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Organicize disintegration: from Nuclear Aesthetics to Interplanetary Art

*Spatial utopias, futuristic temptations, perhaps more
ascribable to the pleasure of the provocation of
traditional values than to technological illusions.¹*

The Nuclear Movement

In 1951, two Milan-based artists, Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo, released the “Manifesto della Pittura Nucleare” (“Manifesto of Nuclear Painting”) and proclaimed themselves not just “Nuclear artists”, but “artists of a nuclear era”. Their manifesto gained international resonance when it was officially published one year later on the occasion of the Nuclear exhibition at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels. An excerpt of the text reads as follow:

The Nuclearists desire to demolish all the “isms” of a painting that inevitably lapses into academicism. [...] New men’s shapes can be found in the universality of the atom and in its electrical charges. [...] We are not in possession of the truth that can only be found in the ATOM. We are those documenting the search of this truth.²

Such critique of a typical modernist mythology, with its succession of competing styles and “isms”, is paralleled by the movement’s political standpoint, which signals the refusal to align with a political agenda influenced by the diktat of a faction (embodied in Italy by the conservative stance of the Communist party) – an attitude that prefigures Baj’s later anarchic stance. The manifesto also displays a positive and technophile position towards scientific discoveries, reminiscent of the tones adopted earlier in the century by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944) in the Futurist Manifesto (1909), which celebrated the advent of modernity in the beauty of speed, the dynamism of the engines, and the advent of the war, the world’s only hygiene.³

In the very early 1950s Italy was still mostly a rural and war-ravaged country. The so-called “economic miracle” did not occur until the end of the decade. It was preceded by years of profound changes across diverse sectors of Italian society, in particular the exodus from the countryside, urbanization, the mass increase in literacy, and the emergence of consumerism, which were all shaped by the policy of reconstruction enacted by the American-mandated European Recovery Program (ERP). This unstable socio-economical context was also marked by the race for power undertaken by the two main political parties: the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana, DC), which

monopolized the Italian political scene until the 1980s, and the Communist Party (Partito Comunista Italiano, PCI).⁴ The DC strived to preserve a political *status quo*, based on the convergence of Catholicism, Americanism, and anti-Communism.

The long-lasting conflict between the PCI and the DC had consequences in society and particularly on the arts. As a matter of fact, the Milanese art scene of the 1950s was still highly affected by the realistic trends officially favored by the PCI: during the Sixth Communist Congress (Florence, April 1948), Emilio Sereni had called for a closer relationship between “cultural producers” and “cultural consumers” since building a link between culture and the needs of the masses was, according to him, the only strategy that could guarantee the survival of democracy, freedom, and culture in Italy.⁵ Concurrently, the party advocated for an “ideological strengthening”, asserting that “the communist education of the party’s cadres based on the doctrine and teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, on the basis of the struggles and experiences of the Italian proletariat is today one of the most important tasks facing the party”.⁶ In short, the party encouraged the production of an art of propaganda, subjected to a political discourse and to a pedagogical intent. It could be argued that Nuclear art emerged also in reaction to these political precepts and more generally in response to the Italian post-war social climate, marked by radical changes affecting the socio-political backdrop and a general desire for reconstruction, and influenced by ideas, people, and goods travelling from Europe and the United States.

In the aftermath of the war, the Venice Biennale encouraged the prevailing of a “post-cubist” style, a tendency championed by artists belonging to the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti* (the New Fronts of the Arts), such as Renato Guttuso and Armando Pizzinato. After 1947, both artists deliberately aligned themselves to the realist trend supported by the Communist Party. The Biennale also played an important role in making international practices popular in Italy, not only by organizing retrospectives on historical avant-garde artists, but, most importantly, by exhibiting contemporary trends, for example Jackson Pollock’s paintings showed at both the Venice Biennale and Museo Correr (1950).⁷

Introduced in Italy with a solo show at Il Milione Gallery in 1949, Wols’ work and his contribution to a space-age aesthetics was an equally pivotal reference for the Nuclear movement.⁸ As Jean-Paul Sartre wrote, “[Wols’ paintings] exhibit the fauna of Mars as it might appear to a member of our species, and the human race as it might appear to Martians. Both Man and Martian, Wols applies himself to looking at the earth with inhuman eyes”.⁹ The presence in

Northern Italy of both Pollock and Wols greatly influenced the Nuclear artists, especially in terms of style and techniques.

This cultural and political background is indispensable when framing the ideas foregrounding the Nuclear Movement, such as the rejection of an overtly political agenda and the adoption of a free gestural abstract style imported from abroad. However, Nuclear artists also responded to a broader “nuclear post-war aesthetics” – influenced by both the fear of a nuclear apocalypse and recent scientific discoveries – a phenomenon that was at the time becoming global. Following from these premises, this essay discusses changes in style and materials, as well as the ambivalent self-positioning – in between extreme excitement and radical skepticism towards technological progress, nuclear energy, and contemporary fantasies of space travels – undertaken by the Nuclear movement during the 1950s. Both an ambiguous attitude and variations in style and theory embraced by the movement have never been clearly fleshed out by the existing scholarship.¹⁰ This essay aims to fill this gap and to provide with more thorough and nuanced understanding of the dialectic at play particularly in the work of one of the movement’s champion representatives: Enrico Baj.

In his essay, “A Short Story about Censorship”, Baj writes: “in 1951, I inaugurated Nuclear Art, which serves as a warning, delivering titles such as ‘The Explosion Comes from the Right’, ‘Do not Kill the Children’ and ‘Nuclearized Figures’. Nuclear Art was surrealist and expressionist as well as an art of protest: a claim of violence and destruction”.¹¹ As this quotation denotes, Nuclear artists maintained an ambiguous stance, neither slavishly embracing the fascination for new scientific discoveries, nor consciously condemning the danger of a possible nuclear catastrophe. However, as testified by the last edition of the Nuclear periodical *Il Gesto*, by the end of the 1950s the earlier curious and ambivalent attitude towards science gave way to a stridently cynical one.¹² This shift in tenor was coincident with the beginning of the construction of the first nuclear power plants in central and southern Italy.

