



Construction

- 1: First, fold each sheet in half along the vertical axis.
- 2: Using a craft knife or scalpel, cut a horizontal slot along the centre dotted line of the first sheet. (pages 1/2/11/12)
- 3: Then cut along the dotted lines on all the other sheets. Make sure to cut to the very edges of the paper.
- 4: Stack the folded sheets in ascending order with the even numbers at the top. Curl the bottom half of the second page (pages 3/4/19/20).
- 5: Thread the curled page through the centre slot of the first page. Repeat this process with the third (pages 5/6/17/18), fourth sheet (pages 7/8/15/16) and fifth sheet (pages 9/10/13/14) with the even pages in ascending order.
- 6: When all the pages have been threaded through, check the pagination. Finally, fold the booklets in half along the horizontal axis.



IMMIGRATION, MEMORY AND PLACE: MILAN, THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS

JOHN FOOT



Milan's urban landscape had been modeled and re-modeled in a myriad of ways over the last 100 or so years by a series of mass migrations and by the specific ways in which the city has expanded. The first modern migrants came from the south of Italy around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Around this time the city became known as the 'moral capital' of Italy thanks to its dynamic economic and financial sectors and in opposition to the *political capital* in Rome. These first immigrants occupied two spheres within the growing Milanese economy: some went into small-scale street trading, often opening working-class wine-pubs. These shops became known as *Trani* after the Pugliese origins of many of their owners (Apulia is the region found at the tip of Italy's 'heel' to the south). These *Trani* sprang up across the city and led to both permanent and temporary migration from the south of Italy. A second wave of southern migrants arrived to occupy new jobs in the growing public sector – railway employees, state administrative workers. Milan's public authorities constructed a series of housing projects for these immigrants. These houses were well built, with beautiful courtyards, large balconies, and large public/private spaces for children and communal activities as well as, in some cases, theatres, washrooms, shops and cooperatives. Built in open countryside, these neighbourhoods were linked through tram and suburban train services to the city centre.

of cultures and peoples which makes Milan today one of the most fascinating spaces in contemporary Europe.

None of this has managed to spark off a real debate about the *memories* of past migrations and the ways in which the city has re-shaped and re-modeled itself to cope with population movements and other forms of mobility – commuters, city-users, business-users and residents. Milan is a rich, post-modern, individualist city, governed by a Berlusconi centre-right Mayor who claims that a city must be run, in his own words, like a business. This glittering, consumerist city, the fashion capital of the western world (four of the top five fashion companies are Milanese: Armani, Prada, Gucci and Versace) is a *shop-window* city. Behind the veneer, in the restaurant kitchens, hospital wards and sweatshops of the city there works an exploited and disenfranchised (and shifting) population of immigrants. Politicians call for their expulsion. 'Locals' do not want them on their doorsteps. Yet the cases of daily solidarity and political mobilization in favour of and by the immigrants are many and the city has not rejected immigration completely. Milan's urban space is contested and re-negotiated in a daily battle over occupation, culture and sometimes the battle to survive. Reflections on the past, however, are conspicuous by their absence. The next ten years will see if this cultural and social amnesia leads to ghettoisation and urban violence, or towards cultural change that could revolutionize Italian urban space.



This publication is one of a series of essays commissioned by Probois for the series SPECIES OF SPACES – inspired by and in homage to Georges Perec's eponymous book. The series contemplates how we, in the contemporary world of the twenty-first century, occupy space – the virtual and physical, emotional and social – what Perec called the 'intra-ordinary'. SPECIES OF SPACES aims to radically question the trajectory of contemporary urban existence, intervening in current debates on how the virtual and the physical relate to each other, and how technological advances affect cultural and social structures.

