

# The IAWA Archives

## 1. "Breaking the silence"

### *A note on "Breaking the Silence"*

"Breaking the Silence: Strategic Imperatives for Italian American Culture" was written in 1989. It has had a long shelf-life, because it forms a basic element in the history of the Italian American Writers Association, and for that reason we have decided to make it available on our Website. The essay makes it clear that **IAWA was born out of conflict and necessity.**

### **Conflict**

Racial conflict has been part of United States history since before the United States existed. It produced the American Civil War (1861-1865) not long before the migration of Italians to the US began to gather force in the 1870s and grow into a mass phenomenon that lasted from 1880 through 1924, when mass migration was shut down. During those first decades, Italian laborers often found themselves competing with African American citizens for jobs, housing, and other material and political advantages. This strife has lessened considerably over the decades, but it has had a long half-life, often flaring up as it did in the 1980s in New York City. The specific episode of conflict in question here is narrated in the opening paragraphs of the essay "Breaking the Silence: Strategic Imperatives for Italian American Culture," which we are reissuing here.

### **Necessity**

The essay took its cue from two facts. For both of these facts, a response was a necessity.

First fact: the protest marches led by Al Sharpton on 20th Avenue in Bensonhurst, where local youths murdered a young black man named Yousuf Hawkins on August 23, 1989. These marches amounted to a challenge to the conscience of the community.

Second fact: the almost complete silencing of Italian American intellectuals, who were not invited to join the public debate about this event in the newspapers and on broadcast media. This issue had the feeling of necessity. Many Italian American writers and intellectuals felt that their Italian names, or their interest in Italian American culture, had pretty much excluded them from the attention of serious readers.

I wrote this essay to outline my analysis of where this silencing had come from. It had historical sources that needed to be discussed, and it called for a program of cultural activism.

The essay sparked a lively debate at the conference of American Italian Historical Association in San Francisco in November of 1989. In a discussion after that debate, three of us –Theresa Aiello-Gerber, a psychologist who taught at New York University; Peter Carravetta, an Italianist who taught at Queens College, and I – went for a long walk and discussed the issues. We decided that the best thing to do would be to start a writers association, which could open a public forum for discussing Italian American issues in a spirit of honest inquiry and anti-racism. Out of that discussion IAWA was born.

It took a little while, but this essay was published as the first essay in the first number of the new journal *VIA: Voices in Italian Americana*, in Spring, 1990 and as the opening essay in the conference proceedings, edited by Paola Sensi-Isolani and Anthony Tamburri, entitled *Italian Americans Celebrate Life: The Arts and Popular Culture* (New York: The American Italian Historical Association, 1991); it was also excerpted by Daniela Gioseffi in her anthology *On Prejudice: A Global Perspective* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 381-385

IAWA held its first monthly meeting and published its first monthly newsletter in March 1991.

“Breaking the Silence” is not the last word on the issues it addresses. It is more in the nature of a first response.

RV  
June 26, 2012

## Breaking the Silence: Strategic Imperatives for Italian American Culture

by Robert Viscusi

**Riassunto**<sup>1</sup>: Trattando gli incidenti razziali successi a Bensonhurst l'estate scorsa, il presente saggio incomincia col lamentare la mancanza di un discorso autocritico italoamericano adeguato ai problema storici e sociali che ci riguardano; sostiene, poi, la tesi abbiamo il dovere – l'imperativo, retengo – di sviluppare un discorso di questo genere, un lavoro che necessita di tre elementi: un linguaggio, una narrativa, e una dialettica. Dobbiamo essere bilingui, dobbiamo creare una storia biculturale che rispetti sempre i due mondi diversi che formano l'America italiana, e dobbiamo addentrarci in una dialettica che non permetta al razzismo di affermarsi come espressione della nostra identità storica.

During the aftermath of last summer's events in Bensonhurst, many Italian Americans endured a difficult mixture of feelings. There was shame that some youths had committed a racial murder, apparently in the name of Italian neighborhood values. There was frustration that the provocateur Al Sharpton used this as the opportunity to stage a series of widely-publicized protests that seemed to spotlight this event, making it appear different from other intergroup crimes in the city. There was anger that many residents of Bensonhurst rose to his bait, making shameful spectacles of themselves, shouting racial epithets and engaging in an unforgettable dumbshow of bigotry, waving watermelons in the air and showing their middle fingers to television cameras.

