



PERSPECTA 50

URBAN DIVIDES

Contents

Preface

7

Meghan McAllister
and Mahdi Sabbagh

Foreword

8

Jon Calame

Power Lines: Boundaries of Erasure and Expansion in Los Angeles

15

Dana Cuff

{Dis}Incorporation: Further Notes on the City as a Legal Concept

27

Jesse Vogler

(Re)Connecting Belfast: Mobility Justice in Divided Cities

36

Mark Hackett and
Ken Sterrett

Watercraft: Detroit Water Infrastructure and Its Protocols of Sprawl and Displacement

44

Mitch McEwen

Terrains of Contestation: The Politics of Designing Urban Adaption

63

Kian Goh

A Metropolis – Not an Enclave Gaza Ring City

75

Michael Sorkin
with Terreform

Forever Transient: Life at the “Affordable” Mexican Periphery

85

Tatiana Bilbao Estudio
with Onnis Luque

Deepening Division: Interpreting Scales of Spatial Contestation in Johannesburg

103

Guy Trangoš

Separation Anxiety: Inequality and Exclusion in Athens and Cape Town

121

Alfredo Brillembourg,
Hubert Klumpner and Alexis Kalagas

“Along Sound Lines”: Drawing up Dubai’s Labor Camps from 1950 to 2008

132

Todd Reisz

Jerusalem's Divisions:
Architectures and Topographies
of Urban Violence

144 Annabel Jane Wharton

Evidence: Visualizing Urban Divides

153 Meghan McAllister
and Mahdi Sabbagh

Traversals:
In and Out of the
Dadaab Refugee Camps

173 Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi
and Alishine Hussein Osman

The Concrete Tent:
A Paradox of
Permanent Temporality

193 Decolonizing Architecture Art
Residency

Heritage, Modernity, and
Difference in Contemporary
Indian Urbanism

202 Jyoti Hosagrahar

Rio's Favelas:
The Power of
Informal Urbanism

213 Theresa Williamson

A Hierarchy of Separation:
Emerging Territorialization Techniques
in Romanian Gypsy Communities

229 Andreea Cojocaru

Transmedia Urbanism:
Berlusconi and the Birth
of Targeted Difference

243 Andrés Jaque

Open Portals:
On the Divisions and Permeabilities
of Global Chinatowns

252 Gary W. McDonogh

The Making of a Public:
Guerilla Art
in the 1970s and '80s

264 Jenny Holzer

Toward new possibility in
the public realm, together:
Polis Station

282 Jeanne Gang and
Alissa Anderson

Urban Commoning in Cities Divided:
Field Notes from
Hong Kong and Taipei

292 Jeffrey Hou

Radical Urbanism in the Divided City:
On M. Paul Friedberg's
Riis Park Plaza (1966)

302 Marisa Angell Brown



ANDRÉS JAQUE
OFFICE FOR POLITICAL
INNOVATION

TRANSMEDIA URBANISM:
BERLUSCONI AND THE
BIRTH OF TARGETED DIFFERENCE

Aerial view of Milano 2.

Accounts of Silvio Berlusconi's power seldom include two of its key sources: namely, architecture and urbanism. Whereas his involvement in media is seen as a momentous constituent of his political trajectory, what is often forgotten is that his particular way of reinventing the relationship between politics and media was an architectural invention, developed and tested through the interiors, buildings, landscapes, and urbanism to which he and his team devoted a large part of their time and resources, from the late 1960s to the early 1990s.

In 1968, Silvio Berlusconi, then chair and owner of urban development company Edilnord Centri Residenziali, started to promote "Milano 2," a 712,000-square-meter residential city ten minutes from the center of Milan. Presented as an alluring and inoffensive mix of rational architecture and vernacular embellishment, Milano 2 embodied a radical urbanism. Conceived as an alternative to the converging and homogenizing culture promoted by state-centered postwar European governments, this new urban model would instead segregate society into differentiated clusters of specialized consumption targets. Life in Milano 2 was structured by a cable television service that would grow to become the corporation now known as Mediaset. Milano 2's capacity to integrate the economic, social, and political evolution of its inhabitants was fueled by a series of design strategies meant to coordinate TV programming, interiors, access to commodities and services, architecture, and landscaping into what I will call "transmedia urbanism." This coordination was intended to render Berlusconi's company as the compulsory node in a new context in which purveyors, consumers, and the links that brought them together were reinvented.

