

A marvellous and useful new world: Constructions of American ecology in Christopher Columbus' Indies.

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Abstract

This paper analyzes some of the discursive constructs and the “semiogénesis processes” (Halliday, in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2003:180) that Christopher Columbus' earliest arrival at the Indies created, and the actions that his discourse stimulated in the following 500 years, regarding American ‘ecology’ – intended as all the earth ecosystem's living and non-living forms and under a deep ecology perspective. This study follows a multi-disciplinary and diachronic Ecolinguistic approach, therefore employing related theories and methodologies such as Critical Discourse Analysis; Intercultural, Globalization and Latin American Studies; History; Literary, Linguistic and Communication theories; as well as Global Environmental Analysis; Ecological Criticism; Ethno-Biodiversity Conservation; and Sustainability studies. After establishing the research corpus, this paper defines the historical context of 1492, of Columbus and of ‘America’, and it then analyzes Columbus' discourse of reality creation and description, exposing its two inter-connecting macro-categories of “*marvel*” for “*the Indies*”, the “*islands*” and the “*lands*”, and of their parallel “*possession and use*” as “*things of value*” for “*profit*”. Columbus' narration of the Indies' ecology invents a world where magic and reality are simultaneously constructed on the new territories' elements, even before they actually come into sight. Moreover, Columbus' ‘proto-America’ ideas are still part of contemporary discourses and actions on non-Western areas of the global Gaia ecosystem.

1. A diachronic macro-analysis of the earliest discourse on American ecology.

Among the many chronicles of the foundation of Western discourse on American nature, this analysis examines some early texts written by the very first person to open the age of Modernity, albeit unconsciously: Christopher Columbus. His explorations mark the beginning of the creation of modern perceptions, narratives and actions on the planet (see for example Sloterdijk, 2002; Cipolloni, 1990; Cipolloni, 1994) and its ecosystems, not only regarding Latin America.

This analysis is carried out on Columbus' fundamental narrative on ‘America’, when it was still thought to be the Indies, as it is reported in his two surviving official letters on his very first travel, the Letter to the Monarchs and the Letter to Luís de Santángel (1493). Columbus' controversial figure and writings' significance in contemporary global studies, proved by a massive past and present literature in various areas, is a fundamental starting point for a critical ecolinguistic research. This project aims to point out an important source of the categories through which Western communication started to “invent” America (as the Mexican philosopher and historian Edmundo O' Gorman suggested, [1958] 1986), and to construct modern discourses on the ‘new’ and ‘other’ ecological spaces. The research explores how Columbus' early myth creation and possession discourses, inscribed in classic Latin and Medieval traditions but also anticipating Renaissance and Modernity, may have greatly facilitated the European and Western

creation of the “Edenic islands discourse” (Grove, 1995:5; see also Pratt, 1992), and the consequent colonial and post-colonial uses of the tropical worlds (see for example Crosby, 1986).

Under a Hallidayan approach (Halliday, in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2003:180), this paper’s investigation intends to apply the trans-disciplinary (Fairclough:2003; 2005) and holistic (following Lovelock’s Gaia image, 1979, 2000; Lovelock, 2005) framework of Ecolinguistic studies (for example, as Chawla, 1991; Bang & Døør, 1993; Penman, 1994; Goatly, 1996; Fill, 1998; Harré et al., 1999; Fill, 2000; Bang et al., 2007; Mühlhäusler & Peace, 2006; Stibbe, 2007), intended as the broad and inclusive critical analysis of the “language of ecology” or “greenspeak”¹ and of the multicultural discourses on ecological matters. ‘Ecology’ is hereby intended as the interrelationships of all the earth’s living and non-living forms, under a deep ecology perspective (for example as Leopold, 1949; Naess, 1973; Naess, 2005 Stibbe, 2005). The role that languages and communication have in the creation of socio-ecological identities, and of positive and negative actions on the planet, encompasses the critical study of the global and local linguistic and communicative strategies used by different social actors to talk about ecology (the environment, nature, the planet’s local and global ecosystems) in different language contexts. It also includes two other factors, that are the analysis of the discourses therefore created, maintained and exported, compared to other cultures’ discourses and categories; and the analysis of human actions which potentially arise due to those forms of language. To analyze this, this research’s trans-disciplinary approach employs different correlated theories and methodologies such as Critical Discourse Analysis; Intercultural, Globalization and Latin American Studies; History; Literary, Linguistic and Communication theories; as well as Global Environmental Analysis; Ecological Criticism; Ethno-Biodiversity Conservation; Environmental Ethics; and Sustainability studies. A trans-disciplinary research of global ecological phenomena and of the discourses on nature created by the different socio-geographical sectors has become absolutely necessary: an inclusive study on how words create and determine human semiosis and actions, a critical analysis intended as both “a theory and a method” (Fairclough in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:121). It is urgent to link traditionally separated humanistic and scientific sectors, to actively face today’s crisis. Our global mosaic of realities has to be analyzed not only to underline human discourses’ often disruptive practical effects on the planet’s life, but also to try and change this tendency, with the introduction of more sustainable perspectives in contemporary mass communication society. This is due to the enormous and interconnected ecological issues that we have to deal with at present, given the increasing recognition of human kind’s active role in causing them.

