

The Anarchist Library talk at 2020 London Anarchist Bookfair

librarian

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On October 18th, 2020 The Anarchist Library project participated in an interview that was featured during the London Anarchist Bookfair

The conversation covered some of the libraries past, a brief how to of sorts, and more.

Reader: Hello, anarchists. Welcome to the London Book Fair 2020. I am a reader and I'm here with a librarian all the way from across the pond. Hello!

Librarian: Hello there. Thanks for having me.

Reader: You're welcome. How's the weather?

Librarian: Oh, it's a bit chilly. This morning had some frosts last night, but Suns out.

Reader: Same here, same here. Right. Let's get into it theanarchistlibrary.org. We've all used it. It seems to have been around forever. Where did it come from?

Librarian: Yes, so. This has gotta be around 13 years ago. At this point. And at that moment in time, there was a IRC Internet relay chat, which is a protocol that's over 30 years old and people use it to converse and chat over the Internet. So there was an IRC server. Hosted by some anarchists and participating in. There was a general call up by guests or an idea shared about a project to create an archive of anarchist texts. That would be the largest archive eventually on the Internet. With the specific focus of being a site for high quality texts, so in the past you could visit other websites like the Spunk Library, the Kate Sharpley Library. Well, Kate sharply is very high quality, actually, but the anarchy archives like Deward Mac and you'd go there. And there was you could read a text, but often there was a lot of errors and texts were just scattered around everywhere. So yes, that's the origins. Back in 13 years ago, Aragon. One of the founders of the project. Along with a handful of other people from across North America, but also the worlds here, often I find well these days. Sometimes people call the library a specifically USA project, but that is definitely not true, even though who I am speaking from. New York. Yeah. So it's participants around the world and it certainly was at the origins as well. People have come and gone since that started. But we still have a handful of the founders here, including myself, so. Feel free to jump into with the questions I feel.

Reader: Yeah I did want to just say for. People who don't know in in the UK, Aragon, whose name was mentioned, was an indigenous North American anarchist who died earlier this year. If you are not familiar with his work, I would recommend the brilliant podcast. That was another project of his yeah, and the library. The library was another. Let's just. Say OK, let's say I'm on the Internet. I'm looking around and I find an essay. Aragon somewhere out there, not on the library, and I would like to add it to the library so that I can, you know, print it off, share it, etc. How do I do that?

Librarian: OK. Yeah. Do you, I mean we can jump right to that question like I could add a little more about the. The history of the library as well here.

Reader: OK. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Consent. Yeah.

Librarian: If you don't. Mind just will not do that. Cool. Yeah, cause I mean, why not?

Reader: It has a long history it seems.

Librarian: Yeah, well, I've been 13 years, so you're not too. Much, but yeah.

Reader: OK, OK. So so the the. Call out. It went out. You were there, Aragon, with lots of other people were there. And yeah, I mean, what's the tech behind this because.

Librarian: So originally we it was offline for just a couple of months. I want to say maybe. Even more. And so we had collected around like 500 texts and we made sure the texts were like all really nicely edited up and, you know, uploaded there. So that was all offline. And then we launched with those like 500 texts or so like 405 hundred and the CMS, the content management system. Of the website you know, so how? You like interact with. It was originally a Drupal. Which is, you know, a. Quite a popular CMS, but it was just so cumbersome and I mean there was just a lot of work to. Upload texts and edit and it wasn't. It definitely wasn't the website that one might know today. So over some time there, one of the main participants in the library. Homebrewed content management system that has since become known as. A muse wiki. And that is a whole a separate project. That the library uses that content management system to. Publish share edit texts. So that's kind of how things started there and one of the really cool things about it about a Muse wiki is that you can find the PDF. You can find the letter imposed PDF, the A4 imposed. The epub for your E readers HTML source and you know you can even fire up Emacs. And download the latex files and added it up and designed something. Beautiful like that.

