

Conversation with
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On January 14th 2026, I had the opportunity to organize a conversation with the people who created the digital collection of Grafton9. It was very interesting to understand who actually created this archive and how it should be understood. They explained to me that calling it an archive is somewhat inaccurate, since it follows amateur collecting practices rather than institutional archival ones.
Through the conversation, I learned how the people involved later took part in hacktivist movements as militants and as participants in social centers and hacklabs. In fact, I was keen to include a more historical perspective in my thesis, because the networks I study emerge from a specific context and from practices that are particularly strong in Italy. Moreover, these networks originated within hackerspaces that developed inside social centers, meaning they are fully embedded in a broader historical trajectory. I believe this history is worth including, as it helps to build a more comprehensive understanding of these practices.
Starting from the different ways in which alternative networks have been created, for example BBS systems or, more simply, alternative networks formed through countercultural zines, the conversation proved to be highly stimulating. Unfortunately, it was not possible to organize an in-person meeting, as part of the group behind the archive is based in Bologna. Nevertheless, I am glad that I was at least able to speak with them.

LM:
I was interested in hearing about your experience with the Italian hacktivist scene back in the day, and also your experience with the use of alternative networks such as BBS.

RP:
Generally speaking, as I was saying, I arrived at the end of the 90s when the web already existed. So, I didn't experience the BBS (Bulletin Board System)[06] era much; I was still very young and, living in Southern Italy, I struggled to connect to those networks. Both Fidonet and Cybernet had access points mostly in the North, so for me, it was an expensive hobby.

I got closer to this environment when I started frequenting "centri sociali" (social centers)[07] at the end of the 90s. I moved to Bologna as a student, aligned myself politically with the social center scene, and started my activism there. I joined various collectives, specifically those dealing with technology within the social centers.

Since I am a computer scientist by training and profession, I found a space where I could merge political activity with a cultural — or rather, professional — interest. My career eventually followed other paths, though always linked to IT.

By the late 90s, the BBS phenomenon had already wound down. In Italy, it didn't last long; it served more as a training ground, a springboard to get to the web. The movements found their strongest expression once the internet arrived.

Italy represents a somewhat unique case, maybe not entirely unique, but it was likely one of the first instances in the world where the hacking ethics and free software ideals coming from California and Silicon Valley were reinterpreted through a very strong political lens.

In the United States, that hacking culture was linked to a very liberal ideology that, over the years, led some to drift toward the right. Today, we see the result: large multinationals born in that environment that took a turn that was anything but libertarian. They became hyper-liberal, and the "New Right" now feeds off that environment.

In Italy, however, within the social centers, there was already a group deeply interested in this new digital communication landscape. It started with BBS, but by the time the web arrived, the political promises and ideas on how to use this tool were already ripe. The core idea was that these new tools would serve to spread political communication.

This trend started long before the social centers. Every movement — starting even with anti-fascism during the twenty-year regime — has always adopted new communication tools to spread ideas and information.

It goes from the mimeograph and clandestine printing to photocopiers, the first computers, desktop publishing, printers, and finally, the networks: BBS and the internet.

It was an environment where movements were always ready to embrace these subjects. As soon as these tools arrived, the immediate thought was: "We have to use these."

With these tools, it was quite clear to us that they wouldn't be virtual environments divorced from the real world. The word "cyberspace"[08] was used, but within the movement, it was mostly seen as bullshit.

The network wasn't a separate, idyllic environment where one could create a new form of society. In the network, you experienced all the contradictions of the real world: the rise of the right, job precarity, all real-world problems were found online.

For us, the web was initially a tool for reporting information, but it eventually became a tool for organization. It became a way to create new networks and relationships, connecting geographically distant groups—initially just within Italy, but then movements started communicating with groups abroad. All of this led to the early, great Italian web experiments.

Today, there is much talk about the "Fediverse" and self-managed spaces; the BBS network, in its own small way, was the first great example of that very idea.