Additionally, as this study wishes to include non-Anglophone voices situated in many of the areas where the investigated discourse took and takes place, a multi-cultural approach and use of textual references, often purposely translated, has proved to also be methodologically required. Therefore, this analysis will also embrace investigations that come from Europe as well as from the Latin American regions, in order to offer a critical spectrum that wishes to be as comprehensive as possible - including for example hispanophone Latin American researchers such as the historian Edmundo O’ Gorman ([1958] 1986), the philosophers Leopoldo Zea (1953; 1976; 2003), Arturo Andrés Roig (1991; 1998, 2002), Edgar Montiel (2002; 2005), Enrique Dussel (1994; 1995; 2003), the novelist and critic Carlos Fuentes (1992); as well as the Iberoamericanist Marco Cipolloni (1990; 1992; 1994), the jurisprudence philosopher Ugo Mattei (2007; 2008) the historian Aldo Andrea Cassi (2007), the biologist and biogeographer Mario Zunino (1997), the historian Jacques LeGoff (2002), the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk (2002), all self translated into English.

¹ A term coined in 1999 “as a catch - all term for all the ways in which issues of the environment are presented, be it in written, spoken or pictorial form” (Harré et al., 1999:VII).

Furthermore, because of the many necessary reflections on the ‘green’ lexicon and discourses’ origins, and on the global concerns’ historical formation, a fundamental diachronic expansion of the analysis is required. Thus, as the CDA theorist Jäger writes, “the analysis of a synchronic cut through a discourse strand can ... find its historic roots by referring this synchronic cut back to a chronology of the discursive events that thematically belong to the discourse strand at stake. Such historic references are particularly helpful...” (Jäger in Wodak & Meyer, 2001:48-49). A diachronic standpoint is another fundamental implementation of deeper investigations on what the Spanish sociologist and policy linguist Bastardas Boada (2003) calls today’s “post-modernity”, its “complexity paradigm” and “glocal” stage.

Thus, these comprehensive research fields aim to find and explore some of the original causes of the contemporary ecological crisis, particularly concentrating on the diachronic elaboration of Western discourses on Latin American ecological aspects. This direction tries to discover some of the primary categories of thought that created our contemporary ‘green’ imaginary and discourse, and the actions that follow, using the ‘New World’ as an emblematic example of today’s relations between the so-called North and South of the world. As the geographer David Pepper writes in one of his works on the relations between societies and nature,

“above all, a historical and ideological perspective teaches us that there is no one, objective, monolithic truth about society-nature/environment relationships, as some might have us believe. ... Such studies, of the ‘social construction’ of nature and society’s relationship to it, all underline, then, the need to get below the surface in order to be thinking and acting effectively: to see ideas about nature in social and historical context.” (Pepper, 1999:3-4).

To begin the analysis, this paper presents a brief outline of the ‘American’ and Spanish situations in 1492 (paragraphs 2 and 3), assessing what Columbus was looking for in his expedition (par. 4), before comparatively analyzing the Letter to the Monarchs and the Letter to Santángel to investigate his first acts of seizing the Indies’ lands (par. 5), his descriptions of the islands and their ecological elements (par. 6), and the beautiful spaces’ discursive creation (par. 7). It then continues examining the progression in Columbus’ definition of the lands and their functions (par. 8 and 9), concluding with a final paragraph where his two narrative macro-categories are included within the wider discourse on the linguistic and the practical legacy of the ‘discovery of America’ process (par. 10).