Reader: See that would. Be that would be why, yeah, so. You find the text it's on. A blog? You know, it looks very nice on the screen, you know. On on, on your laptop or your your tablet or whatever, but. If you want to get that in. Out into the real world. I mean, that's what I'm used. One of the things that Musiki is for, right?

Librarian: Yes indeed. So you could, you know, download any of those formats and files, print them out and share it, create your own distro, create your own little Info shop archive, or just put something together like that. And it does. Have some really cool features like the book builder that I just. Want to give a quick shout out for? Where you can just like take a text and take some other texts, throw them all together and really customise your how it looks and make something really cool to share with your friends. Right now there's over 7000 texts on the English library, so starting from that original date like 13 years ago, like 400 or so 500, there's like 7000 now, and there's also 13 different languages that are all. Separate projects, so right this is the English language anarchist library calling in right now, so I can't speak for any of the other projects, but there's 13 and you can all find them there and under the languages tab and they're all separate projects. Their own ideas. But you know anarchist texts,

yeah. So you can start your own language library. I just a quick disclaimer, it is a lot of work you have to and you know I won't get into how to do that. But if your language or. Language that you're interested in, that you're fluent in. And able to do something like that. You can reach out to us at the project. And we can. You know the English language library can help you set up a domain, provide some server space, some technical side of things, and you do the rest of the project yourself with your. Friends and your. Your group.

Reader: The idea is, isn't it? Once the once the infrastructure is there that readers like myself will will contribute will, will, will find texts that they're interested in and add them to the library. That's, I mean it's set up so that people could do that, right? It's meant to be user friendly and open open. Oh, and people can also edit. You know, if they find an error in the text or something, but. Let's say I don't know how to do that, but I I do have a text I wanted to share. It's on no blogs or somewhere like that. How do I go about getting it from? From node blogs to theanarchistlibrary.org.

Librarian: So there's. Well, here's. The the workflow, the first thing you know you definitely want to read the fine manual and there's some you know about us there and you know, finding just checking that out, reading a little bit about the A amuse. Wiki markup, but to be honest you could kind of just jump in so you have a text on another website. That you want. To upload. So first thing that you want to do is cheque and see if it's already on the library. We get, like I said, so like you mentioned as well, anyone can you know add text to a library. It's not just librarians adding texts, right? You can go right. Anyone around there the world and just add a text. So just search to make sure that it's not on the library first. And the library search function works, it can. Be a little. Tricky, so perhaps also fire up your favourite search engine and just search the domain that way as well. Well, and if it's not on there. Then you know what does. How is the text? Is it a website like HTML text or is it a PDF? So let's talk about just like the text and the the website first. So you're going to, you know, copy and paste it, and you could even use your favourite editor of choice. Uhm, go back to the library website. And click on the archive, click on add text. And the library uses a wizzywig editor which is, uh, you know what you see is what you get, which is if you're familiar with Chumbawamba. And I just say that because this is London bookfair you know?

Librarian: That's the name of one of their albums, Wizzywig.

Reader: Yes, it is. Yeah.

Librarian: So you know it's the what you see is. What you get out of there? And you can just taste.

Reader: So as as you're editing it, you see. How it will look when it will be finished?

Librarian: Yeah. Yeah. So you just copy and paste it there, make sure that you include the relevant fields like you know the some topics, the author notes, any other stuff that's very important that you can include there, the topics will. Just pop up if you type some in there, or you can add some new ones as well. Very bit of a mess, but that's one thing for certain that needs some some work. So then you click. Everything's

good. You know, you looked at the text and you. Click create text screen modes up and there's another. A jump to another page. So at this page you just want to double cheque it again, and then there's a little box where you can include a note. What you did like added this text and. It's really nice if people include the reason why they added a text if it could be something that's not as well known and maybe a a little more controversial or like someone would see it like, let me do some digging to see if this should be up or no. So any information that you can provide is really appreciated. UM, along with you don't have to include an e-mail or anything like that, but if there's a field for emails as well. So you know, if we. Do have a question for you. We can e-mail you back and. Be like oh, this text needs some work. On this area. The footnotes are broken. Here's how you do it. Could you help us out here? We'll a librarian. We'll get to it when they have some moments. And yeah, so after you do that, you just submit it and the text will be put into a queue of library, and the librarians will cheque that out in a reasonable time frame. Hopefully there's not too much else going on in their lives, and it will. Possibly might show up on the front page eventually. So yeah.