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 SPECIES OF SPACES

Architecturally, this housing was similar to that found in the Lombard countryside: the *casine* (large courtyard farms) with their long and wide balconies, huge communal courtyards and organic spatial links between work, the domestic sphere and public space. The 'active' part of this space looked inwards, away from the road or the fields, onto huge central courtyards. As Milan grew (both through public construction of the type described above and via more chaotic private and industrial expansion) many of the *casine* were incorporated into the urban fabric. These spaces can still be seen today if you know where to look. They form bizarre oases of 'rurality' in the city.



By the 1980s, this immigration had all but ended. Italy was a rich country – the world’s fifth industrial power. For the first time in her history, she began to attract large numbers of foreign immigrants. Italians could no longer be found to work in the ‘dirty’ sectors of Italy’s booming service and export-based economy. Foreigners (cheap, expendable, without rights) were needed to fill this huge gap – arriving from all over the world to work as cleaners, carers, builders, and steel-workers but also (although in tiny numbers) as petty criminals and prostitutes. Where did these immigrants live? (One and a half million came into Italy between the early 1980s and the end of the century.) How did their presence plasmate Milan’s urban fabric?

No new houses were built by local or national government for these immigrants. On the contrary, they suffered from continual eviction and prejudice in the housing market. Some ended up, as with the southern and north-eastern immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s, in the (even-more) crumbling working-class housing of the city centre and old industrial periphery. Here the presence of a mosaic of immigrants could be seen and heard on a everyday level through satellite dishes, clothing, cooking smells, the colours and sounds of different continents. Albanians lived alongside Egyptians who lived alongside Chinese (a community with a presence in Milan from the 1920s) and Ecuadorians. Some even managed to buy their own houses, flats or obtain long-term rents. None had the option to *build* their own houses, although some purchased properties in the ex-Coree themselves. This type of integration into the city led to the formation of a real urban melting-pot in Milan, without the ghettos shaped by public housing projects built for the Italian immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s. Hence, the refusal of the city to do anything at all for the immigrants at the level of housing has had some beneficial effects in terms of creating an urban mix



In many cases the farm land around these ex-casine was sold as part of the urban sprawl of the twentieth century. Elsewhere, these spaces were conserved as allotments or worker’s farms. They were continually modified over the century, usually through individual and spontaneous building using a variety of materials such as ex-mattresses and street signs. Today, these rural-urban spaces are ‘outside’ of the city, whilst physically very much still within the urban fabric. In part controlled by the owners of the allotments through fencing, warning signs and private policing, these spaces are also utilized for a whole range of clandestine and semi-licit activities, from sex to drug-dealing to simply sleeping rough.

But not all the immigrants of the boom ended up in the Coree. Many hundreds of thousands were housed in huge local government projects on the edge of the city. These were, at first, built with the collaboration of famous architects and using decent materials. This was true of the housing estates of the 1950s and 1960s that, nonetheless, later became sink estates with serious problems linked to crime and urban decay. Yet, the projects of the 1970s and 1980s were even worse. No longer were any serious decisions taken involving planning or services. Huge tower blocks were simply thrown up and occupied, without any consideration for their visual impact on the environment or their isolation from the city centre. These zones became symbols of urban decline. Quarto Oggiaro on the north-east periphery was known as The Bronx or *Barbon City* (Tramp City). The police were forced to build a new police station at Ponte Lambro near Linate airport to prevent residents firing at each other across the two huge, long and straight tower block structures. This 'new periphery' merges to some extent with what has become known as the 'spread-out-city' (*La città diffusa*) stretching from Turin to Milan to Venice across the northern part of Italy and consisting of public housing, small factories and middle-class villas. Here, across a vast swath of territory, the urban and the rural have ceased to exist. What we have is an urban environment without the city, and a rural environment without the countryside. Only recently have scholars, photographers and environmentalists woken up to this irreversible and epoch-changing series of developments in the Italian landscape.



These additions were not merely symbolic, or indications of wealth, but also sources of income, as they were rented out to families of new immigrants. The original owners thus moved *upwards* within their own houses over time (creating separate entrances and exits). They also moved upwards in social and cultural terms, away from the bottom of the immigrant scale. Thousands of immigrants passed through some houses, leaving tiny traces of their presence.

