# Archival Parties and Parties to the Archive

## Creating and Recovering Anarchist Resistance Culture at the Interference Archive

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Scholars researching anarchism in the United States have frequently turned to a small number of radical literature archives housed at major universities, including the University of Michigan's Labadie Collection and the Tamiment Library at New York University. These collections provide access to extensive runs of nineteenth- and twentieth-century periodicals and to the personal papers of some key movement figures. The International Institute for Social Research, based in Amsterdam, has likewise proven to be an essential repository. Aspects of the anarchist tradition distinguish it from other political movements, however, including those on the left, presenting challenges for archivists and researchers alike.

It is a misconception that anarchists oppose all forms of organization, but many do believe that informal, task-centered groupings better represent their values and serve their goals than large, permanent parties and federations.[1] At the same time, what Jesse Cohn terms "anarchist resistance culture"—creative work in a variety of media, as well as sartorial and lifestyle expression—has played an outsized role in the movement's strategies. Historians of anarchism rely less heavily on extensive organizational records than scholars of communism and other radical currents.[2] For these reasons, cultural artifacts and periodicals take on heightened significance for researchers, since anarchists have frequently organized themselves around adherence to the editorial lines propounded by specific newspapers and their influential editors. While other contributors to this Forum reflect on the benefits that periodical digitization offers to scholars of anarchism, I consider a unique attempt to collect and share material remnants of radical cultural production.

Archivists have dealt with the highly ephemeral nature of anarchist artifacts with varying degrees of success. The Labadie Collection, for instance, maintains a highly valuable subject vertical file, full of (often anonymously created) leaflets, event programs, newspaper clippings, and other material indexed in a category tree. But capturing the true "structure of feeling" of anarchist movements in different times and places may require greater attention to cultural products and practices than text-centric, institutional archives currently provide.[3]

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[1] See Alexandre Skirda, *Facing the Enemy: A History of Anarchist Organization from Proudhon to May 1968,* trans. Paul Sharkey (Oakland: AK Press, 2002); Andrew Cornell, *Unruly Equality: US Anarchism in the 20th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 32–38.

[2] Jesse Cohn, *Underground Passages: Anarchist Resistance Culture, 1848–2011* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014). Other work emphasizing the centrality of cultural production to anarchist movements includes Marcella Bencivenni, *Italian Immigrant Radical Culture: The Idealism of the Sovversivi in the United States, 1890–1940* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Maria Monserrat Feu-Lopéz, "'Transatlantic Trenches' in Spanish Civil War Journalism: Félix Martí Ibáñez and the Exile Newspaper España Libre (Free Spain, New York City 1939–1977)," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 53–77; Laura Portwood-Stacer, *Lifestyle Politics and Radical Activism* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

[3] Raymond Williams describes structures of feeling as "characteristic elements of impulse, re-straint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought." He maintains that "The hypothesis has a special relevance

The Interference Archive, located in Brooklyn, New York, offers new approaches to the work of recovering anarchist "worlds." Launched in 2011 by four artist-activists with long-standing ties to the antiauthoritarian political milieu, the archive is dedicated to "exploring the relationship between cultural production and social movements" of the left.[4] Run by a collective of volunteers and funded by a monthly sustainer program, the archive currently contains more than ten thousand items donated from private collections, most of them produced after the Second World War. While the Interference collection includes hundreds of books and periodicals, it tilts more heavily toward visual, textile, audio, and video material than conventional archives. Flat file cabinets full of political graphics, in the form of posters, leaflets, and banners, occupy considerable floor space and double as desktops in the archive's joint workroom-gallery.

In addition to collecting anarchist material in many formats, the anarchist values of equality, cooperation, participation, and irreverence shape the way Interference functions, leading the institution to adopt practices at odds with traditional archival practice but potentially generative of unique insights. Interference follows in a line of "movement" archives that emphasize accessibility to current activists and direct advocacy of radical ideas.[5] While many university and government collections are open only to credentialed scholars, Interference welcomes the public at large. Whereas traditional archives require professionals to retrieve items from closed stacks in the name of "preservation," all items in the Interference Archive are housed in open stacks. This affords visitors the unique experience of browsing through primary source material. Co-founder Josh MacPhee distills this practice into a principle: "Use *is* preservation." Interacting with material to gain inspiration or knowledge preserves its ideas and emotional resonance in the minds of visitors, and in the new art and ideas they produce under its influence. Interference archivists would rather that a page is occasionally bent or an item "walks away" than the works be forgotten.[6]

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to art and literature, where the true social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief-systems, institutions or explicit general relationships." *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132–33.

