

Project presentation

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General situation of archives

What are archives for? Why keep memory of what has been written, thought and published in the past?

It would be simplistic to reduce anarchist archival to an idea of testimony to the past. Anarchism, in fact, was born rather as a way of living, thinking and fighting oriented to the radical transformation of the present. The past, therefore, represents just a collection of experiences and testimonies from which to draw ideas and ideas and certainly not a tradition to be protected and made mythical at the same time.

**Information findability, vitality of
archives and digital domain**

The archives, also given the general contextual situation (at least in Italy), are closing, becoming increasingly difficult to access or gradually less alive and used. Sometimes it happens that those taking care of them get old, or even that after a life dedicated to a specific library, archival funds donated to a whole movement are perceived as a private possession, either preventing the access to individuals belonging to different currents or entrusting the material, which was collected by autonomous groups and individuals, to the institutions and to the State libraries. Unfortunately, without fresh energies and commitment in the movement, only the State can preserve texts which anarchism can't keep anymore accessible.

It is not possible to try to change existing realities or "reform" past questionable management of archives. Instead, it is possible to reflect on what it means and how it is possible to simplify the fact that books and ideas of the past, through archival activity, can be linked to an outline of struggles and / or initiatives of study and consultation. In our opinion, this means preserving a wealth of knowledge and experience while making it accessible to those who want to study it, obviously not driven by ambition towards academic prestige but by anarchist tension and the desire for radical rupture. Digitalization, in some ways, opens up possibilities in this regard. Possibilities, however, that must be faced with knowledge of the facts so as not to create, on the contrary, a vicious circle of atomization and isolation.

Books, people, material

Massive digitization makes an incredible amount of texts and knowledge only apparently available. However, they remain only an unexpressed potential when the tools to understand and interpret this immense amount of information are lacking. Libraries are places not only where we can meet books, tomes and volumes, but also people who know, remember the facts of the past and their contexts. A small volume, for some, may be much deeper than an encyclopedic monograph, but it risks easily disappearing among many other texts if it is not *remembered*.

Not only accumulate books then, but also order them, know the roads and the links that connect them. Reconstruct the hermeneutics of certain ideas, rediscover the passion from which the black types imprinted on the white paper have arisen.

So what is the purpose of an anarchist archive (also digital)? Keep certain ideas alive. For this reason, metadata is perhaps more important than the quality of the scans. Because metadata represents valuable information about the relationship between texts, while scans only make sense when form, as is mostly the case in magazines rather than books, is communication as well. A punk fanzine does not only use the lexicon to attack the existing, but the shape of the letters, images, captions spat on paper. For this reason, the heart of a digital archive should be the possibility of bringing back into real life, that is, in the hands of people – everywhere, not only within the four walls of the local anarchist headquarters – certain ideas dangerous for the established order. For this reason, questioning how to print or re-edit preserved and handed down texts is something that cannot be separated from the attempt to create a digital archive. The Archive and the Typography, although simple and reduced to a minimum, should be a single place conceived and designed as such.

The amusewiki bookbuilder

In this regard, take as an example the interface of the different sites using the amusewiki software. Reading on the computer is just one of the options. You can download the text, lay it out to your taste from scratch, or you can set up an automatic template that transforms all parts of the text into a consistent whole. And this applies both to whole texts and to different selections and parts from different sources. In short, with a few clicks each individual can set, with almost no necessary knowledge, the graphic form of their texts and disseminate them as they see fit.

Access to texts and dissemination of archives

However, here lies one of the limitations of the "all accessible" approach: a search engine must not make knowledge and reading advice between human beings outdated. At the same time, by limiting access to the full text (i.e. providing only bibliographic indications as happens in other large projects of digital anarchist archives) the risk is to make the use of those texts difficult, because very often non-disclosure is accompanied by a partial digitization that is limited only to the main data (author, date, place where the book is located). Rather, the spirit of this proposal is to combine the question of the human relationship that is created by attending an archive and discussing with the people who deal with it and who carry it forward with that of digitizing texts. How to deal with these two problems?

One solution could be to distinguish what is shown on the digital archive site depending on the place from which it is viewed. Surely an anarchist digital archive cannot be something that is freely accessible to anyone. Anarchist texts can sometimes be particularly unwelcome to authority. So it will be necessary to think of a way for those who want to can apply for credentials to access the site. For example, by visiting (or contacting) an anarchist archive existing in reality. With these credentials it will then be possible to access all digitized titles, but with some limits. Reading the complete text, as well as downloading the material, will be possible to do so only by being physically inside an archive. In short, from your home you can do research by title, by author, maybe know where the original copies of certain texts are and so on. But to get to the heart of the matter, you will have to go to an archive. In short, return to that materiality that digital often comes to erase.

