

10 Years Later, A Reflection And A Response

On An English Language Anarchist Library Project

An Anarchist Librarian From North America

Aug 26, 2018

Contents

A Reflection	3
A Response	4

A Reflection

The Anarchist Library project in English is alive and well. We have a new IRC channel for the English language project hosted over at the anarchist server irc.anarchyplanet.org channel #library and can still be reached by emailing library@angrylists.com. The “about us” has always said that *The Anarchist Library* “is (despite its URL) *an* archive focusing on anarchism, anarchist texts, and texts of interest for anarchists.”

I’m writing this as an individual who has been around since the start of the project. A little more than ten years ago a help wanted sign of sorts was posted to the Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed website (if I remember correctly), announcing the creation of the project and looking for people to help out. It linked to an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel where people met (most had never met each other in real life before, although a handful did know each other face-to-face). From the IRC chat, a group of participants from all over the world created what has today become the English branch of the anarchist library. We discussed many ideas and the “about us” at length, went back and forth over images, a possible logo, and exactly what an anarchist library is and how it could work. There was a solid base of expectations and a definition of the project that for the most part, hasn’t changed over 10 years later.

Since then, a few things have changed. For example, the online chat has gone from IRC to XMPP, to SILC-IRC, to nothing, back to IRC but hosted on Freenode servers, and now, finally back on an anarchist IRC server. You can still find the other languages on the Freenode IRC #anarchistlibrary channel. Lots of people have come and gone from the English project, but a core group has remained and kept one of the largest archives of anarchist texts online sailing strong. We plan to keep it going for many years to come.

Looking back on relationships and the comings and goings of individuals, here are a couple of thoughts. One of the reasons that it’s difficult to find a solid core of people in long-term projects like the library is because it takes a lot of work. An online archival project like the library is often thankless, although the kindness and appreciation from people around the world in regards to the overall project has been tremendously positive, a big motivation to keep going (at least, for me). In some ways, I’m surprised that the site has become so popular and well-respected internationally and continues to be even after some bad press here and there. And finally, we’re anarchists so there is the choice about who we work with; some people can be more difficult to work with than others, on a project that is mostly conversations online. From the very start, it was not always a smooth ride, but one filled with turbulence and disagreements about everything and anything, as all meaningful anarchist projects can be; yet at the same time we’ve managed to mostly keep it together, be resilient, and create a long-standing archive of anarchist and related texts.

At the start of the library, we worked with the site offline until we had posted something like 100 texts from various other archives and locations across the web.

Spunk library, the Kate Sharpley Library, Anarchy Archives (dwardmac) and pretty much anything we could find and edit. Since then, a lot of those original sources like Angelfire domains have disappeared from the Internet. This was one of the original reasons for the library, as we saw anarchist texts from the digital age going into the dark void of nothing and disappearance. Today, the English library has over 3,500 texts. Over the years, the library has received around 3 DMCA take-down requests from publishers and agents of a few popular writers, which we've complied with. More than a few academic institutions and related have reached out and offered support, but we've chosen to keep the project outside of the academy, other than sharing some texts from within it.

Originally the site ran the Drupal content management system, which was a bit of a pain for a library site. Soon, the project changed to a home brew designed by an anarchist librarian, which has gone on to become AmuseWiki. One of the great things about this archiving and publishing platform is that it gives high quality files in .epub and PDF (letter and A4). One can download a book as .epub and put it on their eReader / mobile or take the imposed PDF and print it out, staple it together, and start their own distro, or load up the LaTeX file and edit it with Emacs, into some gorgeous new design for an upcoming text.

The librarian and programmer behind the AmuseWiki archival and publishing platform has left the English language project, taking most of the other languages libraries with them, and disowned the original English library project¹. Having said that, the original English language project continues on as strong as ever across the vast digital seas of anarchist texts.

A Response

We still find a great deal of love and joy working on this anarchist library. In the following, I talk about our choices, and what a library is, and reaffirm our support for the project and for helping others create anarchist libraries.

