Italian American Urban Landscapes
Images of Social and Cultural Capital

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Introduction

Students and practitioners in urban sociology are simultaneously blessed and cursed with competing theories and methods for describing the post-modern, post-industrial metropolitan urban scene. But throughout all the theoretical, methodological, and ideological questions characterizing the filed, the central organizing construct for urban studies has remained, in one form or another, "space". Therefore, explaining how these real and imagined spaces are used, contested, and transformed by different social groups remains the crucial task. As sciences are described in terms of their ability to produce cumulative knowledge, something is sorely needed to tie together so many disparate threads. One may also inadvertently notice how often proponents of competing perspectives echo one another but without acknowledging the voice of the "other".

Admittedly, weaving a seamless sociological garment is an overly ambitious goal. However, visual sociological study of the vernacular landscapes in ethnic (e.g. Italian) neighborhoods could provide at least some continuity from the "Old" urban sociology to the "New," and from pre- to the post -modern urban scenes. Contemporary urban sociologists sometimes suffer from parallax vision. One eye sees the "natural" spatial form and function of the city as a biological analogy as did Parks and Burgess. The other eye sees these same urban places and spaces as the commodities, reproductions of power, and circuits of capital a la Manuel Castells, David Harvey, and Henri Lefebvre. In this essay, the empirical and theoretical case of Italian American urban neighborhoods or "Little Italies" has been chosen because as an archetype it has been the focus of a broad spectrum of historical description and theoretical discussions, not unlike the way the "ghetto" frames the Jewish and Black experience. At the conclusion of this discourse I will illustrate the utility of a visual approach to the questions raised in this essay by presenting a series of photographs of Italian and Italian American.

When I first began teaching urban sociology some three decades ago, the Chicago School of Urban Ecology was offered as the only way to approach the study of the city. As part of the 60s generation, naturally I attacked its Spencerian implication that the plight of inner city residents was caused by some "invisible hand". In my own dissertation I attacked this seemingly insensitive determinism from a perspective which combined Phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism. Central to my activist arguments was the work of Erving Goffman who at the time was considered by the scions of Sociology as anathema. Essentially I tried to show that neighborhoods occupied by nonwhites were stigmatized as such. In turn their discredited appearance limited the moral capital of local organizations as they appealed to public and private authorities for social justice. Practically speaking, in my work I devised and taught dramaturgical methods for "The Presentation of Community in Urban Society" by stigmatized people in stigmatized places. (Krase, 1973, 1977,

1979)

About a decade later leading texts in the field divided the field of urban sociology into various Social Organization, Urban Ecology, and Social Psychology perspectives. Today we see the domination of political economic and world systems approaches in the theoretical debates between proponents of the New versus Old Urban Sociology, or as described by Flanagan, Culturalists who "explore the cultural, organizational, and social psychological consequences of urban life", and structuralists who "are concerned with the wider economic and political impact of the city.' (1999: 385-98. See also: Kleniewski, 1997 and especially Gottdiener, 1994)

This essay looks at Little Italies, but they are only one genre of a collection of taken-for-granted socially constructed exotic urban places that have found their way into our ethno-territorial vocabulary. At the turn of the twentieth century, American cities contained settlements, mostly of European immigrants, for example, in the form of Pole Towns and Jew Towns, with a smattering of Chinatowns. Today, at the turn of the twenty first century as part of the complex ethnic landscape one is more likely to discover those of newcomers from Asia and the Southern Hemisphere such as Koreatowns, Little Bombays, perhaps a Little Lagos, and a wide assortment of Barrios.

What is Visual Sociology?

Most of us think that Visual Sociology is merely using a camera for collecting data in social research, or more interestingly illustrating a finding arrived at using non-visual methods. Apropos of this last point are the frequent announcements by textbook authors calling for photographs to illustrate or represent their written text. Seldom do we see text requested to illustrate a photograph. Not quite to the contrary, Douglas Harper has argued that the field is divided into at least two different types: "Visual Methods", which includes any project where researchers 'take' photographs in order to study social worlds." And "Visual Studies" in which researchers "analyze images that are produced by the culture". In this second approach, "sociologists typically explore the semiotics, or sign systems, of different visual communication systems". Harper also identified four modes of research; the "scientific" where one categorizes the world and creates data; the "narrative"- where the data is structured into accounts; the "reflexive"- where data is built from the point of view of their subjects; and the "phenomenological"- in which researchers use their own subjective experience as a source of data. (1988)

John Grady expanded the scope of the visual perspective on the social with a three part, "Pragmatic Definition" (1996). The first is "'Seeing': how sight and vision help construct social organization and meaning." The second, "Communicating with Icons ", looks to how images and imagery can both inform and be used to manage social relations. The third, which I have found most valuable in my own work on vernacular urban landscapes of all sorts, is "Doing Sociology Visually" or "… how the techniques of producing and decoding images can be used to empirically investigate social organization, cultural meaning and psychological processes." It is in this last area that the techniques, methodologies and concerns of Visual Sociology are the best known and where the camera and other techniques of representation play crucial roles in the analytic process (14).

Finally, Jon Rieger notes that among many other advantages in research, such as freezing a complex scene or enabling unobtrusive measurement. "Photography is well-suited to the study of

social change because of its capacity to record a scene with far greater speed and completeness than could ever be accomplished by a human observer taking notes." (1996: 6) Given the rapidly changing metropolitan landscapes, which in some cases simply whiz by unnoticed by contemporary urban sociologists, the value of visual methods and techniques should be obvious. And since, both actually and virtually, Little Italies are geographically immobile they are excellent venues for sociological reconnaissance of globalization and de-industrialization. The changing worlds around them become visually apparent on the street scenes inside the neighborhood.

What is Vernacular Landscape?

In the sister disciplines of Architecture and Geography there is a discussion of more and less "progressive" approaches to the built environments of the powerful and/or the powerless which parallels that which we find in Sociology. Beginning with reading Bernard Rudofsky's Architecture Without Architects I have understood that the "vernacular" is "nonpedigreed", "anonymous", "spontaneous", and "indigenous". (1964: 1) Later, the work of John Brinkerhoff Jackson informed me that the commonplace aspects of the streets, houses and fields and places of work can teach us ourselves and how we relate to the world around us. For Jackson the "Vernacular Landscape" lies underneath below the symbols of permanent power expressed in the "Political Landscape". It is flexible without overall plan and contains spaces that are organized and used in their traditional way. Much of it is "countrified; home made using local techniques, local materials, with the local environment in mind. Here I take the term "countrified" ageographically as even in the urbanized of places, vernacular landscapes are part of the life of communities which are governed by custom and held together by personal relationship. For him and his students "vernacular landscape cannot be comprehended unless we perceive it as an organization of space; unless we ask ourselves who owns the spaces, how they were created and how they change." (1984: 6) Clearly, the study of the vernacular landscape lends itself to both the new and old urban sociology. Seeing its applied, practical value, Dolores Hayden argued that an understanding of immigrant and ethnic vernacular urban landscapes would also benefit urban planning, i.e. making city life more livable and equitable as well as visually interesting. For her, ethnic urban landscapes consist of culturally meaningful vernacular buildings, localized spatial patterns, folk and otherwise vernacular arts and material traditions, and "territorial histories" which are "the history of bounded space, with some enforcement of the boundary, used as a way of defining political and economic power. It is the political and temporal complement of the cognitive map; it is an account of both inclusion and exclusion." (7) What could be of more interest to a contemporary urban sociologist?

In contrast to Hayden's virtual exaltation of the commonplace productions of the less than powerful denizens of inner city neighborhoods, Wilbur Zelinsky offered that there are no meaningful ethnic landscapes. Doubting their "ethnic authenticity" he believes that "exotic tidbits" found in ethnic neighborhoods are merely cosmetic. For him "There are of course, particular sections of a city where a particular ethnic group, or its descendants, comprises all or most of the population. And, sure enough, one comes across "ethnic markers", such as distinctive shop signs, exotic religious objects in yards or on porches, ephemeral festival decorations, certain cemetery features, an occasional historical monument, or startling new color patterns for houses..." (8). In other words, such productions are not significant enough to merit much in the way of attention of serious study. This may sound like a dismissal but it is really a caution expressed here, by Zelinsky

as others, that this could lead to an over-estimation of the power of relatively powerless urban dwellers.