That said, much will depend on the distribution in space of these access points. It is obvious that if there are archives every 400 km it will be very difficult to access certain information for those who live far away. However, there are several possible solutions, which obviously only the unfolding in the reality of this project will be able to evaluate: one of these could be that to have some texts it is enough to contact an archive by email by having them sent, or make a copy on your USB stick of a lot of material, or why not open an anarchist archive in the place where you live? On the other hand, a computer and a printer would be enough, as well as an internet connection. Not much, after all.

Dispersing anarchism in time and space

This, in fact, is the potential of such a project. Dematerialize the clutter by giving the possibility to access via the internet to a vast series of texts in many different languages and at the same time rematerialize the ideas giving the possibility to print directly what is most dear to us. Forms of economic support, therefore, could take place with little effort: collecting unused computers still able to connect to the network or old printers in order to spread in the world, in every remote corner of the planet, a *corpus* of ideas that would otherwise need vans and vans of books as well as large rooms for rent or property.

Metadata and the overall vision of anarchist publication

A myth of the digital age must be immediately debunked. Too much information is like having no information at all. It is not enough simply to have correct metadata, a result that is not always easy to obtain, but the aspect of the relationship between the texts will have to be developed. Let us take the example of the famous text of *Fra Contadini* by Errico Malatesta (cf. an archival analysis of the translations and re-editions of this text in Japan - <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni4/riviste/annali-di-ca-foscari-serie-orientale/2020/56> which has been printed and translated in dozens of editions and languages. These texts, or rather these versions, must somehow be related, made navigable with each other, uniquely identified both between texts (both at the magazine and magazine article level, cf. the gigantic work done on *Tierra y Libertad* 1910-1919 - <http://www.cedall.org/Documentacio/IHL/Tierra%20y%20Libertad%201910-1919.pdf>) and between authors, contextualizing them in space-time.

Often for texts considered minor, there are sometimes translations in different languages which are not immediately attributable to the original and therefore it is not known from which language and from which version they were translated, and so on. It is certainly not a job that can be done overnight, but a program that allows you to highlight and use this data already creates a reading and mental structure that is relationship-oriented and not just the accumulation of voices and data.

Obviously, for a text to be easily printable, the processing of the text in markup must be done accurately and correctly. Doing this work means facilitating as much as possible the willingness to work on the texts and re-edit them, even for those with less technical skills. Obviously, no organizational facilitation can clearly solve the problem of the absence of a precise will to deal with books and ideas.

Cooperative translations and international relations

In the past, the importance of translations and relationships between different individuals and groups (including international and transnational - <https://www.mimesisjournals.com/ojs/index.php/acronia/article/do>) has been highlighted by many in order to edit and distribute anarchist material and information from other places. There have been attempts to preserve this aspect even in the digital world. On the one hand, they certainly focused on the aspect of making the existence of translations of some specific texts intuitive (cf. Tabula rasa - <https://tabularasa.anarhija.net/special/index> - and the structure of its links at the bottom of the page - <https://tabularasa.anarhija.net/library/ai-ferri-corti-con-l-esistente-i-suoi> -

- or the section on the international debate of The plague and the fire), on the other hand, however, it is necessary to find a way to give the possibility to identify which translation projects are in progress and how to possibly contribute to it, while maintaining the anonymity of those who are translating and finally it is important to be able to take an overview of the languages of which the translations of certain texts are missing.

A button to take charge of a translation, for example, which can only be activated from within an archive, could involve the creation of a temporary "work in progress" page and, why not, the sending of an email to the other archives that have that text among the volumes preserved or to those who have requested to be notified for any translations in progress from language *a* to language *b* or even to those who wrote and edited or translated into other languages the same text. Obviously, it is the people in the archive who should act as a filter clarifying, in case of requests, whether or not the person who is starting the translation wants to be contacted and/or helped. A good starting point to combine communication and anonymity?

Some elements of critical reflection on the project

Who manages everything?