The idea was that all the social centers could come together in this federated collective, pooling financial resources to maintain a physical server. In those years, that meant literally buying a computer and housing it at a provider's facility, which had extremely high costs, we're talking tens of thousands of lire per year.

06 » Bulletin Board Systems (BBS), a computer-mediated space that predates the Internet, emerged in mid-1980s Italy. BBSs were structured around thematic discussion areas that facilitated asynchronous communication. BBSs were important centers for Italian hacktivism that connected networks across the country and beyond. *Fidonet* was one such BBS that hosted early politicized cyberpunk forums, the European Counter Network (1989), and Cybernet, the first fully Italian cyberpunk network supported by the Decoder collective, Bazzichelli, *Networking: The Net as Artwork*, 75-84.

07 » Social centers known as "centri sociali" are autonomous or squatted social spaces that came into existence in Italy, especially after the 1970s. They are grassroots projects based in abandoned buildings, managed by their own people in a collective manner without any kind of organizational backing.

08 » The term "cyberspace" was popularized by William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer* — published in 1984 — although it was initially used in his short story *Burning Chrome*, which was published in 1982. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson refers to "cyberspace" as a "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators," a virtual space that represents abstract information from computer systems around the world. Cyberspace, meanwhile, developed as a metaphorical and experiential space within the imaginary of the cyberpunk movement where hackers could "jack in" through neural interfaces and manipulate digital information, Bazzichelli, *Networking: The Net as Artwork*, 70-71

So, it was an entire self-funded collective, self-managed by all these groups. It was literally a "collection of islands in the network." It was a safe, self-managed space through which we provided public services like the web and email.

This is the environment I was born into. I started with my own social center in Bologna, then I joined the *ECN (European Counter Network)*[09] collective. For years, I was one of the sysadmins for that server.

Later, *autistici.org*[10] would branch off from *ECN*, and from

that, *Indymedia*[11] was born. It was a very interconnected environment; in those early years, there were many projects that seemed separate on the surface, but many of the same people were contributing to all of them.

The fundamental idea was that the web and new electronic networks made it very easy to create relationships and spread information between people—and at a very low, or almost zero, cost.

In all of this, the existence of Free Software was of fundamental importance to us. If it hadn't existed, probably nothing we did would have existed. On one hand, Free Software had no costs. On the other, it showed its source code: it allowed us to learn how it worked, to adapt it to our needs, and to modify it. It was a training ground that simultaneously gave us the ability to build the tools we wanted.

We didn't "buy" services. Starting from the second half of the 2000s, we arrived at this current idea that you "use" services on the web: there's a social network provided by Facebook or Twitter, or Google tools for editing documents and sending mail.

In the first half of the 2000s, those tools didn't exist, so we had to write and build them ourselves. Before social networks existed, the closest experiment we had was Indymedia, which we built entirely from scratch; all the code was self-authored. It wasn't a social network designed for individuals or one-on-one communication; it was closer to the idea of a self-managed journalism site.

09 » The European Counter Network (ECN) is an alternative digital network from Italy that was created in 1989 as a circuit of BBS (Bulletin Board Systems), with the aim of linking social centers, free radio stations, and organizations from the extra-parliamentary left wing of Italy and Europe, offering them means for autonomous and free communication. The initial active nodes, including those in Rome, Florence, and Padua, were created in 1990, mostly in squatted social centers; the network had ten nodes in 1991, structured in a way similar to the FidoNet system, and was the only centralized network of antagonistic BBSs in Italy at the time. In 1996, the ECN moved to the Internet through the Isole nella Rete ("Islands in the Net") project, which was one of the precursors of Autistici/Inventati. "ECN e Isole nella Rete," EduEDA — The Educational Encyclopedia of Digital Arts, accessed April 30, 2026, https://www.edueda.net/index.php?title=ECN_e_Isole_nella_Rete; Arturo Di Corinto and Tommaso Tozzi, Hacktivism: La libertà nelle maglie della rete (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2002).