Launched by Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo, the movement maintained an open and blurred structure to avoid a blind adhesion to a fixed program. However, it progressively acquired new members while also drawing the attention of a wide range of critics. The first show entitled *Baj e Dangelo: Pittura Nucleare* was organized at the Gallery San Fedele in Milan, between the 3rd and 16th November, 1951.¹³ On the 10th of November, the first public debate on Nuclear Art took place in the gallery itself. Well-known critics and artists, namely Giorgio Kaiserlian, Lucio Fontana, Gianni Dova and Mario Carletti were in attendance.¹⁴ However, despite considerable efforts, sometimes the objectives pursued by these artists as well as their canvases were difficult to

digest for a wider audience. The press ironically highlighted the obscure vocabulary of one of the manifestos “Per una pittura organica” (“For an Organic Painting”) [fig. 1] which proclaimed the will to “organicize disintegration”.¹⁵ In an article in the newspaper *Il Corriere d’Informazione*, Leonardo Borgese wrote:

To organicize? This verb does not exist! Maybe those nuclearists intended ‘to organize’ [...] what disintegrated worlds? So far only a few atoms have been decomposed. And if the world was truly going to be shattered, you [Nuclear painters] could not discover anything at all, you would be disintegrated as well!! What’s the nature of this peculiar inferiority complex of the artists towards the sciences, which begins at the time of Divisionism through Futurism and continues until Spatialism and Nuclearism? This is a rather grotesque competition...¹⁶

Despite the evident mockery, the reviewer unconsciously acknowledges the two main ideas informing the nuclear doctrine: to “organicize the destruction” and to inflame “a race between art and science”. At the same time, the review places the movement as the sequel of two major avant-garde trends: Spatialism, championed by Fontana, and Futurism. The impact of Futurism on Italian post-war artists and the importance it held for the whole decade is also due to the link with modernity that the movement sought after. As emphasized above, Futurism was the first avant-garde movement in twentieth-century Italy that promoted the country’s progressive modernization, visible in the establishment of new factories and in the expansion of industrial cities. Italy’s participation on the side of the Allies during the World War I gave way to its ambition of becoming a globally acknowledged power and an internationally recognized hegemonic country. Futurism not only supported this obsessive wish for modernity, but it also promoted the advent of a new, anti-academic, anti-classicistic style, becoming a groundbreaking movement and a model to imitate for future generations of artists. In the following section, I shall dwell upon *organicization*, destruction, and science, owing to their importance for the Nuclear artists.

Organicize disintegration (?)

By ruminating on the images of Japanese cities bombarded in 1945, I believe I might be able to construct a point of view with which to confront world history. It was only from the springboard stance of a return to that point where all human constructs were nullified that future construction would again be possible, I thought. Ruins to me were a source of imagination, and in the 1960s, it turned out that the image of the future city was itself ruins, professing faith in ruins was equal to planning the future, so much were the times deranged and out of sync.¹⁷

In the words of Japanese architect Arata Isozaki, images of bombed cities allegorically symbolized the death of an old system, as well as new life for the city. For Isozaki, the ruins emblematically constituted a “source of imagination [...] crucial in constructing alternate times and spaces to revive fading memories”.¹⁸ Images of nuclear blasts and wastelands played a pivotal role in the imagery adopted by Nuclear artists and became a source for a painterly – and therefore metaphorical - reconstruction.

The notions of destruction, reconstruction, and nuclear threat have been extensively investigated by Nuclear artists; the visual impact of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki reached such an extent to the point of deeply affecting also the portrayal of the human figure, the representation of which collided into the shape of a notional post-atomic man, a relic of the atomic disaster.

Several Japanese photographers contributed to collect documentary material on the effects of nuclear explosions, capturing images of the A-bomb survivors in the 1950s. Among others, Yosuke Yamahata, a Japanese-army photographer, was one of the first to testify to the effects of the carnage. The ravaged urban landscape with its fires and architectural debris, as captured by Yamahata and others, appears as the *tabula rasa* that later features in the sub-atomic scenes portrayed by the Nuclear painters. Alain Resnais’ influential movie *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959, based on a scenario by the French novelist Marguerite Duras) is built upon this scenery as well.

Looking at some of the earlier works by Nuclear artists dating from the beginning of the 1950s, one could see Informal canvases characterized by dark colors and thick, dense brushstrokes that materialize a zero point of creation akin to the material destruction of the atomic bomb. Only at a later stage does the human figure begin to populate these paintings again, metaphorically revealing hidden life beneath a masking surface of matter. Asger Jorn writes of Baj’s black compositions:

Against abstraction – that begins with the color white, pure optimism – he [Baj] tries to start off with black – nothingness, absolute zero – up to where he can,

and it seems he has already reached an advanced stage. In this total darkness, he proceeds to materialize and synthesize a new world. The first glimpse of the presence of a universe of shadows and anxieties that smolders beneath the ashes, waiting for the flame.¹⁹

The notion of “zero” as appropriated by Jorn in reference to Baj’s work has a twofold interpretation: firstly, it links to both the destruction caused by World War II and to the impending threat posed by nuclear technology during the following period of the Cold War; and, secondly, to the already mentioned positivistic idea of war as “world’s hygiene” as professed by Marinetti. Baj’s *Concezione immacolata (Immaculate Conception, 1951)* stages this double-faced rhetoric of purity/destruction, linked by a reciprocal causality: spurts of color fall over a heavy dark background, grasping a metaphysical presence that remains concealed by the impenetrability of the matter. Similarly, Baj’s *Nuclear Forms (1951)* depicts three dark clouds on a yellow backdrop potentially on the verge of discharging energy. The iconography of this work recalls the mushroom-shaped cloud generated by atomic bombs, a form already appropriated and deployed in the first Nuclear manifesto. The latter consists of a concrete poem, the words of which are arranged to shape the mass of dust and debris caused by an atomic explosion [fig. 2]. The scattering of nuclear charges that mimics the slow rebirth of a chaotic world features in the 1951 collective painting *Nuclear Explosion* by Baj, Dangelo, and Colombo – a work also indebted to Abstract Expressionism.

The frequent recurrence of the term “nuclear” – according to Baj, the only effective term to address aesthetic and scientific relativism as theorized by Albert Einstein – denotes a certain meaning.²⁰ As Jorn observes:

The denomination “nuclear” means a lot to Baj. To be honest, the first time I heard this label I took it with skeptical irony, but the subsequent development of Baj’s Nuclear art forces me to stand by it. And that name becomes increasingly clear. It can be rightfully acknowledged as the natural Italian development of Spatial and Futurist art towards a new dimension.²¹

The new dimension identified by Jorn in this passage emerges from the act of wiping out of what has come before, an obliteration masking a constructive rhetoric progressively disclosed in later works, in which the destruction portrayed becomes reimagined as the preliminary stage of a subsequent *organicization*. The task at hand is to make art in a post-atomic age characterized by a sense of imminent doom, of *irrequieta quies*. To overcome what we could define as theoretical impasse, Nuclear artists seek a new vocabulary of expression suitable to “*organicize disintegration*”. The neologism *organicize* comes from both “organic” and “organize” and

represents a nod to the organic matter that spills randomly on to the canvases and shapes subterranean worlds that gradually re-emerge from a zero state of obliteration. As seen above, such eccentric neologism was subjected to mockery by the contemporaneous press. Yet, the term was key to the aforementioned manifesto “Per una pittura organica” (“For an Organic Painting”) which called not only for *organicizing* disintegration, but also for “revealing the intimate structures, the fertile germs [of] our organic experience”.²² The ultimate aim was to search for “primary images”, a label that echoes Jungian studies on the notions of archetype and collective unconscious. The term *organicize* reflects both this dual rhetoric of destruction/reconstruction, and the organic appeal conferred to matter, which signals its potential to be molded and transformed in something new.

