

Understanding Resistance: An Introduction To Anarchism

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Succinctly stated, anarchy is opposition to authority. Throughout history, and across the globe, anarchists of all stripes have been actively writing, protesting, and working against authority in various forms: political, economic, and social. During this time, various individuals have been collecting and archiving the wealth of anarchist material in the form of posters, books, flyers, and speeches. Given the diversity of thought within anarchism, individual archives vary in scope and breadth. However, each of these archives shares a common belief in the importance of preserving the historical record of anarchist ideas and practices for future adherents and researchers.

As a movement based in anti-authoritarian philosophy, many of these archives cannot be found within educational institutions or museums. The Anarchist Archives Project, founded in 1982 and consisting of more than 12,000 items, is but one example of the number of independent archival collections. Independent collections hold a distinct advantage over institutional archives in that many are maintained by anarchists active within the movement.

From personal connections, these individuals have direct access to pamphlets and ephemera often published for the expressed purpose of local distribution. Cataloging standards and accessibility are often secondary to the compilation of material. Also, individual archives are often abandoned due to constraints on time and money. Institutional collections, on the other hand, tend to be more specific to historical figures or periods, such as social or labor movements. The advantage to many of these archives is the accessibility created through finding aids and catalog records. In addition, institutional archives tend to be more sustainable in the long-term due to annual funding provided by the hosting institution. This dichotomy, however, has been slowly eroding over time with the onset of open source software and operating systems.

Both individual and institutional collections tell the story of the anarchist movement throughout history and today. However, grouping the existing collections of anarchist material together is to ignore the complexity and divergence of thought to be found within the movement. The breadth, focus, and sustainability of a particular collection stems from the individual strain of anarchist thought the archivist espouses. Each collection is defined for what it excludes, more so than what material it includes.

Definitions/terminology

In practice, anarchism is an umbrella term for a number of different theoretical approaches to anarchist practice. While principled resistance to all forms of domination and authority is what unites anarchists, different groups identify different sources of oppression as having a greater effect than others, and hence emphasize different forms of resistance. Broadly speaking, anarchism can be divided into social and individual forms.

Social anarchism places an emphasis on egalitarianism, mutual aid, and either collectivizing (anarcho-collectivists) or abolishing (anarcho-communists) private property. Additionally, anarcho-syndicalists maintain that participatory (self-managed) labor unions are essential to bringing this about.

Unlike their social counterparts, individualist anarchists stress the importance of the individual liberty from forms of collectivism, which they tend to see as limiting the freedom of the individual. While most social anarchists view capitalism as a source of domination, anarcho-capitalists see nothing wrong with capitalism, and advocate the abolition of the State in order for individuals to pursue their freedom within the market.

Despite their respective differences, socialist and individualist anarchists have frequently influenced one another, resulting in the development of new schools of thought in the late 20th century. Women and minorities, identifying with their unique social status as a target of oppression, have incorporated anarchist thought into various programs for liberation, resulting in anarcho-feminism, anarchist people of color (APOC), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) anarchism. Inspired by the environmental movement, eco-anarchism emphasizes a return to simpler, environmentally conscious forms of social organization, while the more radical anarcho-primitivism identifies domestication and technology as a source of oppression, advocating a return to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Post-left anarchists share many of the concerns of social anarchists, but reject the fixation on labor as a locus of organization, instead advocating a drop-out lifestyle.

While historically anarchism has often been associated with violence, certain currents, such as insurrectionary anarchism, advocate an active campaign of violence against property as a source of oppression. Others, like Christian anarchists, reject the use of violence and insist on principled nonviolence.

General Guides

Anarchist FAQ. Created in 1995 as a refutation of libertarian-anarchism, this site is an in-depth inquiry into the history, movement, and philosophical underpinnings of anarchism. The FAQ is divided into several sections answering the most commonly asked questions of the anarchist movement. Individual sections are extensive and provide ample sources. A complete bibliography accompanies the FAQ, which is divided into four sections: anthologies of anarchist authors; books by anarchists and other libertarians; books about anarchism, anarchists, and anarchist history by nonlibertarians; and books by nonanarchists/libertarians. Access: infoshop.org.

Anarchist Studies Network. A specialist group within the Political Studies Association of the United Kingdom, this organization hosts conferences, workshops, gatherings, and often puts out call for proposals. Although focused on anarchist movements within the United Kingdom, an anarchist yellow pages is included to locate local chapters around the globe. Of particular strength are the basic reading lists, providing an anarchist approach to topics ranging from Art History to Philosophy. Access: anarchist-studies-network.org.uk.

Wikipedia Anarchism Portal. This portal is an updated guide to the various branches and concepts in anarchism, and can be useful in locating organizations, schools of thought, and literature. The guide seeks to be as broad in its coverage and depth. The discussion tab will be of particular interest to those interested in how material is added or edited on the site. Access: en.wikipedia.org.