There was finally a small degree of relief when some neighborhood leaders organized public expressions of grief for the murdered youth and convinced local residents to allow that a protest march take place without meeting loud resistance. A little peace, at last, a little silence.

This was a positive step. But what is the next step? Is silence the best response we have to offer? – as violence and dumbshow are the worst? These questions have no easy answers. We are not equipped to deal effectively with a massive failure in our own community. Instead, it is only too likely that we will hope for the noise to subside, will speak vaguely or even obsessively of “peace” and “healing” at the same time that we firmly avoid any real analysis of the problem, any sharp debate about its sources in our past, its structural function in our present, or its implications for our future. Such avoidance is an old story with us. The fact is that Italian America lacks a tradition of self-critical discourse.

It is not my business here to give a full account of the reasons for this lack. Such an account would be the work of many hands and many seasons. For the moment it will suffice to suggest a few lines of thought. The first is that the language spoken by poor and regional populations in Italy has been the instrument of their suppression for hundreds of years. This history of suppression has two phases. In the first phase, the rich learned standard literary Tuscan in school, erecting a wall of shibboleth that excluded everyone else from serious discursive power. That practice prevailed for centuries, but in the present it has been supplanted by the new method of forcing everyone to speak the standard dialect.<sup>2</sup> The modern policy gives to native speakers of regional languages indisputable access to a measure of central power, but it exacts as a price most of their own local linguistic self-possession. Though these approaches work differently, both have the effect of weakening the authority of discourse anywhere except in the centers – here local and standard may be seen to coalesce, as in the formula *lingua Toscana in bocca romana*. To these Italian deprivations has in the United States been added the cataclysm suffered by Italian migrants and their offspring when entering the order of English, a language with its own walls of shibboleth – walls that have required, for most families, two or three generations even to approach, much less surmount. Then, one would need to follow as well the effects of Italian Fascism upon the freedom of speech in Italian America, and the devastating impact of the war upon such prestige as the speaking of Italian may still have possessed in the United States.<sup>3</sup> What has been the effect of all these deprivations but silence? And what is such silence but degradation? The contemporary Sicilian poet Ignazio Buttita writes

*Un populu,  
diventa poveru e servu,  
quannu ci arrobbanu a lingua  
addutata di patri:  
è persu pi sempri.*

A nation  
turns poor and servile  
when they steal its language  
handed down by its fathers;  
it is lost forever.<sup>4</sup>

*Forever* is a strong word. While we are entitled to hope that it will turn out to have been too strong for the future that awaits us, such an outcome is scarcely certain. For it is plain that Italian America much resembles a nation whose language has been stolen from it. We are all proud of our famous crooners and divas and actors and actresses, no doubt, but we do not look to them for the power of utterance. Characteristically, they are the instruments of other people's words. Likewise, no number of brilliant artists, architects, designers, business executives, dancers, musicians, composers, or cinematographers can break the silence with which we are afflicted. When we look for discursive power, we find a prospect relieved by very few figures indeed. It is good to report that we are not totally speechless. The governor of the State of New York has made genuine contributions to the language of American politics. The literary theorist Frank Lentricchia has developed powerful methods for using criticism as a form of social action.<sup>5</sup> But these and a handful of others one might name do not constitute a thriving tradition of discursive power.<sup>6</sup> And this is what we require.

What is discursive power? It is the capacity for authoritative speech. Persons who possess it are able to use language to deal with their personal, social, and political problems.<sup>7</sup> Persons who lack discursive power are often reduced to servile responses – to violence or to dumbshow – when confronted with serious personal, social, or political problems. None of these is a satisfactory way to deal with a complex or threatening situation. While it is perfectly true that all such forms of expression evoke deep feelings, so that in a season of calm weather it may be useful to discuss cheerfully the powerful cult of Italian parenthood or to describe the masque of dignity played out by the mafia or to examine the complex poetics of the *festa*, still it is also emphatically the case that in a season of anger and shame none of these conversational themes constitutes an adequate reply to a serious question. Discursive power, on the contrary, allows its possessors to grapple directly with the problems that confront them.

While we can simply define this power as the capacity for authoritative speech, we must immediately problematize the definition by pointing to the complex structure of this power. We can do this readily enough by saying that discursive power requires or subsumes three distinct, though overlapping, possessions: these are a *language*, a *narrative*, and a *dialectics*.

