⊠narchy in the ⊠rchive!

A Review, Study, and Some Ideas for the Future of Anarchist Archives

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Contents

Hi there peoples. So this is a thing that I originally wrote for my grad school class because I'm interested in the subject & because I thought it might be useful/interesting to some people. It's far from perfect, obviously, but I hope you enjoy it anyway! If you don't have access to any of the things I cite (there are some that aren't open access ⊠), please feel free to email me & I'd be happy to send you a PDF or whatever! Also, if you have any questions/concerns/rants/etc., feel free to reach out as well. My email is sagan [at] ashevillefm [dot] org. OK, here goes!

Anarchism as a philosophy, a lifestyle, and an influential force in the world has existed in its current state since the early 1800s. There have been countless anarchists throughout history and countless media have been produced by, for, and about anarchists. This fact, of course, means that there has been—and continues to be—a great deal of archival material pertaining to anarchists. What is the state of this material? Given the long-held antagonism of many state-sanctioned institutions and virtually all states to anarchism and related ideas, relatively little of the material has been preserved in "official" institutions such as university or government archives (although there are some exceptions). Instead, since the days of the earliest efforts at archiving anarchist materials, anarchists themselves have created their own archives and libraries, which are cooperatively self-controlled and mostly self-supported. Today, there exists a worldwide assortment of anarchist archives, all united by a common goal: to preserve and propagate the legacy of anarchism for the present and future. This paper examines the state of anarchist archives today and considers potential strategies and programs for greater accessibility and visibility of materials in the future.[1]

To begin, the anarchist archives must be placed squarely in the paradigm of community archives. Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens, and Elizabeth Shepherd define "community archives" as "collections of material gathered primarily by members of a given community and over whose use community members exercise some level of control" (2009, p. 73). Anarchist archives unquestionably fit in with this setting. They are created by anarchists, contain mostly or solely materials that pertain to anarchism, and—most importantly—are run using anarchist principles. Jessica Moran points out that community archives at large, and anarchist archives specifically, "should not be seen as vanity projects, nor as alternatives to active struggle, but rather as acts of resistance, consciously made" (2014, p. 176). Therefore, they are intimately and inextricably part of the anarchist movement and cannot be separated from it. They are also extremely important historically, since they often save materials that no other archive has or would be interested in.

Likewise, anarchist archives usually lean toward being as accessible as possible to as many different people as possible. This belief is in line with the general anarchist belief in open access and lack of paywalls to consume information (Kuhn and Lauesen,

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[1] A note on terminology: outside the United States, the term "libertarianism" (and its forms in other languages) is often used as a synonym for anarchism. The word "libertarian," in this sense, has little connection to its current meaning in United States politics and should not be construed to have the same meaning.

2018). However, the creed of accessibility does not hold true if anarchists are not aware of the presence and availability of documentary evidence of their history. There is a dearth of knowledge about the existence of numerous anarchist archives that focus on collecting both historical and contemporary material. For example, in the essay "Anarchism Without Archives," Nathan Jun points out, truthfully, that "the historical archive of anarchism has long teetered on the brink of extinction" (2012, p. 3). However, he follows this sentence by asserting that "while anarchists of the past would have regarded this state of affairs a dire emergency, anarchists of the present have largely responded with indifference" (2012, p. 3), an erroneous claim that is directly and obviously contradicted by the contemporary presence of numerous anarchist archives and anarchist efforts to preserve their own history—as will be detailed later in this paper.

Literature review

Anarchist archives have been little written about in the scholarly literature, and few—if any—scholars have attempted to study the full spectrum of anarchist archives. In addition, anarchist archives seem to have only begun to be written about at all in the 1980s and 1990s. [*EDIT: Since this essay's initial publication, I have been informed of at least one article about anarchist archives: Karl Walter's article on CIRA in the November 10, 1962 issue of Freedom News. It has been added to the bibliography.*] Writings about anarchist archives can almost all be sorted into three categories. Several authors (Firth, 2014; Pell, 2015; Pérez et al., 2007) focus on the ways that particular anarchist archives function as expressions of anarchist praxis and direct action. For example, Pablo M. Pérez, Juan Manuel Heredia and Hernán Villasenin (2007) described in their article how la Biblioteca Archivo de Estudios Libertarios (BAEL), an anarchist archive in Buenos Aires, Argentina, functioned as a diversified and cooperative community space rather than as an exclusive academic archive.[1] Similarly, Susan Pell (2015) examined the workings of the 56a Infoshop Archive in London and discussed how organizing the 56a Infoshop Archive in an explicitly anarchist fashion and decentralizing the traditionally institutionalized power of the archive furthers anarchist goals and ideas.