10 » Autistici/Inventati (A/I) is a collective based in Italy, formed in 2001 by activists who belonged to the anti-capitalist movement. Its objective was to develop a self-hosted server that could offer free digital communication services such as email accounts, website hosting, and mailing lists to its users without compromising their privacy or anonymity and maintaining the highest level of confidentiality as there would be no logging of the user activity and no profiling or commercialization of the user data. This collective, which did not have any physical offices but relied on a server network spread across various countries, became one of the prominent references of media activism in Italy, especially when they were involved in organizing protests against the counter-summit of the G8 in Genoa in 2001., "About A/I," autistici.org, accessed April 30, 2026, https://www.autistici.org/.

11 » The Indymedia or Independent Media Center, also known as IMC, is a worldwide independent media activist organisation set up in Seattle in November 1999 to offer coverage of the demonstrations at the WTO summit protest. This initiative operates under the motto, "Don't hate the media; become the media." Structured into several autonomous nodes all around the world, it enabled any user to post audio, video, and written reports in an instant without the need for any editing process. In Italy, the indymedia node developed out of the encounter of the no-global movement and the hacktivist community stemming from social centers and experienced its moment of greatest splendor in 2001, during the G8 summit in Genoa, as it gave the only alternative account to mainstream media reporting on the events. Arturo Di Corinto and Tommaso Tozzi, Hacktivism: La libertà nelle maglie della rete (Rome: Manifestolibri, 2002); "Indymedia," Lessico del XXI Secolo, Treccani, accessed April 30, 2026, https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/indymedia_(Lessico-del-XXI-Secolo)/.

So, between Free Software and the ease of building relationships, there was a cultural ferment that allowed for this circulation of information.

Between the 90s and the early 2000s, we gave our absolute creative best in the most diverse projects. Later, they died out somewhat due to inertia, which was actually part of how we conceived them. All our projects were experiments; we loved to experiment, and we had a lot of free time. The initial idea was never that we had to create lasting services for the public.

We did things just for the sake of doing them—for the "play" of it. The element of play was fundamental. Even if there was a strong political motivation, we approached things with the spirit of a game or an experiment.

If they worked, great; if not, they were set aside. And after a few years, when interest in a project waned, it was shelved anyway. The only thing that survives today is the Autistici.org project, which at a certain point focused on offering public services.

It still provides email, personal sites, and blogs. The group continues to provide these services today, but we're talking about hundreds of thousands of mailboxes and thousands of sites. It's essentially a small provider. Today, Autistici has the responsibility of maintaining these sites and ensuring the security, privacy, and safety of its users—given that a large portion of them still come from the world of Italian (and international) leftist activism. And that, in a nutshell, is the environment I come from.

LM:
Tell me about Grafton9. What led to its creation? Tell me how you found the material.

RP:
Regarding *Grafton9*, it's a sequel to the experiments I just mentioned—meaning, it was born exactly as an experiment. There was a "play" component there too. *Grafton9* is not a collective, it has no physical headquarters, and it isn't a structured project; it's very informal.

Furthermore, in this case, the term "archive" is used somewhat improperly. If I presented the *Grafton9* archive project to a professional archivist, they would likely turn up their nose because *Grafton9* doesn't follow any of the traditional practices or rules of archive management.

We use the term "archive" because, stylistically, it's perhaps the most appropriate and understandable term, but conceptually it remains imprecise. Our difficulty was that we couldn't find an equivalent word that captured the true meaning of it.

So, we continue to use the term "archive," but it's fundamentally a mistake, let's say. Sometimes we are described as a "movement archive," but we are actually the great impostors among movement archives.

In fact, *Grafton9* is a collection of personal collections. A large part of what you find inside is part of my own collection or from friends who lent me materials or gifted me their books.

The terms "personal collection" or "private collection" are terms we really don't like. Collectibles usually imply a sort of overt possession. Today, there is actually a trend in "movement collecting"—people selling materials we produced in social centers at exorbitant prices. The idea of a personal collection, the term "private," just didn't sit right with our intent.

Our main goal is to re-introduce this collection into circulation. We want to allow the distribution of materials that are no longer in print and are difficult to find today, precisely because they were originally printed in very small quantities.