[4] The archive was founded by Kevin Caplicki, Molly Fair, Dara Greenwald, and Josh MacPhee. For more information on its history, philosophy, and holdings, see the website of the Interference Archive, accessed October 23, 2018, www .interferencearchive .org.

[5] Anarchists have a tradition of maintaining independent archives as a means of making material more accessible to movement participants and less subject to the budgetary priorities, political whims, and prying eyes of government agencies. Prominent examples focused on English-language materials include the Kate Sharpley Library, founded in London in 1981 and now housed in Northern California, and the Anarchist Archives Project, launched in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a year later. See Jessica Moran, "To Spread the Revolution: Anarchist Archives and Libraries," in *Informed Agitation: Library and Information Skills in Social Justice Movements and Beyond,* ed. Melissa Morrone (Sacramento, CA: Library Juice Press, 2014), 173–84; Jerry Kaplan, "Preserving Our Past: The Anarchist Collections," *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 3–8.

[6] Josh MacPhee, "Survival Strategies: Building the Counter-Institution" (presented at Williams College Museum of Art, Williamstown, Massachusetts, April 17, 2017).

Interference Archive encourages visitors to become collaborators. Collective members invite guests who enjoy the collection to participate in biweekly "cataloguing parties," where professionally trained librarians, volunteering their time, teach them to create standardized records of pieces in the collection in a convivial environment. Staffers also encourage researchers to scan or digitally photograph materials, with the caveat that they share copies of the files to be incorporated into the online catalog. This form of participatory digitization enacts another iteration of the "use is preservation" motto.[7]

While collectivity is central to the archive's operation, Interference also encourages visitors to engage with its materials collectively, that is, conversationally and in social settings. Institutional distinctions between archive, museum, gallery, and studio fade away. In six years of operation, Interference has mounted more than sixteen original exhibits and hosted over one hundred lectures, workshops, and other events. A recent exhibit, *if a song could be freedom … Organized Sounds of Resistance,* displayed the album art and liner notes of two hundred political record albums and encouraged visitors to explore the music on stereo equipment included as part of the exhibit.[8] This mode of engagement contrasts sharply with the individual, nearly monastic, atmosphere of many traditional archives. How might we think differently about sources if we were to engage with many of them displayed side by side, with period-appropriate music playing, other interested people making observations, and a little wine facilitating associations?

Such irreverence for received distinctions and protocol encourages those using the archive to develop new methodologies and conceptual lenses. In a project related to the *if a song* exhibit, MacPhee recently produced a booklet akin to an annotated

[7] This process of collaborative cataloging and digitization builds on earlier precedents. Radi-cal organizers and educators have long recognized the power of information technology to make obscure political materials widely accessible. They have crafted a series of online repositories, including the Anarchy Archives, initiated by Pitzer College professor Dana Ward in 1996 (dwardmac. pitzer.edu), the Anarchist Library (theanarchistlibrary.org), multipurpose websites such as LibCom (libcom .org/ library), and transitory "shadow libraries" of PDFs, such as AAARG (Artists, Architects, and Activists Reading Group). On the latter, see Jonathon Basile, "Who's Afraid of AAARG? The Crisis of Academic Publishing and the Uncertain Future of the Humanities," *Guernica,* August 25, 2016, https:// www .guernicamag .com/ jonathan -basile -whos -afraid -of -aaarg/ . Such practices align with calls made by scholars such as Benjamin Fagan for researchers to collaboratively generate open-access digital archives of vital print material (Fagan focuses on pre-1865 African American newspapers) currently available only through expensive private databases. See Benjamin Fagan, "Chronicling White America," *American Periodicals* 26, no. 1 (2016): 10–13.

[8] The exhibit was organized by Chris Bravo, Kevin Caplicki, Josh MacPhee, Amy Roberts, Valerie Tevere, and Ryan Wong and ran from June 25 until September 6, 2015. See "Interview with Kevin Caplicki, Interference Archive on 'If a Song Could be Freedom ... '" Urban Democracy Lab, July 24, 2015, http://interferencearchive.org/if-a-song-could-be-freedom-organized-sounds-of-resistance/ ; Scott Borchert, "From Punk to American Folk: Two Takes on Music and Politics," *Hyperallergic,* August 18, 2015, https://hyperallergic .com/ 230208/ from — punk — to -american — folk — two — takes — on — music — and -politics/ .

bibliography cataloging politically engaged independent record labels from around the world.[9] What would it mean to think of the albums issued by such labels, which were often more interested in spreading a message than in maximizing profits, as *periodicals?* Produced and circulated semiregularly and combining music, visual art, text, and sometimes inserts such as posters, cloth patches, and advertisements, these are collaborative works intended for circulation. In other publications, MacPhee has analyzed the cover art of radical paperbacks, asking what the patterns and evolving aesthetics suggest about the times and the movements in which they were produced.[10] Seriality is a crucial aspect of the way the producers of these objects make meaning, as well.