TV NATIONS

The European national TV networks, such as the BBC (United Kingdom), RTF (France), and RAI (Italy), played a fundamental role in the social articulation of economics and politics of everyday life in Europe's postwar period. While the 1952 European Coal and Steel Community is often considered as the first forerunner of the European Union, the true antecedent was the 1950 organization that brought together the European national public TV networks, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). It was precisely these networks that played a role in the social, economic, and material reconstruction of postwar Europe, operating within a system where the unifying elements of national societies could be organized from the top-down with the intention of maximizing their power of self-production.

In this process, RAI was paradigmatic. In January 1954, RAI began broad-

casting television programs from its Milan headquarters at a central position in the city: Corso Sempione. The building included Studio TV3, which was, at the time, the largest television studio in Europe.¹ The headquarters were redesigned by no less than the architect Giò Ponti. Architecture was already an essential factor.

In postwar Italy, television was not watched alone. In 1954, the cost of a TV set was 250,000 lire—three times the annual salary of a secretary. Very few people

could afford them. They were found mainly in bars, churches, and the living rooms of wealthy families. These places, where television was communally watched, turned into transfamilial spaces of interclass enactments. Control over the television signal was precious, for it brought the power to decide what content would shape collective existence.²

RAI worked hand in hand with the Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, a public holding company that owned many



Interiors of Milano 2 apartment. Photographs by Miguel de Guzmán.



Interiors of Milano 2 apartment. Photographs by Miguel de Guzmán.

of the main industries that shaped everyday life in Italy—from telephones to highways, food to cars, airplanes to military weapons. By 1960, eighty percent of Italy's population watched television, with RAI playing a unique top-down role in unifying Italian society. RAI significantly contributed to the standardization of language and helped make Italian universally spoken in southern Italy. Moreover, RAI suspended its programs everyday between 7:30 and 8:45 pm to synchronize dinnertime across the country.³ National schedules were coordinated to ensure rest hours for workers and efficiency in family management. Television delivered a coordinated mass of workers to the nationally centralized industries.

In 1957, RAI began to produce short films to advertise industrial products. The intention of these films was to convey the value of industrial products to audiences who would be rendered into a generic universal public in part by the effect of this commercial TV content. These short films signaled the birth of the TV commercial. The made-in-Milan *Carosello*, a TV show composed of accumulated short commercials, encouraged a common children's bedtime, as it was intended to be watched right beforehand.⁴ From 1955 to 1959, Mike Bongiorno hosted *Lascia o raddoppia?*—the most successful Italian TV program to this day.⁵ In this massively popular quiz show, the cultural knowledge of participants was challenged and rewarded, with prizes reaching 5,120,000 lire and with the Fiat 1400 as a consolation prize. The public celebrated the collective achievement of the nation's educational

competence week after week, and Bongiorno's language was carefully tailored to make participants and audiences feel as if they were exactly the same: equal citizens or "ordinary Italians." Ordinary Italians would simultaneously be the unspecialized consumers and manufacturers of the generic products advertised on television.

This entire process dovetailed with a massive provision of residential units in cities. During the 1950s and 1960s, the number of residential units in Italy increased by thirty-five percent, sixty-eight percent of them built in the thirteen most populous cities. Waves of migration followed a government initiative to concentrate workers in urban areas. The government's aim was to ensure a uniform provision of labor to the factories that were producing goods at a national scale.⁶





In 1968, not only did students protest in Milan, but so did domestic migrant workers, who had come mainly from the south of Italy and who were still attracted by Milan's economic miracle and industrial development. These workers were paid twice the wages that they could earn in their hometowns, but due to the scarcity of affordable housing, their living costs quadrupled.⁷ Scandals, such as cuts to Gescal, the government's fund for workers' housing, brought the housing crisis into the streets, where demonstrators demanded more government financing. "Guerra per la casa" (War for the House) was the name given to the protests by *Casabella*, the renowned Italian magazine. In January 1970, an editorial exhorted big industry to collaborate and speed up the provision of housing. It argued that the innovation


capacity of the nation's industrial muscle should aid in the development of advanced solutions to provide the workers it attracted with places to live.⁸ At *L'Espresso* magazine, architect Bruno Zevi added his voice to the discussion, advocating for the relocation of workers from cities to underdeveloped rural areas, where land was cheaper. All these ideas would rapidly develop into housing projects—but not for the workers.