Often, these materials never entered mainstream book distribution; they were only found in specific shops or at stalls and tablings. Our goal was to take these physical materials, digitize them, put them back on the network, and make them accessible to everyone. Online, with no registration or owners. Anyone can consult them, download them, and keep them at any time.

People think digital is a way to preserve materials that were found online. For us, it's actually the exact opposite.

Among the activists and those who participated in those movements, there is a shared responsibility that we find ourselves assuming. There are many movement archives, but also "collectors" among us, to use that term. We have largely managed to recover materials that were circulating on the network.

So, for us, digitizing them didn't mean "preserving them better"; our goal was to encourage sharing and to fuel conversations.

Actually, the *Grafton9* project began in 2013. In the beginning, what we did was take a production of documentation covering the 90s and the first decade of the 2000s, put it online, and try to create conversations around it. We did this partly through social media, blog posts, presentations, and participating in conferences and events.

In the first part of the project, Twitter was very important. At the time, it wasn't the Twitter it is now; it was a social network that had certain qualities back then. A nice community formed around *Grafton9* there, with many interested people. It was a "real" social network—there were conversations on various topics, materials were exchanged, and it was an excellent tool for sharing at that moment. Then it became something else and we abandoned it. Now we maintain a blog and use the Fediverse; we have a Mastodon account where we continue to do that.

So Grafton9 is essentially this: our collections that we digitize with professional-ish equipment—though we insist on calling it an amateur project for a reason. We use standard scanners bought at the supermarket, not high-end technology. Even the scan quality is low. Our goal is sharing and reading on the web; we have no interest in making ultra-high-definition images for reprinting. For us, the goal is electronic reading on the web.

We brought our practice of hacking and experimentation into this project too. We built custom devices to make scanning easier and facilitate digitization. To do this, a few years ago we bought a kit for a scanner called the "Do It Yourself Book Scanner." It was a wooden kit with a structure that allows you to photograph both pages of a book simultaneously.

So there was this kit for the structure, and on it, we mounted cameras we bought on the used market. They are medium-high quality cameras, bought used for very little. Then we wrote various software to acquire the images, process them, and modify them to make them better for consultation.

We assemble the pages on screen and publish them on *Archive.org*, which is the place we chose to host our content. Why did we choose *Archive.org*?

We had known about the project for a long time and were already contributing other materials to it. It is a non-profit foundation based in the United States whose political mission seemed very close to ours. It's not a commercial entity; it's an entity that cares about the dissemination and preservation of a wide range of materials. Our own vision of rejecting copyright fit very well with the mission of *Archive.org*, so we started using it and we continue to use that tool.

It isn't the only place we pour our digitizations into; for safety, they are duplicated in several other places. If for some reason *Archive.org* were to disappear, we have copies available elsewhere. We've tried to safeguard what we've done.

The interesting thing, however, is that we aren't the only ones preserving our content. Over the years, other archives managed by different collectives have emerged; they have autonomously taken everything we've done and created copies on their own sites. Some of them asked us, others didn't, but that's not the point. There is no license on our documents. We have tried to prioritize scanning documents on which no copyright exists.

The point is that other archival projects similar to ours have emerged. They've made copies of our documents and republished them, for example, *Leftovers*, which is a British project born from a circle of movement archives in London like *MayDay Rooms*, or other anarchist archives.

They also have a site where they publish digitizations. They took all our materials from *Archive.org* and put them there. For us, this epitomizes the success of our project: the fact that we wanted to create an archive that — just as we reject the idea of a private library collection — ensures everything goes online so that anyone can access it, save the documents to their own computer, preserve them, and read them without even telling us.

On *Archive.org*, you can take the PDFs or even all the raw images, save them to a disk, and keep reading them. If the internet vanishes tomorrow, you can still use these materials; they aren't tied to a specific platform or app. So, *Leftovers* created this copy, and there are other sites we know of — and perhaps many others we aren't aware of — that are republishing digitally preserved materials.