Considered in the light of direct social dilemmas such as the one presented to us by the sequence of catastrophes in Bensonhurst, these three desiderata take on rather a

different aspect than they might if one were merely to look up the words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Indeed, I am proposing the attainment of these three – language, narrative, and dialectics – as strategic imperatives for Italian American culture. If it is not to be a nation *persu pi sempri*, Italian America requires these three in something like the senses I am going to outline.

## I

*Language.* Italian America must be bilingual. This is basic. While it is true that the achievement of linguistic competency in English has exercised the energies of two and even four generations in many families, it is also true that a nation which loses its language is itself lost. The language of Italian America is not English. Neither is it Italian, but an interlingual diglossic speech that passes freely between these two. The widespread attainment of bilingualism may appear an unrealistic goal. *Unrealistic*, in this as in many cases, is merely another word for *difficult*. Some may not reflect how much residual Italian remains in the conversation of even those United States citizens of Italian descent who think of themselves monoglot speakers of English. Even these persons will have a large repertory of Italian words and expressions – *lasagne, Sorrento, Madonna!* – and will routinely use some of these as markers when engaged in conversation with another person of Italian descent. Of course such a use of decontextualized fragments hardly constitutes bilingualism, and indeed is one of the clearest signs of the discursive impotence we mean to overcome, but it does suggest that even after several generations, there remains a base of linguistic desire upon which to build, that Italian Americans often still recognize some lost strength in the lost language they mildly invoke. However, such desire as most people feel has not often enough resulted in an understanding that for Italian America bilingualism is a strategic imperative.

Why *imperative*? Italian names can only be read in Italian. In English they become other names. Italian contemporaries can only be spoken with in Italian, or at best in diglot. Without Italian interlocutors, we are disconnected from not only our roots but our branches as well.

“But English is good enough for us,” some people say. If they are content to be identified as Italian Americans but to have no way to respond to Italian American problems *as* Italian Americans, then English is good enough for them. If their dialect for social problems can be the taxonomic monologue of the social sciences, then they must rest comfortable in the categories assigned to them by this monologue.<sup>8</sup> But if they wish to escape this objectification, then they need to be able to speak with their own tongues. And those tongues are, by history itself, decreed to be forked. To be Italian Americans we must speak the diglot.

Perhaps the most powerful reason if not the most convincing, to regard Italian as an imperative is the motive of pleasure. There is an enormous satisfaction, analogous to what we derive from the light of the sun, that comes from speaking the language in which one's own name is a word. It would be frivolous for me, no doubt, to add what a pleasure it is to speak this language on the hills and plains of Italy, but it will not be frivolous to point out that neither of the other two desiderata, narrative and dialectics, is attainable to us if we are not bilingual. Before explaining why this is the case, I would turn aside to remark that though the attainment of diglossia may be difficult, it is both pleasant and traditional. In Italy, since the Middle Ages, to have schooling at all has meant to master both the local language and the language of the center. Indeed, nowadays, though most Italians do not add Latin to these two tongues, as was long the custom, they do speak a third language, a regional variety of standard Italian that works as a mediating language, having features of their local speech mingled with enough of the standard speech to make itself understandable to Italophone speakers elsewhere. Thus a high degree of linguistic competence is a skill generally attained by Italians in Italy. A firm commitment to it in the Italian United States ought to widen the presence of Italian programs in lower schools and make the teaching of the language in colleges and universities as widespread as French or Spanish. But, though the tactical program for realizing this goal must be the theme of a different discussion, it must certainly be added here that the implementation of such a program would itself take us a long way towards the development of the power of authoritative speech, for this enterprise would require the marshalling of resources and the organization of positive social action on a scale large enough itself to count as an unmistakable expression of social force.<sup>9</sup> Finally, we must attain diglossia because of the other forms of discursive power that it will enable. The first of these is the possession of a narrative.

## II

*Narrative.* Italian America has no history of its own. This observation will not come as news to the hundreds of scholars, many of them members of the American Italian Historical Association, who have devoted their careers to the construction of this narrative. These scholars have succeeded in laying the groundwork for such a narrative. They have begun the vast archival enterprise that it requires, and they have written many of its parts. Equally important, they have created a forum for the discussion of their work. These achievements are the bases of a labor that has not yet been attempted because it has not yet been possible, or even imaginable. What is this labor?