MILANO 2

In 1968, Edilnord acquired the 712,000 square meters of land in the municipality of Segrate, where Milano 2 would be constructed, at a bargain price due to the noise pollution of air traffic from the nearby Linate International Airport. Berlusconi's political influence facilitated a reduction of air traffic and the acceptance by left-wing municipal authorities of Milano 2's masterplan. This development was designed not only to supply accommodation for ten thousand inhabitants, but also as a complete urbanism equipped to provide education, fitness, entertainment, idealized nature, and, above all, sales. Its 2,600 apartments were placed on the perimeter, with their TV rooms expanding onto big balconies, directed not toward the Milan skyline, but to an inner landscape, with large trees carefully placed to suppress any perception of a neighboring human presence. Under the direction of the landscape designer Enrico Hoffer, more than five thousand trees were planted at Milano 2. A significant number of them were already over twelve meters tall when they were relocated—among them, fir trees, maples, Japanese red maples, cedars, birches, beeches, ginkgoes, magnolias, pine trees, plane trees, and lindens.⁹ Adjacent dwellings would be screened by a costly and carefully composed biological version of TV snow, an arboreal screen vibrating like the static light noise of unsynchronized TVs.

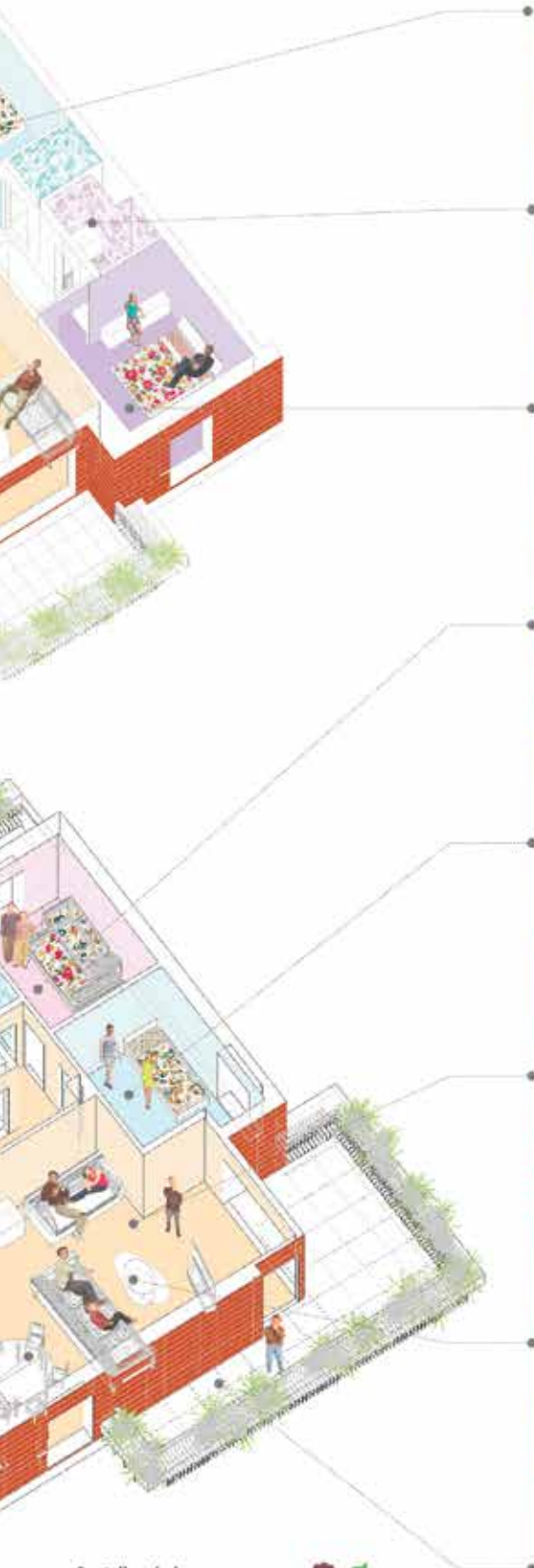
Milano 2's young design team was led by the then thirty-one-year-old architect Giancarlo Ragazzi, partnered with Giulio Possa and Antonio D'Adamo. The architects paid careful attention to the sectional bifurcation of the design. Milano 2's architecture segregated an above-ground domain for daily human life, characterized by a green landscape crisscrossed by pedestrian and bicycle circulation, from a netherworld of car traffic and underground centralized pipes flowing with utilities and media content controlled by Berlusconi's company, Fininvest. Milano 2 was the outcome of a growing context of Italian companies operating internationally, including Abet Laminati, BTicino, Hoval, and Max Meyer. The ideas promoted by these companies aligned with those defended in *Casabella*'s January 1970 issue, which suggested that the development of techno-

