

THE
POLITICS
THE
GRAPHICS
THE
WORKERS

TEXT BY DAVIDE FORNARI

These protest and political posters of the Seventies, preserved in the Polo del '900 Archive, are a graphic counterpoint to the formal purity of advertising communication, in hard social turmoil era.

Poster for debate on People, Movement and Revolution in Iran, 1979. Offset print 44 x 70 cm. Turin FULC. Vera Nocentini Foundation.

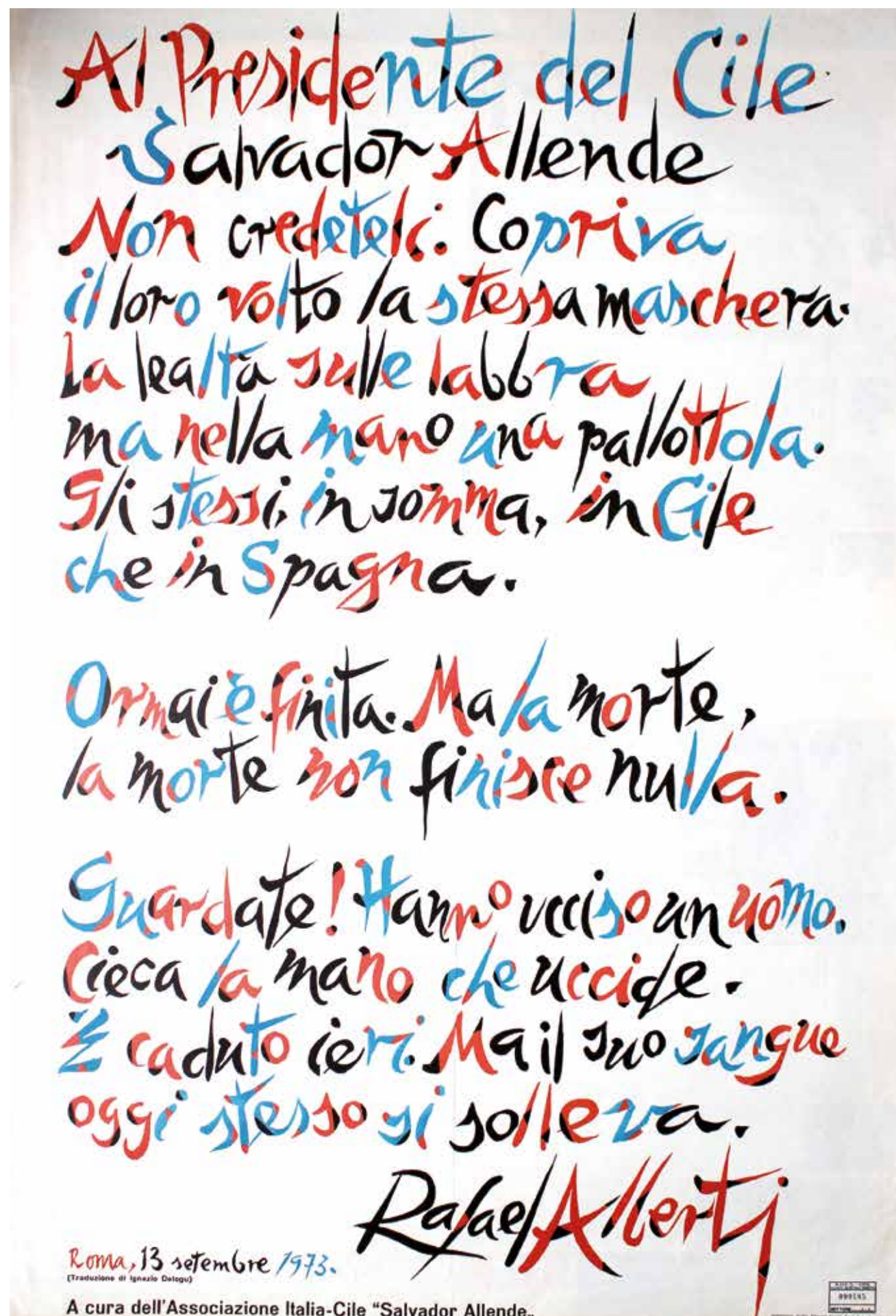




Poster for the day of protest of the entire FIAT plant, 1973. Screen printing, 70 x 100 cm. Gaetano Salvemini Institute of Historical Studies.