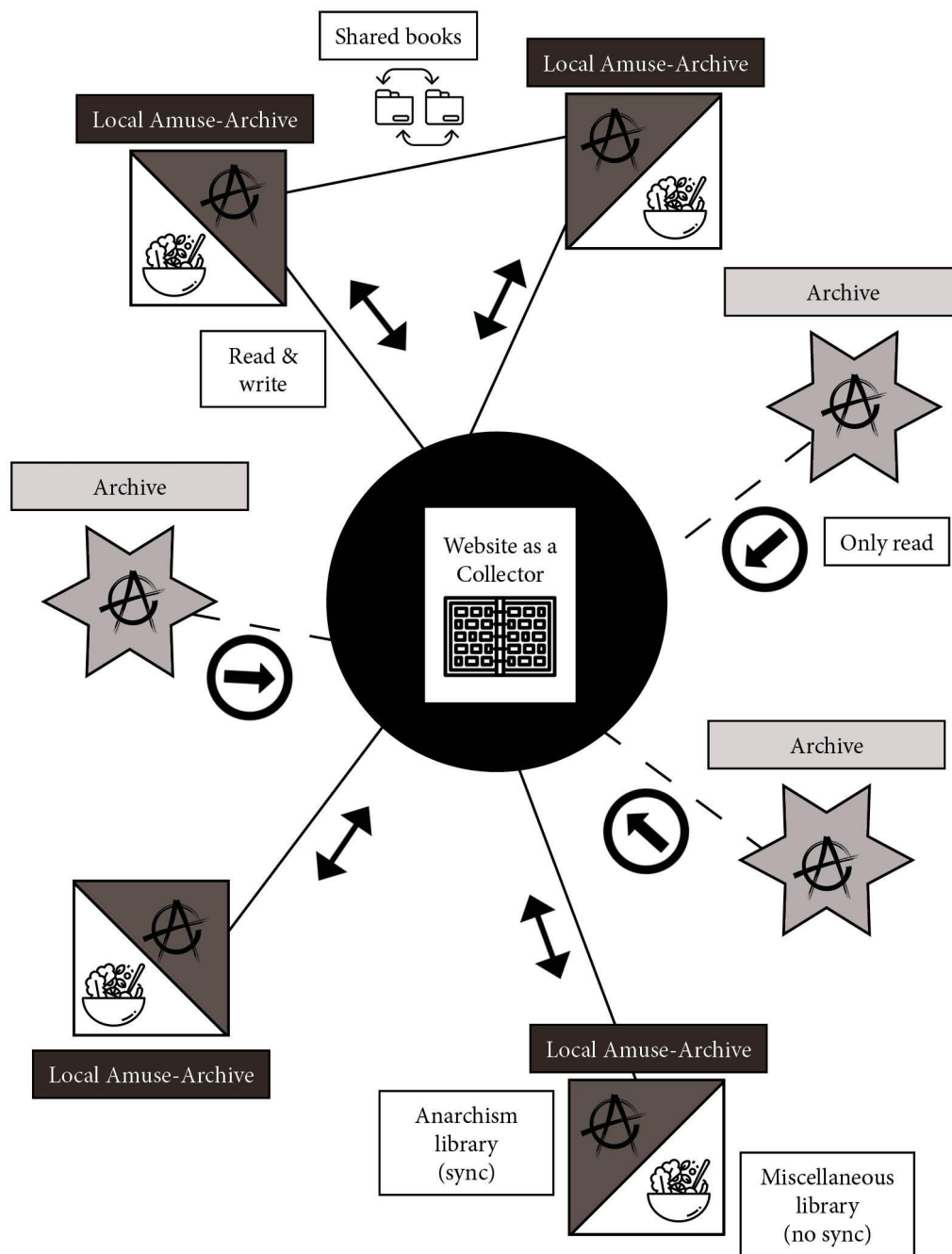
These have always been central problems in the field of anarchism, because they revolve around crucial nodes of anarchist thought including the relationship between thought and action and the consequentiality between means and ends. So how can we keep the management balance functioning over time? Why should individual archives give up their specificity and their singular projects to enter (or only contribute by sharing data) in a macro-project? How can we resolve differences, sometimes even ethical, in an area, such as the anarchist one, which is in itself ungovernable and cannot be aligned with precise and unique positions? How to avoid blob of useless data, poorly made or redundant scans, approximate and incorrect metadata? How can we avoid going beyond the scope of texts specifically linked to anarchism and becoming a container of all human knowledge?

With regard to this last issue, for example, the CIRA of Lausanne poses differences between the library and the archive (www.cira.ch - <https://www.cira.ch/risorse>): similarly, could one imagine a library of anarchism (the library) that becomes a sort of "synchronized archive" with the other anarchist archives, and a part of the archive, donations, various collections of books that are not synchronized in the anarchist digital archive (concept of "miscellaneous library")? And what about those archives that want to maintain their own platform that does not communicate in two ways with a site that is a kind of "Collector", but whose data can only be read?