2. Columbus’ communication on his first travel.

Among the many documents comprising Columbus’ written corpus, almost all his official communication was instantly published and translated into many languages. Columbus’ very first official communication on his arrival at the Indies are two letters he wrote, one to the Spanish monarchs, and one to the royal treasurer Luís de Santángel, while he was arriving back to the Iberian peninsula in 1493. The Letter to Santángel (indicated in this text as LS) and the Letter to the Monarchs (LM) texts can be read in many ways, as a genres collage, a Propopian tale, a modern cosmogony, or an Uhr-plan of natural resources’ private use. LS and LM have extremely similar structures, and a very analogous organization and construction. Although quite similar in content, character and function, LM and LS have a different history. The original manuscript of the letter addressed to Santángel was the only one of the two that was thought to have survived throughout the centuries, and was firstly re-published in 1880². Nevertheless, at the end of 1985³ a sixteenth century copy of the letter Columbus had written to the monarchs was found by chance in a *libro*

² In the anonymous volume *Cristóbal Colón : cartas que escribió sobre el descubrimiento de América y testamento que hizo a su muerte* – see references.

copiador (Correspondence Book, where the useful mail used to copied), among other unknown Columbus documents' versions, and firstly published in 1989 (Rumeu de Armas, 1989; also see its complete critical edition, Gil & Varela, 1997). This very recent finding is an extraordinary addition for every contemporary study on Columbus, the European-American encounter and its many outcomes.

In addition, Columbus had also written a navigation journal (*Diario*) for private reading only, that queen Isabel had retained giving him a copy in return (both manuscripts were already lost in the first half of 1500). Nevertheless, a version of the journal, was preserved in friar Bartolomé de Las Casas' transcription, inserted as a paragraph of his *Historia de las Indias* (History of the Indies) with the title of *Libro de la primera navegación y descubrimiento de las Indias* (Book of the first navigation and discovery of the Indies). The Spanish historian and 'ethnologist' Las Casas started to compose his *Historia* around 1552, but the book was unknown and was only firstly published in 1829, by the famous Spanish philologist Martín Fernández Navarrete. Moreover, Las Casas' version of Columbus' Journal is anticipated by an incomplete letter-prologue directed to the monarchs, that Las Casas writes to have left as Columbus composed it, and that is nevertheless quite different from LM and LS. An analysis of the letter-prologue as transcribed by Las Casas, and its comparison with LM and LS, is going to be the object of an impending examination.

In this research, the versions of Columbus' texts that have been used are the LS' 1892 Spanish edition⁴ and the fifteenth century Spanish LS and LM original editions by Barry W. Ife, as well as Ife's LM and LS English translations⁵. Where specified, Columbus' texts have been self translated for etymological and lexical analysis' reasons. In addition, to keep a linguistic unity in this paper, all the textual references and the quotation from the non-English authors and works used in the analysis have been translated into English. Columbus' texts' extracted expressions are reported between inverted commas and in italics, whereas the essayists' quotes are between commas, and the foreign terms, in Latin or Spanish, are written in italics.

As anticipated above, the choice of examining the very first official communication about the expedition's findings has the purpose of analyzing their earliest discourse creation, as it has been composed by the voice of the earliest agent of both the physical and the communicative act. Columbus discourse on the Indies' ecological elements will be hereby macroscopically investigated, due to the vast amount of information available and the many issues involved, and the results that will be produced are to be considered as a first step towards a more complete future study of the early European discourse on Latin American ecology.

3. 1492: America.

In 1492, a continent had still not been suspected to exist in the middle of the Western sea, apart from Nordic memories of ancient encounters traceable in the Viking sagas (see for example

³ The *Libro copiador* (Letter book) appeared in a Spanish antique bookshop in Tarragona and was immediately bought by the Centro del Tesoro Bibliográfico y Documental de España in 1985. It was first critically examined by the philologists Juan Gil and Consuelo Varela (Gil & Varela, 1992), and it is now part of the Spanish Archivo de las Indias' collection.

⁴ Anonymous volume, available online, as the 1880 edition (note 2), on the Instituto M. de Cervantes' Virtual Library - see references.

⁵ Available online on the King's College's Early Modern Spain project - see references .