Many other writings (Baer, 2001; Balsamini, 2012; Bibliothekskollektiv Anarchistische Bibliothek & Archiv Wien, 2014; Domínguez Rubio, 2017; Goodway, 2008, Pezzica, 2003) straightforwardly describe the histories and operations of different physical anarchist archives, including very little, if any, critical analysis of their subject matter and instead functioning much as directory entries/guides to extant anarchist archives. Luigi Balsamini (2012) wrote about various anarchist archives in Italy, describing their history, holdings, and operations in detail.[2] Lucas Domínguez Rubio (2017) wrote a similar piece in regard to Argentinian archives. Similarly, Bibliothekskollektiv Anarchistische Bibliothek & Archiv Wien (2014) wrote about their organization of Anarchistische Bibliothek & Archiv Wien, an anarchist library and archive in Vienna, Austria, matter-of-factly describing their cataloging, operational and digitization efforts.[3] Articles of this type serve mainly as introductions for the unaware to the mere existence

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[1] *http://www.federacionlibertariaargentina.org/archivo.htm*

[2] It should be noted that Balsamini also authored a book about Italian anarchist archives, which was not possible to examine for this study. See Luigi Balsamini, *Fragili carte: Il movmento anarchic nelle biblioteche, archive e centri di Documentazione* [*Fragile cards: The anarchist movement in libraries, archives and documentation centers*]. Editore Veccheirelli, 2009.

[3] *https://a-bibliothek.org/*

of anarchist archives, which is an indication of the greater need for publicity of many of these organizations.

Finally, a few articles have surveyed anarchist archives of the world and made some determination about their status and future (Hoyt, 2012; Kaplan, 1997; Moran, 2014). Andrew Hoyt and Jessica Moran used surveys sent to and filled out by various—almost solely physical—anarchist archives to gauge the current status of anarchist archives worldwide. Both end their articles with calls for more organized networks of cooperation and mutual aid between anarchist archives internationally. Hoyt, in fact, indicates that the "mutual aid potential seems largely untapped at this time" (2012, p. 37). The current study continues the efforts of these authors, especially Hoyt, by examining a variety of anarchist archives worldwide and making another call to action to make these organizations more connected and accessible to all.

One aspect of anarchist archives is left virtually unaddressed in the scholarship, however: online anarchist archives. There are numerous born-digital anarchist archives of widely varying levels of size, scope, professionality, upkeep, and usability, the most well-known of which is the Anarchist Library.[4] Research for this paper found 32 born-digital archives, many of which are of significant size and/or have unique materials. Despite the number and significance of online anarchist archives, writing about only one of them could be found for this project. In his 2001 book *Alternative Media*, Chris Atton makes brief mention of Spunk Library[5], a no longer updated but still available archive that was active in the late 1990s and early 2000s (p. 114-118). The now-defunct website the Bastard Archive was also briefly mentioned by Moran (p. 179), and Shawn P. Wilbur of the Libertarian Labyrinth website[6] stated that he had been interviewed by scholars (Wilbur, 2020), but these examples do not constitute significant study of online archives. At the time of Atton's writing, Spunk Library was one of the only online archives of anarchist material (the other was Anarchy Archives[7]), but they have since proliferated. It is surprising, then, that the majority of scholarly attention has been focused on physical archives and their initiatives. This paper moves toward rectifying that oversight by examining both born-digital and born-physical anarchist archives. More scholarly attention to online anarchist archives is much needed, however.

