

Luca Buvoli

Notes on Propaganda Posters, Expanded Drawings, Vectors and Protectors, part of the *Intermediate phase of the Method* Flying-Practical Training, 2003-2006 [Beginners phase: flight = creativity (relation of the real to the imaginary; symbolic) + lightness and desire to defy gravity; Intermediate phase: (after September 2001) flight = heaviness, control].

The recurring presence: a figure with open arms on his side—as if in an attempt to fly (is he traveling to the end of the future?)—; an axonometric view with the horizontal axis on a diagonal plane, changing the cross into a tilted sign.

Having drawn it initially for an animated sequence in the film *Flying: Practical Training for Beginners* (1999, 18 min.), I then noticed a similar shape in a 1932 poster promoting athletic competitions by the OND (Organizzazione Nazionale Dopolavoro—Leisure Activities for Workers), and I chose it as an emblem for heroism in its monumentalized form.

Silhouette of figure/unknown hero = a tool to address a series of questions (from the dimension of painterly sensuousness and desire, to collective vs. personal memory, to the complex meaning of freedom vs. total control).

Trajectory of the Propaganda Posters:

Point A: they began as one- or two-color monoprints (for my show at the Weatherspoon Art Museum in 2003, coinciding with the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Wright Brothers' first flight).

Point B: I kept painting and drawing on some—adding figures + sentences, expanding them to their supporting frames, matte, and glass, until they reached—>

Point C: the adjacent sculptural Vector.

A MONUMENT TO MOVEMENT: Before I adopted it as a trope (in the *Propaganda Posters* and the *Expanded Drawings*), this silhouette had already become the source for the Vectors.

Vectors and Protectors:

-modeled by hand, simulating extruded forms of this figure, now receding and vertiginously diminishing in space;

-molded in rubber, shelled in an armor of fiberglass;

-cast in translucent and pigmented polyurethane resin (**frozen light**).

The sculptures have become the streak or contrail generated by the human figure: crystallization of motion and speed—all segments pointing to one and many vanishing points at the same time. → a **backward flight-line** starting from Siegel and Shuster's Superman to a Futurism revisited from a post-utopian perspective.

Contrails/streaks = memories of aerobatics I used to watch with my father (a pilot born in 1920), but also of **modernist rhythms and myths—now hopelessly entangled**.

(...)

Between the desire not to hear and not to remember:

<I closed my eyes, my ears, everything>, <And I would hide myself under my blanket>, <I have forgotten everything>; these and other sentences, which I painted and carved onto the works in resin and on paper, come from the interviews with my parents in the video *Adapting One's Sense to High Altitude Flying (for Intermediates)—An Almost Silent Version* (2004, 7:33 min.) [by the time they watched themselves during a screening at MoMA, my parents had forgotten of having said some of these].

The recollections of my mother's objection to air raids and my father's interment in prison camps generated a chain of freely associated words, either written or spoken, and animated sequences that reflects their inner turmoil. Transitions between sequences (from live-action video or film to hand-drawn or computer-generated animation) reflect the instability from hope to disillusionment, patriotism to fear.

ANACHROHEROISM or:

How to rearticulate the past and the visual imaginary of Futurism and Italian Art Decò (some suggestions for anti-strategic strategies):

a. early tests '03 only; pour Gatorade powder in the mold of the Protectors as I cut them in liquid resin (humorously "reenergizing" the heroic representation/figure); mix different flavors to obtain a variety of colors; test small quantities of water and other incompatible substances to generate bubbles and other irregularities;

b. write/paint the un-heroic WWII memories of my parents (replacing bombastic messages and rhetorics of heroism);

c. spill words (letters repeating, echoing—back to the tactility of language, the physicality of the spoken word and the echo);

d. spill resin (explore the interstitial spaces between wall and frame);

e. erode bright colors and flat surfaces (traces of the passage of the "angel of history");

f. decentralize the paper (dream of placing the viewer at the center of the painting (Boccioni), and tattoo onto the frames and onto the candy-colored Protectors and Vectors some letters/marks of inscriptions);

g. erasure/removal and forced dislocation on matte board;

h.