These self-constructed neighborhoods surrounded the whole urban edge of Milan. They were also given a name – *Coree* – following their first appearance at the time of the Korean War, and their similarity to images coming back from that conflict. The *Coree*, at their peak, were home to more than 100,000 people. Most *Coree* construction took place between 1950 and 1960, although what has been called 'continual construction' goes on up to this day. For a time, the *Coree* were stigmatized as symptomatic of the problems supposedly caused by mass immigration, and blamed for crime and other social ills. The *Coree* were and are fascinating urban spaces, given their low-rise and crowded feel. *Coree* shapes and places created communities, but also led to a separation from the city itself. In some ways, the *Coree* inhabitants were recreating the villages they had abandoned to come to Milan. *Coree* remain neither urban nor rural spaces. Some have been eaten up by urban expansion; others are still as intact and different as they were in the early 1950s. Today, the memory of this period is fading, and is all but absent from the official history books. Yet these neighborhoods remain as testimonies to this epoch of mass internal migration and as monuments to the hard work and sacrifice of the immigrants themselves. Many remain here, unable to leave the material product (the house) of their life-changing decision to migrate in the early 1950s.



The second wave of immigration was by far the biggest, and revolutionized the urban form of Milan, as well as transforming its cultural and political maps. From the early 1950s onwards hundreds of thousands of migrants began to arrive in the city from all over Italy. For the first time, thanks to the 'economic miracle', poor Italians had an alternative to leaving their country altogether in search of work. Many chose to board a train in Bari, Palermo, Verona or Naples and try their luck in the 'capital of the miracle' – Milan. Nearly all the immigrants arrived at the vast central station, a monument to the industrial city with its huge iron roof and its hundreds of clocks. New arrivals were left in no doubt from the outset that this was a city governed by time and by work. The main sources of immigration were two desperately poor regions; the north-east of Italy (struck by massive flooding in 1951) and the deep south. During the peak years of the 'miracle' (1958-1963), at least 100,000 such migrants arrived every year – 2,000 a week, 300 a day.

Where did these immigrants go in Milan? One long-term process in the city had seen the working class *and* the well-off leave the central urban areas – the former thanks to high rents and eviction, the latter in search of more salubrious and spacious housing in the suburbs. Some new immigrants ended up in abandoned poor-quality dwellings (many houses were, literally, falling-down) in the old industrial centres of the city. New immigrants also found temporary, overcrowded accommodation in attics, cellars or simply on other people's kitchen and bedroom floors. For many, the dreams of a promised land were quashed almost immediately by the terrible conditions of their first months in Milan. Times were particularly hard from women, whose workload was back-breaking and combined with a chronic lack of domestic space and an absence of any kind of privacy.

Others, instead, did succeed in adding to this ground floor – building cellars, car parks, gardens, walls and, above all, first and second floors replete with terraces and kitsch additions such as concrete lions and even Greek gods.

within their own housing. beyond this concrete cube. They were relative failures, unable to move up this period as one of non-stop work and sacrifice. Some families never got of a building site: they were the builders. Many early immigrants remember downwards. For years, families lived surrounded by the dirt, dust and noise family could then occupy this space, and continue to build upwards and usually built, often as a kind of concrete block. Once this was completed, the by the planning committees. In the first instance a small ground floor was final product (the house) was often very different to the original plan passed construction. These were not illegal constructions, but had passed all the necessary legal hoops in order to gain planning permission. However the help of the whole family, and friends, used their free time for this self- went on, in some cases, for more than twenty years. Immigrants, often with what was then Milan – and started to *build their own houses*. This building savings, many immigrants purchased land on the urban periphery – beyond plans for the future. By a combination of extreme hard work, debt and (sometimes, quite literally, *by the hour*). Others, however, had much grander them. They could, as in the centre, rent rooms, beds or simply mattresses Other migrants headed for the urban fringe. Here two roads were open to