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[4] *https://theanarchistlibrary.org/*

[5] *http://www.spunk.org/index.html*

[6] *https://www.libertarian-labyrinth.org/*

[7] *http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/index.html*

Methods and findings

In order to find the greatest number of anarchist archives possible, a variety of approaches were used. There are several extant directories and bibliographies, such as the website of la Fédération internationale des centres d'études et de documentation libertaires (FICEDL),[1] which is or was an international organization of physical anarchist libraries and archives founded in 1979 in order to encourage long-term preservation and coordination of anarchist materials (FICEDL, 1979). FICEDL will be discussed more later, but they included an extensive directory of their members on their website. Several other bibliographies and lists were also mined. In addition, web searches, citations in articles and general word of mouth were utilized in compiling a list of archives. Archives that are devoted solely to one anarchist individual or organization (such as the Emma Goldman Papers at UC Berkeley or Archivo Electrónico Ricardo Flores Magón[2]) were not included due to time and space restrictions. It should also be noted that this survey was in large part limited to archives with some modicum of online presence, although several archives had very little online presence at all, only retaining a listing in a directory or a Facebook page. The list of archives was then converted into table form, and each archive was examined for the following accessibility criteria:

1. Is contact information available for the archive, and if so, what information?

2. Does the archive have online finding aids and/or inventories of their material?

3. Does the archive have digitized materials available online?

4. Does the archive have a searchable catalog?

5. What language is the archive available in?

6. What is the archive's location?

The full table can be found in Appendix A. A total of 95 archives that are clearly currently active (and/or available online) were found during the research for this project. Several other archives' status could not be conclusively determined through online searches. They might be currently inactive, so they were not included. Some of the listings on FICEDL's website were out of date and the status of archives had to be
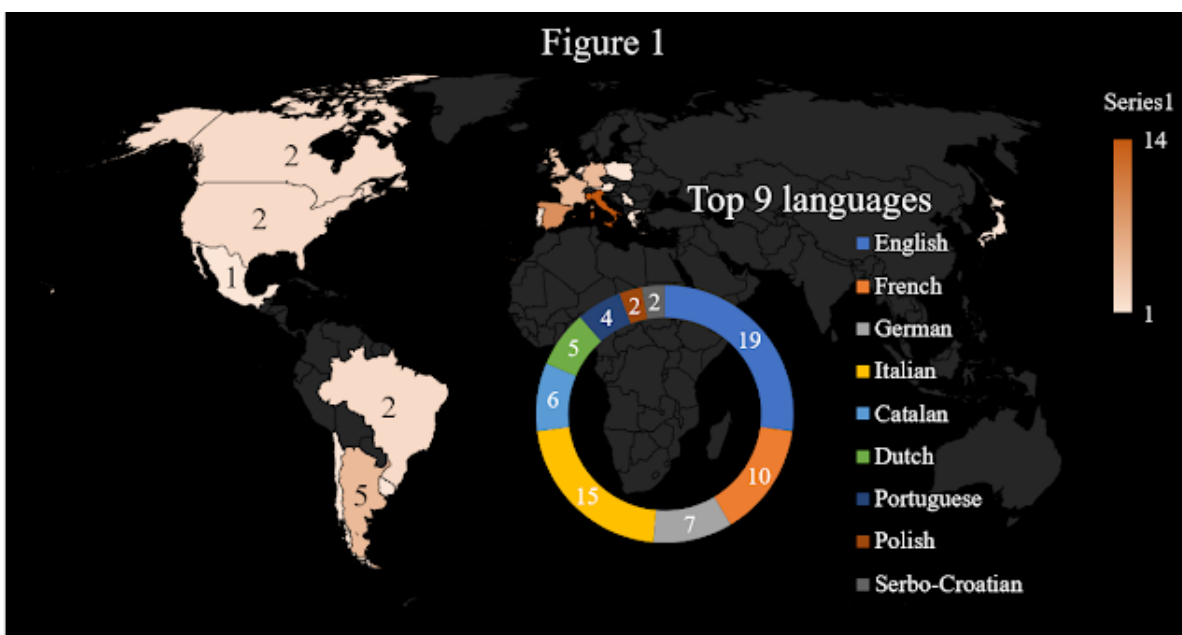
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[1] *https://ficedl.info/*

[2] *https://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/index.html*; *http://archivomagon.net/*

determined through additional web searches as well. Although the search attempted to be comprehensive, it was likely not all-inclusive due to linguistic and regional barriers of web searching and directories. All in all, there were 63 physical archives found and 32 online archives, although there are very probably more out there.