On the other hand, if editing and correcting texts digitally is a sort of digital-only "re-edition", it is not possible for everyone to accept all the texts that are uploaded from the different archives. Similarly, how to avoid requests for the removal of specific texts that, if public, could for someone offend sensitivity or violate the law? Each archive should therefore maintain its decision-making and archival autonomy, taking responsibility for what "synchronizes" in the anarchist library and what instead puts in its own section of miscellany that anarchist, maybe has nothing, but this does not mean that it can not contain precious and important texts.

Imagining

A site combines form and substance. It can work perfectly, but if it is not easy to use, intuitive and well organized it will inevitably remain deserted. At the same time, if there is no powerful engine, the whole shack will not move an inch. For this reason, therefore, it will be necessary to think to the best of our ability on both aspects. How to imagine research? How to imagine the mechanisms and internal relationships of databases? For this reason, we try to focus on the loading, search and reading workflow, both from the local Amusewiki archive and by doing remote access from the Collector site.



Metadata Editing and Format

What format to give to metadata? Dublin Core, Marc21 or FRBR? Beyond the standard, however, it is important to ensure that with as few clicks as possible you can edit one or more fields in one or more entries. Check duplicates, synonyms in multiple languages of proper names and titles, check the correctness of the fields (as well as choose accurately which are the important ones to fill in). In short, it seems simple as a theme but it is not at all, both from a technical and logical point of view.

Colors as an indicator of text quality

Color has the power to communicate at a glance. For this reason, a colorimetric scale can help to clarify the accuracy of an entry. Here's an example:

- Green = PDF + TXT
- Orange = TXT
- Red = PDF
- Black = Paper reference only
- Blue = Translation in progress

Remote search homepage

Remote search should allow different ways to delimit the field of investigation, especially with selectable language boxes (even one or more languages). Some buttons with recent texts and program instructions may be useful. Consider a contact page with addresses and emails of all archives, divided by language. Perhaps the possibility of uploading texts remotely should be connected to a specific archive, so the text must then be accepted and included in the collection of the XXX archive selected within the upload procedure.

See e.g. this prototype: <https://archivio.anarchismo.net>

Search homepage from a local Amusewiki archive

In the screen displayed by the local Amusewiki archive, of course, some buttons must be different. If the instructions are always valid, you need to add a "management" section to accept the texts uploaded remotely and to add new ones, to check metadata, to generate reports and to be able to generate access credentials to the Collector site. It could also be interesting to add a button to go to locate in the physical library of the archive the titles on the shelves and maybe a loan section that keeps track of the books. Being in fact a sort of managerial / administrative site of each archive (not necessarily public in its contents, but perhaps viewable even through research from the Collector or other local Amusewiki archives), some functions could be related to the maintenance and specific functionality of the archive.

See e.g. this draft: <https://archivio.anarchismo.net/samples/demos/ricerca-locale.html>

As for the search options, however, you could add whether or not to search also in the miscellaneous section of the local archive, whether to filter by color and whether to filter by texts not yet translated into language X. In this way, for example, you could also generate random results (or determined by search keys) of a.e. green texts to be translated a.e. into French a.e. from English and / or Italian. In short, do research that helps to expand and internationalize the texts.

Search queries

The search results should be sortable by the different variables (date, alphabetical order, text length, color, etc. etc.). Obviously, the colorimetric descriptions for the different results should be very evident.

Remote result

Remotely the result should contain bibliographic information (metadata), notes to the text, the list of archives in which there is a paper copy, the ability to save / share the bibliographic citation and a button to request a digital copy of the text (if any) to a specific archive.

Result from a local Amusewiki archive

By accessing the Collector database from within a local Amusewiki archive, the screen should include a whole series of buttons that allow you to edit/print/download texts, as well as specific actions like creating a translation page or seeing editions in the selected language.

See e.g. <https://archivio.anarchismo.net/samples/demos/>

Conclusions

As can be seen from these short lines, the project is ambitious but at the same time could offer interesting prospects for the future. Thinking about internationalization, about the reorganization of the documentary heritage of anarchism and thinking about the possibility of printing and keeping alive the places where books are kept are certainly efforts that have their own meaning and importance beyond the contingent urgency. And, for this reason, perhaps it makes particular sense to commit to it. To give oneself a perspective of oneself, an autonomous path from which to imagine other projects and other adventures.

Mycorrhiza Project

Project presentation

mycorrhiza.amusewiki.org