<p>13.00 Naturalmente... in cucina. Mon to Fri La 5</p>	
<p>22.40 Bella più di prima every wednesday La 5</p>	
<p>14.30 CentroVetrine Mon to Fri Canale 5</p>	
<p>20.30 Bye Bye Cinderella Mon to Fri La 5</p>	

<p>24h Grande Fratello every day broadcast online</p>	
<p>08.00 TG5 Mattina Mon to Fri Canale 5</p>	
<p>24h Casa Vianello online broadcast fivestore.it</p>	
<p>22.00 Un ciclone in famiglia 4 every thursday Canale 5</p>	
<p>20.30 I cesaroni every tuesday rete4</p>	



Mediaset TV-mirroring of actual apartments' daily life.



i cesaroni

I cesaroni
every tuesday
rete4

20.30



Bella più di prima

Bella più di prima
every wednesday
La 5

22.40



centroVetrine

CentroVetrine
Mon to Fri
Canale 5

22.40



i cesaroni

I cesaroni
every tuesday
rete4

20.30



Uomini e Donne

Uomini e Donne
Mon to Fri
Canale5

14.44



Casa Vianello

Casa Vianello
online broadcast
fivestore.it

24h



Pomeriggio Cinque

Pomeriggio Cinque
Mon to Fri
Canale 5

17.10



melaVerde

Mela Verde
Sun and Sat
Canale 5

10.00

Cuatrilocale house
Milano 2
Ragazzi and Partners, Architects





Milano 2 show apartment, 1976.



Fictional scene produced by Edlinord portraying the Number Ones, 1976.

logically advanced systems and societies should be specifically applied in new forms of urbanism and architecture.

PRODUCING THE NUMBER ONES

From the beginning, Milano 2 was not a project designed to accommodate an existing group of humans, but instead one meant to produce a new type of society. Throughout all media outlets, the development was profusely advertised as “La Città dei Numeri Uno” (The City of Number Ones). Actors were hired to impersonate the prospective inhabitants in fictional renderings depicting these Number One humans in their City of Number Ones. The Number Ones were not the workers, not even the workers who proved to be exceptional, but neither were they members of the wealthy Milanese society. Number Ones were instead an until-then disconnected sector of ambitious young middle-class, family-oriented executives. They were not working for the national industries governed by the Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale, but instead they mainly worked for growing multinational corporations such as IBM, 3M, Siemens, and Unilever. These corporations had started to locate their branches in places like Segrate that were more likely to attract middle-class employees and young executives: people, as Berlusconi would present himself, unrelated to Milan’s elites or industrial dynasties.¹⁰

Most of these employees were not owners of the companies where they worked, nor did they have personal fortunes, but they were paid high salaries. Milano 2’s favorable financing arrangements and low upfront payments enabled them to purchase dwellings of a kind that, in most cases, they could have never afforded in Milan’s center. These employees incarnated the shift from a postwar nation-based Europe to a globalized realm of multinational corporations.