Fitzhugh & Ward, 2000). In the fifteenth century, nothing but water was expected between the Western coasts of Europe, and a still quite vague but enormous territory alternatively named ‘the far East’, ‘the Orient’, ‘Levant’, ‘Indies’ (the Indian peninsula), ‘Cathay’ (Marco Polo’s China), and ‘Cipango’ (legendary island mentioned by Polo, modern Japan).

As it is well known, the first clear European experience and visualization of the American lands as a new territory, separate from what would later be called Asia, was not accomplished by Columbus. It was most likely to have been another Italian explorer and controversial figure, Amerigo Vespucci (Florence, 1454 - Seville, 1512), who discussed this idea in his ambiguous 1502 “*Mundus Novus*” letter and varied versions. The creation and first use of the term Americas are also not owed to Columbus, but to a German cartographer, Martin Waldseemüller. In 1507 he would officially baptize the newly-established Western land mass with the neologism “America” in his *Cosmographiae Introductio* book and map⁶: “...alia quarta pars per Americum Vesputium ... inventa est, quam non video cur quis iure vetet ab Americo inventore, sagacis ingenii viro Amerigen quasi Americi terram, sive Americam dicendam”, that is, “the other fourth part [of the world’s lands] was found by Amerigo Vespucci, [land] that I do not see why anyone would lawfully forbid to call from [its] discoverer Americo, man of acute intellect, Amerigen [with a reference to the Greek *γη*, land], something like land of Americus, or America” (my translation). All this, more than a decade after Christopher Columbus’ first travel, and a year after his death. In spite of the new term and concept of America, Columbus’ name “*Indias*” and its derivations were to be still very much used (see paragraph 11).

In 1492, what was going to be America was an incredibly vast territory of more than 42 million km² with extremely diverse climates, regions, flora and fauna species, and an enormous number of different ethno-linguistic groups. Before 1492, the American continent was not, as it has been thought until very recently, the anthropologically untouched environment of the “pristine myth” (Mann, 2005:5) that many 1960s and 1970s environmentalists portrayed in opposition to Western colonial and industrial disasters. Recent findings are proving how many ecosystems had been manipulated and anthropized by several ancient cultures, for example in the Amazon and Andes regions, to improve agro-forestry and agricultural production. Nevertheless, in 1492 the planet’s ecology’s modern revolution was about to start. The American socio-biological space - the ‘natural and ‘cultural’ worlds - would radically and forcibly change, and new syntheses were to be created. Starting right after Columbus’ arrival, a large number of the Atlantic islands’ inhabitants and ecosystems were eradicated and completely changed, even before the actual conquest period (from Hernán Cortés’ expedition in the Aztec empire in 1519, to the last Southern and Northern American territories’ subjugations at the beginning of the eighteenth century), and before the great epidemics and atrocious slavery system. For example, the Antillean Carib or Lucayo and Tahino ethnic groups that are described in Columbus’ first letter, as well as their culture and therefore their relations with their ecological surroundings and cosmogony, were very soon completely eliminated, leaving their trace only in a few geographical (*Caribe*, Caribbean – also see paragraph 10), phenomic (*huracán*, hurricane, probably “centre of the wind” in Tahino) and cultural (*hamaca*, hammock, is a Tahino root) terms. In roughly a hundred years, “one out of every five people on earth” had probably been killed (Mann, 2005:94). Simultaneously, all the landscapes, the marine, mountain, forest and the other incredibly diverse ecosystems, were to suffer an utter disappearance or change, of names, discourses and uses. The astonishment their ecology produced to the European eye did not stop the conquerors and colonizers from creating narratives that immediately started to promote their mass-scale use and devastation. The native peoples were just one of the ecological elements that were to be exploited for the expansion of European power.

⁶ The only known copy of the volume’s first edition, published in 1507, is in the New York Public Library, but it is available online (see references).

4. 1492: Columbus.

It is with Columbus' first expedition that Spain and Europe open the first modern stage: “world mercantilism” (Dussel, 2003:46), that initiated contemporary separation between the social and the natural worlds. Nevertheless, global issues of course have numerous historic roots, just as Columbus' ideas have many traceable diachronic sources. For his calculations, studies and narratives, Columbus significantly follows Rustichello da Pisa's and Marco Polo's fourteenth century memories of his family's travels to Khubilai Khan's empire. He also read Latin philosopher Posidonius's (135-51 b.c.) measures of the earth's circumference, and his Platonic-Ptolemaic-Aristotelic philosophical *Orbis Terrarum*. Other sources for Columbus' travel planning were the Italian cosmographer Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli's (1397-1482) letter on a scheme for sailing westwards to reach the “Spice Islands” – based on severe miscalculations of the size of the earth, also due to confusions between Arab, Italian and Spanish sea miles -, and French theologian Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420)'s *Imago Mundi* treatise, with nominalist and Ockhamist writings and calculations on astral influences.