In 1951 Giorgio Kaiserlian, a critic and champion of the Nuclear movement, wrote: “the matter has more imagination than ourselves”.²³ Inspired by scientific discoveries on the atom, Nuclear artists acknowledged the autonomy of matter and its biological self-mutation so as to exploit its properties through an alchemical approach. The breakdown of the atom’s integrity did not really “become a metaphor for the crisis in materialism that Kandinsky experienced, spurring his inward turn to abstraction”, but rather it developed into the opposite.²⁴ The discovery that the atom does not constitute an indivisible unity paralleled the breakdown of the order of the old world after the war, instigated not only a sense of passive fear that prefigured an uncertain future, but also a constructive will made concrete by the possibility of rearranging the matter after its decomposition. The atomic catastrophe seemed to provoke a new material composition as well as the rise of the notions of monochrome, Conceptual and Kinetic art forms, the ideas of ephemerality and that of the spectacle. *Organicize* can be interpreted as both “to bring back to life” and also “to make something organic”, animated by an autonomous life. In this respect, faith in modern science as enlightened rationalism is signified by the atom seen as “a source not only of devastation but also of inspiration”.²⁵ For instance, Roberto Crippa’s *Spirale (Spiral)*, 1951) and Mario Colucci’s *Nuclei in movimento (Nuclei on the go)*, 1963) - whose style is no doubt indebted to both Pollock’s gestural action painting and Wols’ graphic-like drawing – both sought to depict nucleus of the atom and the frantic spins of its electrons.

The paradoxical race between Man and Science

The Japanese photographer Ken Domon documented the A-bomb survivors visiting a hospital, an orphanage, and several communities in the city of Hiroshima, collecting the shots taken in the eponymous series *Hiroshima*,

published in 1957. Domon was one among others to witness to the conditions of the survivors, displaying the tragic situation of post-atomic man.

In Nuclear art, the depiction of the atom goes in parallel with the birth of atomic man that emerged from a new relationship with scientific discoveries and their consequences. One should investigate such relationship in order to explain and justify a novel understanding of man and its representation:

Baj's recurring image of the "atomic" man was a crude, graphic, at times whimsical conflation of a mushroom cloud and the skull and vertebrae of an eviscerated figure formed from freely poured enamel paint. On a certain level, these damaged and mutated forms resonate with written accounts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki at time when photographs of the bomb casualties were still being censored by the occupying authority and genetic mutations were only gradually being discussed in the international press.²⁶

The unusual nature of the atomic man becomes evident in those paintings in which imaginary sub-atomic landscapes are invaded by monster-like figures, embodying the "new forms of Man" mentioned in the Nuclear manifesto. The latter reference sub-human beings – or *homunculi* – generated by radioactive contamination. Yet, the tone of the text is neither of mourning nor of blame; it reads as a euphoric celebration of man's advancement in science, exemplified by the development of the atomic bomb. How can the "body-snatcher" – the alien-man either deformed by the bombs or coming from the outer space – depicted by these artists legitimize a correspondence between scientific progress and human rationality? I argue that the discrepancy here is only apparent. A proto-human being born from the atomic devastation shows the effectiveness of scientific development, which in turn is man's achievement. These homunculi notionally testify to both the success of science and the empowerment of man and its progress, as well as inherent danger of altering the natural order in a way that arches back to the old faustian dreams of magicians and alchemists. The atomic man has amorphous features, which question definitions of race and gender; he controls science and possesses atomic power. Here the paradox is glaring. Man is at one victim and creator of his own progress.

This helps to explain the tension between art and science, a competition consisting in the artists' ambition to represent this ambivalence and its effects. This equivocal antagonism becomes the landmark of the postwar era. Since it supposedly occupies a less significant position within human consciousness, art strives to reaffirm its power against the progressive vaunting of human rationality. As Gabrielle Decamous puts it:

The overspecialization and regulation of science led to an acceleration that supplanted the arts and the humanities in the task of visualization – and invention – of the atom and the universe. Quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg even suggested that modern physics and its atomic applications had superseded philosophy from antiquity to Kant on the question of the formation of matter.²⁷

Nuclear figuration rethinks contemporary scientific advancements questioning their possible evolution and negative consequences; at the same time, it adheres to a modernist celebration of the “modern Man”, effortlessly riding the waves of progress.

An anarchic humanism

Such modernist praise suffered a change by the end of the decade. This is particularly evident in the anthropomorphic twist endured by the iconography of the human figure in the practice of Enrico Baj. In Baj’s work, (sub)human shapes appeared in the mid-1950s, in concurrence with the release of the first issue of *Il Gesto* in 1955. The emergence of man was anticipated by paintings such as *Figura atomica* (*Atomic Figure*, 1951) and *Quamisado II* (1951). Initially Baj investigated the representation of the “child”, the archetype of human being par excellence: in *Testa Solare* (*Solar Head*, 1953) a stylized face is painted with black thick lines on a bright red background; while *Bambino magico* (*Magic child*, 1953) portrays the child’s bodily structure in a way similar to Man Ray’s rayographs or Asger Jorn’s brute animistic figuration. The influence of Surrealism in Baj’s practice becomes evident if we parallel this series of works with the cover of *Il Gesto* that reproduced Max Ernst’s sculpture *Oiseau-tête* (1954-1955); similarly, Wolfgang Paalen’s circles and spirals in *Matter and Light* (1940) foresee Nuclear subterranean landscapes, while *Figure Pandynamique* (1940) suggests a return towards the representation of man. As Gavin Parkinson puts it:

Although Paalen’s painting can be viewed as a set of indeterminate waves, an anthropomorphism is suggested in the title *Figure Pandynamique*, sanctioning an alternative but not simultaneous reading of the painting as ghostly face.²⁸

Man has a central role in Baj’s work. As I shall illustrate further, during the 1950s his anthropomorphism undertook a peculiar evolution shifting from the aesthetization of the spectacle of destruction to the genesis of stylized embryonic forms, progressively turning into atomic monsters. This metamorphosis runs parallel to a shift in techniques and focus, from the “Man of a Nuclear era” to an “Alien-Man” coming from outer space. The change in interests is symptomatic of the loss of both the fascination for the atomic age

and the faith in technological progress. Concurrently, the end of socio-economic stagnation transformed Italy from an agricultural country to a highly industrialized one. With the so-called “Economic miracle” at its peak from 1958 to 1963 Italy became one of the major developed nations of the West. One of the main reasons at the basis of this abrupt rise was the end of traditional protectionism, the use of new sources of energy – methane gas and hydrocarbons that powered the steel industry – and the availability of low-cost labor. One must investigate Baj’s work in this context for it to be fully understood.