Model apartments were built in the middle of the yet non-urbanized estate where Milano 2 was to be constructed. They were carefully decorated, photographed, and published in the most fashionable international media outlets, including *Vogue* magazine.¹¹ From images of fictional Number Ones in these spaces, potential buyers would imagine what it might be like to be Number Ones themselves. This use of printed media set into motion the evolution of the potential subjectivity of Number Ones by the way they were confronted with fictionalized, stylized versions of themselves. These media outlets created a mirror-based dynamic meant to maximize the displacement of daily life into a progression from the actual to the aspirational and vice versa. This dynamic was produced by the fictional architecture of the model apartments where actors performed as Number Ones. These fictions



Views of Milano 2. Photographs by Miguel de Guzmán.



Views of Milano 2. Photographs by Miguel de Guzmán.

ESCAPING URBAN PROMISCUITY

In the sales brochures, Berlusconi himself encouraged buyers to “escape from metropolitan chaos—from traffic, crime, immigrants, and workers. From the city itself.”¹² Milano 2’s marketing suggested self-banishment from urban promiscuity. Milano 2 provided an additional means to render oneself as a nonworker and as a nonimmigrant. Being a Number One was not only a progression to the aspirational, but a departure from urban promiscuity into a realm of class sorting and clarification.

The strategy of offering an escape was paralleled by offering a suburban marketplace within Milano 2, and Edilnord managed to reap a share of the money spent on every good or service that Milano 2’s residents purchased on a daily basis. A central part of Edilnord’s strategy was to retain ownership of the on-site commercial spaces.¹³

If gray concrete and modern architecture had once embodied the aspirations of Milanese society, now red vernacular seemed to cater to the sensitivities of the emerging Number Ones, who were young enough to enjoy the then-trendy aesthetic context brought about by folk music, picturing themselves in a globalizing rural romanticism.¹⁴ Along with the red vernacular came mansard roofs. Milano 2’s underground cables ensured TV antennas did not ruin the picturesque atmosphere.¹⁵

The center of Milano 2 has never been occupied by the symbolic presence of religious or administrative power but, instead, by the Lago dei Cigni, the Lake of the Swans. The core of Milano 2’s infrastructure, which could be perceived as a pleasant architecture celebrating picturesque banality, also contained a sports and business center, schools, retail, a four-star hotel, and a park intended—according to the apartment sales brochures—to allow the children of Number Ones to play Cowboys and Indians and have organized treasure hunts.¹⁶