David Harvey seems to echo Rudofsky, Jackson, and Hayden when he says: "Different classes construct their sense of territory and community in radically different ways. This elemental fact is often overlooked by those theorists who presume a priori that there is some ideal-typical and universal tendency for all human beings to construct a human community of roughly similar sort, no matter what the political or economic circumstances." (1989:265) For those lacking power (especially "low-income populations") "the main way to dominate space is through continuous appropriation. Exchange values are scarce, and so the pursuit of use values for daily survival is central to social action. This means frequent material and interpersonal transactions and the formation of very small-scale communities. Within the community space, use values get shared through some mix of mutual aid and mutual predation, creating tight but often highly conflictual interpersonal social bonding in both private and public spaces. The result is an often intense attachment to place and "turf" and an exact sense of boundaries because it is only through active appropriation that control over space is assured." (265-66) Harvey has here also unwittingly painted a perfect modernist landscape of traditional Italian villages and their American counterparts which differs little from that sketched by allegedly anti-Marxist culturalist school of urban sociology. After reading Harvey, we can imagine that "the defended neighborhood" is a natural spatial expression of the socially centrifugal "amoral familism" practiced by some southern Italians. Edward Banfield described this as "inability to act together for the common good or, indeed, for any end transcending the immediate, material interest of the nuclear family." (15)

Does Semiotics and Ecology = Spatial Semiotics?

Visual Sociology and Vernacular Landscapes are connected via Spatial Semiotics. From the perspective of literary criticism, Julia Kristeva writes "Thus, when we say semeiotics, we mean the (as yet unrealized) development of models, that is, of formal systems whose structure is isomorphic or analogous to the structure of another system (the system under study)." ... "By defining semeiotics as the production of models... representations and, as such, are produced within spatio-temporal coordinates." (1994: 275) For Mark Gottdiener "the study of culture which links symbols to objects is called semeiotics." and "spatial semeiotics studies the metropolis as a meaningful environment" (1994: 15-16). These definitions are more than vaguely reminiscent of the more or less "classical" discussions by Claude Levi-Strauss, Robert K. Merton (1968), C. Wright Mills (1959), and Alfred Schutz (1964), among many others, of the relationship between social structure and culture. What is cultural is the particular content or socially meaningful pattern, with the structure referring to the general or universal model. This was stated most succinctly by Levi-Strauss as "…'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built after it." (1963:271)

Furthermore, Anthony Giddens "structuration theory" would warrant a strong caution that in order to understand urban regions, cities, and neighborhoods one needs not only an understanding of theory but of local history, resources, and the ideas of local leadership (1984). It is clear that Zelinsky, and others who doubt the "authenticity" of the ethnic vernacular landscape might benefit in their observations of ethnic neighborhoods from an appreciation of semiotics and sociospatial analysis. Shop signs written in a foreign language are easily noticed, but "seeing" the

uses and/or meanings of space require sensitivity and understanding of the particular culture that creates, maintains, and uses the re-signified space. In other words even the most powerless of urban dwellers is a social "agent" and therefore participates in the local reproduction of regional, national, and global societal relations. A Visual Sociology of the most deteriorated central city area would vividly demonstrate this "Human Agency" of the least empowered. It can help to capture the "deliberate efforts of human beings, thinking and acting, alone or in concert" to create or modify the spaces they occupy, perhaps only demonstrated in the marking of their own vernacular landscapes with graffiti and vandalism. (See: Sciorra in Anthony King)

Few sociologists of my generation (b. 1943) have not committed to memory Ernest W. Burgess' Concentric Zone diagram from "The Growth of the City" (1925). Despite protestations to the contrary we have not really moved much beyond his symbolism. For some younger New Urban Sociologists a re-reading of Walter Firey's "Sentiment and Symbolism as Ecological Variables" (1945) and Land Use in Central Boston. (1947) might also be a sociologically humbling experience as it might easily been seen as a pioneering spatially semiotic work. We might say that Burgess provided us with "The" semiotic for "The" City. Until the present decade most "urban" research, especially of the ethnographic sort, had been centered on the domains and denizens of the "Inner City" or other euphemisms for what Ernest W. Burgess called the "Zone of Transition". There one found roomers, hobos, addicts, poor folks, nonwhite minorities, and lower class immigrants who lived in the Ghetto, Slum, Black Belt, Chinatown, Underworld, Vice, and Little Sicily. Of special note for this essay is that by 1925 "Little Sicily" was already a spatial semiotic of Italians in America.

The question for pre and post-modern urbanologists has not been "Who or what is where in the city?" but "How and why?" they got there. Different researchers look at the same objects but the meanings of those objects seem to vary by the respective ideology of the viewer. In this regard it would be enlightening, I think, to conduct a photo elicitation experiment by giving a variety of researchers the opportunity to interpret a photograph of the same urban scene such as stereotypical "slum." My own interests would lead me to ask them "What kind(s) of people live here?"

The purely descriptive models of Classical Urban Ecology have as their ultimate source a biological analogy. In the city, equilibrium is expressed through the interaction of human nature with geographical and spatial factors producing "natural" areas. Political economists on the contrary see these same natural areas, and ecological zones as the result of "uneven development", and perhaps even cleverly planned cycles of decay and renewal. The question remains as to whether these disparate causes produce disparate visual effects. Depending on one's ideology, slum dwellers may be seen as victims or perpetrators. One must recognize as well in our own society that the visible skin color of the denizen of the inner-city affects their moral evaluation by viewers. Here is how Don DeLillo expresses this sentiment through Sister Edgar who "…stopped hitting the kids years ago, even before she grew too old to teach, when the neighborhood changed and the faces of her students became darker. All the righteous fury went out of her soul. How could she strike a child who was not like her?" (1997:238)

At the most cerebral level of spatial semiotics, or symbolic ecology, James Dickinson sees in the landscape of the "zone of social pathology" more than a simple process of dereliction- the view shared by both the Chicago School and Marxists geographers. Looking at ruined neighborhoods he posits that, "These decaying zones become factories producing the ruins that will

be become the monuments of tomorrow. Here, then, are the liminal zones where new meanings and values are negotiated for old structures" (1996:82. See also Vegara, 1995). At this point one might wish to consider the pre and post 1989 meaning of the crumbling Berlin Wall i.e., as a symbol of oppression and symbol of liberation or the Roman Forum as a symbol of the glory Roman Empire or of its decline and fall.

In looking for a sociological bridge between the old and the new I have found Harvey's "Grid of Spatial Practices" from Lefebvre's The Production of Space (262) to be the most theoretically and practically powerful. To paraphrase Harvey, in the arena of social conflict and struggle, commanding and producing spaces reproduces and enhances power.

Down left hand side of the grid we find:
1.   Material spatial practices refer to the physical and material flows, transfers, and interactions that occur in and across space in such a way as to assure production and social reproduction.
2.   Representations of space encompass all of the signs and significations, codes and knowledge, that allow such material practices to be talked about and understood, no matter whether in terms of everyday common sense or through the sometimes arcane jargon of the academic disciplines that deal with spatial practices (engineering, architecture, geography, planning, social ecology, and the like).
3.   Spaces of representations are social inventions (codes, signs, and even material constructs such as symbolic spaces, particular built environments, paintings, museums and the like) that seek to generate new meanings of possibilities for spatial practices. (Harvey: 261)

Across the top of the grid: (263-64)
1.   Accessibility and distanciation speaks to the role of the "friction of distance' in human affairs. Distance is both a barrier to and a defense against human interaction. It imposes transaction costs upon any system of production and reproduction (particularly those based on any elaborate social division of labor, trade, and social differentiation of reproductive functions). Distanciation (cf. Giddens 1984: 258-9) is simply a measure of the degree to which the friction of space has been overcome to accommodate social interaction.
2.   The appropriation of space examines the way in which space is used and occupied by individuals, classes, or other social groupings. Systematized and institutionalized appropriation may entail the production of territorially bounded forms of social solidarity.
3.   The domination of space reflects how individuals or powerful groups dominate the organization and production of space so as to exercise a greater degree of control either over the friction of distance or over the manner in which themselves or others appropriate space.