The history of a people, considered in the fullest sense, is a narrative of its collective purpose. Clearly, given such a definition, the history of a people is always and everywhere impossible. Collective purpose, since it does not exist except as an abstraction, is incapable of full representation. However, fullness is not required for authority. What is required is articulation. To articulate a collective purpose *is* possible. To articulate such a purpose as narrative is history.

Can Italian America have a history? Only if it has a double language. Why is this? Because Italian America has as its boundary conditions Italy and the Italian language. Its narrative begins from these, returning to them and departing from them again and again. This ceaseless movement has been our case from the European beginning of Colombo, who made the passage four times. Italian America is not so much a *place* as it is a *passage* and a *message*. Because it does not remain unilocal, its narrative requires a diglot prose.

The message, that is, is written in diglot. Does this mean that Italian American history itself should be written in diglot? Such a suggestion has an echo of improbability that follows it around the room. And yet it is worth pointing out that models for diglot and even polyglot narratives exist in such modernist works as *Finnegans Wake* and *The Cantos*. Contemporary feminist theory has often recognized the desirability of a new language, and the intrepid Mary Daly has actually provided the model for such a tongue.<sup>10</sup> Compared with the fearful difficulties of such a project, the invention of a diglot Italian American would pose relatively negotiable difficulties.

The message, once we can write it, will teach us the passage. Not only should Italian American history read and speak Italian American, that is, but it must also discover the shape of its own passage, which cannot reveal itself except through the exploration of the diglot, with all that this will encode of our destiny, our genealogy, and our irreducibly doubled condition. This formulation, no doubt, seems unreasonably cagey, a mouthful of words and a thimble of sense. But this appearance is only the result of the absence of the diglot. People who cannot speak their own language – and that includes us all, since even the bilingual among us are without a rich bilingual community of readers and speakers – can only imagine what that language will say. What will it tell us when it can move back and forth freely among its two encyclopedias, its two archives, its two lexicons, its two vocabularies of heroism and its two grammars of love?

Indeed, the reader of the various utopian languages invented by such modernists as Gerard Manley Hopkins or Gertrude Stein will recognize without difficulty the advantages to be gained in sense and authority from inventing a language *out* of an historical situation *for* an historical situation. But the objection arises that such an invention would impose huge difficulties upon readers and writers. Difficulties, yes, and at first. Huge, probably not. The difficulties would be those of invention. If diglossia were widespread, then reading and employing and continuing to invent would be relatively simple matters.

However, I am willing to suspend the project of a diglossic prose, provided there are diglot readers and speakers. It is safe to say that no part of the message encoded in the passage will reveal itself until our history starts expressing itself with the



doubleness of its languages. Nor is the advantage to be gained purely ontological in nature. There is also the vast increase in assurance that belongs to a people that can read both sides of the page in its own history. Imagine a Jewish people in which hardly anyone could read Aramaic or Hebrew. But that is hard to imagine, because the Jewish people has been extremely attentive to the role of its own languages in sustaining its authority as a people, even under the worst possible historical conditions. Only that assurance and that authority enable a people to confront the contradictions in its own situation.

### III

*Dialectics.* Without contraries is no progression. But Italian America has cultivated that monotone cheerfulness which experienced observers always know for the clearest sign of uncertainty and stasis. Such fears, I should add, have not always ruled the forum. In the first four or even five decades of this century, when Italian America was still predominantly bilingual, it still possessed a lively tradition of dialectic, of internal critique. It had not forgotten the social inequities that had driven its people out of Italy. It still could hear the debates of class and culture that were continuing to emerge from the powerful struggles taking place there. One may reflect that two of the most effective oppositional voices in that period in the United States belonged to Italian Americans – the anarchist editor Carlo Tresca and the American Labor Party’s one vote in the House of Representatives, the member from Italian Harlem Vito Marcantonio. That each of these has recently been the subject of a biography by a scholar not of Italian descent is not only a compliment to their historical importance for the United States but also a suggestion that Sal La Gumina, who in the early 1970s published serious studies of Marcantonio, has not had all the honor he might deserve from younger generations of Italian American scholars.<sup>11</sup> We can never study carefully enough the oppositional clarities of Marcantonio or Di Donato, Giovannitti or Tresca. But it is fair to say that the dialectical tradition in Italian America that produced these clarities has been muted in recent years.

