Back to books, back to ideas

Anarchist Libraries Network

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In conclusion

Based on a federative principle, this project does not replace individual sites but offers the possibility of aggregating their contents in a non-hierarchical, completely independent and autonomous way. The proposal therefore moves on a methodological level, not on what the different entities decide to preserve and index.

Since full access to the texts present in the aggregator and the ability to create an account for comprehensive searching should be yet another reason to visit physical spaces, the site cannot become an alternative to them.

We would like to simplify the process — within and between anarchist spaces — of finding, (re)printing, translating, preserving in paper form, and/or distributing written texts, as well as fostering relationships (including international ones) between groups and/or individuals — even anonymously.

Additionally, to make metadata easily editable (based on new standards) and to reconstruct bibliographic relationships between texts and translations — enabling the potential development of further historical-archival meta-analyses.

Finally, to streamline both file and metadata formats, enable mass backups, avoid building projects on links that break later, preserve information on appropriate, non-commercial and/or uncensorable servers, and make it easy and intuitive to know what already exists (e.g., scans) or what's missing (e.g., in periodical collections).

http://www.anarchistlibraries.network
info@anarchistlibraries.network
Newsletter
Github repository

Technical notes

This aggregator works by collecting various data sources from different archives or libraries (OAI-PMH, spreadsheets, hard drives of PDFs with any index) and makes them browsable. Each data source has an account from which it can perform various operations, including setting language relationships (text B translated from text A), unifying author references (e.g., solving the problem of different transliterations/translations of names), and grouping different texts under a single entry if uploaded separately. The reference logic model is IFLA-LRM — not just a simple list of features, but the relationship between elements of a catalog.

This project is oriented toward physicality despite being a digital project. In fact, each space/site will be able to input its own data, describe its activity, and so on. The project accepts everything from bibliographic citations to raw scans to editable, reprintable texts using the amusewiki software platform. This means the collection can be enriched and completed not only by the "name" of the books, not only by their "scan," but also by their "text" — typeset and printable. However, each library, archive, or publishing house will be able to decide independently whether to make its material "public" (see various "anarchist library" projects) or "private," i.e., browsable only by logged-in users, such as those in physical spaces with an account.

In fact, it's as if it were a vast interlibrary system — not only of titles, but of the content itself. The development and improvement of metadata is completely collaborative and does not affect how each space has done its cataloging.

The mind drinks less and less. Impatience. Highways full of crowds going somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, nowhere. The gasoline refugee. Towns turn into motels, people in nomadic surges from place to place, following the moon tides, living tonight in the room where you slept this noon and I the night before.
Ray Bradbury — Fahrenheit 451

Back to the roots, back to material solidity. To real discussions, physical spaces of confrontation before connection. Faced with a reality that crumbles between our fingers, with a memory of what anarchist thought once was — now fading in the face of media doublethink and the sweet constraint of new communication channels — the only choice was to rethink the conflicting relationship between what this world imposes — digitization and the dematerialization of relationships — and what we carry in our hearts and refuse to abandon — the rejection of consensus and the love for unique, sensual encounters between individuals struggling against this existing order.

Why still go to an anarchist library? Why sacrifice hours and days of one's life to keep a door open for a chance encounter, rather than retreat into the perpetual, effortless availability of a website? Because there is something more.

To foster the birth of dark alcoves where printing and discussion intermingle means to keep fanning embers we want to see blaze. It means refusing to give in to the irreversibility of the loss of meaning, the flattening of language, the uselessness of physicality in expressing one's desires. It means refusing isolation, staying eager and hopeful to meet eyes that burn in sync with the beat of our hearts. And such an encounter can only happen based on ideas. We will meet many people in our lives, of course. We will share passions and interests, days of play and nights of love, but only a few individuals will brand our life's path with letters of fire. And when those dreams are stifled, starting again from ideas is the only way to stay alive.

Not surrendering to the mediocrity of survival also means continuing to shout through the streets who we are not and what we do not want. Straining to hear a faint echo of our dreams, which sometimes comes unexpectedly and in unforeseen ways. The social fabric is not a mystery to be unveiled with the scientific determination of cause and effect.

https://www.anarchistlibraries.network

We therefore propose a non-website — a small taste of something greater, which can only become such if we rise to the challenge of continuing to question the world in its physicality, to keep that door open through which visceral rage may enter and from which thoughts and actions irreconcilable with this oppressive social pacification, this climate of war and apocalypse, this suppression of individual uniqueness may emerge.

On the other hand, sharing information already increases visibility for the various spaces that house collections and want to make them accessible and viewable. Also because if, globally, there is a virtual space in which to share anarchist material that encourages the vitality of physical spaces — collaboratively improving the quality of descriptions/metadata and, above all, facilitating the printing and dissemination of such material in the outside world — then yes, thinking beyond national-linguistic boundaries and churches can become an element of rupture with this world. In any case, we have included an "omit" function by which each space can decide what to show and what not to show during the search process from their account: this is not about finding forced consensus on what is anarchist and what is not, but rather each group of people can independently make their own evaluations and considerations. This too is a reason why this project — which does not aim to become a political identity or a point of "belonging" — can be a place where sensitivities and projects meet, united by being enemies of authority, yet with different shades and even significant divergences in their approaches.

How to contribute

Through https://www.anarchistlibraries.network we want to support the spread of anarchist ideas by making the various databases searchable, printable, and collaboratively improvable; and by giving visibility to physical spaces that house anarchist libraries and archives.

You can contribute to the project by sharing your materials and improving metadata and the completeness of the information.

The sharing of one's archives can take place in various ways (as explained in the technical notes).

For any request or to add your data source, contact us. You will be helped and supported in organizing the import of the catalog and the creation of your profile:

info@anarchistlibraries.network

Is everything downloadable?

Uploading texts and scans of books and magazines — both old and contemporary — online is not a universally shared practice. You can add your archive using various options:

Public entity and accessible catalog — All projects that are publicly accessible and want to make their catalog freely browsable online.

Public entity and restricted catalog — For projects that are publicly accessible but want their catalog browsable only after authentication.

Private entity and restricted catalog — For collections that are not publicly accessible (e.g., private libraries) but still want to share their catalog and make it browsable through login on the site.