It's a bit like peer-to-peer was for music or movies. We are happy that our content can circulate freely online. On this very topic, a book was released last spring called *Archiving Activism in the Digital Age*, edited by Daniele Salerno and Ann Rigney and produced in Amsterdam[12]. This book is quite useful because it systematizes the concept that, within the movement or leftist movements, there is a growing focus on the theme of archiving.

For a long time, we didn't value this. During the early 2010s, it wasn't something we thought about; we just threw everything onto the internet. We thought, somewhat naively, that whatever went online would stay there forever. Then, at a certain

12 » Daniele Salerno and Ann Rigney, eds., Archiving Activism in the Digital Age (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, n.d.).

point, we realized the web isn't a universal archive, things vanish, websites disappear. So today, there is a new sensitivity toward the archiving of movements.

Just as *Grafton9* exists, there are dozens of other collectives doing something similar. In Italy alone, alongside Grafton9, there is *Agenzia X,* who did a digitization campaign for fanzines. There's another project in Florence called Archivio Flow Acculent, which is a private collection like mine that is putting its magazines online. Then there is the *Museum of Modern Art in Rovereto (MART)*; they have a collection on the 90s and cyberpunk. They are an institution, but they too understood the importance of digitization and are saving materials.

A project born in recent months called *Fanzinet* focuses specifically on music fanzines from the 80s. This joins at least four or five different projects in Italy and others in Europe. There are already about a dozen collectives or projects dealing with this theme, the recovery of information, and not necessarily just paper.

Currently, *Grafton9* mainly deals with recovering paper, but there is also the recovery of multimedia productions, music, video, and late-90s software applications that are being restored and put back online. In my own work with *Grafton9* over the last few years, I haven't just dealt with paper; I've also recovered websites. I've tried to reconstruct sites that were no longer online, retrieving them from my own backups or having the original curators send them to me. I'm putting sites back on the web that were no longer available.

So, there is a new sensitivity today regarding "curating" things. There is much more attention than in the past. Even when new sites are built today, we try to explain: "Look, you need to make sure these sites are as simple as possible, that they don't depend on platforms, and that they are easily replicable and copyable." This way, anyone can take them and redistribute them without relying on the idea of centralized platforms like social media.

Facebook, YouTube, and any other type of social media pose serious risks to the survival of this information. This is a problem. Today, for example, YouTube contains an immense archive of materials from the 80s and 90s regarding social centers — material not necessarily produced by activists, but also by readers or people who simply frequented them. It is an incredibly important historical record.

The same goes for Facebook; there are collections of photos, posters, flyers, and postcards there. But keeping them inside those platforms is a risk because these platforms can decide to delete them whenever they want.

In recent years, this has happened quite frequently. For instance, entire collectives have vanished from Facebook because they expressed sympathy for Palestine during the latest conflict. One large Milanese collective lost more than a decade of its history on Facebook — photos, publications, flyers, their entire activity — and they hadn't made a copy anywhere else. That content is gone.

So, there is a dual effort: we try to save what is still salvageable from these platforms by creating copies, but at the same time, we raise awareness so that when people create new things, they choose "friendly," non-commercial platforms. Above all, they should choose platforms that give full control over the content. Closed tools make it hard to retrieve your content once it's published, or they limit how that content circulates. Downloading a video from YouTube was simple until recently; now it's becoming a hassle because they add more controls and limits every time.

Grafton9 fits into this new sensitivity of "caring" for information. "Care" is a word we like, and it's being adopted by various archives. Information is something alive; it must be tended to. It isn't just something you produce, throw online, and let die. It is our responsibility to keep it online and accessible over time, because these are pieces of history that, if lost, leave holes behind.

While we can study the history of 1977 and the 70s with great precision in large movement archives today, there are already massive gaps in the 2000s — history that we have lost because it isn't documented anywhere.

Just think of Genoa 2001. Paradoxically, it was the first moment where we had complete access to digital tools, meaning production and dissemination were easy. Yet, a significant part of the history of Genoa has been lost because Indymedia disappeared, and many of those related sites vanished.