According to Gottdiener (1994) the most basic concept for urban studies is the settlement space which is both constructed and organized: "It is built by people who have followed some meaningful plan for the purposes of containing economic, political, and cultural activities. Within it people organize their daily actions according to meaningful aspects of the constructed space." (16) As part of national and global systems, a wide range of supply-side forces affects neighborhoods. For example, Harvey noted that the spatially-based community organization movement, inspired by class-based political rhetoric, threatened the control exercised by economic elites and therefore necessitated an ideological shift to facilitate the process of the urbanization of capital. Frankly,

some now recognize this as getting people to move out and mortgage their futures in suburban housing. "Block-busting" and "racial steering" in white ethnic neighborhoods during the turbulent 1960s take on different meanings than the traditional urban ecological interpretation as simply concomitant with the i.e. "natural" process of ethnic invasion and succession. Here we might think also of the spatial semiotics of white flight as well as gentrification. It is instructive that Italian American neighborhoods such as Canarsie, and Bensonhurst in Brooklyn, New York came to symbolize resistance to "ethnic succession" whether it was a "natural" process or merely a stage in the circuit of capital. (Reider, 1985, Krase, 1994)

Manuel Castells provides us with a different kind of insight into how real and imagined urban spaces are used, contested, and transformed by different social groups by discussing the " Reconstruction of Social Meaning in the Space of Flows." In the contemporary world, power is information, therefore the "Spaces of Places" are superceded by networks of information or "Spaces of Flows". Along with the globalization of power flows however, comes the tribalization of local communities. As local identities lose meaning, place based societies and cultures (cities, neighborhoods) also lose power. Castells believes that this momentum toward the total disempowerment of urban dwellers can be reversed by the reconstruction of place based meaning via social and spatial projects at three levels; cultural, economic, and political. For this essay it is the cultural level which is most relevant for local societies. Territorially defined ethnic groups can preserve their identities and build on their historical roots regardless of the ways that they are dependent on the space of flows. This is accomplished by the "symbolic marking of places", preservation of "symbols of recognition", and the "expression of collective memory in actual practices of communication". At the same time he cautions against the "over-affirmation" of local identity which could lead to tribalism and fundamentalism. The extensive discussion of Italian and Italian American vernacular landscape in later pages of this essay shows that although ordinary people can physically and symbolically affect their local environment, they are ultimately at the mercy of larger societal forces. DeLilllo puts it this way as Matt went to see Bronzini, his old chess mentor in the old neighborhood: "He sensed an eyeball on the other side of the peephole and he thought of his own street and house and the life of the computer suburb, those huddled enclaves off the turnpike, situated to discourage entry, and the corner store that sells eleven kinds of croissants and twenty-seven coffees…compared to this man, he thought, on the other side of the peephole, who watches the ruin build around him on the actual planet where he was born." (211)

I can second Castells caveat that ethnic and other kinds of place based groups must cooperate in order to positively influence the political structure by my own extensive experience at the "grass roots". The classic ecological explanation of the mass exodus of whites from the inner city in the 1960s was that residents left the negatively valued spaces and places of the inner city in pursuit of those with positive value in the suburbs. In order for this exodus to happen, however, the meanings held by white ethnics of the spaces they occupied had to be changed from that of a sacred "home" to a profane piece of "real estate". Disenchantment with the neighborhood was made possible by the manipulation of racial biases. We might argue that in order to dislodge deeply rooted residents, the local real estate industry expropriated white working-class bigotry. The survival of some of these ethnic enclaves are also useful lessons in the face of Gottdiener's observation of the futility organizational efforts to stabilize inner city neighborhoods in the face of "a combined state-economy marriage which promoted fringe area development for the post-war

housing needs of the white population." (1994: 11)

Having spent two decades on the battle lines promoting both racial integration and neighborhood stabilization, I should note here the economic utility of racial bias in the promotion of "white flight" from the central city. In the 1970s I worked against mortgage redlining in the inner city with many more or less "progressive" community organizations. Ironically, we facilitated the exodus by alienating white working class residents and increased inter-group divisions, which in turn helped to accelerate more demand for the outward transfer of capital. (Krase, 1997)

In recent decades we have seen the flip side of this process of neighborhood deterioration in "Gentrification", the conversion of socially marginal and working class areas of the central city to middle-class residential use which began in the 1960s. If we were urban ecologists we might call this phenomenon the invasion and succession of inner city neighborhoods by the "new bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie" Sharon Zukin notes that "Gentrification thus appears as a multidimensional cultural practice that is rooted in both sides of the methodological schisms…" between neo-Marxists and neo-Weberians. (1987:143) Looking closely at this urban transformation, Zukin has provided a synthesis of economic and cultural analysis to show "…how space and time are used in the social and material construction of an urban middle class." (1987: 130) In her earlier work on Loft Living Zukin noted "The promotion of a historical infrastructure, for example, changes the nature of urban space. By giving value to old buildings near the downtown, preservation makes them into a scarce commodity and so creates monopoly rents. Alternatively, the uncertainty that surrounds their conservation-in the face of the predominant tendency to destroy and rebuild- can create a climate in which speculation runs rife. So, too, the promotion of an arts infrastructure changes the nature of the urban space." (1982: 190) Borrowing from her insight into "patterns of cultural and social reproduction" (1987: 131) it should be possible to see how those of the less "elite" members of society are also reflected in the residential and commercial landscapes of the central city and, respectively, affect more limited ethnic neighborhood markets.

Visual Sociology and attention to Vernacular Landscapes in the inner city allow us to see conflict, competition, and dominance at a level not usually noticed and which can easily be related to the theories and descriptions of Lefebvre and Bourdieu. Just think of how different, and perhaps more interesting, "accessibility" and "distanciation" become when we speak of racial discrimination in local housing markets, and inter-ethnic violence at the street level. What is a better introduction to the ethnic neighborhood than when Harvey speaks of spatial dominance in the following way: "Successful control presumes a power to exclude unwanted elements. Fine-tuned ethnic, religious, racial, and status discriminations are frequently called into play within such a process of community construction." (266) Other productions of Symbolic Capital, defined by Bourdieu as "The collection of luxury goods attesting to the taste and distinction of the owner." (1977: 188), might help us to understand the residential and commercial up-scaling of these very same, often working-class white ethnic areas during a later phase in the second circuit of capital. This is when ethnic neighborhoods become the shabbily chic "in" places to live, such as did New York City's Bohemian (and Italian) Greenwich Village in the 1970s. (See: Jacobs, 1969, Ware, 1965, and Tricarico, 1984)

Bourdieu notes that since "the most successful ideological effects are those which have no words, and ask no more than complicitious silence." Therefore we can say that the production of symbolic capital serves ideological functions, because the mechanisms through which it contributes

"to the reproduction of the established order and to the perpetuation of domination remain hidden."
(1977: 188. See also King, 1996: 112-136.) For a Visual Sociologist some of these "hidden" reproductions cum re-presentations are in "plain view."

The Heuristic Value of Italian American Enclaves
      Without benefit of Gottdiener, Harvey, or Lefebvre, Donna R. Gabaccia provided a perfect example of the "Production of Space" in comparing Sicilians in agrotowns with Sicilian Americans in New York City tenements. The working hypothesis of her study was that, since New York's housing was neither built by nor for Sicilians, but they and their own ancestors had directly "shaped" the houses and streets of their home towns, agrotowns "should have matched Sicilian resources, needs and desires far better than did the tenements." (xx) She also assumed that because the New York tenements could not match Sicilian needs and desires, that immigrants would have to change their social behavior in response to the requirements of their new environment.
      After studying both environments she was surprised to discover that unlike other "folk" or "vernacular architectural forms", Sicily's agrotowns did not adequately reflect the housing and social ideals of their inhabitants." Although they met minimum housing standards, they limited the residents' ability to achieve and ideals in everyday life. Gabaccia found that although Sicilians were somewhat satisfied with their houses they also recognized and resented them as indicators of their obvious social failures. Therefore she concluded that "Their migration was as much a response to residential as to occupational dissatisfaction." (xx) Later, sounding very much like a New Urban Sociologist, Gabaccia noted that historians varied in their accounts as to what caused the agrotown pattern, from the designs of "feudal barons, hoping to expand grain production in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, (who) deliberately planned large towns to attract a sufficient labor force to Sicily's underpopulated mountain regions." to "peasants' desire to protect themselves from coastal raiders or nearby enemies during the Middle Ages." (14) As World System Political Economists, we could surmise that in both Sicily and New York City, peasants and ex-peasants were collected into agrotowns and tenements which made it possible to better exploit their labor. As a "vulgar Marxist" I might say that over time, these settlements and the people who resided in them were affected by other powerful economic and social forces as well as their own agency thereby producing and reproducing the recognizable culture of community seen in virtually stereotypical Italian enclaves.
      It has been forcefully argued by many, and especially Castells (1983, 1996), that as we moved from a traditional to a modern, and now to a post-modern society, technologically driven changes have reduced the efficacy of locally based institutions. But against all odds some ethnic urban villages, initially established to provide mutual assistance and support among immigrants, have survived. Residual, white-ethnic, working-class central city neighborhoods (especially Little Italies) are well suited to demonstrate the ways in which all social groups transform as well as defend space. Because of their situational longevity, Italian American neighborhoods have been the venues for the complete, and still ongoing, series of urban transformations; from the "New" Immigration of the turn of the Century, through the Melting Pot of assimilation, the uprooting of urban renewal, the tensions of racial change, the displacement of gentrification, and the multicultural confusion of the newest "New" Immigration.
      Until recently, most social scientists had predicted the gradual disappearance of Italian