The artists’ focus on the human figure establishes a novel iconographic scheme, a visionary anthropomorphic code detached from any reference to reality. Proceeding from the abstract representation of children, Baj continues to populate his figural theatres with monstrous essences: from the arrival of ultra-bodies, or body-snatchers, extra-terrestrial phenomena to the birth of the *Generals*, a satirical portrayal of the state police. Baj’s critical attitude assumes exaggeratedly grotesque tones in the last issue of *Il Gesto* (1959), which reveals a strong disappointment towards the nuclear itself. This transformation in Baj’s figuration is rightfully acknowledged by Arturo Schwarz:

The primitive informal disorder gradually comes to organize itself towards the emergence of the human presence, until the history of the relationship between man and woman, its social games (music, dance, vanity), its tragedies (war, pestilence, death) and finally to the narration of the decay of the whole and its cyclical return to the original chaos.²⁹

This very path is intertwined with several other strands. Its ties to American and Italian science-fiction went alongside neoclassical references, prompted by the reading of Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*. At the same time, the series of *Generals* witnessed the adoption of kitsch materials of mass consumption and alluded to the current political situation.

As Stephen Petersen has already pointed out, Baj’s ultra-bodies are highly influenced by contemporary science fiction that commercially exploited the fear/fascination for invaders from the outer space, both merchandising and popularizing the image of the alien. The American horror-movie *The Thing from Another World* by Christian Nyby and Howard Hawks – a screen adaptation of the 1938 novella *Who Goes There?* by John W. Campbell – was released in 1951 and gained extraordinary success. However, while in the novella the humanoid thing has the same internal structure of a plant and can possibly be defeated, in the film the alien is an intellectual life form with a transformative power, who takes on physical and mental characteristics of

any beings it comes across: “‘The Thing’ makes this [special kind of fear] perfectly plain: there was a new world after World War II. There was a world that was just beginning to understand the significance of that atom bomb... Doom seemed imminent”.³⁰ Even more than “making this special kind of fear” evident, science-fiction demystified it through a mass-consumed Hollywood production. On this matter Petersen emphasizes that Baj’s Nuclear Art was also coincident with the release of the pioneering flying-saucer film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1952) and Baj’s term “ultra-body” or “body-snatcher” came from the 1956 horror movie *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, that in turn appear as a title in several of Baj’s paintings, including *The Arrival of the Body-snatcher* (*L’Arrivo dell’Ultracorpo*, 1959), made in collaboration with Piero Manzoni.

The *Generals* assume the same formal prototypes of the *Body-snatchers* plus the insertion of collaged fabrics coming from mattress covers and colored wall papers, reifying the avant-garde-and-kitsch canonical bond and making the surface of the canvas protruding out of the flat plan [fig. 3]. The series of the *Generals* is almost totally dismissed by Petersen from his account on Baj’s art. It is acknowledged solely in the following short sentence, which traces its iconography back to references to the regime: “General: a fascist dictator typical of the Twentieth century totalitarianism in all its guises...”.³¹ Equally, Jacopo Galimberti’s description of Baj conveys a one-dimensional perspective: “Baj was an anarchist who put the atomic thread, authoritarianism, religious, conservatism and the resurgence of fascism at the core of his work”.³² Baj himself describes the series as follows:

At the beginning, I did not intend to portray generals: I want to make fun of a certain type of people who like to adorn themselves with benefits and medals. This was the satire of a typical Italian weakness: of the mark of power. People named those characters generals: and I had to adapt myself to become the painter of the generals.³³

Debates around Fascism, Anti-fascism and Resistance – epitomized by the neo-realist trend and by the diktats of the political propaganda – were still bursting on the Milanese post-war scene. Moreover, the beginning of the 1950s were marked by the fear of a possible return to Fascism, legitimized by the presence of a judiciary full of reactionary elements.³⁴ Court records between late 1940s and 1950s show that while so called “fascists” were regularly absolved even from serious crimes, ex-partisans were easily prosecuted for incidents of little importance, endorsing the hypothesis of a corrupted judiciary. Baj’s depiction of the *Generals* stems from the previous *body-snatchers* series, but it also reflects this situation, mocking what could

resemble to Mussolini's cadets. In *A Brief History on Censorship*, Baj himself recounts:

Following on from 1959, mixing various techniques of painting and collage with an ironical attitude towards the military grotesque, I created a series of generals and military parades. With these characters, I started performing my satirical invective against the military aggressive power that caused me a lot of troubles.³⁵

Baj experienced political censorship for the first time in 1961: on the 4th of June the large canvas *Grande Quadro antifascista collettivo (Collective anti-fascist painting)* [fig. 4] on display at the exhibition *Anti-procès 3* and made together with Gianni Dova, Enrico Crippa, Antonio Recalcati, Errò and J.J. Lebel was seized by the police.³⁶ The painting featured in the middle two of Baj's *Generals* carrying the following inscriptions: death, nation, morality and liberty. One of the two personages, described as "idols" by the public prosecutor, bore in its mouth the image of the Madonna, alongside photomontages of the Pope and the cardinals. For this reason, the painting was accused of moral offence and insult to the Pope and to the state religion. It was sequestered for 25 years. It follows that the series of the *Generals* must be read in light of coeval circumstances since it witnesses to the fierce reproach of the current obsolete state of affairs in Italy, especially concerning the Church. Made of collage of extremely redundant materials, the *Generals* also functioned as a means to denounce both the kitsch of an uncontrolled consumerism and the danger of an emergent authoritarian state. Moreover, this series targeted the reactionary petit bourgeoisie, criticizing "the good thing of bad taste" that were decorating the houses of Italian middle-class families.³⁷

The last thread that can be detected in Baj's investigation on Man in the 1950s concerns his work inspired by the Latin text *De Rerum Natura*. Influenced by classical Picasso in terms of iconography, Baj realized in 1952 the 36 etchings based on Lucretius' poem of the same name an apparently strident intellectual counterpoint in respect to Nuclear figuration [fig. 5; fig. 6]:

After the bold Nuclear performances – where in paintings overwhelmed by a gesture that was getting closer to the limit of expression wasn't difficult to discern the burned and deformed presence of a sore human figuration – Baj wanted to re-organize himself more than what he had already done.³⁸

Also, it has been argued that Baj looked at Lucretius nostalgically in a way that exorcised post-war threats of a looming nuclear catastrophe.