Reader: Are there are there any extra steps if it's? So my example of the Aragon essay would would just be just on a HTML page I guess, but if it's a PDF, you know if it's, say, an episode of Return Fire or something, is there any extra steps to take it from? PDF into the editor like.

Librarian: Yeah, there are. And the PDFs are. A bit more tricky and require some more work. Without a doubt so. What the best? Practise for PDF because if you just go to a PDF and you copy and paste it, you know like with your mouse and stuff, you're going to miss all the the fine formatting like the italics, the bolds, the sections, stuff like that and. Often a lot of PDFs have these. You know the footnotes can be set up differently in the subscript and all that. So what you what? I recommend the best practise workflow is you're going to want to use an optical character recognition programme.

Reader: Ah yes.

Librarian: So I call it OC. Well, we people call it OCR. Yeah. So optical character recognition and there's a handful of programmes out there. On the Internet, some of them work a lot better than other programmes. And I don't want to give any shout outs to any like corporate programmes obviously, but you know those in my experience have them. The best results, but you know you can test out stuff on your own and there's some open source proprietary stuff, but there's also corporate paid ones that you can find and everything. So you feed the PDF into this programme and what it does is it basically reads the image. Yeah, and it turns that PDF image into editable text. And so you take that text and you put it into your favourite editor. And then edit it from there, convert it to the Muse markup just by copying and pasting it into the library submission queue and then. Do any further editing from there so it is a bit more cumbersome for sure to do the PDFs and it takes a lot more work, but often those are, you know, some of the. Best texts that we get.

Reader: Thank you. And I presume if what if it's in a magazine, so you're reading a Joe, you know, and a kitchen or desire armed and something Andy Robinson or something you want to get it out of the magazine of the paper onto the library. I mean, how? How through. What are your options here?

Librarian: Yeah, they're well, the easiest option, you know, without any. Buying fancy stuff is just if you have a cell phone, take a picture of the page with your cell phone or a digital camera and then. Upload that image to your computer and take that image and feed it into your OCR programme. I found that dot TIF files are the best for saving stuff like that as so you know use your cell phone camera or if you're. Have a little more. Access to fancy materials. You could use a scanner and you know scan. The magazine. And you can look on the Internet there and find some really cool scanning devices that like, you know, will are able or visit some place in the world that you can see the stuff that unis and universities where they can just scan pages ridiculously fast.

Reader: Yeah, well, it turns the page for you.

Librarian: Exactly. Yeah. I mean, not that we have. I'm doing anything like that. I'm just using the flatbed scanner. And so you scan the image, I save it. As a TIF. File and then I fire up the OCR programme and. Edit it from. There. So that's the basic workflow is you just. Find something that. You like get an image of it and then go from there.

Reader: OK. Thank you. What?

Librarian: I do want to add just.

Reader: Go on. Yeah, go.

Librarian: Audio. You know, that's one thing I haven't mentioned yet.

Reader: Right. Yeah, yeah.

Librarian: But let's say like. You're listening to your favourite podcast. Like let's say you know a news or the final straw radio, and then have a shansen segment on there so you know you could.

Reader: OK. Yeah.

Librarian: Technically you can. Use some transcription application and then take that text, edit it up and upload it as well, and that is probably the most difficult in my experience at least the one that have the least amount of time being successful. The same thing.