What would a lively dialectics do? It would, to begin with, proceed from a double tongue and a double narrative of passage. Thus it would always be aware of its own implicit contradictories. Second, it would proceed from the strength of its riches. Thus it would not fear the force of its own critical powers. It would begin, then, by dismantling the monotone discourse of weakness that has led us to repose so much tacit faith in forms of ethnic self-enclosure. It would ask, do we really believe in the Italian family, that construct of medieval merchant bankers? It would question the most sacred truths of food and folklore, asking, what are the implications of a past we make immobile? Is this a form of sacralization or is it simply a form of commerce? It would ask whether these or other discursive practices have the effect of strengthening our commitment to social progress or of weakening it. In short, it would provide us with a public conversation freed from the bonds of *omertà* and disobedient to the iron

protocols of *bella figura* – a conversation, that is, open to the admission of its own weaknesses and failures and so free to deploy its own strengths and victories.<sup>12</sup>

Is such a dialectics too difficult of achievement? In the present state of language, Italian America has a very uncertain grasp of discursive power. Its clearest and most effective messages have been now for a long time those of dumbshow: one calls to mind the indelible traces of the lullaby that sounds in the opening darkness of *The Godfather*, one sees the dancing feet of John Travolta, the profane masquerade of Madonna, the gritted teeth and the blood and sweat of Stallone with an automatic rifle on his shoulder. How do these images serve us, well or ill? We lack the means, at this moment, to decide such a question. Without such means, we cannot confront our own present realities. If Italian America is to regain the power of effective speech, it must work to conquer a language for itself. Is this too much to ask of our young men and women, that they employ their formidable cultural energy in a project of language? Can it be that others have reflected, as I did watching the films from 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Bensonhurst, that perhaps we have not been asking enough of these youths? The brute dialectics of dumbshow will never answer the expressive needs of a complex fate. The only project now is the project of our language.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Slightly different versions of this paper were delivered at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the American Italian Historical Association, “Italian Americans Celebrate Life: The Arts and Popular Culture,” San Francisco, November 9-11, 1989, and at the Second International Symposium of the consortium State University of New York at Albany / Regione Molise / Università di Salerno, “Southern Italy and America: Regional, Cultural and Political Life,” State University of New York at Albany, November 16-18, 1989. I am indebted to Professor Paola Sensi-Isolani for her support of the project of this paper and for the suggestion that it would be useful to the visiting scholars from Italy – as well as consistent with the theme of the paper – to preface it with a summary in Italian. I wish to express thanks to my colleagues Gloria Salerno, George P. Cunningham, and John D. Roy for useful discussions of some of the themes in this paper. Finally, I wish to thank the teachers of the Scuola d’Italia in New York for their contributions to the discussion of bilingual and bicultural education, which formed an important part of the background to the present essay.

<sup>2</sup>See Tullio de Mauro, *Storia linguistica dell’Italia unita* (Bari: Laterza, 1976), Gabriella Klein, *La politica linguistica del fascismo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), Sergio Salvi, *Le lingue*

*tagliate: Storia delle minoranze linguistiche in Italia* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1975). An interesting study of some of the contradictions built into this Project was given at the conference "Southern Italy and America" (see above, n. 1), by Ruth Ben-Ghiat, "Doing Away with Dialect: Fascist Anti-Regionalism and the Quest for a National Culture, 1930-1940." See also below, n. 4.

<sup>3</sup>See Gaetano Salvemini, *Italian Fascist Activities in the United States* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1977).

<sup>4</sup>Ignazio Buttita, "Lingua e dialettu," in Hermann W. Haller, *The Hidden Italy: A Bilingual Edition of Italian Poetry* (Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1986), p. 532. Haller's General Bibliography and Introduction to this anthology form an excellent beginning for a study of the problematics of Italian and Italian American language. Another text of basic utility is Ferdinando Alfonsi, ed., *Poeti italo-Americani / Italo-American Poets: Antologia bilingue / A Bilingual Anthology* (Catanzaro: Antonio Carello Editore, 1985). On the relations between Italian and American languages in writing, see R. Viscusi, "De Vulgari Eloquentia: An Approach to the Language of Italian American Fiction," *Yale Italian Studies*, I, 3 (Winter 1981), 21-38, and "Circles of the Cyclopes: Schemes of Recognition in Italian American Discourse," in Lydio Tomasi, ed., *Italian Americans: New Perspectives in Italian Immigration and Ethnicity* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1985), pp. 209-219.