I argue that gap between this series of etchings and contemporary nuclear paintings is only apparent, since Baj's appropriation of Lucretius is coherent

with the Nuclear agenda. Notably, in 1960 André Breton and Marcel Duchamp included Baj in the noteworthy exhibition *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters's Domain* at the D'Arcy Galleries in New York and in 1962 Breton describes Baj's series on *De Rerum Natura* as "a first celebration of an atomic vision of the universe."³⁹

Similarly upholding the continuity between these and previous works, Scholar Gabrielle Decamous highlights how "it would be false to state that the humanities suddenly became host to reflections about the atom only after the bombings. Theory of matter has been inherited from the Greek – Democritus and Lucretius among others".⁴⁰

In *De Rerum Natura*, the philosopher and Latin poet Lucretius makes himself the spokesperson of Epicurean theories on both the reality of nature and the role of the man in an atomistic, materialistic, and mechanistic universe. *Ratio* is celebrated by Lucretius as the dazzling detector of truth that disrupts the darkness of the gloom, while *religio* is considered epistemological blunting a vulgar ignorance.⁴¹ In the first book of the poem, Lucretius focuses on the main themes of the Epicurean doctrine: the atom's behavior, the theory of the *clinamen*, man's liberation from the fear of death, pain, and God and the explanation of the natural phenomena. Atoms are moving in an open and limitless dimension – the void – across the whole universe. Certainly, modern physics has pointed out that the universe is not as Lucretius believed and wrote about. Nonetheless, the poet's relevance for Baj's practice goes beyond the scientific dimension: not only did Lucretius spread Democritus' materialistic theories writing in Latin hexameters – and thus ennobling the genre of the scientific treatise – but he also put mankind at the core of his whole discussion, politically defining the human being as "man of state" whose *ratio* prevails over an oppressive *religio*. Such emphasis on mankind combines *De Rerum Natura* with Baj's anthropomorphic focus. Moreover, Lucretius develops an apparently tragic idea of the human being, whose life is at the mercy of a continuous atomic motion: a conception that echoed Baj's increasingly pessimistic attitude – finally conveyed in the *Interplanetary Art* issue of *Il Gesto* – which in turn explains the recovery of Lucretius in the aftermath of the war.

The 36 etchings on *De Rerum Natura* were published by Arturo Schwarz in 1958. The last number of *Il Gesto*, titled *Interplanetary Art*, was released in 1959.⁴² The opening manifesto of the issue reads as follow: "Myth, poetry, the atom and its mystery. The investigation of the smallest structure of the matter has all been of interest of the poet Lucretius, earlier than the bearded and obese sophists of Alexandria".⁴³ Not only does such quote bear reference to Lucretius, testifying to the renewed importance of his text among postwar

intellectuals, but it also brings forward a more mystical appraisal of scientific discoveries on the atom.

Interplanetary Art

Interplanetary Art [fig. 7] originated from the necessity of analyzing modernity's failures by employing new tactics. The task at stake was to dismiss the whole idea of an avant-garde and its proposed notion of progress. Baj manifests this anti-modern attitude through the adoption of a *sui generis* strategy. *Il Gesto* 4 featured three Baj's interplanetary paintings, namely *Qualcosa di Nuovo da altri mondi* (*Something New from Other Worlds*, 1959), *Ultracorpo in Svizzera* (*Body-snatcher in Switzerland*, 1959) [fig. 8] and *Ultracorpi all'assalto delle nostre donne* (*The Body-snatchers Violate our Women*, 1959) [fig. 9]. In the first two paintings Baj portrays large-scale grotesque body-snatchers and extra-terrestrial flying saucers colonizing conventional landscapes. By juxtaposing these images, Baj modifies pre-existing late nineteenth-century mass-produced pictures of alpine scenes that he had purchased for this purpose. Through a strident contrast concerning themes and style – dark thick matter is indeed spilled over a traditional figurative palette – the artist achieves a dual objective: to shock the middle-class and its conventions and to reject what he reckons to be an obsolete conception of painting. The third canvas reproduced in the magazine represents a naked, attractive woman surrounded by horrifying body-snatchers. Despite the sense of threat conveyed by the title – *The body-snatchers violate our women* – the woman is portrayed as leering and assuming a pose of abandoned lust. Stylistic similarities with pin-ups that were all over Coca-cola placards and posters at the time make Baj's woman a satirical rebuke to the myth of the American way of life and its pandemic consumerism. The fetishization of American pop culture suggests the wish of restoring a national sovereignty after subjection to the Marshall Plan, which had massively intervened in both, Italian and European economies.⁴⁴

The fourth number of *Il Gesto* provided a wide range of topic and contributors: Farfa (Vittorio Osvaldo Tommasini), Antonio Recalcati, Luciano Anceschi, the Belgian gallerist Ivo Micheals, to Raoul Hausmann, who published his *Interplanetary Manifesto*, and Mario Viscardini, who released his mathematical *Universal Formula very useful to measure Interplanetary Travels*. Also, Lucio Fontana, labelled as “the creator of Spatial Art”, published his sketch named “L'Era Spaziale” (“The Spatial Era”). In respect to former numbers, few disparities can be detected in this special issue. For example, the cover presented the topic in five languages, not only Italian, English, French and

German but also Russian, “which was both a nod to Soviet space superiority at this time” and a criticism to cold-war narratives.⁴⁵ Indeed, as Baj remarks, the first space mission that fosters the birth of *Interplanetary Art*:

A year ago, while I was also interesting myself in interplanetary art and possible visions of a future in which inhabitants of other planets descend to earth, I thought of making the arrival of some Sputniks or of characters from other worlds appear against absolutely conventional backgrounds.⁴⁶

The Sputnik Program was a series of space operations promoted by the Soviet Union at the end of the 1950s to demonstrate the feasibility of artificial satellites. Sputniks were launched in orbit by the rocket vector R-7 (Semyorka) originally designed for military purposes. Nonetheless, Baj didn’t attempt to celebrate Russia’s successes, rather to condemn international policies, unveiling a pessimistic postmodern standpoint as witnessed in the following excerpt:

