



## "Terre Promesse". Italian Topography at the Calandra Institute

Marina Melchionda (April 18, 2010)



On April 22-24, the Calandra Italian American Institute will host "Terre Promesse: Excursions Towards Italian Topographies", a conference that will guide you on a journey through Italian cultural landscapes around the world. Find out with Joseph Sciorra, folklorist and Assistant Director for Academic and Cultural Programs at the Calandra, why this event is definitely not to be missed!

On April 22-24 the [John D. Calandra Italian American Institute](#) will host "Terre Promesse: Excursions Towards Italian Topographies", a conference focused on Italian "cultural landscapes" or, in other words, on how Italians and their culture have changed and molded the territory where they settled throughout the world.



The event will see a number of eminent scholars, academics, researchers, and authors facing the issue both on a geographical and historical level, in 14 different sections, and touching it from a social, political, and cultural point of view. The panels, "Travelling Writing", "Points South and West I", "Common Grounds", "Gardening and Harvesting", "Narrated Landscapes", "Sacred Spaces", "Space into Place", "Little Italies", "Re-Mapping Italian America", "Architecture Abandoned, Reclaimed, Re-Imagined", "Creative Spaces", "Contested Landscapes/Contested Readings", "Land in Literature", "Points South and West II", will all be hosted at the Calandra Institute, the most preeminent research institute on Italian and Italian-American studies on the East Coast.

This is the third year that the Calandra Institute is the focus of the attention of the Italian-American Academic world with a conference that is capable of attracting not only experts in the field from both Italy and the US, but also a wide public of Italian-Americans or lovers of Italy and its culture that find it to be a powerful source of information and knowledge.

The numerous breaks, refreshments, as well as the inauguration dinner offered by the institute and its Dean Prof. Anthony J. Tamburri on April 22 will also become an occasion for the participating speakers to exchange points of view, information and opinions, and possibly to start new research projects and partnerships among Cultural Institutes and Departments of Italian and Italian-American Studies across the country.

[Joseph Sciorra](#) [3], folklorist and Assistant Director for Academic and Cultural Programs at the Calandra, took the time to talk with us about the conference's program, its purposes, and its central importance in the institute's annual calendar of events.

**This is the third year that the Calandra Institute organizes and hosts a "mono-thematic" conference of such a breadth. How have things changed from the first edition?**

I think that, generally speaking, it is getting better and better every year. Already last year we had a very interesting conference titled "The land of our return", in which we faced themes that are never or very rarely studied on a scholarly level, and it was very successful.

This year we are looking at "cultural landscapes", a theme that is broad enough in its scope but, at the same, is quite specific so that we'll get some very targeted papers. It deals with everything from an imagined landscape to the very practicality of planting a factory, or harvesting tomato plants...

During one of the panels that I will chair, "Gardening and Harvesting" we will also watch two movies on gardening practices. One by Lucia Grillo, "Terra Sogna Terra", and another about Anthony Scotto and Giulia Prestia, a young couple living in the Italian-American neighborhood of Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, named "Memories of Repasts".

For the first time, we will also focus on Italy and its former colonies, such as Eritrea and Ethiopia, since we are adhering to the idea that the notion of Italian topography is so wide that it can include places like Brooklyn and Toronto, just as well as Libya and Eritrea

The scope is not to talk about how many Italians there are in these places, but how Italians interact with the territories they are settled in.

A broad theme that can really interest a wide public...

Yes, last year we had a huge attendance, and we expect the same for this year. This is in spite of the fact that two other important conferences are taking place in this same period. The [Hofstra University](#) [4] organized one this past week, while [Stony Brook University](#) [5] is having its event on Friday, the first day of our conference. I am troubled by the lack, or the seeming lack, of collegiality



of some of my colleagues that seem not to understand that we should cooperate and organize our calendars so that people and scholar's won't find themselves having to choose which event they should attend. It feels like the Italian-American community is still operating as if it's 1953 and everybody is a member of a social club. They are competing against each other, when there should be no competition.

Why did you choose this particular theme this year?

We chose it for two main reasons. First, it is a theme that scholars have been dealing with for some time, since it involves gender, cultural, and historical issues. Second, it's a theme of which I have been writing specifically for a good number of years, looking at Italian-American spaces here in New York City, particularly religious ones.

Besides chairing two panels, you will also present your own paper, "Vernacular Exegesis of the Gentrifying Gaze: Saints, Hipsters, and Public Space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn". What will you talk about?

I look at the neighborhood of Williamsburg in Brooklyn and the ways in which long-term Italian American residents and new Hipsters settling there are interacting in the area of the public-staging of religious processions. My interest is to see how Italians are reacting to these new arrivals.

They feel invaded...

Change is by definition what a city is about, especially in New York's case. The idea of invasion goes back to the 40s, 50s, and 60s, when Anglos felt that New York was being invaded by Italians. So what goes around, comes around...