For many years, texts from an eco-extremist (EE) group calling themselves “Individuals Tending toward the Wild” or ITS, were on the library, as they once claimed to be anarchist-influenced. No problems were raised over those years. The library stopped publishing the ITS communiques and related texts once they stopped calling themselves anarchists and started claiming indiscriminate attacks against hikers, and there were some attacks in Mexico City. The library has not had writings by ITS since then.

Another example: Not very many people have submitted Michael Schmidt texts to the library, but he can still be found there, at least one of his texts². Would we publish more from him if people submitted them? Sure, maybe. Apparently, Schmidt didn't

¹ Statement from Marco, <https://www.anarchistlibraries.net/history>

² “The Kurdish Question: Through the lens of Anarchist Resistance in the Heart of the Ottoman Empire 1880–1923”, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/michael-schmidt>

do much of the writing though and it was mostly Lucien van der Walt it turns out. It's a conversation we would have, like previously when we decided to just leave Schmidt's text up after everything came out. This is an archival anarchist library project.

Coming back to EE and ITS: We have an entire tag / category called "not anarchist"³ that currently includes 33 different texts, including some ITS texts. The library has almost all of Ted Kaczynski's texts⁴, who is definitely not an anarchist thinker, but his writings are archived due to their relationship with anarchist thought. We have texts about kneecapping scientists, various acts of propaganda of the deed, and all sorts of violence, that have not drawn the same ire and amount of attention that the older ITS texts have. ITS came out of the anarchist space and how far from it they've found (or removed) themselves from it is of interest to some anarchists. It is part of our history and is completely appropriate for it to appear on an archival project documenting anarchist and related texts.

Reading things by people we disagree with (or making such readings accessible to other people) is not condoning the things we disagree with, much less supporting them. Anyone who insists on banning particular texts from the library because they personally disagree with the content is acting to indoctrinate, not allowing people to make up their own minds.

The branch off also lists an English language archive that claims to have been around since 2009, however it was created this year, 2018. Who knows what direction that new website will take, but currently it is just a mirror of the original English language project site, sans one text from Atassa on indiscriminate anarchists⁵ that wasn't on the original library during the conversations about the split, nor is it a text by ITS. Everything else on their new English library is the same, except it hasn't been updated recently (and you can't submit txts there, so it's just a static page). It would be unfortunate if there are two competing English libraries with the same content, which seems like the direction things are going.

Of course, more anarchist libraries are always better, than fewer anarchist libraries – I just worry of the fallout that this split and the resulting confusion will have and from those anonymous people that have helped submit and edit texts and keep the original English library alive. I also worry that someday soon the English project will no longer find itself supported by AmuseWiki, as the main creator left a project on a poor note and the CMS will eventually break. By writing this I'm drawing attention to the situation, which could be good or bad. People disagree, and that's okay, and especially healthy for having critical conversations, although there are also good and bad ways to have conflict that perhaps matters the most.

We have always agreed that we want to help other anarchist libraries be successful.

³ ITS tag / category on the library, currently with 9 related texts.
<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/topic/its>

Not anarchist tag / category, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/topic/not-anarchist>

⁴ Ted Kaczynski, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/ted-kaczynski>

⁵ "Indiscriminate Anarchists" by Seminare <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/seminare-indiscriminate-anarchists>

Also in their announcement, they talk about each library being their own project. While this is true and sounds great, there is another reality to this statement. I'd be very curious to know, if the other languages will run into problems when they publish a text that the library.net admins disagree with. What happens then? Do they actively monitor all the languages? That seems like a lot of work. On a positive note, there are a lot of great things happening behind the scenes at AmuseWiki in the other languages; for example the recent support for right-to-left (RTL) languages, which could be huge for providing support to languages like Chinese and other RTL language-speakers who have reached out for help in creating an anarchist library.

This is perhaps a bit more of a reply than I had originally imagined. It's never fun to air out the dirty laundry, and who likes arguing over a library or spending energy on things like this, but in the end I thought it was important to present another side to the ongoing narrative. Please continue to support the original English language project and understand that our editorial decisions are open to discussion. For a library of 20+ years next time around!

The Ted K Archive

An Anarchist Librarian From North America
10 Years Later, A Reflection And A Response
On An English Language Anarchist Library Project
Aug 26, 2018

www.thetedkarchive.com