<sup>5</sup>See Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup>The notion of discursive power developed here is aimed at the historical situation outlined in the opening pages. In its background, it owes much to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), though its resolution of the problem of language is in the nature of an intervention rather than an analysis. The first attempt to use Bakhtinian theory extensively in this field was that of William Boelhower, *Immigrant Autobiography in the United States: Four Versions of the Italian American Self* (Verona: Essedue Edizioni, 1982). Equally useful for its survey of the problematics of a grounded self in contemporary American ethnic discourse is Boelhower, *Through a Glass Darkly: Ethnic Semiosis in American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The proximate models for the present approach are in feminist criticism and other approaches to "marginal" languages. Signal examples are R. Radhakrishnan, "Negotiating Subject Positions in an Uneven World," in Linda Kauffman, ed., *Feminism & Institutions: Dialogues on Feminist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 276-290; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Authority, (White) Power and the (Black) Critic; or, it's all Greek to me," and Elaine Showalter, "A Criticism of Our Own: Autonomy and

Assimilation in Afro-American and Feminist Literary Theory," in Ralph Cohen, ed., *The Future of Literary Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 324-346 and 347-369; Cornel West, "Marxist Theory and the Specificity of Afro-American Repression" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 17-29.

<sup>7</sup>That is, they are not captive to the authority of the discourses of others. This is not to propose an act of domination but an act of resistance to domination. Voices of minorities need their own entitlement. An interesting parallel to this proposal is R. Radhakrishnan, "Poststructuralist Politics - Towards a Theory of Coalition," in Douglas Kellner, ed., *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (Washington, D.C.: Maisonneuve Press, 1989), pp. 301-332.

<sup>8</sup>The danger implied by a passive stance are important themes of Michael Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith (New York: Random House, 1970), *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1973), *The Birth of the Clinic*, trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1973), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977).

<sup>9</sup>Such a prospect is not pure fantasy. Important steps have already been taken. Two initiatives of the past decade; the project "Due Case, Una tradizione," under the direction of Professor Mario Fratti, has sponsored important advances in the teaching of Italian in the schools of the State of New York and merits careful study elsewhere in the United States; similarly, Scuola d'Italia in New York, a private school founded and supported by the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, has made major progress in developing a bilingual curriculum from kindergarten through *liceo* and may serve as a powerful model for similar initiatives elsewhere. Much basic institutional work remains to be done. The City University of New York is the second largest university in the country; one-fifth of its students are of Italian origin; The City University of New York does not offer a doctoral program in Italian language and literature. A task force is at work to propose such a program, but it is startling that such fundamental matters yet remain to be resolved.

<sup>10</sup>Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), explains her linguistic program: "When reflecting the artificial lights of patriarchal prisons, words help us recognize the superficial coatings, the flashy phoniness of the fathers' foreground falsifications." "Breaking the bonds/bars of phallocracy requires breaking through to radiant powers of words, so that by releasing words we can release our Selves." (p. 5). This program leads both to new words and to new senses for old words. The fulfillment of the plan begins to reveal itself in Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language, Conjured by Mary Daly in Cahoots with Jane Caputi* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), where not only a long and rich

word-list is provided but a new sort of prose is woven of it: "Spell-speaking, word-hurling/world-whirling women are kin to Fire-breathing *Dragons*, who we join in the work of Distempering the man's world" (p. 19).

<sup>11</sup>Dorothy Gallagher, *All the Right Enemies: The Life and Murder of Carlo Tresca* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902-1954* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); Salvatore J. LaGumina, "The New Deal, the Immigrants and Congressman Vito Marcantonio," *International Migration Review*, 4 (Spring 1970), 57, 75, "Vito Marcantonio: A Study in the Functional and Ideological Dynamics of a Labor Politician," *Labor History*, 13 (Summer 1972), 374-399.

<sup>12</sup>It may be that the word *dialectics* is misleading in this context. I do not have in mind a traditional Marxist oppositional discourse, with all that this would imply for a theory of historical meaning and purpose. The enterprise I am proposing is more modest – what isn't? – than that of Marxist dialectics, aiming instead at a language and method of critique that arise from and respond to specific historical conditions, allying themselves with parallel struggles of other groups, and neither requiring nor accepting the utopian allegory of a generalized *telos* equally valid for all persons. A remarkable vision of a new approach to oppositional tactics is that of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "Rhizome," in Deleuze and Guattari, *On the Line*, trans. John Johnston (New York Semiotext (e), 1983), pp. 1-65.