Today the situation is somehow different, given that this new incoming is mainly caused by the Italian-Americans themselves that choose to rent or sell their houses to the new incomers and go live outside the city, maybe with their children. It's the individual "egoistic reasons" against the general interest that is contributing to the change. Still, this does not detract from the general feeling of loss experienced by the community today.

There are several panel speakers who are obviously non-Italians. Why are they interested in Italian themes and issues?

There is an historical attraction to Italy, but today Italian-Americans themselves are becoming a subject of interest to scholars who are not necessarily Italian. Our history and culture provide information about the ways American society operates on a number of different levels. Pick your subject...

I am reading a book about New York, "Naked City" by Sharon Zukin, that reserches historical and radical culture in the city, labor activism. While in the past, authors of such books would mainly talk about Jews, Anglos, Germans, to provide examples of activism, in this book Italians are the first ethnic group mentioned. You can clearly notice a rising interest toward the history of Italian-Americans.

If you had to give advice to the readers about the conference panels that, in your opinion, they should definitely follow, what would it be?

There are two panels I would never miss. First, the panel I am actually chairing, "Gardening and Harvesting", that features two film screenings and a speech by Patricia Klindienst on Sacco and Vanzetti's gardening. It's a newborn field of study that I find of particular interest, and even if I weren't involved in it, I would without a doubt attend it with the public. Second, "Creative Spaces" with author Tiziana Rinaldi, filmmaker Antonino D'Ambrosio, and Lorenzo Brusci who is coming from Italy. He does marvellous "acoustic gardens", sound environments for which he has become internationally famous, especially in India and Germany.



Two others that look very interesting are "The Little Italies" one, that will take place on Friday afternoon, with Stefano Luconi, Jerry Krase, and Dana David, and "The Re-Mapping of Italian-America", that will feature contributions by Joseph J. Inguanti, Francesca Canadé Sautman, and Ottorino Cappelli

And finally, of course, one cannot miss the keynote panel with Luisa del Giudice...

## **Terre Promesse:**

### **Excursions Towards Italian Topographies**

April 22-24, 2010

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

25 West 43rd Street, 17th floor, Manhattan

(between 5 th and 6 th Avenues)

#### **THURSDAY, April 22, 2010**

6:30-8:30 pm

WELCOME AND RECEPTION

Anthony Julian Tamburri

John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Queens College, CUNY

James Muyskens

Queens College, CUNY

Francesco Maria Talò

Consulate General of Italy in New York

#### **FRIDAY, April 23, 2010**

9-9:30 AM



Coffee and Pastries

9:30-10:45 AM

CONFERENCE ROOM

**Travelling Writing**

Chair: Nancy Ziebler, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

The Dead Sang with Dirt in Their Mouths

Joseph P. Cosco, Old Dominion University

Found in Translation: Symbolic Representations of la madreterra in Literary and Vernacular Writings

Fulvia Masi, Bard College

Click to Enlarge: Connecting Memories, Places, and Cultures in the

Virtual Paese

Robert Oppedisano, Editor/Writer

11-12:15 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

**Points South and West I**

Chair: Vincenzo Milione, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

The Italians of the Jamestown and Virginia Colonies

Giuseppe Di Scipio, Hunter College/CUNY

Here Come the Sicilians: Another Puzzle Piece in the Making of New Orleans

Gerald T. McNeill, Southeastern Louisiana University, and Melissa Puglia McNeill, Stuart Hall School for Boys

The Making of Little Italies in the Appalachian Hill Towns of West Virginia

Victor A. Basile, Independent Scholar



11-12:15 PM

LA GALLERIA

**Common Grounds**

Chair: Maria LaRusso, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Fright or Delight: The Cultural Implications of Wild Fungi as Food

SUSAN M. ROSSI-WILCOX, Independent Scholar

Social Justice and Democracy: The Significance of a Commons

CHRISTINE F. ZINNI, State University of New York at Brockport

12:15-1:30 PM

**Lunch on your own**

1:30-2:45 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

**Gardening and Harvesting**

Chair: Joseph Sciorra, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Memories of Repasts (Film)

Karina S. Ramirez, The New School Media Studies Program

Gardens of the Mind: Memory, Ecology, and Justice in the Story of

Tullio Inglese

Patricia Klindienst, Independent Scholar

Terra sogna terra (Film)

LUCIA GRILLO, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute



1:30-2:45 PM

LA GALLERIA

**Narrated Landscapes**

Chair: Rosangela Briscese, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

La Brigantessa: The Life of a Female Brigand

Rosanna Micelotta-Battigelli, Author

Mirage

Paola Corso, Western Connecticut State University

U Bizz' di Creanza: A Piece of Politeness

Joanna Clapps Herman, Manhattanville College

3-4:15 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

Sacred Spaces

Chair: Dominick Carielli, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

To Struggle for a Place at the Table: Italian-American Protestants in Italy

Dennis Barone, St. Joseph College

The Role of the Holy Place: Memory and Nostalgia in Italian Jews Who Emigrated in Israel After World War II