When the world learned of the first space launches, we hoped, for a moment, with relief, that the attention of governments might have shifted from the study of an even larger nuclear bombs to that of ever more potent rocket engines, and that the diabolical plans for earthly destruction might have given the way to plans for astral navigation and interplanetary conquest.⁴⁷

As Nuclear Art had previously defied the law of gravity and liberated the minds of men by adopting an insubordinate and anarchist stance, Interplanetary Art worked as the postmodern critique of the restrained modernist approach formerly embraced by Nuclear artists themselves, disrupting any possible positivistic belief. The appeal for a “good use” of novel technologies can be also discerned in a poem written by Farfa [[fig. 10](#)]:

To all manufacturers of rockets
To all the governors of the world
To all the missile ballistic basis
[...]
To all is recommended the exchange of data and instructions related to paper industries to build rockets made of paper.
Let’s begin the tests from the bags of sugar, the coffee sweetener, and from the envelopes of love letters, raising this practical felling a bit higher up...⁴⁸

Farfa’s short poem demands to be read in relation to specific circumstances.⁴⁹ I am referring to the political alliance with United States and the subsequent deployment of atomic weapons on Italian soil, which had been established on an utterly blurred political ground: the accords between the two countries

were never submitted to Parliament for approval and were never formally debated or voted upon.⁵⁰

Conclusion

To conclude, it is important to acknowledge that the Movimento Arte Nucleare emerged not only as a questioning the so called “Miracolo economico” and its profound influence on both the social and cultural Italian context, but also resulted from a much broader landscape, in which a new-born space-age aesthetics fostered the birth of fantastic space travels. Nuclear artists initially embraced this phantasmagoric side of technological advancements, but later questioned its political consequences – a shift in tenor opened up by the present study. Interestingly, this shift does not concern only a socio-political and cultural attitude towards contemporaneous events, but also the style employed, which merged North American influences – particularly Abstract Expressionism – with European phenomena, such as French *Informel*, *Art Brut* and Surrealism, yet avoiding any fawning adherence to a particular trend.⁵¹ Later in the decade, *Interplanetary Art* questioned the adoption of an America globalized model of mass-consumption. Artists rightfully saw the risk of the commercialization of the cultural industry.

The alteration in tone concerns particularly Enrico Baj, who had embraced and praised technological progress and scientific discoveries on nuclear energy before adopting a more moderate, and ultimately skeptical, position. Interestingly, the rise of *Interplanetary Art* runs parallel not only to the technological development in various sectors of the society, but also with the establishment of the first atomic electric-power plants in southern Italy. The high demand for electric-power led to the atomic plants being regarded as particularly feasible in the context of this economic growth with the first Agip-Nuclear power plant built in Latina, south of Rome, on the 20th of November, 1958.

By 1959, the “grotesque competition between art and science”, as described by Leonardo Borgese, lost its original *raison d’être*. In the last issue of *Il Gesto*, which reflected a sensible political turn, science stood as an allegorical surface exploited by Nuclear artists to expose controversial policies and to unmask the effects of trauma experienced by contemporary man.

PLATES

1 “Per una pittura organica”, manifesto released by the Nuclear movement, via Teulié 1, Milan, June, 1957.

2 Enrico Baj, *Manifesto Bum*, 1951, varnish and acrylic on canvas, 104 x 94 x 3,6 cm.

3 Enrico Baj, *Generale (General)*, 1961, oil and collage on textile, 146 x 114 cm.

4 Enrico Baj, Gianni Dova, Enrico Crippa, Antonio Recalcati, Errò and J.J. Lebel, *Quadro Collettivo Antifascista (Collective Anti-Fascist Painting)*, 1961, oil on canvas, 500 x 400 cm.

5 From the series *De Rerum Natura* by Enrico Baj, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, 1952-1958, etching printed on paper.

6 From the series *De Rerum Natura* by Enrico Baj, *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia*, 1952-1958, etching printed on paper.

7 From left: Farfa, Nanni Balestrini, Angelo Verga, Antonio Porta and Enrico Baj with an “interplanetary rocket”, 1959, b/n photograph. Courtesy of Archivio Baj, Vergiate.

8 Enrico Baj, *Ultracorpo in Svizzera (Body Snatcher in Switzerland)*, 1959, reproduced in *Il Gesto*, September 1959, p. n. n.

9 Enrico Baj, *Ultracorpi all’assalto delle nostre donne (The Body Snatchers Violate our Women)*, 1959, reproduced on *Il Gesto*, September 1959, p. n. n.

10 Farfa, *Manifesto Manifestante, Cartacei Razzi*, (1959) reproduced on *Il Gesto*, September 1959, p. n. n.

- ¹ Umberto Eco, "A Critical Apocalypse", in Roberto Sanesi et al., *Apocalisse/Apocalypse* (Milano: Banca Commerciale Italiana, 1995), 29. This article owes much to the insights and suggestions of both Neil Cox and Catherine Spencer. My utmost thank goes to Roberta Cerini-Baj, who opened her house for me and brought me on an interplanetary flight of memories.
- ² "Manifeste de la peinture Nucléaire", in Luciano Caramel, *Arte in Italia: 1945-1960* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1994), 142, my translation. Originally published in the catalogue of the exhibition, curated by Paul Delevoy, at the Galerie Apollo in Brussels in February 1, 1952.
- ³ Marinetti's Manifesto was published in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, February 20, 1909. In contrast with my argument, in a recent essay on Piero Manzoni, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh seems to dismiss the recovery of any Futurist legacy by post-war artists; he writes: "As is typical for European post-World War II schizo-culture at large, Manzoni and his generation of Italian Neoavantguardia [sic.] artists seem to have repressed their memories of their endogenous avant-gardes (for example, avoiding all references to the Fascist affinities of Italian Futurism, or its inversion into the italianità of Carlo Carrà or Mario Sironi of the 1920s and 1930s) and were complemented by an equally intense desire to posit themselves within a renewed international visibility after the Marshall Plan". Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Universal Anaesthesia: Piero Manzoni, Little Boy, And Arte Nucleare", in *Piero Manzoni. Writings*, edited by Luigi Gaspare Marcone (New York: Hauser&Wirth Publisher, 2019), 256.
- ⁴ Cfr. Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy, Society and Politics, 1943-1988* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 141-42. On the same period see also Guido Crainz, *Storia del miracolo italiano. Culture, identità, trasformazioni fra anni Cinquanta e Sessanta* (Rome: Donzelli, 2005).
- ⁵ Emilio Sereni, quoted in Vittoria Albertina, "La commissione culturale del PCI dal 1948 al 1956", *Studi Storici*, 31 (1990): 137.
- ⁶ From the proceedings of the PCI directorate, 1948, quoted in Albertina, "La commissione culturale," 137-138.
- ⁷ Pollock's works were shown both in the American Pavilion of the XXV Biennale (three paintings: *Number 1*, 1948, *Number 12*, 1949, *Number 23*, 1949; June 3 – October 15, 1950) and in the Napoleonic wing in the museum Correr, Venice. The exhibition was organized by the "three hands" (Giuseppe Marchioni, Oreste Ferrari, and Bruno Alfieri) with the collaboration of Peggy Guggenheim and Vittorio Carrain. Cf. Francis V. O' Connor, *Jackson Pollock* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1967), 67; Bruno Alfieri, "La mostra di Pollock", in *Jackson Pollock a Venezia* (Milan: Skira, 2002), 9-18; Jeremy Lewison, "Jackson Pollock and the Americanization of Europe", in *Jackson Pollock. New Approaches*, curated by Kirk Varnedoe and Pepe Kermel (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1999) Exh. Cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art: N. H. Adams, 1998), 201-231; Francesco Tedeschi, *La Scuola di New York: origini, vicende, protagonisti* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2004), 111.
- ⁸ Wols exhibited at the Galleria Il Milione, Milan, from the 29th of April 1949.
- ⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Finger and Non-Fingers" in *Wols: watercolors, drawings, writings*, edited by Werner Haftmann (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1965), 30-41.
- ¹⁰ This article owes much to Stephen Petersen's book *Space-age Aesthetics: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein and the postwar European avant-garde* (University Park, (Pa): Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), which unveils a new-born space-age aesthetics informed by Cold War policies, and by the emerging of Pop Art and new media, among other factors.

