist-influenced group of artists calling itself *Mavo* embraced anarchist ideas and experimented with subversive strategies, some anticipating the shock effects of contemporary performance art, others aiming at the aestheticization of everyday life.