In 1492, Christopher Columbus, a Humanist of some erudition and a Catholic version of Dante's Ulysses, was mainly searching for a shorter maritime spice route to the Indies, planning to anachronistically reach the Mongolian empire and expand European trade power. He also wished to bring an improbable new crusade against the Muslims, mixing up his different sources in his writings. Columbus and the Spanish kings were also part of a very old and powerful Christian world, as it is evident from the numerous invocations of Christ's supremacy, found in all of Columbus' corpus. This “providentialist gloss” (Ife, 2002) general frame helps validating every word inside its solemnity, therefore dogmatically justifying every following action: the islands found are “*a place pointed out by the hand of Our Lord*” (LM). The religious category connects, though the lexical choices and the culturally-shared semantic universe it carries, the Muslim world with the Great Khan on one side, and the true Christian values on the opposite pole. In the Letter to the Monarchs' text Columbus explicitly writes of “*the war and conquest of Jerusalem, which was the reason for undertaking this enterprise*”, therefore indicating his purpose of leading a new crusade to free the Holy Sepulchre. This macro-concentration around Christianity justifies the agents's god-given mission of “Christopher”⁷ and of civilization to other, historically sacrilegious, spaces. This narrative polarization device echoes similar but much more contemporary communicative strategies of manipulative connection and polarization of perceived differences into oversimplified macro-categories, in order to divide the world between ‘us’ (the ‘civilized’, ‘free’ Christian humanity), and ‘them’ (the ‘terrorists’, the ‘foreigners’, the ‘different’), to justify new economic wars with inaccurate religious pretexts.

The monarchs are the other principal agents of the main action described in Columbus' letters: LM starts with a rhetorical eulogist invocation of the god-given power of the Spanish royals, that the Christian divinity expanded through the new victory, “*greatest ever given to any monarch*”, whereas in LS the divine victory is directly associated with Columbus (“*Our Lord has given me on my voyage*”). Also, LM starting formula bears a more solemn tone compared to LS, clearly stating its addressee's difference, status and relationship with Columbus. The LS has a less

⁷ The etymological meanings of his name and its Latin, Portuguese and Spanish versions are analyzed by Columbus as carrying an intrinsic significance for his own purposes of “bringer of Christ” (Cristoforo and Cristóforo in Italian and Spanish, as “Christós” + “fero”, to bring in Latin), “colonizer” (Colón, his Spanish surname version), and holy spirit's representative (Colombo, his original Italian surname, “white dove”, symbol of the biblical holy spirit's visual representation) – see Cristofanelli et al., 1992; Todorov, 1997.

solemn and more pragmatic opening tone, being directed to the real financial investor and risk-taker of the operation - a banker and trader - but with a very different hierarchical status and power compared to the monarchs'. "Crusades may be well of interest to the monarchs, but might cut less ice with merchants and financiers than would news about the riches of this world." (Ife, 1992, online edition). In both letters, the monarchs are portrayed as the "*Most Christian and most high and most mighty*" sensors and sayers, the mental and verbal ideators of his expedition, as if it had been the kings and not Columbus to ideate and prepare it, stressing Columbus' deep ingratiatory intention. Historically, the kings had not personally given Columbus much money for his first expedition, and that it had been the wealthy treasurer Santángel to personally lend him more than a million *maravedís* on the royals' behalf. The population of Palos had also been ordered by the monarchs to pay for and construct two ships for Columbus, to extinguish a political debt.