Essentially, *Grafton9* is this: it is born from the Hacker Ethic — the spirit of dissemination and information sharing — merged with the need for long-term preservation. It took shape in the second half of the 2010s, and fortunately, this approach is gaining ground. I am happy to see projects similar to Grafton9 continuing to emerge.

LM:
Is there any kind of selection for the materials that you present in Grafton 9?

RP:
Well, one of the reasons *Grafton9* can't be defined as a "proper" archive is that our selection process ignores traditional rules. Generally, most materials come from the 90s and 2000s, but there are also items from the 70s and much more recent stuff from the last few years. We don't have rigid rules; we let ourselves be influenced by the content. When we encounter something we like or find stimulating and important to put online, we do it, regardless of the historical period.

As for the subject matter, we are very open. Inside *Grafton9*, you can find everything: content related to networks and communication, the world of drugs, music, raves, the entire world of self-management and DIY production, literature, early 90s sci-fi, and new forms of labor organization. It would actually be difficult to find a single thread connecting all these topics.

Perhaps the common element is that these were the first magazines created entirely on a computer. Before that, there was the fanzine phenomenon (which the Fanzine Archive project is currently handling); those were photocopied materials, but they were still written with typewriters, collage techniques, or drawings. These early *Grafton9* documents were among the first to be made with personal computers, coinciding with the arrival of the PC. Those early computers provided desktop publishing tools that were even more important to us than the photocopier.

Software like *Aldus PageMaker* on early Apple computers allowed for total self-management of a magazine's creation — from writing and layout to printing multiple copies, which were then photocopied. For the first time, these tools allowed us to have total control over the production of a printed artifact.

Paradoxically, we are taking paper and re-digitizing something that was already born digital. The digital originals from those years were almost never preserved. So, we are performing a process where something was born digital, printed to paper, and now we are bringing it back to digital.

I call it "return digitization." This is particularly evident because in many of those magazines, it was common to find a note on the inside or back cover: "Self-printed with Apple II, *Aldus PageMaker* software," etc. Today that seems trivial — no book lists the tech used for its layout — but back then, it conveyed the idea that this was something done entirely on our own. We were capable of self-managing the entire process.

LM:
How do you track the items, do you use any sort of protocol for this specific process?

RP:
The selection is diverse. I haven't digitized everything in my collection because it's just too much; the limit is time, and I do this in my spare moments. Whenever I find something interesting, I try to upload it. Often, current events give me the spark.

I might remember a magazine that talked about a specific topic; I go look for it. If I don't have it, I find it at the homes of people who were in my same collectives. If I can't find it there, I check libraries, which sometimes preserve such things. If not, I look on eBay or in second-hand markets to buy and recover it.

That's for paper. Regarding other materials, I've dealt more with websites than audio or video, as I don't have specific skills there. But there are others doing exactly what I do for those formats. One project I missed earlier is Italian Tapes Archive, available on YouTube and Archive.org. They recover "absent" music — tapes from flea markets that they digitize and put online. Not just music, but radio recordings from the movements, assemblies at social centers, and historical movement records.

LM:
And for the efforts you mentioned in archiving websites and digital contents, may you tell me a bit more about that?

RP:
For websites, when we encounter something still active and functional that we find interesting, we make a copy.

For example, if I find a particularly interesting video on YouTube, I download it. Sometimes I republish them on Archive.org or my site, but often I just keep them locally on my disks. The idea is that if it vanishes from YouTube tomorrow, I have a copy.

I also take complete sites, for example, from Blogspot. That was a popular blogging platform in the early 2000s; many sites are still online but no longer updated. They are frozen in time, perfectly functional, but there is a fear they could disappear overnight if Google decides Blogspot is no longer profitable.

I make a complete copy of these sites. There are specific technologies to mirror these sites and keep them fully navigable. I take a "snapshot" of the site and host it elsewhere, where it remains just as navigable as the original. I've done several of these, which are available at grafton9.net/web-archive. These include sites on music culture, the history of movement printing, subcultures, and specific social centers.