Reader: That's quite near, as I've seen a few uploads going up on a library where where people from YouTube, et cetera, have transcribed one of their recordings. And that's really interesting. I mean that would that. Would be great if people. If if people. Had the time to, like, say, interviews, you know, like they're they're because they're they're kind of lost. If they're just. There as a recording, you know there's no there's no way of other than telling people to listen to that recording, as long as it's still being hosted, it's quite difficult to share. OK so. Aside from from those you know. Those ways, what other ways are? There of getting involved in. The library other than uploading new content.

Librarian: Yes. So let's say you're sitting down and you're reading some texts off the library on your E on your e-reader, and you notice an error in some format in there. So you could, you know. Write that down, save it or and when you get a chance, go back to. Your computer. And actually go to the text and at the top of the screen there there's a icon and it looks like a pad of paper with a pencil. And you click on that and you can go to the text and you can edit it. So then you you know, Scroll down to the error fix it. Then go down to the next field and say what you did and then submit it and it will go into the queue and librarians will cheque it out and be like, Oh yes, this edit looks good or this edit is just. It doesn't make sense and you know, so just helping edit texts like that on the library is a really great help. And as I I threw out at the. Start there, hopefully most of. The texts are. Quite beautiful and finely tuned already, but you know.

Reader: Yeah. Hey you're really human.

Librarian: And things slip through. So that's one way to become involved there. You can also join the IRC, the Internet relay chat. It also has a bridge from the Matrix Protocol, so you can join that and say hello and. Talk to some librarians. If they're around. I just want to do. I do want to mention proper IRC etiquette is having some patience. And after you. Say hello. Stick around for a while because. It's so it's so funny. I get a kick. Out of it, people will come. And then expect. I don't know if they expect an immediate response, but they come in the IRC and say. Hey, what's up? And then like 30 seconds later, no one says high and they're gone. I often wonder who they are, but.

Reader: It's the same person. It's the same person. Discovering again and again. Can I I have a. Suggestion for the wanting to get involved, I think the. I guess it's what we would call. Tags. You know if it was on Instagram or something. It would be a hashtag. I think it's called topics on the library. Yeah. So that's how you find texts where you don't know the title or where you don't even really know what you want to read. You just know I want. To read something about insurrectionary. So there will be a topic. Insurrection and insurrection area, insurrection area and because maybe all three of them. And I I do, I have found quite a few texts that are missing topics that would make it. Much easier to find, you know, or to browse even. You know if every if everything was kind of indexed with these topics then you could just as an example, say desert desert. I think only has the one topic I think. I think it's tagged as nihilist well. You know what? If you wanted to read green texts from the UK, I mean that desert should be coming up really with that kind of search but it but it won't because it's it. It's missing the topics. So if. Someone is reading. The text like desert and they think OK. This is a green text and they notice that it doesn't have the green topic at the top of the text. How do they? How do they add that?

Librarian: Yes, the topics are a disaster without a doubt. And part of that is just because. It's, you know. It's opened up to everybody. So so when we'll submit a text and we'll add their own topics there so that I really stress like checking the topics and sometimes it'll pop up like as you're typing it on most browsers. I feel like if a topic

already exists. So yeah. So going through and adding topics or helping. You know. Fine tune them and delete topics and merging topics is something that we really need some help on and over the year. Well, how you do it is you do the same. You just do edit text and then there's a topic sort topics field. Within that text edit. And you could add some stuff there. So I just, I do want to really quickly mention that you know, when the library had started and one of the people involved with it was working on something that it's more like a academic. Kind of university aspect, but the anarchist decimal classification system or as I like to call it, the AD CS so you know we were trying to like classify and you know they'll do decimal system and create this like and just like having a system like that seems a bit absurd and ridiculous. But there has been some efforts of the past that haven't gone too far. Are and so we're just back at the normal topics now and like, oh, you put green or, you know, nihilism or anti saver whatever topic. That's what we're doing.