- ¹¹ Enrico Baj, “Una breve storia di censura”, in *Catalogo Generale delle opere di Enrico Baj dal 1996 al 2003* edited by Roberta Cerini Baj (Pondetera: Bandecchi e Vivaldi, 2004), 51.
- ¹² *Il Gesto* was edited by Enrico Baj and Sergio Dangelo and published in 4 issues in between 1955 and 1959. Its digitized issues are available at www.capti.it
- ¹³ The exhibition *Enrico Baj e Sergio Dangelo: Pittura Nucleare* was held at Galleria San Fedele, Milan, from 3 to 16 November 1951.
- ¹⁴ In the following year, the movement became widely renowned both in Italy and abroad: several exhibitions in Brussels and Milan were arranged. This remarkable escalation of events led to new artists joining the group: Joe Cesare Colombo, Ento Preda, Antonino Tullier (both literary critic and artist), Leonardo Mariani Travi, Max Rusca and Pino Serp. During those intense years, a fervent production of manifestos and theoretical texts shaped and defined the foundations of the movement. The essays “Prefigurazione” (Pre-figurations) by Enrico Brenna and “Definizione dei nucleari” (Definition of the Nuclearists) by Beniamino Dal Fabbro were of particular importance: see the exhibition catalogue curated by Enrico Brenna *Prefigurazione. Prospettive del Movimento Nucleare* (Milan: Edizioni Ariminum, 1953) - the exhibition was held at the Studio B24 in Milan and comprised the works of Baj, Colombo, Dangelo, Mariani, Rusca, Serpi and Beniamino Dal Fabbro, “Definition of the Nuclearists” (1953), in *Arte Nucléaire*, edited by Tristan Sauvage (Arturo Schwarz) (Éditions Villa, 1962), 207. Cf. Caramel, *Arte in Italia 1945-1960*, 136.
- ¹⁵ “Per una pittura organica”, in Marcone, *Piero Manzoni*. 46. The original text “Per una pittura organica/Pour une peinture organique” was published in Italian and French, and signed by Guido Biasi, Mario Colucci, Piero Manzoni, Ettore Sordini, and Angelo Verga. It was distributed by the Nuclear Art Movement, via Teulíé 1, Milan, in June 1957.
- ¹⁶ Polignoto [Leonardo Borgese], “Ancora un manifesto: l’assurda gara tra arte e scienza”, *Corriere d’Informazione*, August 14-15, 1957, my translation.
- ¹⁷ Arata Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2006), 99-100.
- ¹⁸ Yasufumi Nakamori, “Imagining a City through Photography: Japan from 1945-1968”, in *Postwar Art: between the Pacific and the Atlantic, 1945-1965*, edited by Okwui Enwezor, Katie Siegel and Ulrich Wilmes (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2016), 135.
- ¹⁹ “Contrario all’astrazione che comincia col colore bianco – l’ottimismo assoluto – egli cerca di procedere dal nero, dalla nullità o zero assoluto, fino a dove può, e sembra già essere arrivato a buon punto. In questo buio assoluto egli inizia la concretizzazione e la sintesi di un nuovo mondo, il primo scintillio dell’essere di un universo di ombre e inquietudini che cova sotto le ceneri, in attesa della fiamma”: Asger Jorn, “Enrico Baj”, in Enrico Baj and Gérard-Georges Lemaire, *Baj: dal generale al particolare* (Milano: Fabbri, 1985), 67, my translation. Originally published as Asger Jorn, *Enrico Baj* (Copenhagen: Kunst, 1956).
- ²⁰ Cf. Enrico Baj, letter to Asger Jorn, January 30, 1956, in *Baj-Jorn Lettres*, edited by Maurice Fréchuret (Saint Etienne: Musée de l’Art Moderne, 1989), 1959.
- ²¹ “[...] La denominazione di ‘nucleare’, alla quale Baj tiene molto. Ammetto che presi questa etichetta con scettica ironia la prima volta che la sentii, ma lo sviluppo dell’arte nucleare di Baj mi obbliga a rispettarla. E questa giusta denominazione diventa sempre più chiara. Si può dire che è, in Italia, lo sviluppo dell’arte futurista e spaziale verso una nuova dimensione [...]”. Jorn, “Enrico Baj”, 67, my translation.
- ²² See ft. 10