neighborhoods, thus producing a large collection of studies on the imminent death of one or another old central city white neighborhood. Contemporary studies of where Italian Americans are going and staying, present a much more complex picture, one that does not easily fit the assimilationist-ecological models which projected their total eclipse. Although one must concede the disappearance of many older enclaves, both new and old Italian neighborhoods are still visible on the urban scene. A few of these new enclaves are products of immigration, but most are the result of migration of assimilated central city Italian Americans to the urban fringes and near suburbs. (See: Alba, 1985, and Alba et al 1995)

In the post-modern society, although stereotypically ethnic neighborhoods may admittedly be of less immediate and practical importance to assimilated individuals, new, often symbolic, functions for them have evolved. Many ex-urban villagers periodically return from the suburbs to their own and other's old neighborhoods to visit, shop, and recharge their "soul". They may attend celebrations, buy things, like freshly made mozzarella, unavailable in their own homogenized settlements, visit old relatives, occasionally demonstrate ethnic pride, and increasingly to re-discover ones roots. Some returnees, who are landlords, may attend to the needs and demands of tenants who now occupy their once venerated homesteads. Finally, in the post-modern world which allows for "voluntary ethnicity', those who wish to be ethnic can choose to live in an enclave among more or less voluntary and "authentic" co-ethnics. (See: Waters, 1990.)

According to Alejandro Portes and The Economic Sociology of Immigration, many of today's immigrants still have a need for ethnic concentration. They lack much in the way of Social Capital, or "the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures." (1995:12.) For them the ethnic enclave facilitates their employment. Although most enclaves are found in the central areas of large metropolises, others can be found in smaller cities and virtually every location where immigrant labor is required. The relatively small-scale ebb and flow of Italians to and from the United States depends on the relative states of the American and Italian economies and the fluctuations in demand for males who work in excavation and construction work. It is interesting to note that Italians who are employed at higher occupational levels, such as United Nations or corporate officials, who come to a place such as New York City do not contribute to the maintenance of Little Italies because, as cosmopolites, they prefer more prestigious residential venues.

In contrast to Italian Americans, however Portes posits that a different social context exists for many of today's second-generation immigrants who, even though acculturated, may not be able to enter the white mainstream. Therefore, for Asians, Africans, Middle Easterners, and Latinos, remaining in the enclave is not necessarily a symptom of escapism (due to rejection of conventional norms and institutional means), but a rational strategy for survival. In contrast, one might say therefore that ethnic concentration among Italian Americans is another aspect of "Voluntary" or "Symbolic Ethnicity". (Gans, 1991) To the importance of Social Capital in the lives of less empowered labor forces, M. Patricia Fernanadez Kelly adds "Cultural" Capital as "a repository of symbols and meanings interactively created and dependent on the conditions that generate social capital." (213) In a very real sense the vernacular landscapes produced by contemporary Italian Americans, who are relatively more empowered working and middle-class white ethnics, reflects their social as well as cultural capital.

The Italian American Vernacular Urban Landscape: Seeing and Re-Presenting

Beyond the great public spaces and edifices lies a vast domain of little people and little structures which in fact comprise most of our material society and where ordinary people have created distinct landscapes and places. The designs of these neighborhoods are rich in the way space is socially as well as physically constructed. Italians, like all other migrants, carry designs for living from their original home environments and adapt them to the resources and opportunities in new locales.

The work of Lyn Lofland adds another dimension to our understanding of ethnicized spaces. Arguing from a social psychological, I would say even Symbolic Interactionist, perspective. She argues that "The city, because of its size, is the locus of a peculiar social situation: the people found within its boundaries at any given moment know nothing personally about the vast majority of others with whom they share this space." (3). And she adds that, "city life was made possible by an 'ordering' of the urban populace in terms of appearance and spatial location such that those within the city could know a great deal about one another by simply looking." (22) In a richly descriptive chapter titled "Privatizing Public Space: Locational Transformation" she outlines three methods by which public space is transformed into private or semiprivate space. (1) The creation of home territories; (2) The creation of urban villages, both concentrated and dispersed; and (3) The creation of temporary mobile "homes" by means of the travelling pack. (1985: 119)

Of course it is the spatially concentrated urban village that receives the most attention of social scientists, and fiction writers. She writes, "In its ideal form, the concentrated urban village is a small settlement, set intact in the middle of a large city. All its inhabitants know one another personally, their relationships are long-lasting -from birth to grave- and whatever one knows, the others are likely to know too. The ideal neighborhood village neither needs nor requires the intrusion of "outside" organizations. It polices itself, it cares for itself, it plans for itself." (133)

As noted by Lofland the model neighborhood village is a fiction, but today those that do the best imitation of this ideal are stereotypical ethnic neighborhoods. In American social discourse, the term "ethnic" ordinarily is used to describe only the millions of poor and working class white immigrants who poured into the U.S. between 1880 and 1920, and their more or less assimilated descendants. Americans of Italian descent are a significant segment of this cohort and most have their roots in the poorest villages and neighborhoods of the Italian south. Despite the romantically pleasant stereotype of southern Italian village environments, not unlike the "happy" rural southern black scenarios, Humbert Nelli wrote that on the contrary they were "miserable and wretched places in which to live." (1983: 2) (See here especially Marazzi, 2001.)

The vast majority of Italian immigrants took up residence in established urban places and as they became assimilated, or "Americanized," they gradually adopted the values of the dominant society. Therefore only limited "traces" of the environmental values they brought with them from their home territories are found in even the most stereotypical of their hyphenated-American neighborhoods. Some of these southern Italian community practices are not easily understood in the American context. For example, historically, poor Italian peasants tried to hide assets from neighbors and officials. At first this tradition was directly imported to the US, and American urbanists as late as the 1950s commented on the especially shabby appearance of working-class Italian American areas and were surprised when they discovered well-kept or even luxurious

accommodations inside "slum" buildings in Italian colonies. (See especially: Gans, 1962.)

For all groups, architectural, and other physical artifacts of ethnicity are most easily seen when they successfully clash with the cultural values of the dominant society. Vincent Scully describes the American community structure as a tendency toward "unity, homogeneity, a sense of openness, impatience with communal constraints and a preference for change." Although the American residential norm is "nomadic," at the same time it demonstrates "the self-righteousness of American Puritanism, which must see alternatives in terms of black or white." (1969: 229) Even the most casual observer would agree that such a colorless description could never be made of an urban Italian American neighborhood or their Southern Italian counterparts. (See: Notariani, 1983.)

Italian spaces provide contrast and help to point out what is "American" by being oppositional. Rudofsky noted that "If for no other reason than it embodies the antithesis of the America street, the intensely Italian street is amply documented. Though it may not suggest the best of possible worlds, it affords, in the words of an unbiased American architect, James Marston Fitch, "the most delicious experience of embrace and enclosure of any space on earth."…"Italy represents the rear-view mirror of Western civilization. Just as her towns have always been test cases of urbanity, her streets- seemingly antiquated but even on brief examination, still valid, indeed future-oriented models-are full of the sort of inspiration that comes without theorizing. " (1969:20)

J.B. Jackson noted two general types of European vernacular home construction; the immovable homes of the Southern Europe (Mediterranean) based on stone, and the more mobile houses of northern European (Atlantic Woodland Culture) built of wood. (20) As a product of the Atlantic woodland, the American residential tradition is easily contrasted to that of Mediterranean southern Italy with its wooden as opposed to stone houses, and picket fences, versus high stone walls respectively. Finally, the styles of Italian ironworks, stone, stucco, and ceramics came by way of the Mediterranean and North Africa which imparts an exotic, perhaps even "oriental" quality.