These and other shifts to question the inherently authoritarian and threatening side of our fascination with the future, velocity and power.

(...)

On the search of the perfect oxymoron (the aesthetic is the ability to think contradiction—J. Rancière)

A Futurism without optimism: an homage to both my cultural heritage and to individual and collective creativity and energy, yet framed within a different perception of time—a time of war, of all-future and yet a time of de-actualization of history; when the promise of real freedom in the future is doubtful, and rather echoes the recurring manipulations enacted by ideological systems.

... fly - butterfly - butter - lard - hunger - poverty - property - prop - propeller - helical - elliptical - ellipse - eclipse...

CENTRAL COLUMN, FROM TOP:

Detail from: *Propaganda Poster—And I Would Hide Myself Under My Blanket* (Monumental Zigzag—Dark Green with Ocher Shadow), with Painted Frame, and Orange Spill with Red Strokes, 30 x 35 x 1 in.

General view and detail from: *Propaganda Poster—Remember when I Was Hearing Those Ramblings* (Triple-Red in Green), with Painted Frame, and Vector with two Streak Segments with Painted "Those Ramblings", 32 1/2 x 38 x 20 in.

Propaganda Poster—And I Would Hide Myself Under My Blanket (Monumental Zigzag—Sienna Shadow in Violet), with Painted Frame, Protector Dismantling Violet, with Painted "Zig" and Red Wedge, 30 x 31 x 2 in.

Propaganda Poster—I Didn't Want you to Grow Up with Hitler (Bridge—Yellow in Violet), with Painted Frame, and Protector Carved with Painted "Trot", 31 x 31 1/4 x 6.34 in.

Gouache and pencil on manuscript, wood frame, glass, metal, enamel, and polyurethane resin, 2006.

RIGHT COLUMN:

Stills from *Adapting One's Sense to High Altitude Flying (For Intermediates)—An Almost Silent Version*, 2004, DVD, color, sound, 8 minutes.

Luca Buvoli

is an artist living in New York. His two main multi-media projects over the last 15 years, entitled *Not-a-Superhero* and *Flying*—*Practical Training* have been shown in ten museum solo exhibitions including the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the M.I.T. List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, MA, and in many galleries and museums internationally. His films and videos have been screened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, the Lincoln Center, New York, the ICA in Boston, and the ICA in London among other places. His sculptures are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and many other prestigious public and private collections in Europe, Asia, and the United States. He is currently working on the solo show *A Very Beautiful Day After Tomorrow (Un Bellissimo Dopodomani)* which will open at the ICA in Philadelphia in January 2007.

Claudio Fogu teaches modern Italian culture in the Department of French and Italian Studies at the University of California Santa Barbara. Trained as a cultural historian he has published essays on fascist-period art and culture, and Mario Sironi in particular, and has published a book-length study of the fascist vision of history with University of Toronto Press in 2003 (*The Historic Imaginary: Politics of History in Fascist Italy*). He is now working on the Mediterranean in Futurist art and poetry.

Claudio Fogu

There is a double vector of memory in Luca Buvoli's work, at once material—like the flying figures he has quite appropriately called "Vectors" and "Protectors" which reproduce in four dimensions the image of his father's mimicking of a flying airplane—and immaterial, cultural, both generational and epochal. Buvoli started his artistic path from the fortunate series *Not-a-Superhero*, which led to his gentle explorations of matter and a postmodern pastiche of Derridian deconstruction¹ and pop-artish pillaging of popular cultural icons, or better, of the hyper icons of the mass cultural imaginary: Superman, Spiderman, Captain America, etc... But there, in between his action (dis)figures mutated from Marvel Comics and the wonder of his own childhood, the immaterial vector of a cultural memory for many years expressed in both the history of art and of mass culture began to make itself felt. In the evil counter-heroes of his comics, Dr. Logos (the "most absolute foe") and Temporibus (the "Guardian of Pseudocyclical Time") we find the ciphers of the enemies that Italian Futurism had battled eight decades before, when they declared the death of history at the dawn of the Avant-Garde.