Reader: It could work. That could really work if it. If I think if the text you know if it's more it, it would be nice to browse I think to be able. To browse and know that. Not missing anything if just because you don't know the names of the authors. Yeah, I would. That seems to me like that would be the simplest way to contribute would be to just find some texts you like and make them easier for other people to find by. Adding some topics.

Librarian: And there's the on the wiki. Or, well, the. It's called the library bookshelf, which is basically. Like the wiki. The library. There's some work being done already on this, and you could you know, cheque that out and there's some ideas about the topics and tags and where to go from there.

Reader: Thank you. OK, last. Last I I did want to talk about. The torrent, but maybe I think we should let people explore that themselves, you know? But but I. Mean what is? There is a. Anarchists library torrent for the book there. Right.

Librarian: Yes. Yeah. And it's just. A collection of text there we. Threw in do or die. Do you want me to list some things?

Reader: Ah, you could you could.

Librarian: There just the general things.

Reader: Tempt people in with. Yeah, let's do or die. Ah, Sweden.

Librarian: Yes, your diet Anarchist Federation UK Anarchist Studies UK freedom Press Solidarity Federation elephant edition. Some linen faxes, texts. Anonymous. Ruth, Kinner ERICO, Ian McKay, Colin Ward, Andy Robinson. Monsieur frere. DuPont desert. Plus some critiques. Review commentary. And you know, so we did the the UK focus there tried to just you know UK tax and. It's not all their texts, so I mentioned, you know, like Colin Ward or Ruth Kinna. All the texts on the library are not included in the torrent, but they they've just curated some of the text there and usually the the longer texts and can all you can even find some. Lorraine and Freddy Perlman.

Reader: Ah, there you go. I'm sure they visited the UK at some point. OK, so.

Librarian: On as well.

Reader: How do people get that sorry. So they have a torrent programme. Qubit, torrent or whatever? And how did they get? It for off.

Librarian: So you can go to the library bookshelf and it doesn't look like well. I need to update the front page and we could put a little link on the front page of the library there, but you'd go to the library bookshelf under the top drop down archives. And it's it's posted right there, library torn and it's the most recent one that just says the the London Book Fair Torrent and it's it's about 80 texts all the formats so PDF A4 imposed everything epub, HTML, latex, plaintext, you name it. It's on there.

Reader: Right.

Reader: Yeah, go and have a look. See what you can find. Oh yeah, I.

Librarian: Think that's actually returned? Fires on there as. Well, too.

Reader: Brilliant. Yeah. OK. Last question plans for the future for the library, you said it's been going 13 years. That's a long time, 13 more I. Mean what's the plan?

Librarian: Yes, the plan is to stick around. We're not going anywhere. You know, our as you mentioned, great friends are going passed away earlier this year and with that. You know, it was someone that provided the infrastructure and. So many things for the project. So it took us a while, but we've we've gotten back on our feet here and. I would say that the English language projects Library has, you know, never been more active than it has been in these last couple years currently. So we're just going to keep on trucking as they say and. No, really big plans other than just kind of I was. I was thinking about it would be really cool if there was like audio links to texts as well or like an like a like an anarchist library audio that you could, you know click on it and then you could hear like a MP3 or podcast of some text. Being read something along those lines, so other another thing too. Like I mentioned earlier, but other languages if people are interested in your you know and you really want to put forth some time and become involved in like an online anarchist archival project. Yes, we can help you out and some know how the technical aspects and you know your project is otherwise autonomous from that and you can e-mail us at library at angrylists.com. Yeah, so it's library angrylists.com. Also, right on the website. There, yeah.

Reader: OK. All right. Thank you. So 7000 more texts in up and coming then, right?

Librarian: Indeed, hopefully so.

Reader: High quality text Sonic please. Thank you so much for your time librarian.

Librarian: Yeah. Thank you so much Reader.

Reader: Keep up the good work. Yeah. Take care.

Librarian: It's been a pleasure. Cheers.

Reader: OK. Bye bye.

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