In the LS text, there is also a reference to Columbus' restricted economic resources for his first travel, as he writes to Santángel at the end of the letter that "*And in truth I could have done a great deal more if the ships had served me as reason demanded.*" In LM there is even a longer and more explicit complaint: "*I should very much have liked to take small caravels, but since this was the first voyage and the men I had were afraid that the sea would be rough and were dubious about the voyage, and there were so many obstacles, and everyone was bold enough to criticise this route and put thousands of dangers in my way without giving me any reason, my wishes were disregarded*" Therefore, in spite of his many formal praising expressions for the monarchs, Columbus is very present as the real central agent of the facts' narration. The agent Columbus is generally associated with verbs of physical action such as to leave, to come, to gather, to follow a route. These expressions of agency reveal how Columbus really portrays himself, and his concurrent characterization of the hero's narrative, as the figure that puts into practice what he had thought, and said, at court, although he disguises it under the many religious and eulogist references. The creation of the narrative "I" and of the self's "place in history" (Ife, 2002) is implicitly found in the construction and description of the actual spaces and landscapes of the Letters (see next paragraphs), but also explicitly in Columbus' conscious use of complaints, reminders and legal discourse, in his pleads for recognition and promotion. Columbus writes in the LM that "*... may Your Highnesses remember that I left wife and children and my homeland to serve you, I spent all I had, I wasted seven years and received nothing but opprobrium and discredit and suffered great need; ...this voyage, which was due more to my importunity than to anything else; and not only have I received [no] thanks, but promises made to me have not been fulfilled. I do not ask Your Highnesses for reward in order to make money, because my intention is only to serve God and Your Highnesses...; and so I ask that I be honoured in accordance with my service.*" And also that "*The Church of God must also attend to this: ... it is right that the Holy Father should provide prelates who are absolutely free of greed for earthly goods...; and so I humbly request that in the letter which you will write about this victory, you ask him for a cardinalate for my son...*". It must not also be forgotten that all the explorers' chronicles were also and above all written for the monarchs, an extremely socially and economically powerful reader, narratee and addressee. The source's intention of praising his communicative target, as well as promoting himself, in order to obtain more sponsorships, benefits and power, is quite tangled in these expressions. Ife calls this the "administrative constraints" and "contractual obligations" of the "business of discovery", as well as of the "defensiveness" and "sense of accountability" in the explorers' use of the "power of the document and the written record." (Ife, 2002).

Consequently, in Columbus' documents all these many contrasting and complementary influences are reflected. In his broad discourse, different and conflicting points of view often coexist. Columbus' culture is full of seemingly ambivalent thoughts, and his words are "the result of the graft of a series of experiences (technical-nautical and religious) that he had in Portugal and

Andalusia, and regarding a Mediterranean mercantile *koiné*. Such a picture should be compared with the disorganized readings of a curious and inspired self-taught man, particularly interested in the meeting points between time and space representations. It is an ideal both animated and legitimated by a religious exaltation, exhibited with surprising obstinacy and insistence; nevertheless, it is also a deeply secular, modern and realist life and cultural ideal.” (Cipolloni, 1992:156-157). This greatly illustrates the ideological duality and shifts of Columbus' personal and his historical context (see Todorov, 1997), the significant epistemological passage from one epoch to another, from Middle Age to Modernity.

5. Land in sight?

Supported by his composed vision and by his absolute hieratic faith, Columbus' Indies are such and there even before he sees any land. As the Argentinean philosopher Arturo Andrés Roig underlines, “The ships sailed from Puerto Palos with an ideological world along them, result of a very ancient elaboration, and if we wanted to find its antecedents, we should go and search for them in the organization and expansion epochs of the Greek and Roman ecumenism.” (Roig, 1991). Furthermore, Leopoldo Zea, an acute Mexican analyzer of the European and American cultural identities' creation processes, sustains a sharp socio-economic analysis: even before being invented, America is already “a European creation. America arises as a reality inside European cultural life, among one of the largest crises that this culture suffers. The discovery of the American Continent has its origins in the ineluctable necessity that the European has for a new world. Fate does not count at all in this adventure. Europe needs America, and for this reason discovers it.” (Zea, 1973). Columbus writes in LM that “... *I had to do what those who were to sail with me wanted - anything to get the voyage over and done with and find the land.*”

On the early morning hours of the 12 October 1492, Spanish Rodrigo de Triana yelled “*Tierra a la vista*⁸!” (Land in sight!) from the Pinta caravel: Columbus' expedition had found a shorter way to the Indias, exactly as their commander-in-chief has forecasted. The Italian sailor is aprioristically sure that he has started to discover the shortest nautical route to Kublai Khan's empire, as he had planned. As the linguistic anthropologist Tzvetan Todorov writes in his famous book on the European and American encounter, Columbus' interpretations of reality's signs are always predetermined by the result he wants to achieve, and his whole expedition to the Indies “...is a consequence of this same behaviour: he does not discover it, he finds it where he ‘knew’ it should have been (that is, where he thought the Asian oriental coast would be).” (Todorov, 1997:27).