After decades of photographing Italian neighborhoods in the U.S. and Italy, I have isolated what I believe are the central visual elements of an Italian American community culture re-presented in its vernacular landscapes. These "Material Spatial Practices" are not merely aesthetics expressed in folk art and crafts as represented in sidewalk shrines and lawn sculpture, but are re-presentations of social values and cultural norms derived from the historical experiences of the vast majority of Italian peasants.

1. Residential communities of Italians tend to be small scale and arranged so they facilitate intrafamily and interpersonal relations.
2. Italian neighborhood residents seem to have a great tolerance, if not a preference, for high human density.
3. Italian communities endorse the supremacy of private (family) over public (nonfamily) values and interests in regard to territory and activities related to local spaces.
4. Among Italians, individuality and competitiveness are emphasized over conformity and cooperation in spatial interactions.
5. Toleration for the mixing of commercial and industrial activities with residence in Italian neighborhoods is common.
6. Italian American communities provide a wide range of different types of places for

various age and sex groups.
7. Where feasible, Italian Americans have introduced traditional architectural and other aesthetics in new construction, maintenance, and renovation.
8. The physical and symbolic defense of individual, family and neighborhood spaces is the most important feature

The Spatial Semeiotics of Little Italies and Italian Americans

As with all idealized ethnic enclaves, not all of the places where Americans of Italian descent reside are regarded as "typical". Only those that fit the stereotype are recognized as Little Italies thus creating an interesting paradox for students of Italian Americana: even though the most celebrated Little Italies are actually teetering on the brink of extinction, virtually they linger on as models in the American ethnic collective consciousness.

Paradigms of Ethnicity in America

While today I characterize this essay as an exercise in "Spatial Semiotics", over the decades in order to validate my intellectual efforts I have described my work variously as Ethnomethodology, Phenomenology, Social Constructionism, and/or Symbolic Interactionism. As academic fads and foibles do ebb and flow, perhaps, in a parody of today's post-industrial scholarly jargon, the best appellation for my work would be "Pre-Post-Modern". And as Post-Modernism is hypercritical of Positivism, I should note that positivistic approaches to the study of ethnicity in America are usually divided into two main "structuralist" camps. The first, and most useful in my opinion, is predicated on the ideas of Max Weber and the second on the work of Karl Marx. Simply put, Marxian analysis stresses the importance of "material" e.g. economic forces, in influencing life chances as opposed to the Weberian which stresses factors such as prestige (Status), and power (Party) in addition to economics (Class). These competing theoretical frameworks have created varied paradigms and ideologies of ethnicity in America.

For a phenomenologist like myself, both the Marxian and Weberian approaches to ethnic studies are "naturalistic," that is; they emphasize those factors that can be objectively measured such as socioeconomic status (usually operationalized as income, education, and occupation). My own approach pays attention to the common sense ways that ordinary people produce social realities, such as ethnicity, during their interpersonal and inter-group interactions. To naturalists on the other hand, one is Italian American or not based on objective data as to where ones parents were born, and one's response to a scientifically designed questionnaire.

The first of these naturalistic paradigms is Assimilationism; the idea that immigrant groups to the United States eventually will melt into, and become indistinguishable parts of the whole. This theory becomes an ideology when it is assumed that the predicted outcome is the way things ought to be. On the other end of the spectrum is the current paradigm/ideology of Multiculturalism that is predicated upon the notion that not only do distinct cultural groups continue to exist in American society, but that their distinctiveness ought to be preserved.

Defining Italian Americans

To a sociologist, all historical events occur and are reconstructed in ideological contexts. The establishment of the discipline of Italian American Studies took place during a decade of intense ethnopoliticking in America among "White Ethnics" which was viewed by Herbert Gans

and many other scholars as a hostile reaction to a rising tide of Black nationalism and AfroAmerican cultural revival. As a "working class style", Italian American ethnic consciousness becomes in this paradigm a more or less "defensive ethnicity." (Gans, 1991) Whether progressive or reactionary, Italian Americans, like Italians, are a difficult group to study. There is a great deal of evidence and argument supporting the notion that they don't exist as an "authentic" ethnic group at all. For example, Italian Americans are presented in Introductory Sociology textbooks as one of the best examples of the processes of acculturation and assimilation. Regardless of the debate, in the 1990 Census over 16,000,000 people in the United States identified themselves as Italian American.

Even though most social scientists would agree that Italian Americans are well integrated into America's social structure, they are still, at some times more than at others, recognizable. This paradox raises a number of questions that provide the grist for the Italian American Studies academic mills such as: Who is, and who is not a "real" Italian American? Other than by self-identification, how do we ascertain membership in the putative ethnic group? Who should do the defining? Despite the practical disunity of Italian Americans, they are united by shared images in the minds of people about who "they" are. The fact that these re-presentations of Italian Americans can be contradictory is to be expected because Italian America itself, despite stereotypes to the contrary, is extremely diverse. As other large American "ethnic" groups, Italian Americans do not comprise a monolithic, cohesive group but are members of disparate collectivities; that is, collections of social actors who share a varying number of socially relevant demographic attributes such as: national origins, cultural values, practices, language uses, and religion. In many cases Italian Americans have more in common with nonItalian Americans than with each other.

The questions of whom is Italian American, and how many Italian Americans there are varies considerably by the method used to identify and count them. At the turn of the 20th century, Italians in America were defined demographically- by their place of birth. Italians in America were then simply those persons who had been born in "Italy". The study of Italian Americans was the study of this collectivity. Also, until the 1940s nationality and race were virtually synonymous, so Italians were both a scientific and a commonsensical "racial" group. By the 1940s the Census Bureau had added the category of "Foreign Stock," or persons who had at least one foreign born parent, to that of "Foreign born". After World War II in response to the Nazi holocaust which was facilitated in part by academic racialism, the professional literature began to treat ethnic groups more as cultural, and less as genetic groups. During the 1980 Census a sample of the population was asked to identify themselves ethnically. In 1990 this sample survey was included in the full enumeration. In this way ethnicity, as a research concept, had moved from a genetic to a symbolic term. From each of these different definitions we could assemble a different Italian American collectivity, and the geographical boundaries of Italian American neighborhoods would wax and wane. But, the image of Little Italy, as a cultural model, would change much less.

As once The Ghetto stood for Jews (Wirth, 1928), and The Dark Ghetto (Clark, 1965) still stands for African Americans; both semiotically and structurally-speaking Little Italy stands for Italian America. Because Little Italies are used as models of Italian American ethnicity, who we study as Italian American and what we say about them is greatly influenced by where they live. Italian American culture has an especially strong territorial orientation. For example, even Richard Alba, who has persuasively argued that Italian Americans are moving into the "Twilight" of their

ethnicity, notes that "the concentration of Italian American loyalists in neighborhoods with a definite ethnic character keeps alive the notion of an Italian-American ethnicity, even in the midst of wide-spread assimilation." (1995: 162)

The centrality of territory in Italian culture was made clear in a 1980 compendium of leading research published by the Giovanni Agnelli Foundation. The study offered the following models of Italian Americans: Italian Resident in the United States, Italian American, and American of Italian Extraction (1980: 36-37). For each type of Italian Americans, sociospatial factors are crucial. Although we can arrive at this conclusion intuitively, research has shown that the central factor in all models of cultural and structural metamorphosis (assimilation) of Italian Americans has been the role of the neighborhood. For example in the Agnelli study three of the four ingredients that comprise the various "Italian American Cultural Identities" were essentially territorial;
A. "the importance attached to intermediate groups: the family, the neighborhood, the community";
B. "values germane to the quality of domestic life: the importance of the home, the dinner table, holidays";
C. "values relating to interpersonal supportiveness: religious faith understood as love of neighbor, as actions in this world; a feeling for group and village ties; hospitality, and the importance of personal relationships";
D. Only the last- "a realistic view of life: anti-dogmatic skepticism, political realism: higher education choices made pragmatically"- has no obvious territorial referent.

Whither Little Italies and Italian Americans?