In cases where the original site has already vanished — because someone didn't renew the domain or the software broke — I try to recover a copy by contacting the original creators. Often, it's a copy I made 10 or 20 years ago that I still have on my disks. There is a "restoration" aspect here. If a site was made with standard web technologies, it's easy. But if it used outdated software, like very old versions of WordPress, you have to temporarily rebuild the environment to get it running again so you can make a clean copy.

It's an activity of restoration and recovery. Sometimes it's possible, sometimes not. Some sites are irredeemably broken. This often depends on the technology used; for many years, the big problem was Flash sites, which used an interactive technology that for making animations, small games, and music. For many years, those sites were invisible because Flash had vanished from browsers; you needed a plugin to see them, and for a long time, they just didn't work.

Then, at a certain point, someone wrote a sort of emulator that can be injected into a page to make them work again today. So, for example, some of those sites we had lost are now usable once more.

This is the thing: if something isn't usable today, there's nothing stopping someone in the future — in that same hacker and Free Software spirit I mentioned at the start — from implementing solutions to make these things accessible again.

Essentially, there are early web video formats that we might have lost forever because they were in RealAudio — a proprietary format used before video was standardized on the web.

LM:
Just out of curiosity, do you have any future evolutions in mind for the archive? New materials you'd like to add or new ways of presenting what's already there?

RP:
Respondent: Regarding materials, we have a huge number of large-format posters. So far, we haven't done them because we haven't committed to finding a way to scan them; we'd need to find the right technology.

In a professional setting, there are planetary scanners, large hubs where you can place a very big sheet and scan it. Amateur practices for this usually involve setting up a photo shoot where you hang the poster and photograph it with a high-quality DSLR camera. What we'd really like to do one day is process these hundreds of posters. They were street posters, a form of communication that has almost vanished today.

Firstly, because "postering" (attacchinaggio) in the street has become illegal — you face a lot of legal trouble — and secondly, because it has been superseded by social media communication. Today, you find a concert on Instagram, whereas once you'd find half the city plastered with 50x70 posters. That's the format we're interested in.

As for how we display them, we've experimented a lot over the years. We've tried to move beyond the classic PDF format, though that remains fundamental to us. Anything we develop in the future must not replace the fact that we want tools to be simple and downloadable. A user must be able to download and read on their own desktop or phone without installing extra tools. Anything we add will be a "surplus" — something to make navigation faster or easier, but not a replacement. The main feature remains redistributability; it must be easily copyable without software dependencies.

Regarding visualization, for that *Fanzinet* project I mentioned, we did an experiment at a specific *Grafton9* URL. It embodies that sense of redistribution: just as people have copied *Grafton9*, we copied all the content of *Fanzinet* and put it here. When you click on a publication, it opens not as a flipbook, but as a grid view with zoomable pages. This facilitates a quick exploration of the content, but it doesn't replace the original Fanzinet site, which still provides the PDF for you to download and keep. We do experiments like this whenever we find a technology that might be useful.

We try to choose things that are simple and low-cost. Obviously, professional technologies exist for ultra-high-quality images, allowing you to zoom into the smallest details or crop and alter the image in an online viewer, but those have costs because they are complex software stacks to maintain.

We pursue a sort of minimalism; there's a term for it: Minimal Computing. It's about committing to simple technologies that don't depend on complex stacks. The more complex the technology, the harder it is to maintain over time—the day it breaks, you lose everything. We certainly aren't interested in, and will never follow, the current hype around Artificial Intelligence, search engines, and things like that.

One of the things missing from *Grafton9* — which people often criticize us for — is a search engine. In *Grafton9*, you literally cannot search for anything, not in the titles, the metadata, or the text content—though if you visit *Archive.org*, they allow you to do those things. If someone is committed to understanding how it works, they can do it there.