Even more, according to another essential Mexican philosopher who deeply researched European and Latin American multicultural identity issues, Edmundo O' Gorman,

“Columbus lives and acts in the frame of a world in which America, unexpected and unexpected, was anyway a pure future possibility, but of which neither him nor anyone had any idea, nor could have. ... Columbus' travels were not, and could not be, travels to America, because the interpretation of the past does not have, cannot have, as the correct laws, retroactive effects. ... With diametrical difference, therefore, from the outlook of many historians, that start with a totally constituted ‘America in sight’, we will start from a void, from an America that still does not exist”. (O'Gorman, 1986:79-80).

⁸ Registered in the Diary on the 12 October, 1492.

6. The Indies: naming and possessing.

The Indies, focal point of the text and the action, are an expression of the semantically empirical repertoire, a collective cultural symbol, and it comprehends all Columbus' personal and historical, synchronic and diachronic contexts. The Indies are one of the trigger words of the intratextual and intertextual references of all Columbus' corpus, just as the terms "*island*" and "*maravilla*" are (see next paragraph). Also, the first and central joint actions of finding and taking possession of the Indies create a facticity account (Martin & Rose, 2003; Potter 1996) where the new spaces are in fact old, they are given as a fact before any eventual interpretation. They are where it was planned for them to mentally be, therefore their invention, creation and narration coincides with the real purpose of the action - possessing, conquering, expanding the empire. "For Columbus, to discover is an intransitive action" (Todorov, 1997:16). Description and ownership seem to simultaneously go together, culturally identifying, and thus creating, the new reality. Arriving at the Indies, and looking at the islands for the first time, Columbus is creating the space and elements he is seeing, but he is also immediately seizing everything, as it is reported in his two letters. Both LM and LS have quite long descriptive sections, although they are differently inserted inside their two texts. Two main macro-discourses are deeply knotted together: the report of the new ecological spaces' immediate possession, and the description of their incredible marvels (see paragraphs 7 and 8).

Columbus portrays himself as the victorious hero just back from the Indies in LM, and just arrived at the Indies in LS, but in both letters he writes that he found islands and people, similarly described as abundant, and that he immediately took possession of everything, with the required legal acts and rituals. In LS he writes that "*I found there very many islands inhabited by people without number, and I have taken possession of them all on behalf of Their Highnesses by proclamation and by unfurling the royal standard, and I was not contradicted.*" And in LM he similarly states that "*I found people without number and very many islands, of which I took possession in Your Highnesses' name by royal proclamation and by unfurling the royal standard, and without contradiction.*" Planting the royal flag and proclaiming the required legal formula lead to an immediate Western conquest of the space, that had been thought of long before it was put into practice. Possession for Columbus and the Spanish royals coincides with the very first act of baptizing the lands, that is with the necessity of reification and visualization of an unexpected reality inside a well-established semantic frame. As Ife writes introducing the two letters,

"...the Santángel letter was published in part to create the impression, ... that the new discoveries were Spanish possession by right. The almost simultaneous publication of the Santángel letter in some of the major commercial and political centres of Europe ... is clearly an attempt at blanket press coverage of an important event on the world stage, and it shows an early appreciation of the advantages of media manipulation on a grand scale." (Ife, 1992).

In the second paragraph of both LM and LS, the second ritual action that is described of verbally and physically seizing the 'free' space, and turning it into the 'private property' category, is instantly perceivable through Columbus' "real naming fury" (Todorov, 1997:33) over every land and water space, and therefore their semantic appropriation. The biblically-rooted action of taking possession of any otherness from the self (spaces and life forms, the animals and plants as well as the closer 'otherness' to man, the woman, in the Genesis books) through its naming, god's

Verbum that creates reality and the world, and baptism that creates identity and self-definition, as well as the culturally-centred possession and private property concepts, are joint in Columbus discourse with the blindness towards the reality he is seeing and naming. From the very beginning of these letters, reality, or what we would holistically call the ecological world, is encompassed by culturally intra-textual references, that adjust it to the source's needs of systematization and appropriation. His first verbal and physical appropriation acts are of biblically baptizing every island he finds with a new Christian name, that is a homage to religion (“*San Salvador*” [possibly Watling island, today's San Salvador in the Bahamas archipelago], “*Santa Maria de la Concepción*”) or to the royal family (“*Fernandina*”, “*Isabela*”, “*Juana*”). At the very end of the LM he also writes that “...*the first island of the Indies, nearest to Spain, ... this island they call Martinino* [Martinique]. ... *The second they call Caribo* [one of the Lesser Antilles islands]... *there is another island they call Boriquen* [Puerto Rico], *and none of this is very far from the other part of the island of Juana, which they call Cuba; in the western part, in one of the two provinces I have not visited, which is called Faba* [a name used by Columbus for a Great Can's land or city]...”