Since then, Buvoli's confrontation with Futurism has grown in both cultural sophistication and artistic boldness. Buvoli's new artistic project, but it would be more correct to call it, using a cinematic image, Buvoli's new *filone*² exploits the dirty places where Futurism merged with the mass politics of Fascism and the rise of the modern culture of communication, while at the same time suggesting an alternative route for the development of early Futurism. The mixed-media animated film entitled *Flying* takes the vertical projection of Futurist *modemolatria* (idolotry of modernity)—which, in the 1930s became the signature of Futurist aesthetics in the quintessential Futurist genres of *aeropittura* (aerial-view painting) and *aeropoesia* (aerial poetry)—and merges it with the earlier Futurist utopia of the *uomo metalico* (metalized man). The spirals, the sculptural vectors, the analogical words-in-freedom³ and, in particular, the several large installations we encounter in Buvoli's courses for flying reconnect Futurism to the history of the European avant-garde and post avant-garde by interlacing an expressionist *mise-en-scène* with a surrealist conceptual framework, and a Derridian passion for the tracing of language.

It is not surprising, then, that Buvoli's latest creation in the *filone*, *Flying*, would tap into the Futurist passion for transfiguring the world of commercial and media communication into high art, and vice-versa. In particular the *Propaganda Posters* capture the slicing of the early Futurist call to "reconstruct the universe," famously launched by Balla and Depero in 1915, towards the "auto-propaganda" theorized by the latter in his New York years (1930-1932), the conceptualization of advertising as the "art of the surprise" in Enzo Benedetto's 1937 manifesto, and all the way to an all-out program for the modern artist to become the "designer" of a mass-consumer culture still in its infancy. The material forms of Buvoli's art, therefore, (re)call, or better reclaim to our collective memory the Futurist unconscious that animated everywhere in the West the momentous transformation of popular cultural forms, icons, and rhetoric into a mass cultural process of stylization and de-referentialization throughout the first half of the 20th century.

And yet, none of this memory-work is imposed on the viewer or is necessary for the viewer in order to "get it." Buvoli's experimentation recalls Neo Rauch and Kai Althoff's revisiting of Soviet-style propaganda and Germany under Nazism, rather than Komar and Melamid's mimicry, and its gesture towards the Futurist imaginary is informed by the reading of Virilio⁴ rather than Marinetti. This is how Buvoli achieves an arresting effect that we could call "an archivalization" of the future, iconically rendered in the mosaic *Day & la vittoria?* (Where is victory?)—which translates a verse of the Italian National anthem and suspends the question—for all viewers, not just Italians—in a space between parody and arresting seriousness.

This special space that Buvoli creates in the mind of the viewer is also the most original trait of his art in so far as it is also materially there in the work itself in the somewhat parodic but again deadly serious gestures of decentering the posters in their frames and of extending the figurative work to the frame and beyond the frame itself, into the three-dimensional vectors that draw the gallery space into the work of art. This quintessential avant-garde gesture, repeated ad nauseam by modernist artist after modernist artist, reacquires in Buvoli's hands the freshness of an "art of surprise" conscious of its burden of history but, for that very reason, courageously willing to fly beyond the frameworks of the memory it recalls.

1 Philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) is the putative father of "deconstruction," a continental philosophy that identified the metaphysical prejudice of Western culture in its privileging spoken over written language.
2 The Italian term for a cinematic genre.
3 The Futurist practice of composing poetry without any regard for syntactic, semantic, or grammatical conventions.
4 Paul Virilio (1932-). French philosopher who writes on the intersection of technology, the media, and war.

Luca Buvoli