On the *Grafton9* site, we deliberately chose not to put even a small search form. All these search systems act as intermediaries; they are algorithms that add interpretations to content. For us, Grafton9 is more like a newsstand, it's a window display of covers. Someone has to look at them. If something interests you, you have to "waste" some time reading it.

Today, web platforms have accustomed us to this convenience where we search and get an immediate answer only for what we want. LLMs and ChatGPT are training us even more for this: we ask specific questions and only want what interests us. Instead, our goal is to throw everything online for you to look at, flip through, and read. If it interests you, download it and do what you want with it.

We reject, as much as possible, software intermediation that interprets or "facilitates" the work. There must be a sort of effort from the user. We believe that "wasting time" while searching is important. *Serendipity* — the act of discovering new things — is something you only get by spending time. You dedicate your time to looking at something, you extract something from it, and that is what produces knowledge.

On the other hand, LLMs are training us for something that can be summarized as a "smoothie substitute" — it gives you only the specific parts that potentially interest you. Our goal as an archive is to throw everything online and require everyone to put in the effort. We are aware that since our content is available online, many LLMs have surely trained on it, but we have no interest in blocking what others do. To be clear, we will never implement any of these tools ourselves; if someone else does, so be it.

We believe strongly in awareness and want to sensitize users to the fact that the web must continue to be a living environment made of people who publish content and people who read it. We must not delegate this process to machines. Hand-made websites, even aesthetically "ugly" ones, are very important, especially today.

LM:
Yes, getting lost in an archive is actually part of what makes you want to share more or learn more. It's about the experience. I wanted to ask one last thing, as an hour has already passed: regarding your blog and the use of Mastodon, how does that type of communication work for you?

RP:
Regarding creating conversations around content: we have a blog, but we don't use it enough because writing requires effort. We'd like to use it more. In the meantime, we use Mastodon. Every time we put something new online, we post it there; we use it more like a publication feed.

We find things on the network, post them, and fuel discussions through threads. We look for other accounts of people interested in the preservation of militant publications and use it as a micro-blog. I should say that compared to Twitter, the audience on Mastodon is much smaller and more limited. It has a good Italian community, but with Twitter, we reached a much more international audience. The relationships we built with collectives in the US or the UK started on Twitter and have continued; we still exchange materials.

In my opinion, international users haven't adopted Mastodon much, whereas it has taken root in Italy. We have a primarily Italian audience now and write mostly in Italian, whereas on Twitter, we published in English. These are very informal dialogues: we share a specific article, a photo, or a graphic excerpt, and from there, we try to create connections, finding a YouTube video of a concert mentioned, or a blog post that discussed it, to encourage discovery.

LM:
Looking back at those years, what would you say Grafton9 took from the broader Italian hacktivist experience?

RP:
There would be so much to say because the 90s and early 2000s were a decade where many things were born — some interesting, some less so — but they are worth talking about. On *Grafton9*, I've tried to tell you almost everything we do.

The essence of *Grafton9* — and all those years — is that beyond the technological component, the truly important thing was the human networking. It was the fact that relationships were created among people who shared ideas and attitudes. Technology was just a tool that facilitated this, but it wasn't the "important" part for us. The important part was knowing other people and collectives, traveling to different Italian cities. This was the underlying sense of all the projects: *ECN, Autistici, Indymedia*, all the way to the new Mesh Network projects.

It's about people getting in touch and creating a community. The truly beautiful thing about this Italian digital activist community is that it has been truly cross-sectional. In a purely political or militant context, there were rigid areas of belonging—anarchists and so on—with very strong identities, so people weren't necessarily all friends. Those environments were often quite separate.

However, the digital world was and continues to be an environment where there is a very strong crossover between different people and projects. In our circle, you can find everyone from communists to anarchists, subcultural groups, "fricchettoni" (freaks), hippies, and intersections of feminism and trans-feminism. The beauty of it is that the internet

allowed the creation of a very diverse universe. People with specific identities shared ideas and practices for all these years. This continues today with hacklabs and “real-life” experiments; even if focused on a specific technological architecture, the core purpose is that we do these things to communicate and share ideas.