Assimilation theorists argue that when Italian Americans are no more likely to live with one another than with non-Italian Americans they have become another dissolved ingredient in the melting pot. This implies that when Little Italies are gone so are Italian-Americans. Demographic data on the most well-known of America's Little Italies indicate significant changes over the past decades and interesting trends for the future. Whereas Little Italies have survived, perhaps even thrived during industrialization and later modernization of American metropolises, they suffered during de-industrialization, and they are not faring well in the nascent post-modern era of globalization. Using New York City as a case in point, Egelman and Salvo (1994) report that many Italian Americans have left the city. The residual resident population is aging, fewer are getting married, and childlessness among Italian American women has also increased. (See also : DeLillo: 207) Although most popular attention continues to be paid to under-achievers, Italian Americans are increasingly well educated and well paid. Although almost one-third of all Italian American males remain in blue-collar occupations there has been an increase in the number of those in the two highest occupational categories. Italian American women have experienced even greater occupational advancement. Should we expect that these post-modern, post-industrial Italian Americans have created the same kind of neighborhoods as their stereotypical traditional, family-centered, central city, less educated, blue-collar, working class counterparts?

Alba, Logan, and Crowder (1995) completed a detailed demographic study of white ethnic neighborhoods in the New York City Metropolitan Area based on the 1980 and 1990 Censuses. They note that Italians have many large neighborhoods, but on average, their central-city neighborhoods have contracted. While the number of suburban Italian neighborhoods fell, their scale increased markedly. The proportion of Italians residing in these neighborhoods increased as

well. By 1990 there were more Italian neighborhoods in the suburbs then there were in the central city, but working class variants were more frequent in the central city.

If we argue that only those areas in which a majority of self-identified persons of Italian American Ancestry, or documented foreign-born Italians live are "really" Italian neighborhoods then we may ignore other important aspects of local life. Official statistics also do not adequately represent the substantial numbers of undocumented Italians who essentially live full-time in two countries, defying classification as well as census takers. The newest immigrants add the most color to the "Italian" as opposed to "Italian-American" character of both suburban and central city areas.

Little Italies are important places to study not only because they are venues for assimilation and acculturation but also because the spatial "idea" of the ethnic neighborhood alone is a powerful force in American culture and society. It is critical to not only consider the places where Italians demographically dominate, but where Italians live as minorities, where they once lived, and where they never lived at all. Actual and virtual spaces help us to understand ethnic-America's past, present, and future. Generally, Italian inner city areas survived in better physical condition for subsequent residential transitions, while parallel Irish and Jewish areas did not. Ironically, maintaining the physical environment encourages invasion and defense. Today's Little Italies have attracted the most residentially successful newcomers whether they are Yuppies and urban gentry, or Asian, Caribbean, and Latino immigrants. Paradoxically, many of the most "Italian" of neighborhood spaces are in census tracts and zip codes where Italians are a minority.

Summary

According to Joe R. Feagin, "The new [my emphasis] political-economic approach decenters the more conventional discussions of urban ecology, the impersonal forces such as urbanization and industrialization, and the "culture of poverty" by forcing consideration of the class and racial domination at the heart of urban growth, development, affluence, and decline." (1998: 19) Despite all that is "New" in Urban Sociology, I continue to be guided by C. Wright Mills dictum that in our everyday lives we are "Seldom aware of the intricate connections between the patterns of our own lives and the course of world history." (1959: 34) Sociologists themselves would do well to heed his instruction and to make the necessary connections between urban ecology, urbanization, industrialization, "culture of poverty", and class and racial domination.

The Visual Sociology of the Vernacular Landscape of Little Italies constructs a methodological and theoretical bridge between Classical Ecology and Spatial Semiotics by allowing us to understand how Italian America is both a product and producer of space. Regardless of perspective, one cannot fail to recognize the agency and symbolic life of ordinary people, while at the same time recognize the overwhelming power of elites to create and manipulate symbols; in other words their ability to expropriate even indigenous cultural capital.

Scenario 1.: The "normal" history of a Little Italy might be presented as follows: over many centuries a local culture of community evolved among Italian peasants in a village they constructed on a hill-top in order to protect themselves from marauders and the malaria of the swampy valley below. There they developed local sentiments and attachments to each other and their shared environments. Due to an unanticipated agricultural calamity at the end of the Nineteenth Century, some of the more adventurous residents found it necessary to tear themselves away from home and search for better opportunities. A few found their way to America, and chose to live near the

construction site in the central city where unskilled work was available for them. In a short time because of their hard work and diligence, some achieved relative prosperity, so they sent news home and encouraged others to follow. Their enclave grew and the Italian invaders came to dominate the territory through a process of competition with other ethnic groups. The successors then imposed their cultural hegemony on the environment and it took on a distinctly "Italian" character. Decades later, members of the group assimilated, took on the local America community values and moved to the suburbs almost as an expression of social achievement. In the process they created a vacuum of residential space for new, less privileged, immigrant groups to move into and thusly process of invasion and succession began anew.

Scenario 2.: The cultural capital brought to the United States in the early Twentieth Century by poor southern Italian peasants was socially produced as a consequence of their assembly in hill-top villages as agricultural laborers by large agricultural land holders. After Italian unification in 1871, national economic and political elites de-emphasized agricultural production in favor of industrialization. The peasants become redundant and were encouraged to serve the new capitalist enterprise by moving to industrial centers in Italy. Another option was to go abroad as sojourners who would remit wages back to the home country as part of a neo-colonization scheme which also indirectly subsidized industrial expansion at home. There was a great need for low cost labor in the United States. Italian and American political and economic elites cooperated with each other to bring desperate peasants to Americas industrial urban centers. Slowly they modified their local environment and transformed them into working-class "urban villages". After the Great Depression, and World War II the economy of cities became dominated by the second circuit of capital, and middle-class urban peasants were encouraged to move to the suburbs, via clearance for urban renewal, the lure of subsidized mortgages, the fear of racial integration. In the 1980s this process was furthered by deindustrialization, and the final straw, gentrification, which raised the value of home territories so high that the remaining ethnic localities either couldn't afford the rent or were enticed to sell their sacred homesteads for huge profits.

Little Italy as a Spatial Semiotic

In my study of urban neighborhoods I have tried to maintain the edge of my own Sociological Imagination; "…a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities." (Mills, 1959:15) Like all real and imagined ethnic neighborhoods, Little Italy is a product and source of both social and cultural capital. Although the ordinary people who live in them ultimately are at the mercy of distant forces, in their naivete they continue to create and modify local spaces allocated to them. In spite of and because of their efforts they become part of the urban landscape. Urban residents and the spaces they inhabit become symbols. Ironically, they come to represent themselves and thereby lose their autonomy as the enclave comes to symbolize its imagined inhabitants and stands for them independent of their residence in it. Localized reproductions of cultural spaces can also be easily commodified. For example, The expropriated cultural capital of the Italian American vernacular such as resistance to diversity, cultural insularity, and perhaps even racial intolerance becomes a sales point in real estate parlance as a quaint "safe" neighborhood, with "old world charm", and romantically symbolizing the "way its used to be".

Most people do not think of the American West as a "proper" venue for Italian immigrants,

but Italians have settled in virtually every state in the union. While on vacation in Colorado I read a column in the Rocky Mountain News entitled "Spicy Meatballs Order of the Day" which re-presented the Highlands neighborhood of North Denver as " where old Italian men play bocce in the park, and where geraniums still bloom in window boxes." (Amole, 1983.) Following his street references which unexpectedly led me to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church (est. 1899), I discovered the "ruins" of the original Italian settlement, which was then occupied by Mexican Americans. Most of the Italians had moved up the hill to a "better neighborhood" where, the vernacular landscape was visually so un-stereotypical that the mail carrier denied that it was an "Italian" neighborhood despite all the Italian names which I could see on the mail boxes.

In almost every Italian neighborhood I have researched and photographed I have either been led to, or discovered on my own, a local bocce court. In this sense the bocce court can be thought of as an "Appropriation of Space". At another level, the physical space and the people, especially old people, playing within it is a common semiotic for Italians and their urban neighborhoods. I have a small collection of photographs of bocce courts that are used to illustrate the written texts about Italian neighborhoods that appear in newspapers and magazines. Italian enclaves are generally featured in local periodicals around October 12th (Columbus Day).

Because there are too many permutations and combinations of variables such as generation, class, and location, no historical model can adequately represent the multiple realities of any ethnic-America. However, I hoped to show here how Little Italy speaks to the idea of Italian America and how a visual sociological approach can add to our understanding of its structural and cultural realities. Perhaps others will follow this lead to produce similar studies of other urban ethnic and class enclaves by employing the broad array of methodological and theoretical tools at the disposal of contemporary urban sociologists.