Unlike most institutional repositories, Interference also actively partners with visitors to create new work—of both the agitprop and historical varieties. After Donald Trump was elected president in 2016, volunteers organized the Inaugurating Resistance Propaganda Party, during which they produced and gave away thousands of screen-printed posters, T-shirts, stickers, and buttons.[11] Meanwhile, the exhibit *Finally Got the News: The Printed Legacy of the 1970s Radical Left* combined pieces from University of Pennsylvania archivist Brad Duncan's private collection of pamphlets and magazines with complementary items from Interference. Anarchist documents from that decade appeared alongside those issued by radical feminists, anti-imperialists, and representatives of other political currents. Duncan and members of the Interference collective went on to produce a full-color book in which documents from the show are interspersed with personal recollections by individuals involved in the featured movements and short analytical essays penned by social movement historians.[12] This project represents an inventive, polyphonic act of historic recovery.

That this new form of open-access archive, with an emphasis on the analysis of images and sound, is emerging simultaneously with the rapid growth of searchable text archives bodes well for the future of research on the transnational anarchist movement. Kim Gallon and others have noted the limited utility of current periodical digitization methods for the critical consideration of illustrations, political cartoons, and other images that have often proven central to the meaning-making work that newspaper editors hoped to accomplish.[13] But historian Andrew Hoyt's work indicates ways in which the sorts of questions and methods encouraged by Interference Archive might be

[9] Josh MacPhee, *An Encyclopedia of Political Record Labels* (Brooklyn: self-pub., 2017).

[10] Josh MacPhee, "New World Paperbacks/Old World Designs: American Communism's Strange Attempt to Join the Paperback Revolution," *Counter-Signals* 1 (2017): 164–79; Josh MacPhee, "Anarchism in Your Pocket: The Rise of Mass-market Anti-Authoritarianism," *Counter-Signals* 2 (Fall 2017–Winter 2018): 132–48.

[11] Colin Moynihan, "A Seedbed of New Images to Protest Trump," *New Yorker,* January 18, 2017, http:// www .newyorker .com/ culture/ culture- desk/ a -seedbed -of -new -images -to -protest -trump.

[12] Brad Duncan and Interference Archive, eds., *Finally Got the News: The Printed Legacy of the US Radical Left, 1970–1979* (Brooklyn: Common Notions, 2017).

[13] Kim Gallon, "Mining Images of Race and Gender in Twentieth-Century Black Popular Periodicals," *American Periodicals* 26, no. 1 (2016): 13–15.

fruitfully combined with the types of computational analysis made possible by online archives. In a recent essay, Hoyt explored the ways artist Carlo Abate used antiquated woodblock carving techniques to produce powerful illustrations for the Italian-language anarchist newspaper *Cronaca Sovversiva.* The fact that *Cronaca Sovversica* has been digitized by the Library of Congress, meanwhile, has allowed Hoyt to map the newspaper's geographical circulation, and thus the spread of a network of radical working-class Italian immigrant communities, across three continents.[14] Hoyt's multimethod scholarship provides just one exciting example of the ways that archival innovations are altering the conventions of anarchist historiography and fueling the recent upsurge in interdisciplinary anarchist studies.[15]

The stability, funding, and breadth of holdings offered by traditional archives will remain invaluable to scholars studying anarchism. But the existence of Interference, which bills itself as an "archive from below," radically expands the notion of what an archive can be and do. That, in turn, explodes assumptions about what kinds of questions we as researchers can ask, the forms and platforms in which we might present our research, and the modes of collaboration and sociality that might enhance the process and the product.

[14] Andrew Hoyt, "The Inky Protest of an Anarchist Printmaker: Carlo Abate's Newspaper Illustrations and the Artist's Hand in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Protest on the Page: Essays on Print and the Culture of Dissent,* ed. James L. Baughman et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015): 32–58; Andrew Hoyt, "Active Centers, Creative Elements, and Bridging Nodes: Applying the Vocabulary of Network Theory to Radical History," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 37–59.

[15] For an introduction to current scholarship on anarchism across the disciplines, see Ruth Kinna, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Anarchism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Carl Levy and Matthew Adams, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

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