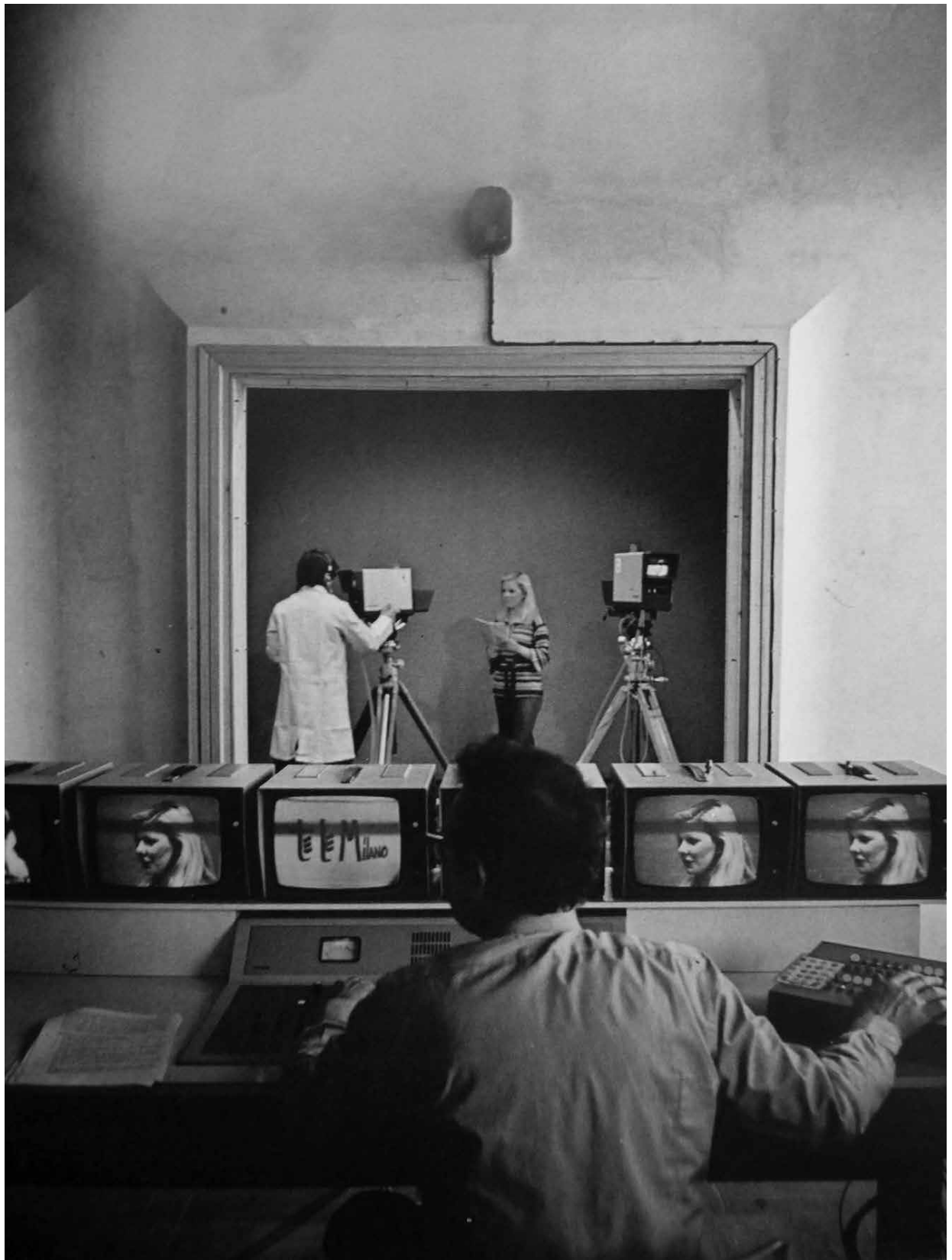
Together, these elements provided potential buyers of apartments with evidence of the way that Milano 2 would produce Number Ones and their children as competitive, healthy, earnest, aggressive, treasure-seeking, and athletic beings, prepared to occupy a position in a socially stratified world. In the way this infrastructure in Milano 2 is used even today, it can still be considered part of Edilnord’s project to shape bodies and societies through architecture and urbanism. An important factor in achieving this goal is that part of Milano 2’s architecture remains virtually invisible: namely, the underground studios of Mediaset, where the core of Berlusconi’s political coordination is concealed, an architecture that needs to be hidden to maximize its political efficacy.

traveled from the fictional settings to magazines and newspapers and eventually to real life. The isolated apartment towers of Milano 2, where the Number Ones would be spatially confined, did not grow out of a city or even the countryside, but rather from media. Milan’s new social type, the Number Ones, were segregated spatially, aesthetically, and economically. Berlusconi, who involved himself personally in selling the apartments, insistently

explained that neither he nor Edilnord had the funds to complete the development, but that funds would be mobilized by a pyramidal financing scheme: those who bought early would get an apartment that would double its value as others joined. From a financial point of view, Milano 2 was sold as the device that would help adventurous early buyers become successful investors.



View of the green landscaping in between Milano 2 apartments.



Tele Milano studios in Milano 2, 1976-1978.

In 1974, Giacomo Properzi and Alceo Moretti started to broadcast amateur programming by tapping into this underground, wired network. Tele Milano had just been born. Unlicensed movies and amateur, self-produced happenings were broadcast from the Jolly Hotel located in Milano 2. The TV station was cheap but successful. It recruited residents to its official board, who would help in choosing the content. A program showing images of women undressing, as male residents of Milano 2 called into the station to participate in a quiz game, would rapidly achieve an unexpected success. Not only did it attract viewers, but also it mobilized a particular sector of Milano 2 society, the adult males, and placed them into a differentiated time gap, experienced by its sectorized audience as an exclusive late-night TV salon. If RAI homogenized society, gathering the public together into a media space inhabited by generic shows, Tele Milano started to break Milano 2's society into specialized clusters according to the TV content promoted. Whereas RAI coordinated bedtime to ensure national industrial production, Tele Milano kept adult males awake to glean a share of revenue from their phone consumption. Consequently, these men became a group defined by their use of time, their media, and their gender practices.