The vast majority of physical archives surveyed were in Europe and South America, with the greatest concentrations of archives in Italy and Spain/Catalonia. Italy had by far the most anarchist archives, with 14 separate institutions, while Spain and Catalonia had nine. Archives were found in a total of 20 languages. Nineteen archives' websites or accounts were in English, followed by 16 sites in Italian and 15 in Spanish. The other languages not listed in the chart only boasted one archive. The location and linguistic results can be found in Figure 1.
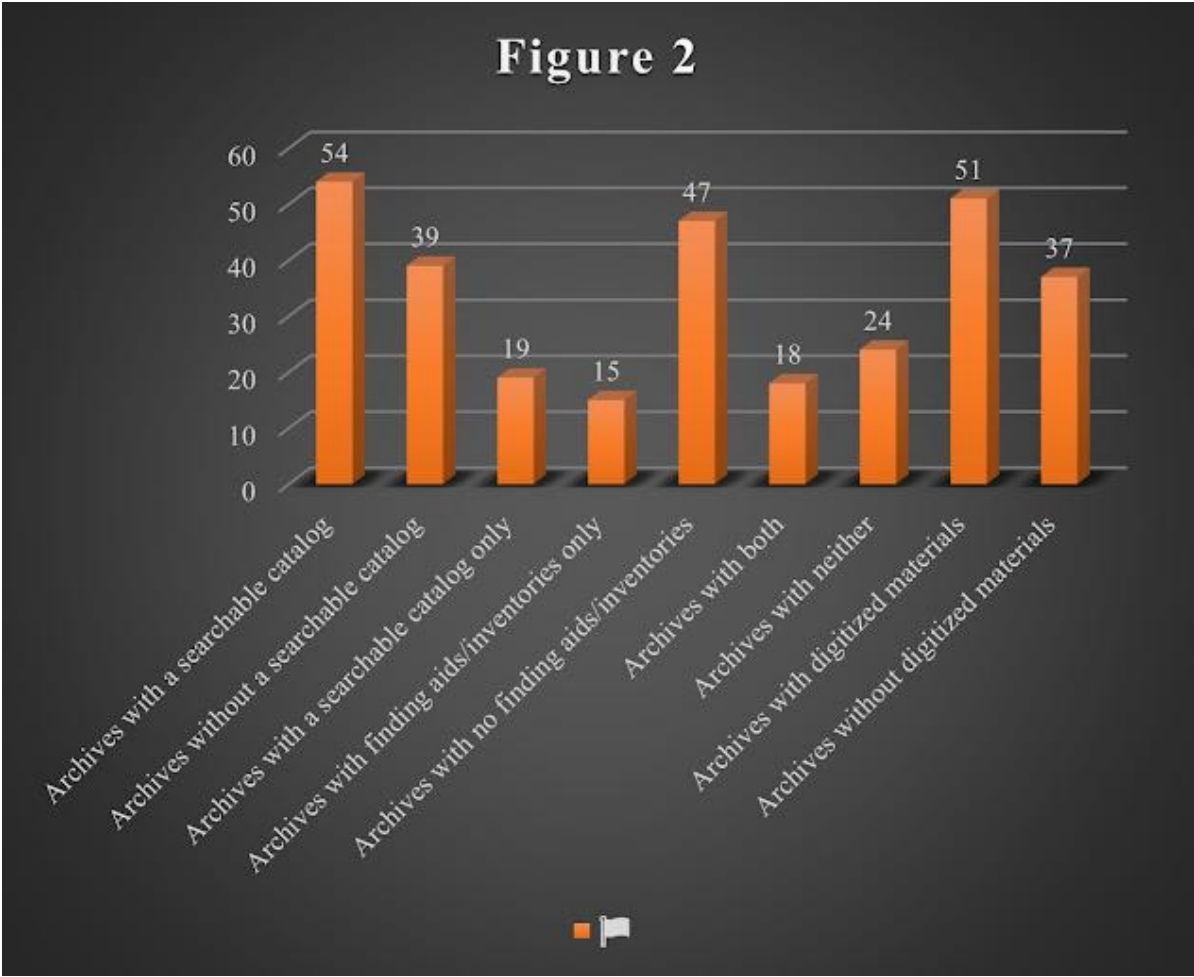