Cristina Bettin, Ben Gurion University

Vernacular Exegesis of the Gentrifying Gaze: Saints, Hipsters, and Public Space in Williamsburg, Brooklyn

Joseph Sciorra, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

3-4:15 PM

LA GALLERIA

**Space into Place**

Chair: James Periconi, Italian American Writers Association

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Tales of a West End Italian Boy

Nicola Battigelli, Author

Performing Nostalgia in Caterina Edwards' Homeground and Marco Micone's *Deja' l'agonie*

Simone Lomartire, Leeds Metropolitan University

The Place and the Action: The Metaphor of the Square According to the

Social Enterprise

Paola Melone, Institute of the National Research Council

4:30-5:45 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

### **Little Italies**

Chair: Christine Gambino, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

Imagined Little Italies

Stefano Luconi, Università degli Studi di Padova

America's Little Italies as Visually Contested Terrains

Jerry Krase, Brooklyn College/CUNY

Re-Membering the Neighborhood: Creating Community with Food Exchange

Dana David, Pace University

### **Saturday, April 24, 2010**

9-9:30 AM

Coffee and Pastries

9:30-10:45 AM

CONFERENCE ROOM

### **Re-Mapping Italian America**

Chair: Anthony Tamburri, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute





America as Garden of Plenty and Hell on Earth: Pre-and Post-Immigration Images of the Promised Land and their Relation to Italians of the Great Migration

Joseph J. Inguanti, Southern Connecticut State University

From the Nostalgia of Origins to Creating Home: Making Place at the Leonardo da Vinci Art School, New York City, 1923-1940

Francesca Canadé Sautman, Hunter College/CUNY

Italian America: Beyond the Imagined Nation

Ottorino Cappelli, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"

11-12:15 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

**Architecture Abandoned, Reclaimed, Re-Imagined**

Chair: Donna M. Chirico, York College/CUNY

Il Borgo Fortificato: Culture, Traditions, Life

John C. Russotto, Independent Scholar, and M. Gabriella Gasbarre,

Italian American Community Club of Rochester

Vernacular Architecture of the Alto Molise

John Caserta, The Design Office

Preserving History in the Old Neighborhood: Saving the Our Lady of Loreto Church, East New York, Brooklyn

Marilyn Ann Verna, St. Francis College, and Mario Togliola, Calitri American Cultural Group

11-12:15 PM

LA GALLERIA

**Creative Spaces**

Chair: Fabio Girelli-Carasi Brooklyn College/CUNY

Terra, Diana, and Other Buried Voices: Losing the Earth for the Heavens



Tiziana Rinaldi, Author

Terra Promessa (film)

Antonino D'Ambrosio, La Lutta NMC

Architettura Sonora/Applied Acoustics

Lorenzo Brusci, Sound and Experience Design

12:15-1:30 PM

Lunch on your own

1:30-2:45 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

### **Contested Landscapes/Contested Readings**

Chair: Ottorino Cappelli, Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"

Speaking of Place: Campanilismo as Linguistic Practice in Northern Italy

Jillian R. Cavanaugh, Brooklyn College/CUNY

Re-imagining the Colonial Landscape: Notions of Faith, Healing, and Prestige in Goffredo Alessandrini's *Abuna Messias*

AnneMarie Tamis, New York University

Segni italiani nelle strade americane

Maddalena Tirabassi, Centro Altreitalia/Globus et Locus

1:30-2:45 PM

LA GALLERIA

### **Land in Literature**

Chair: Fred Gardaphé, Queens College, CUNY

The Transnational Origins of Antonio Stoppani's *Il bel paese*

Erica Moretti, Brown University



Paradise from Mud and Stone: Visions of Italy in the Work of Ignazio Silone and Iris Origo

Fred Misurella, East Stroudsburg University

Place and Narrative as Real and Metaphysical Catalysts in Fiction

Gioia Timpanelli, Author

3-4:15 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

### **Points South and West II**

Chair: Joseph Sciorra, John D. Calandra Italian American Institute

A Northern Southern Italian of the Eastern Western United States:

A Topographical Analysis of John Fante's Fiction

Jim Cocola, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Piedmont on the Pacific: Labor, Race, and Place and the Origins of Italian Winemaking in California

Simone Cinotto, University of Gastronomic Sciences

"Il Fuoco di Minonga": The 1907 Mine Disaster, the Landscape of Coal, and the Making of Transnational Italian Identity in West Virginia

Joan Saverino, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

4:30-5:45 PM

CONFERENCE ROOM

### **Closing Keynote**

Gastronomic Utopias, Promised Land

Luisa del Giudice, Independent Scholar

All presentations are free and open to the public.

### **SEATING IS LIMITED**

For further information see the Calandra Institute's [Website](#) [6] or call (212) 642-2094



The Calandra Institute is a university institute under the aegis of Queens College.

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- [4] <http://www.hofstra.edu>
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