- ²³ Giorgio Kaiserlian, "La materia ha più immaginazione di noi", in *Arte Nucleare* (Milano: Amici della Francia, 1952), p.n.n.
- ²⁴ Stephen Petersen, "Explosive Propositions: Artists React to the Atomic Age", *Science in context* 17 (2004): 580.
- ²⁵ Petersen, *Space-age Aesthetics*, 114.
- ²⁶ Id., "'Form Disintegrate': Painting in the shadow of the bomb," in Enwezor, Siegel and Wilmes, *Postwar*, 143.
- ²⁷ Gabrielle Decamous, "Nuclear Activities and Modern Catastrophes: Art faces the Radioactive Waves," *Leonardo*, 44 (2011): 125.
- ²⁸ Gavin Parkison, *Surrealism, Art and Modern Science, Relativity, Quantum Mechanism, Epistemology* (Yale University Press: New Heaven and London, 2008), 168.
- ²⁹ Arturo Schwarz, foreword, in Enrico Baj, *De Rerum Natura, trentasei acqueforti originali per il poema di Lucrezio, con un testo di Roberto Sanesi* (Milano: Schwarz, 1958), p. n. n.
- ³⁰ Petersen, *Space-Age Aesthetics*, 116.
- ³¹ Ivi, 114.
- ³² Jacopo Galimberti, "The Intellectual and the Fool: Piero Manzoni between the Milanese Art Scene and the Land of Cockaigne", *Oxford Art Journal*, 35 (2012): 78-79.
- ³³ "Io all'inizio non intendevo fare dei generali: intendevo solo prendere in giro un certo tipo di persone che amano fregiarsi di commende e medaglie. Era la satira di una debolezza tipicamente italiana: quella del segno del poter. Quei personaggi la gente li ha chiamati generali: e io ho dovuto adattarmi a diventare il pittore dei generali": Enrico Baj, quoted in Paolo Rizzi, "A Palazzo Grassi, Venezia, mostra Baj", *D'Ars Agency*, October- November 1971, 13, my translation.
- ³⁴ Christopher Duggan lists three reasons to validate the risk of the resurgence of fascism: "first, the absence of an unequivocal elite culture of anti-fascism meant that unlike West Germany, Italy's political defenses against the extreme right were far from the impregnable. Second, the climate of the Cold War together with the Church's crusade to turn Italy into the flagship of 'Christian civilization' made an authoritarian crackdown on the communism seem like a realistic possibility. Third, the presence until the early 1950s of neo-fascist terrorist groups in Italy, such as the Fronte Nuovo di Azione Rivoluzionaria, lent substance to fears of a coup": Christopher Duggan, "Legacy of Fascism," in *Italy in the Cold War, politics, culture and society, 1948-1958* (Washington D.C.: Berg Publishers Limited, 1995), 10.
- ³⁵ Enrico Baj, "Una breve storia di censura", in *Scritti sull'arte: dal futurismo statico alla merda d'artista* (Bertiolo: AAA, 1996), 11.
- ³⁶ Exhibition organized by Alain Jouffroy and Jean-Jacques Lebel in Milan at the Galleria Brera, 5 – 30 June 1961 in collaboration with Galleria del Naviglio and Galleria Schwarz.
- ³⁷ Guido Gozzano, *L'amica di nonna Speranza*, in *Le Poesie*, edited by Edoardo Sanguineti, (Torino: Einaudi, 1990), 146-154.
- ³⁸ Roberto Sanesi, in Baj, *De Rerum Natura*, 1958, p. n. n.
- ³⁹ André Breton, quoted in Sven Lütticken, "Shared Matter, transformed Form: Notes on Nuclear Aesthetics, Part 2", *e-flux* #96, 1 (2019). <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/96/243057/s-hattered-matter-transformed-forms-notes-on-nuclear-aesthetics-part-2/> Cf. also André Breton and Marcel Duchamp, *Surrealist Intrusion in the Enchanters' Domain* (New York: D'Arcy Galleries, 1960).
- ⁴⁰ Decamous, "Nuclear Activities", 130.
- ⁴¹ It would be wrong to translate "religio" as "religion". Its meaning is indeed closer to signify "the combination of false believes", hence it possesses a negative connotation.
- ⁴² Baj, *De Rerum Natura*. See also *Il Gesto*, September 1959.
- ⁴³ "Il mito, la poesia, il mistero dell'atomo, l'indagine sulla struttura minima della

materia interessarono il poeta Lucrezio prima dei barbari e obesi sofi d'Alessandria": "Arte Interplanetaria", *Il Gesto*, September 1959, p. n. n. The manifesto was signed by Giovanni Anceschi, Sandro Bajini, Nanni Balestrini, Leo Paolazzi, Paolo Redaelli, Angelo Verga, Bruno di Bello, Etto Sordini, Antonio Recalcati, Enrico Baj, Farfa.

⁴⁴ See "Remarks of Sergio Romano", in *The Marshall Plan Forty Years After: Lesson for the International System Today*, edited by David Ellwood, (Bologna: the Bologna center of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, 1988); see also the controversial book by Jaleh Mansoor, *Marshall Plan Modernism: Italian Postwar Abstraction and the beginning of Autonomia* (Durnham: Duke University Press, 2016).

⁴⁵ Petersen, *Space-age Aesthetics*, 138.

⁴⁶ Enrico Baj, "A proposito di coesistenza e modificazione", in Stephen Petersen, *Space-age Aesthetics*, 135. Originally published in: *Documento Sud*, n. 2, January 1960, p. n. n.

⁴⁷ "Arte Interplanetaria", p. n. n.

⁴⁸ "A tutti i costruttori di razzi/a tutti i governatori del mondo/a tutte le basi balistiche razzialiche/Si raccomanda a tutti lo scambio di dati e informazioni cartotecniche connesse allo studio e alla costruzione di missili in carta. Incominciare le prove dai sacchetti di zucchero, dolcificatore del caffè, e dalle buste delle lettere d'amore, sollevanti codesto sentimento terra terra e un po' più in su...": Farfa, "Manifesto manifestante, cartacei razzi", *Il Gesto*, September 1959, p. n. n. Please note that "missile" is my free translation from the Italian neologism "razzialiche".

⁴⁹ On the 20th of March 1959, US government official stated that Italy was the first of its allies to accept the construction on its soil of missile basis. The dispute has already begun in 1958, when minister Fanfani very

cautiously had agreed to establish bases for American intermediate-range ballistic missiles with atomic warheads. However, this decision met the disapproval of some political figures and the criticism of the public opinion. From a poll dated March 1958, to the question 'do you favor the establishment of long-range-missile bases (in Italy) by the United States?' The 30% of the population responded in favor while the 39% voted against. A conspicuous 29% didn't answer.

⁵⁰ Norman Kogan, *A political History of Postwar Italy* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1966), 132.

⁵¹ In continuity with my assertion, see Lütticken, "Shared Matter": "Arte Nucleare, then belongs to the postwar afterlife of surrealism and to the prehistory of the Situationist International; it is the historical avant-garde morphing into the neo-avant-garde".