Figure 1

All the physical archives had at least some contact information through which users could access them. All of the online archives except four had contact information, mainly only email. Twenty-six of the physical archives had three ways to contact them: email, telephone, and mailing address. Twenty-nine only listed their email and address. Only a mailing address could be found for two of the physical archives. There were 31 archives with only an email to contact them by, but most of these were online and 16 of them were versions of the Anarchist Library.[3] A majority of archives had some form of online catalog or list of materials. Many archives just had finding aids or a general inventory for their collection as a whole, usually in PDF format. Numerous other archives had searchable online public access catalogs (OPACs) created using a

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[3] The Anarchist Library has numerous versions in 16 different languages, listed in Appendix A. They are all completely independently operated, and thus are counted as separate archives.

variety of different software and several archives had both finding aids/inventories and OPACs. These findings are compared in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Discussion and ideas

It is clear from the wide variety of levels of accessibility and availability of the world's anarchist archives that an improvement can be made in order to ensure greater access, awareness, and utilization of their resources. The tenuousness of some anarchist archives also makes greater preservation and awareness of their importance imperative. Even in the past 10 years, there have been two important anarchist archives that have been shut down or are in limbo (in addition to all the archives whose status could not be determined for this paper). The aforementioned BAEL in Buenos Aires, Argentina, was subject to a hostile takeover by a rival pseudo-anarchist group in 2011 and still has not regained full access to its extensive and important collections, as outlined by Lucas Domínguez Rubio (2017; CIRA, 2011). Access is now more restricted and less certain than in the past, although some digitized materials are still available online. Even more distressingly, the collections of the Centro Studi Libertari Louise Michel in Napoli, Italy, were confiscated by police in 2012 and there is no extant evidence that they have yet been recovered (Redazione, 2012). Furthermore, numerous online archives have gone offline since their inception, such as the Australian site the Bastard Archive, which was active in early 2020 but is no longer online as of November 2020, aside from an incomplete mirror on the Internet Archive.[1]

To forestall alarming incidents such as these from occurring, a several routes could be considered. First is the involvement of, and outreach to the local and international anarchist and general community. As noted by Ellen Crain and Donna E. McCrea (2011), among others, community participation and advocacy are an essential strategy for proving the worth of community archives. Raising awareness of the utility and significance of anarchist archives will mean that they must have larger support systems outside of the archival community—although, of course, these archives' status as anarchist organizations means that they are already stigmatized in many communities. This kind of strategy is largely specific and differs from archive to archive, so it will not be further expanded upon here.

Secondly, ways to drive more traffic and awareness toward various anarchist archives are needed. This would simplify the search process and give users an idea of where and how the anarchist archives exist and how to access them. There are two potential solutions for this issue: the creation of a comprehensive online directory of anarchist archives (and, potentially, other anarchist libraries) and a union OPAC through which materials from many different collections can be discovered by anyone, anywhere. A

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[1] *https://web.archive.org/web/20200224093651/http://www.bastardarchive.org/*

union catalog would be a useful tool to have and would definitely increase awareness of the varied collections that are available. Simon Wakeling et al. found in their 2017 study of WorldCat, the world's largest OPAC, that many users utilize union catalogs to discover materials that are more obscure or difficult to find (p. 2176). Given the rarity and uniqueness of most anarchist materials—especially those held by anarchist archives—a union catalog could help connect rare materials with the people who want to use them.

Luckily, there are several initiatives already in progress or in existence. The aforementioned FICEDL, whose status is presently unclear from their website and the web and may not be active anymore, currently provides the most complete directory of anarchist archives. However, as pointed out above, it is nowhere near complete (listing only members of FICEDL) and is woefully out of date for the listings of several archives. One archive, la Biblioteca social Reconstruir in Mexico City, even was listed as having no up-to-date information on their website but was determined as clearly still active during research for this paper.[2] In addition, the FICEDL site only includes one online archive, la Biblioteca Anarquista Cultura y Acción,[3] a small online archive apparently associated with a larger physical archive in Spain, Fundación Anselmo Lorenzo.[4] There are also many other physical anarchist archives that are not listed by FICEDL. Therefore, while the FICEDL site provides a good starting point to explore anarchist archives, it is far from complete.