Individual Archives

Anarchy Archives. Constructed by Dan Ward, political science professor at Pitzer College, the Anarchy Archives provide full-text access to the collected works of major anarchists throughout history. In addition, a wide variety of full-text anarchist pamphlets and periodicals from the early 20th century are available for browsing. Though not exhaustive in scope, the Web site also provides links to critical commentary on the anarchist movement. Access: dwardmac.pitzer.edu.

Library at Nothingness. A new library focusing on collecting works in the fields of social anarchism, poetry, and Situationist-related literature. Content from the journals *Potlatch*, *Internationale Situationniste*, and *Social Anarchism*, as well as individually published works are hosted in this archive. Access: library.nothingness.org.

Quiver Distro. The primary focus of this archive is to supply publications to community libraries and individuals for distribution and dissemination. Materials range from full-text books, journal articles, prison survival manuals, and posters. Access: www.anti-politics.net.

Spunk Library. Last updated in 1999, the Spunk Library consists of fanzines, pamphlets, books and portions of books, articles, manifestos, quotations, interviews, bibliographies, reviews, posters, and other material, both in-print and out-of-print, with an emphasis on anarchism. Although Spunk is no longer adding new material, literature and zines from regional anarchists organizations not found elsewhere may be accessed in this digital archive. Access: www.spunk.org.

The Anarchist Library. With the aim of becoming the main digital library for anarchist texts, this collection currently consists of books, articles, stories, and essays. The collection may be keyword searched or browsed by title, topic, or author. New titles are added weekly as the library expands in scope and depth. Access: theanarchistlibrary.org.

Institutional Archives

International Institute of Social History (IISH). Located in Amsterdam, IISH has one of the largest collections of anarchist records and papers from around the world. As part of a wider historical collection, the collection contains the collected papers of early anarchists, such as Michael Bakunin and Elisée Reclus. Documenting anarchist movement from around the world, this archive holds papers from the German Radical Movement to Anarcho-syndicalism in Spain. Of particular strength is the multi-genre anarchist squatters collection of flyers, pictures, and sound recordings from the 1970s to the 1990s. Access: www.iisg.nl.

New York University's Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives. Focusing on 20th-century anarchists, this collection contains the collected works of Murray Bookchin and Alexander Berkman. In addition to collected papers, the archive contains court transcripts and legal documents from the Alexander Berkman trial and oral histories from the American Left. Access: www.nyu.edu.

The Emma Goldman Papers. Affiliated with the University of California-Berkeley, this archive is dedicated to the American anarchist and feminist, Emma Goldman. With an emphasis on education and promotion, the project has produced a microfilm edition of Goldman's life and work, as well as educational texts for understanding social movements for middle and high school students. Of particular strength in this collection are the digitally reproduced original letters, telegrams, and handbills accessible from the Web site. Access: sunsite.berkeley.edu.

The Labadie Collection. Documenting a variety of international and social protests movements through the 19th and 20th century, this archive is built around the personal papers of Charles Joseph Labadie, a prominent anarchist and organizer in the Michigan labor movement of the late 19th century. The entire collection is comprised of more than 100,000 materials consisting of serials, monographs, pamphlets, posters, photographs, and scrapbooks. Of the 30,000 pamphlets available in the collection, approximately 600 are available online and many are available to the

public. An online exhibit of the collected posters of the Labadie exhibit is hosted through the Internet Public Library. Access: www.lib.umich.edu.

Current Anarchist Collectives, Journals, and Presses

AK Press. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, this anarchist collective has published and distributed a range of current and out-of-print anarchist texts since 1990. In addition to anarchist texts, AK Press also distributes other radical media published by independent presses. Access: www.akpress.org.

Freedom Press. One of the largest and oldest publishers of anarchist material in the world, Freedom Press was founded in 1886 and based in Whitechapel, East London. While representing the mainstream tradition of anarchism, anarcho-communists, this press has published a diverse number of anarchist thinkers throughout history including, but not limited to, Peter Kropotkin, Alexander Berkman, and Gustav Landauer. Today, the Freedom Press is a publisher, bookshop, and news portal. Access: www.freedompress.org.uk.

Green Anarchy. One of the most noted radical environmental publications discussing green anarchist and anarcho-primitivist theory and practice. Published out of Oregon twice a year, this journal is edited by noted anarcho-primitivist John Zerzan. Access: www.greenanarchy.org.

Institute for Anarchist Studies. A nonprofit foundation based in Washington D.C., the institute provides grants for the writing and translation of radical texts from around the world. The institute also sponsors the Renewing the Anarchist Tradition conference, providing a scholarly forum in which contributors explore the past, present, and future elements of anarchism. Additionally, the institute publishes the online journal *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory*. The journal includes comparative book reviews, news on current activities within the institute, and essays. Access: www.anarchist-studies.org.

Voices of Resistance From Occupied London. A relatively young publication, with only five issues released, this journal is particularly focused on current movements against institutional repression from around the globe. A convergence of anarchist and nonanarchist contributors, this journal attempts to facilitate a broad conversation on what exactly constitutes the “antagonist social movement.” Access: www.occupiedlondon.org.

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