Idealized ethnic urban spaces are "Representations of Spaces" as well as "Spaces of Representation". I have termed them: Oblivion, Ruination, Ethnic Theme Parks, Immigration Museums, and Anthropological Gardens. (Krase, 1997)
"1. Oblivion means "the state of being forgotten." Every day thousands of trucks and cars drive through spaces which once contained vital and vibrant Italian American neighborhoods; communities of homes and businesses which were destroyed in their prime to make way for "improvements". Razing neighborhoods and tearing wide gashes in the fabric of local Italian American life was a common pattern in major cities such as Boston, Chicago, New York City, and San Francisco. For the most part, this "Urban Renewal" merely enabled other, more geographically mobile city residents to flee more quickly to the suburbs.
 2. Ruins. Nostalgia for the rubble of ancient Rome or Pompeii is no match for that of the stores, businesses, and homes in Italian American neighborhoods abandoned in anticipation of "renewal", cleared of misnamed "slums"-, and still awaiting new uses. In most cases, these "liminal" zones of "in betweenness" had already taken their first step toward oblivion. Italian American ruins contain crumbling traces of vernacular architecture, faded signs which once announced active commerce and business, and fig trees growing in the wilds where little else other than various forms of low-income public housing were constructed to replace Italian villages. In his Epilogue to "From Italophilia to Italophobia," John Paul Russo comments on the ruination of Boston's West End, or what he calls the "West End fiasco." (364) Citing Walter Muir Whitehead's retrospective review of "A Decade of Renewal": "total demolition of large areas, without regard for the feelings of people,

and their eventual reconstruction--after long periods as a desolate dump--in unfamiliar form for new uses was neither good sense nor good politics." (201-202)

3. Ethnic Theme Parks. Despite displacement of most of the "natives" the most famous of American Little Italies are preserved as spectacles for the appreciation of tourists, and the streetscapes which are used by film crews shooting "locations" for Mafia movies. Manhattan's Mulberry Street, and the world famous Feast of San Gennaro takes place in an Asian neighborhood decorated with "Italian" store fronts, street furniture, and outdoor cafes where restaurateurs recruit "swarthy" waiters from Latino communities. A few ethnically sympathetic vendors might attempt to recreate Italian markets, but many are more likely unashamedly hawk "Kiss Me I'm Italian" buttons, ethnically offensive, or inoffensive, bumper stickers, miniature Italian flags, and almost anything else in red, white and green.

Most Theme Parks contain (4.) Assimilation Museums and (5.) Anthropological Gardens. Assimilation Museums are places for the preservation and display of inanimate objects whereas Anthropological Gardens (Human Zoos) are places where the subjects of curiosity are maintained in their live state. In Assimilation Museums we find Memorabilia Exhibits, Archives, and Galleries run by groups devoted to the "Preservation of OUR Ethnic Heritage", ubiquitous monuments to Christopher Columbus, homes of the famous such as mayor Fiorello LaGuardia and the more infamous, like Al Capone.

Anthropological Gardens are usually criss-crossed by Naples Streets and Columbus Avenues. There one can observe "Local Italians" at memorial bocce courts, senior citizen centers, and social clubs. Video journalists use them as repositories for on-camera interviews about organized crime. Those left behind are the keepers of the tradition who can tell you how it was in the "good old days" in the old neighborhoods. (104-5)

Photographs and Explanations

No discussion of Italian America can take place without some reference to its Italian origins therefore this photo essay begins with two images from Italy. A major value of photographic images is that at least the "good ones" are sufficiently meaningful to reduce the need for written comment.

Plate Number 1. Trulli in Puglia, Italy, August, 1985

Every year hundreds of thousands of northern European tourists travel to the sunny Adriatic beaches of Puglia and while there take day-trips to view the many white washed villages, and the "trulli" of the Valle d'Itria. Atroshencko and Grundy (1991) provide a classic explanation for "white villages":

"For centuries, the inhabitants of these villages lived almost at subsistence level. There is a notable absence of unnecessary ornamentation on the buildings. Nothing is 'fashionable' or disposable. There is no conspicuous waste. Each village keeps its integrity; it does not lose its soul. There are constant, delightful juxtapositions of strong, natural forms and ever new and varied spaces. Based on the regenerative realities of the locale, this approach to building enabled tradition to act as an invisible hand (my emphasis), guiding the parts toward a unified and ordered completeness. Additions 'grew' adjacent to existing structures. The builders created practical, complex and visually stunning environments without destroying the unity of the village; viewed from afar, it is elegant, sculptural form that fits naturally into the landscape."

It has practical aspects also: the whitewash protects against disease and reflects the summer heat off the walls; the hillside site provides drainage; the civic identity and cooperation necessary for the preservation and protection of the village has remained intact down the centuries. The whitewashed village is a functional organism that meets the requirements for shelter, work, quiet, and social intercourse. Each element feels unique, especially the dwellings, whose scale, asymmetry and flexibility create endless combinations. These villages allow variations of the whole in order to fit individual needs. Here in these beautiful environments we see solutions to many universal problems facing the world, and they are worth emulating." (6-8)

Also, in the photograph, is a conical, "beehive", roof that is a peculiar "style" for the Val

d'Itri area. According to Rudofsky, trulli are "the archaic house form of an early megalithic civilization, they are related to the Balearic tlyots, Sardinian nuraghi, and the sesi of Pantelleria. Despite the passage of a dozen nations, this type has survived almost without change since the second millenium BC" (1964:49 It is likely that the "white village" represents less of an "invisible hand" than the representation of either Spanish or Greek colonization.

There is yet another description of contemporary trulli which argues that although the system of trullo construction already existed it was preserved because of feudalism which came to the territory at the end of the 15th century. In order to maintain the vulnerability of the newly created serfs, Feudal lords decreed that the shelters of peasants and shepherds had to be destroyable in only one night. "So the agglomerate of 'casedde' dry built with rustic local stone and destructible with swift manoeuvre in a short time arose." (Alberobello, 1982)

Plate Number 2, Apartment Houses, Mola di Bari, Italy, August, 1985

Over the past three decades I have observed and photographed what Lyn Lofland refers to as the "Private, Parochial, and Public Realms", of a wide range of Italian and Italian American neighborhoods. To say that they do not generally conform to the visual expectations of middle-class Anglo-American urban "ideal" would be an understatement. Here Gans reflects on the visually induced misperceptions by outsiders of the Italian West End of Boston as a "slum": "The West Enders themselves took the poor maintenance of the building exteriors, halls, and cellars in stride, and paid little attention to them. The low rents were more than made up for these deficiencies, and for the generally rundown appearance of the area. Moreover, they did not consider these conditions a reflection on their status. Having no interest in the opinions of the outside world, they were not overly concerned about the image which the West End had in the eyes of outsiders [my emphasis]. They did not like to be called slum dwellers, of course, and resented

the exaggerated descriptions of West End deterioration that appeared regularly in the Boston Press. Nor were they happy about the rooming houses that bordered the West End, or the skid row occupants who sometimes wandered into it. Unlike the middle class, however, they did not care about 'the address.' Consequently, the cultural differences between working- and middle-class residential choice suggest that the prevailing professional housing standards-which reflect only the latter-could not be rigidly applied to the West End." (1962: 315-16.)

Plate Number 3. An Italian Village in a Brooklyn Alley. April, 1983.

Even where there are large concentrations of Italians in cities, the effective community seldom is larger than a block. For most Italian Americans the ideal residential setting would consist of a few houses on a dead end street. This small scale is related to the accurate stereotype of Italian neighborhoods as multi-generational where vacancies are usually controlled by an almost secretive housing referral system, run primarily by local women. (DeSena, 1990 and 2000.) In Italian America, the owner regards the public right of way in front of dwellings as a personal (familial) domain. This particularly quaint "village" is less than a hundred yards from a debris-strewn vacant lot which borders the highly polluted Gowanus Canal. In Italian American neighborhoods a great deal of effort is expanded toward shielding the family from the outside world, yet those outsiders who wander across them seldom recognize the cues to boundaries. Homes are guarded physically by walls and fences, and symbolically by lettered signs which say "keep out." Hostility may also be seen in the stares of old timers who are on guard while sweeping the curbs in front of their houses, or the comments of young men who congregate at the street corner portals into their blocks.