Many physical archives, as noted above, have digitized materials freely available online, in addition to the rich holdings of the various Anarchist Library sites and other online archives. However, these digitized materials are usually scattered throughout the archive's individual websites, with no streamlined way to find them. Similarly, many archives have searchable catalogs, but most of them are site-specific and of varying degrees of functionality. Three archives, Biblioteca Terra Livre, Circolo Carlo Vanza, and Libcom Library, even had searchable catalogs in the past, but these seem to now be broken.[5]

Happily, there are two initiatives already in progress to build union catalogs in order to ensure greater accessibility and awareness of anarchist archival holdings. They are mainly limited to regional catalogs at the moment but will hopefully grow with time. First is La Xarxa de Biblioteques Socials (XBS), a union catalog for libraries and archives connected to social movements in the Catalonian and Valencian regions of Spain.[6] This catalog, created using open-source cataloging software from PMB Services, includes 21 different libraries and archives from various social movement backgrounds, many of which are anarchist in nature. On their website, XBS emphasizes

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[2] *https://www.facebook.com/Biblioteca-social-reconstruir-1529157054005667/*

[3] *https://bibliotecaanarquistaculturayaccion.blogspot.com/*

[4] *https://fal.cnt.es/*

[5] *https://bibliotecaterralivre.noblogs.org/; http://www.anarca-bolo.ch/vanza/index.php; https://libcom.org/library*

[6] *http://cataleg.xarxabibliosocials.org/portal/index.php*

how providing widespread access to the radical holdings of the libraries in the network help to transform and expand one's consciousness (La Xarxa de Biblioteques Socials, n.d.). Although it includes a mix of dedicated archives and community libraries without special collections, XBS is a worthy model for a cooperative union catalog for anarchist archives because it includes records for a wide assortment of different materials, including archival and manuscript materials.

Even more specific to anarchist archives is the Rete delle Biblioteche e Archivi Anarchi e Libertari (RebAl) catalog,[7] which is currently limited to 10 archives in Italy, one in Switzerland, and one in the Netherlands but shows exciting potential for expansion. Like XBS, it uses open-source software: the Vufind system. The RebAl network has lofty goals. Their manifesto outlines the union catalog's aim of

> facilitat[ing] access to the libertarian cultural heritage, in the belief that a broader circulation of such ideas is an important tool for the social transformation process, and for spreading anti-authoritarian principles and practices.

> The RebAl project is an initiative by a collective of Italian archives and libraries, but seeks to become an international reference to foster the collaboration between those centers which share the same objectives.

> RebAl's core instrument is the collective virtual (publications) directory, offering one-click access to, as well as search and retrieval of, the full stack of documents held by the various participants to the scheme.

> Its single and simple format allows for a simultaneous query of the various participating centers' OPAC directories -emulating a browse through a single directory for the user. In order to offer maximum coverage, it includes also non-RebAl members institutions when these hold a sizable collection of documents pertaining to anarchism and libertarian culture - and are willing to share it with RebAl (RebAl, 2014).

Three libraries in the RebAl network are also experimenting with creating an OPAC using open-source Koha software,[8] which is already in use by Anarchistische Bibliothek & Archiv Wien (See Bibliothekskollektiv Anarchistische Bibliothek & Archiv Wien, 2014).

The RebAl project offers an extremely promising route for several reasons. It was specifically built by anarchist archives, for anarchist archives. It includes the option of potentially infinite expansion and becoming a union catalog for all the anarchist archives of the world. It provides an easy-to-use search interface that involves little danger of corporate or state control or takeover. Finally, it is customizable and provides

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[7] *http://www.rebal.info/vufind/*
[8] *http://ola.bida.im/cgi-bin/*

diverse ways of adjusting and changing the catalog interface in order to suit the specific needs and wants of anarchist archives.

It is with this in mind that a proposal for a new anarchist online directory and catalog can be considered. A unified website could be envisioned that combines several aspects: an interactive map of where anarchist archives exist internationally with detailed directory lists including periodically updated listings of contact information, easy-to-navigate links to the archives' finding aids and inventories, digitized materials, and individual OPACs (if available). The archives' finding aids and OPACs could also be integrated into a union catalog and—similarly to the WorldCat interface—catalog listings and links to digitized copies where they exist could be provided under each listing.