In 1975, Berlusconi's Fininvest became the owner of Tele Milano, seduced by its unexpected success.¹⁷ Edilnord's project to segregate Milan's sectors of mass consumption and solidify control of the interactions and purchases of residents extended to Tele Milano, which would quickly consider its mission as increasing Milano-2-based commerce.¹⁸ With a 1976 ruling by the constitutional court of Italy authorizing the aerial transmission of private local TV channels, Tele Milano became Tele Milano 58, and then Canale 5, and started to be broadcast over the air beyond Milano 2.¹⁹ Fininvest purchased local TV channels across the country and, taking advantage of a legal loophole in Italy's aerial transmission regulations, made all the channels broadcast the same content simultaneously, giving birth to what was, in fact, a private national TV network: Mediaset.²⁰ What had started as a transmedia satellite city expanded into a national transmedia urbanism—one that would produce urban settings in the interaction of actual space with media domains—transferring the segregationist project tested in Milano 2 to the scale of Italy.

SCALING UP: THE BIRTH OF TARGETED DIFFERENCE

In the 1980s, Fininvest developed two related initiatives. First, it acquired the retail chain Standa with the intention of controlling the node between distributors and Number Ones, already exiled from

urban-market promiscuity. Fininvest's team lacked experience in logistics, and the competence of stronger retail groups made this initiative fail. Second, in 1980 Fininvest created the media agency Publitalia. Within ten years, Publitalia would completely transform urban mediation between production and consumption.²¹ Formed to sell TV advertising space for Mediaset, Publitalia developed a different way to recruit advertisers, based on four principles.²²

First, television would no longer be a space for top-down pedagogy, but, instead, a device to bring production and consumption together. Second, TV content would be designed according to advertisers' goals. Third, instead of programming to serve generic audiences, content would be designed to attract specific publics—if toys needed to be sold, there would be TV shows for children; if middle-aged males were targeted, there would be late-night shows for them to inhabit. Whereas RAI had promoted urban convergence and the creation of a unified public, Publitalia focused on differentiation and distribution; progressively scaling up what was previously developed as the 2000-apartment transmedia urbanism of Milano 2 and Tele Milano. Finally, advertisers would not be charged for the amount of time their commercials were broadcast, but for the increase in their sales. Fininvest would get fifteen percent of the increase in sales for companies advertised on Mediaset's channels. Talking of Publitalia's activity, Berlusconi stated: "I do not sell spaces; I sell sales."²³ If nation-driven TV-urbanism in the postwar era constructed space and organized society in social classes, Milano 2 instead constructed sales and structured society in consumption targets. By defining and sorting targeted groups, then utilizing differentiated channels and timetables and depicting and instigating exemplary subjectivities, consumptions, and practices for each individual sector, television would produce urban difference.

Publitalia's project worked. Small local companies such as the furniture manufacturers Aiazzone and Foppap Pedretti, the mattress company Permaflex, and fur coat seller Annabella unexpectedly grew when advertised by Mediaset. This success fueled the expansion of Publitalia. Mediaset's ventures into France, the Netherlands, Spain, and other countries were followed by the organization of new corporations, such as Publifrance, Publiespaña, and Publieurope. In 1984, Publitalia surpassed Sipra, RAI's advertising sales unit, in revenue.²⁴ That same year, Auditel, the Italian research company that measures television ratings and statistics, was created. For the first time, the demographics of audiences were monitored.²⁵

In 1980, Mike Bongiorno, the original host of RAI's biggest hit—*Lascia o raddop-*

pia?—left RAI to become Mediaset's star presenter. As part of his contract, Bongiorno would live in Milano 2, so he could become part of the community of Number Ones. In contrast to gated communities, Milano 2 welcomed visitors, and it became a popular place to go to see celebrities. The superstars would dwell in penthouses in the Garden Towers, but they could be seen when using the facilities gathered around the lake. The *bellini*, sexy young female models playing secondary roles in TV shows, would occupy apartments on the first floor, where their domestic life could be seen from the gardens.