Poster for protest against Oseam for the firing of 33 employees, 1973. Screen printing 67 x 96 cm. Turin Cgil-Cisl-Uil FLM. Vera Nocentini Foundation.



Poster commemorating the death of Salvador Allende. Rome, 13 September 1973. Colour photolithograph 70 x 100 cm. National ARCI-USP and Italy-Chile "Salvador Allende" association. Donat-Cattin Foundation.

Those posters opened the eyes of the economic boom society like unexpected visual poems

In selecting the 100 most beautiful posters produced in the years 1958–1968 for an exhibition commissioned by Adriano Olivetti, Antonio Boggeri (violinist, photographer, founder of the Studio by the same name – a highly prestigious advertising agency) choose the title *Le Spectacle dans la rue* (The Show in the Streets): those posters opened the eyes of the economic boom society like unexpected visual poems.

The trade union and political billboards collected in the archive of the Polo del '900 paint a less known path in the history of Italian graphics, compared to the more accredited one depicted by reference texts such as *La grafica in Italia* (Graphics in Italy, edited by Giorgio Fioravanti, Leonardo Passarelli and Silvia Sfligiotti, Leonardo Arte, Milan 1997). In the Seventies they embodied an experience that runned alongside the official one, consisting of public interest graphics and works of communication and branding for large companies like Pirelli, Italsider and Olivetti. It was a season of great vibrancy for Italian creatives, they started growing a greater awareness of social and political reality.

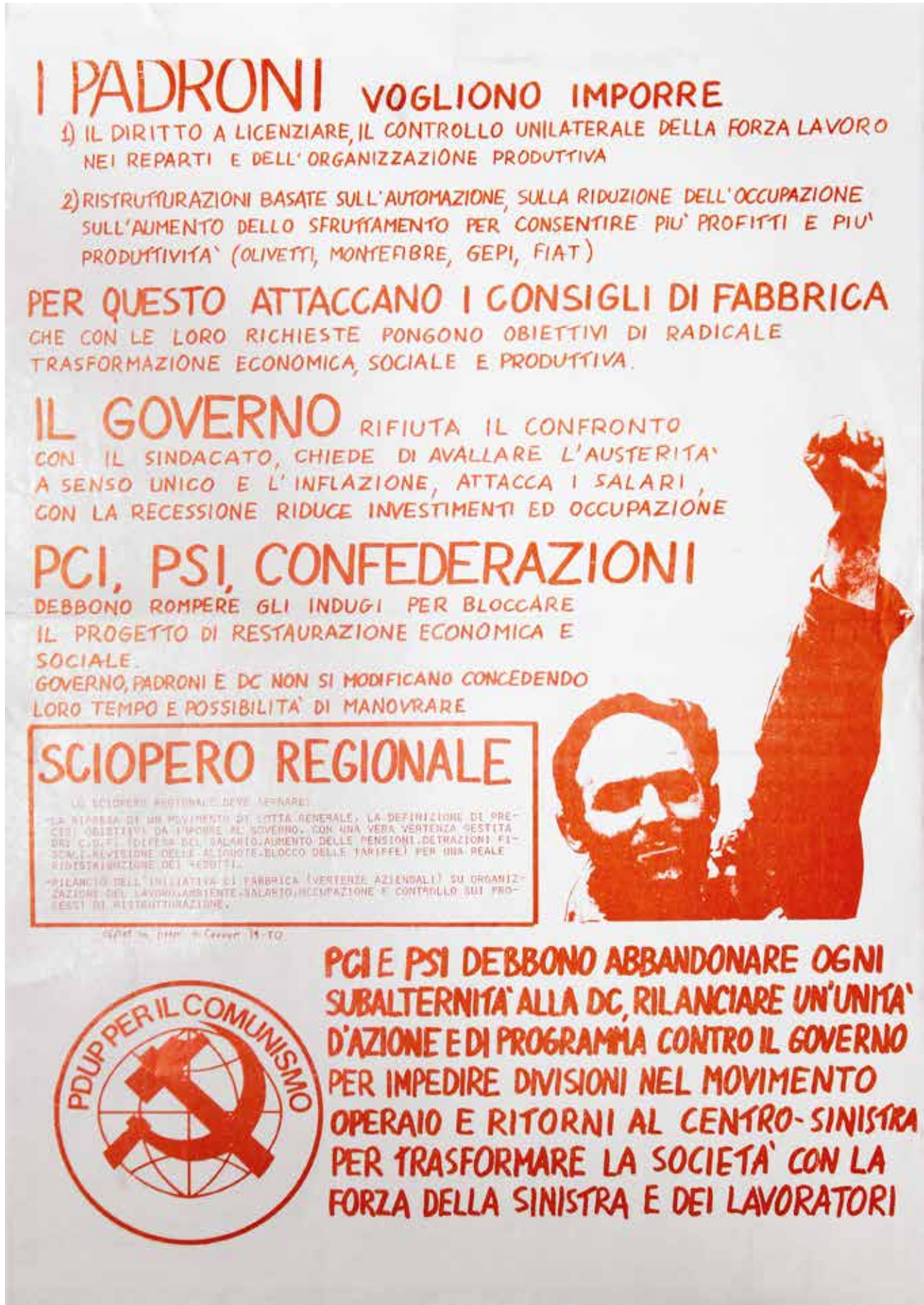
By the end of the 1960s, there had been a decline in industrial style – as defined by Carlo Vinti. Graphic designers had been allied of business, sometimes they were working as employees within companies, engaged as they were in shaping the brand's identity through brochures, signage systems and posters in form of fleeting structures. But the 1970s were a totally different context: it was the end of the economic boom, tensions were growing, and so were the demands by the unions and the working class. Graphic designers started to be replaced by large American style advertising agencies, using a language somewhere between graphic poetry and the practicality of marketing; the selling techniques of the capitalist society prevailed.