However, there are several potential issues with this idea. As noted above, many archives do not have any sort of online catalog or inventory, because they are usually run by volunteers and do not have a great amount of time or resources. Those archives with finding aids would have to have them converted into catalog format and consistently updated. Those without finding aids or OPACs would need to devote significant portions of their often already limited resources to cataloging and updating the listings. There is also the issue of language and connecting many different archives in many different languages. Certainly, in order to make a project such as a directory and union catalog a reality, there is a great deal of work yet to do.

Because of this, Andrew Hoyt's appeal to mutual aid should be echoed and taken to heart anew. The vast array of anarchist archives in existence must be supported by the vast array of anarchists if they are to survive, prosper and be valued and used. If anarchist history is not able to survive in all its myriad forms and in all its myriad archives, then anarchists are left without a history to look back upon. It is only with organized cooperation that anarchist archival materials can be preserved and made accessible for an anarchist future. It is just as much of an essential component of anarchism as is any other activism in the movement. Anarchy in the archive for all!

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La Xarxa de Biblioteques Socials. (n.d.). Biblioteques [Libraries]. http://cataleg.xarxabibliosocials.org/portal/index.php?lvl=cmspage&pageid=6&id_rubrique=1

Appendix A: Table of anarchist archives

Note: Although the vast majority of the archives listed in this table are independent, community-run archives operated using anarchist principles, two traditional institutional archives are included: the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG) in the Netherlands and the Joseph R. Labadie Collection at the University of Michigan in the United States. IISG is included because of its status as one of the major collections of anarchist materials in the world and its membership and involvement in FICEDL and RebAl. The Labadie Collection is included because of its important collections and its explicit embedment in anarchist culture since its establishment. See Julie Herrada and Tom Hyry's article about Agnes Inglis, one of the original organizers of the Labadie Collection (1999).

All websites and listings are current as of November 27, 2020.

Name of archive?	Website	Contact info?	Finding aids/ inventories?	Digitized materials?	Searchable Catalog?	Language?	Location?	Notes
56a Infoshop Archive	https://56a.org.uk/archive-2/	Email; address; phone	N	N	Partial— books only; no manuscript materials	English	England	
Anarchief	http://www.anarchy.be/anarchief/	Email; address	Y	Y; through anarchisme.nl & anarchief.org	N	Dutch	Belgium	
Anarchief [online]	https://anarchief.org/wiki/Hoofdpagina	Email	N	Y	Y	Dutch	Online	
Anarchism and the Platformist Tradition	https://anarchist-platform.wordpress.com/	None	N	Y	N	English	Online	Blog format
Anarchisme.nl	https://archive.org/details/@anarchisme_nl; https://www.anarchisme.nl/	Email	N	Y	Y	Dutch	Online	Digitized materials are only available through the Internet Archive. Most digitized materials are sourced from Anarchistisch

After the publication of this essay and the attached list of archives, I was informed of several other anarchist archives all over the world! Since I don't want to mess up my original calculations, I'll list them here in a separate table for y'all! More listings to come! ⊠

Name of archive?		Contact info?	Finding aids/ inventories?	Digitized materials?	Searchable Catalog?	Language?	Location?	Notes
African Anarchist Archive	*http:// www.struggle.ws/ africa.html*	None (?)	N	Y	Y	English, mainly	Online	Old and difficult to navigate—some navigational tools are here: *https:/ /zabal-aza.net/ archive/*
Archives Révolution-naires	*https:/ / archives-revo-lution-naires.com/*	Email	N	Y	Y	French	Online	
ITHA / IATH - Insti-tuto de Teo-ria e História Anar-quista	*https:/ /itha-nar-quista.wordpress.com/*	Email	N	Y	N	Portugues	Online	
LIDIAP (List of Dig-itized Anar-chist Period-icals	*https:/ / lidiap.ficedl.info/*	Email	Y	Y	N	All; site in En-glish	Online	This is a project of FICEDL (which is appar-ently still run-ning!)
				20				
Southeast	*https:/ /*	Email;	N	Y	Y	English;	Online	