One of the most common images of Italian neighborhoods is the "social club", or as defined by Gerald Suttles in the Addams area of Chicago as the "social and athletic club." (1968: 89) Most urban sociologists of my generation were introduced to a rather deracinated Boston version of SACs by William Foote Whyte in the classic Street Corner Society (1943:). The more sinister version, and popular, of the club is promoted by writers in popular Mafia movies and books such as Mario Puzo's Godfather series, which is quite accomplished in spatial semiotic imagery. The most "accurate" vision of this local social phenomenon is an unremarkable storefront of a regionally or town-based immigrant organization which provides a place for mature males to

drink, play cards, and share conversation.

Plate Number 4. North Beach, San Francisco, November, 1989

Few images can better simultaneously represent Material Spatial Practices, Representations of Space, and Spaces of Representation, Accessibility, Distanciation, Appropriation, and Domination of Space than the Italian fishing boats and Italian Restaurants near San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf. According to Deanna Paoli Gumina Italians from the provinces of Liguria, Sicily, Calabria, and Naples were attracted to San Francisco, California by the fishing, and had established their hegemony in the industry between 1850 and 1870. (1978: 79.) It was the Sicilians, at first with Genoese agents, who developed the business into one of the most profitable in California. During the latter part of the 19th century this particular space near Fisherman's Wharf was known as "Italy Harbor" as Italians, originally crammed into the steep sides of the bay side of Telegraph Hill overflowed into the valley and formed the North Beach "Italian Colony. A hundred years later in the Ethnic Theme Park I found only faint carnevalesque traces of the illustrious maritime Italian Colony remaining near the wharves at the base of Columbus Avenue, such as numerous Italian restaurants. In 1989, "Italian" North Beach was compressed by an expanding Chinatown, a gentrifying Telegraph Hill, low-income housing, and a large public recreation area.

As another Representation, The North End of Boston is an urban tourist space with a split personality. All year long, most of the visitors come in search of American Colonial and Revolutionary War landmarks such as the Old North Church, and follow one or another variant of the Freedom Trail walking tour. For many others, it is a place to find "real' Italian restaurants, and, in season, observe an Italian feast. Because it is such a venerated historic area it would be considered a desecration to festoon the whole neighborhood in the Italian Tricolor as is done in so many other Italian Theme Parks. Street names can be ethnic markers, and signs such as Michaelangelo Street make it possible to be more discreet in designating ethnic spaces.

One of the most powerful images of Philadelphia's Italians was the sight of Sylvester Stallone in the film Rocky (1976) running through the streets of the neighborhood and up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The ethnic composition of Philadelphia's Bella Vista neighborhood has been ethnically mixed and changing for almost a century and a half. Italian Americans comprise the one European group that stayed in large numbers after Irish Catholics, and

Russian Jews moved away. (Juliani, 1998) Yet the neighborhood is still described in tourist brochures as a "Little Italy." In the same sense Black, Chinese, Jewish, Korean, Lebanese, South Asian, Vietnamese and other merchants bring their ethnic foods and other products to sell at the famous Ninth Street "Italian Market".

Plate Number 5. Italian Architectural Museum New Orleans. November, 1990.

The Italian American Renaissance Foundation Museum and Library to express ethnic pride by demonstrating the many important contributions that Italy has made to the world's architecture created this open-air architectural park. As such, it is an interesting spatial "Mis-Re-Presentation" of local Italian Americans many of whom are descendants of migrant agricultural laborers who came to work in the sugar cane fields in the late nineteenth century. Today it is difficult to find signs of the substantial populations of Italians who once inhabited New Orleans' inner city zones such as the "French" Quarter. Near the Slave Market however one can find an "Italian" grocery store, and, as to vernacular landscape, Italian names on fruit and vegetable businesses are visible clues to their earlier presence.

A more literal expression of this semiotic, is the Borgatta Italian theme park in Scottsdale Arizona. As described by Margaret Crawford "…and open-air shopping mall set down in the flat Arizona desert, reinterprets the medieval Tuscan hill town of San Gimignano with piazza and scaled-down towers (made of real Italian bricks)." in "The World in a Shopping Mall" (1992: 16). More recently, has been the creation of the Bellagio Hotel Resort in Las Vegas, Nevada where according to a Bret Pulley in The New York Times "… the hotel and casino, "tries to combine high cost with high culture" and has six pools which are available in what "looks like an Italian village." (1999: 10)

Plate Number 6. Italian Plaza and Fountain, Federal Hill. Providence, Rhode Island, 1984

In 1984 I made several visits to Providence, Rhode Island to plan for holding the annual meeting of the American Italian Historical Association at the newly restored Biltmore Hotel. Even though I understood that a very large proportion of the population of Rhode, Island is Italian, I did not think of it as an "Italian American" state. I thought of Providence as the site of Brown University. While in the city I was treated to a tour of Federal Hill, another not very well known Little Italy which at the time was being turned into a more marketable Ethnic Theme Park. Local business boosters, all of whom were Italian American, explained that the public funds for the project were a partial compensation for the damage suffered by the neighborhood due to nearby interstate highway construction. Here we see the attempt to create an "Italian Space" through the construction of a piazza with requisite fountain. The piazza also serves as an open-air market, and a venue for periodic ethnic celebrations.

One of the most common ways that past or present Italian enclaves are geographically designated is in the form of public or private commemorations of Christopher Columbus. Few people know that the West Side neighborhood near Columbus Circle in New York City was once a bustling Italian immigrant enclave. In San Francisco's North Beach Columbus Park, opposite St. Peter and Paul's Church where some masses were still said in Italian, one can see early morning crowds of Chinese practicing tai chi. One can also find a Columbus Park in the middle of New York City's Chinatown. A statue of Columbus also decorates a park in Chicago's Addams area where part of the old Italian neighborhood was torn down to make way for up-scale housing.

Plate Number 7. Children's Giglio. Greenpoint, Brooklyn June, 1990

Another spatial appropriation that has become a Space of Representation is the Italian Feast. In this photograph we see the Children's Giglio which is part of the combined feasts of Saint Paulinus and Our Lady of Mount Carmel which takes place in Greenpoint, Brooklyn during the month of June. The sacred legend claims that at the start of the 5th century, Vandals attacked the seaside town of Nola and kidnapped many people to sell as slaves. The Bishop of Nola, Paulinus, offered himself in place of a widow's only son. After being carried off to Africa he prophesized the death of the Vandal king. When the king heard this, he dreamed of Paulinus and, terrified, he freed the townspeople and sent them home by ship. They were greeted at dockside with candles or cilii which in a later word shift became gigli or lilies. In the pageants of the 17th and 18th century lavishly decorated baroque towers came to represent the lilies. In Greenpoint the large adult giglio, and the children's smaller version is lifted and "danced" in the crowded streets. Today the Italian population of the area is quite small, and some of the lifters, as well as many visitors use the feast as a reason return to the "old" neighborhood. While recognizing the merely entertainment value of ethnic festivals Salvatore Primeggia and Joseph Varacalli argue strongly that such local activities synthesize old and new qualities to provide an important dimension to an enduring Italian American ethnicity. They note especially early immigrant humor and entertainment as well as contemporary ethnic expressions that are evident in the street celebrations that take place today. (1996)

Plate Number 8. Our Lady of Mount Carmel. "Italian" Harlem, July, 1996.

This last photo of two men carrying the flags of the United States and of Italy while leading the parade for the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Manhattan's "Italian" Harlem (Orsi, 1988) demonstrates the power of the visual sociological approach in raising as well as answering questions about urban spaces. Every summer in New York City there is a feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in at least four of New York City's five boroughs (Brooklyn, Manhattan, Staten Island, and The Bronx). Although they are the "same" feast, each has a different spatial and symbolic, as well as demographic, character. For example, all over the world today people recognize the word "Harlem" as an African American urban neighborhood and visualize the space in terms of their knowledge and understanding of that ethnic community. Demographically, the neighborhood of Italian Harlem at the turn of the Twenty-first Century would more accurately called "Spanish" Harlem. Although the area still contains a few Italian "landmarks" such as Claudio's barber shop, the home of Vito Marcantonio, Rao's and Patsy's Restaurant the visual and aural signs and symbols are distinctly Latino.

As noted, in many other Little Italies, the local feast draws tourists as well as old timers back to the neighborhood. In this photograph we can see another dynamic. Ethnic change is apparent not only in the signs and symbols of local residential and commercial space, but in the temporary ceremonial space of the feast itself. Many of the participants of this particular version of the feast are Haitian. Our Lady of Mount Carmel is also venerated by Haitians, other Afro-Caribbeans, and Latinos. One can speculate as to the point at which this particular feast will change its "ethnic" identity.

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