TRANSMEDIA APARTMENTS: MIRRORED BODIES

Mediaset provided a mirrored broadcasted home, an implemented version of the model apartments publicized by *Vogue* magazine that first compelled the Number Ones to buy apartments in Milano 2: a home that has kitchens, mothers, living rooms, sofas, hosts, bedrooms, showers, and older brothers. In order to increase the legally regulated maximum percentage of promotional space, advertisements leapt from commercials into TV shows, as promotional segments devoted to sponsors started to be included in Mediaset programs. Apartments, celebrities, mirrored homes, and advertisers constituted a daily life to inhabit, one that was not contained in any city, but in an urban enactment resulting from the large corporations' choreography of techno-social interaction.

In the late 1970s, in the underground basement of an ordinary bar in Milano 2, the popular DJ Claudio Cecchetto hosted *Chewing Gum*, a musical TV show. Week after week, Cecchetto brought dancers to populate his basement audience from Milan's disco temple, Divina, where he was resident DJ. Valerio Lazarov, the "King of the Zoom Shot," would edit and broadcast the show in such a way so it would not only bring the best of Milan's nightlife into Milano 2's living rooms, but would also bring the bodily experience of psychedelia and disco dancing to the Number Ones. At the same time that Charles and Ray Eames's *Powers of Ten* (1977) used the zoom to provide universal constancy and "non-discontinuity,"²⁶ Lazarov would expand bodies in the living rooms of apartments in Milano 2 by turning these private spaces into centers of disco nightlife. To go out, one could stay at home.

In March 2012, Clemente Russo, a well-known boxer and policeman, made his debut as the main character in the reality show *Fratello Maggiore*, in which he corrected the behavior of spoiled teenagers by becoming their fictional older brother. In this show on Mediaset's TV channel Italia 1, he can be seen interacting with ordinary people in domestic interiors, where problematic teenagers are asked

to reshape their lives according to his suggestions, a process which is scaled up by the way edited images of his life are scrutinized by his Facebook followers, many living in Milano 2 apartments, where they switch on their televisions, check their smartphones, and find him again. There, he wears Dolce & Gabbana and Nike, drinks Bacardi at the Tatanka Club, exercises following *Muscle & Fitness* magazine, consumes Enervit Sport, communicates with a Samsung phone, and travels on Alitalia.

Today, Milano 2's banality is incessantly published on Instagram accounts: its swans and its trees, the changing seasons of the grass, its living rooms, cats in front of red pitched roofs, people in front of TV sets. With more than four million paying subscribers in Italy, Sky-TV, Europe's most popular satellite TV platform, currently doubles the number of subscribers to Mediaset Premium digital cable television, Mediaset's satellite television service. Together, Mediaset Premium and Sky-TV, as transnational media platforms, are globalizing direct-to-home urbanism, in which the architectural embodiment of the political has been implemented in a way that has so far remained unexplained. The effects of what once started in Milano 2 can be seen everywhere that people consume, and it has become the urbanism we mainly live by.

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- 6 Maurizio Coppo and Marco Cremaschi, eds., *Strutture territoriali e questione abitativa* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1994).
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- 10 S. E. D'Anna and G. Moncalvo, *Berlusconi in Concert* (London: Otzium, 1994).
- 11 Edilnord Centri Residenziali S.A.S., *Milano 2. Una città per vivere* (Milan: Edilnord Centri Residenziali, 1976).
- 12 Silvio Berlusconi, in *Milano 2 sales brochures*. Edilnord Centri Residenziali, Milano, 1970.
- 13 This consolidation of ownership of the market facilities would remain until the 2000s, when the Fondo Mario Negri sold a large number of the spaces to independent retailers.
- 14 Early Milano 2 apartment buyers, discussion with author, October 2013 - April 2014.
- 15 Giancarlo Ragazzi, discussion with author, 2014.
- 16 Edilnord, *Milano 2. Una città per vivere*.
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- 20 Gabriele Balbi and Benedetta Prario, "The History of Fininvest/Mediaset's Media Strategy: 30 Years of Politics, the Market, Technology and Italian society," *Media Culture & Society* 32, no. 3 (May 2010): 391-409.
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