The posters at the Archive of Polo del '900 – coming from the Fondazione istituto piemontese Antonio Gramsci, Fondazione Vera Nocentini, Fondazione Carlo Donat-Cattin and the Istituto di studi storici Gaetano Salvemini –, relate another story. The story of graphic de-

signers who spontaneously responded to the instances of the times: the struggle for labor union freedom at Fiat (March 9, 1973), an exhibition of posters supporting Salvador Allende (September 13, 1973), the opening of the joint headquarters for the Federation of steel workers in Turin (June 1976), a general strike for the trade and industry sector (October 7, 1976), a debate on the people and revolution of Iran (February 2, 1979), a show in solidarity with the redundant Fiat workers (July 15, 1979), and a protest against company policies in the event of a power outage (approx. 1979). This small selection of posters is a counterpoint to the formal purity of the graphics produced by the advertising offices of factories and brands – the same ones that employed the workers and trade unionists who commissioned or produced these artworks.

The use of calligraphic lettering, dramatic illustrations and a few photographic stereotypes suggest a return to 'clandestine graphics', like the ones practiced by Albe Steiner over the years as a partisan in the Val d'Ossola, with mimeographed flyers against the fascist war. However, standard formats (100×70 cm, 70×50 cm) and the prevalent printing by silkscreen in one or two colours on white paper reflect an organised aesthetics of dissent, which will go and find its voices in a generation of graphic designers involved in politics: Nanni Balestrini and Giovanni Anceschi for Potere operaio, Massimo Dolcini for the public administration of Pesaro, Franco Canale for the Communist Party in Naples, and many others.

These primary sources are temporary communicative artworks: torn off their natural due date on the city walls, they represent an extremely rare object in the history of graphics. An alternative history, rarely talked about: halfway between the official institutional and political communication, and the folksy, spontaneous language of the fanzines, and yet lively and claiming; reflecting a time when politics were performed in the streets and in the factories, and the graphic designer's voice was clear and loud, and listened to.



Poster against layoffs. Offset print 44 x 70 cm. Turin Pdup. 1975. Antonio Gramsci Foundation



Poster for protest against company policies in the case of suspension for blackout. 1981. Screen print 50 x 70 cm. Turin FLM. Vera Nocentini Foundation.



FLM poster for working class unity, 1976. Offset print 70 x 100 cm. Gaetano Salvemini Institute of Historical Studies.



Poster for two-hour general strike of industrial and agricultural workers, 1976. Screen print 50 x 70 cm. Turin Cgil-Cisl-Uil FLM. Fondazione Vera Nocentini.