The Bahamas archipelago and the other islands are being created with the superior religious and exclusive anthropocentric legitimation that comes through the qualitative polarization of ‘us’, the ‘civilized’ Christian people, and the rest of the world. As A. A. Roig wrote, the specificity of the discovery-conquest act

“was associated with a continuous message, of a discourse that had as its emitting source, the ‘discoverer-conqueror’, and as its receiver, which is his same own culture, organized around its own world's self-image. ... Therefore, we could say that a ‘discovery’ act was produced, accomplished by an historical subject that had reached a developed self-consciousness level, precisely for the same act of ‘discovery’. ... And that message was what made the ‘discovery-conquest’ act ‘complete and perfect’⁹, as it was a relation of an emitting source and a receiver on an equal level, and that were talking the same language: that of world's domination. This is an intra-cultural message, and not from one culture to a different one, whose populations would be in the condition of receiving it, on their turn, when they would be duly actualized, that is transformed, against their will, in receiving subjects.” (Roig, 1991).

Columbus applies Western utilitarian pragmatism as regards nature to the newly encountered Indies, seen as an endless space to economically evaluate and exploit. With the immediate appropriation act and his narration, again putting himself on the centre stage as the leading actor, Columbus takes immediate possession not only of the islands, but significantly of the people as well, described from the start among their elements (see next paragraph). Besides, and interestingly, in LS Columbus writes that “*I have not been able to determine if they have **private property***¹⁰, *for it appeared from what I could see that what one person had was shared among everybody, especially in the case of food.*” Similarly, in LS he writes that “*I have not been able to establish if any of them have **private property**, because ... when I was with the king in the town of Navidad, I saw that all the people, and especially the women, would bring him manioc*¹¹ *roots, which is the food they eat, and he ordered them to be shared out, a very unusual way of provisioning.*” Evidently, Columbus is not really trying to “*determine*” if the islands' inhabitants have any sense of the fifteenth century European “*private property*” or “*bienes propios*” concept. He is not a twenty first century globalized citizen, conscious of cultural relativism. He

⁹ My inverted commas, “cabal” in the Spanish text; as interpretative solution for the word, I chose the “complete and perfect” expression, between commas.

¹⁰ “*bienes propios*” in the Spanish original, literally “own”, “*proprios*” and “possessions”, “*bienes*”. For the concept of “*bienes*” in Columbus discourse see paragraphs 9 and 10.

¹¹ *Manihot esculenta*, called manioc, yuca (with interference with the different genus *Yucca*) or cassava is a shrub of the Euphorbiaceae family, native of South America. The term manioca is probably of Guaraní origin.

nevertheless contrasts the “*private property*” concept with the opposite action of the verb “to share”: the goods are shared among the villagers, and this act is felt as very ‘other’, as it is associated with the fundamental goods category of food, its social distribution and access. Columbus is thus revealing something that regards a similar, contemporary Western discourse on land possession and use rights in Latin America. Land property is still heavily disputed, and a cause of violence between the state and the national and international economic interests on one side, which are often the invaders or colonizers, and the indigenous and peasants as groups and movements on the other. It is well known that the discursive ideas and the actions regarding the concept of “*property*” are strongly part of the Standard Average European (SAE) languages (Whorf, 1956), and that what is culturally considered to be “*private*”, also regarding the individual’s body, identity and personal sphere, deeply varies among the world’s cultures. Columbus’ discourse on the European right to “*property*” appropriation is an example of a strong anthropocentric and elitist communication, where power, religious and cultural predominance are never questioned, but simply transferred to other spaces. Western political significance of resources’ private “appropriation ability” (Mattei, 2007; 2008), that started with the Roman law and its definition of *dominium* (property), is part of Columbus’ ideology even before his first travel. In fact, Columbus had brought with him a notary as well as a priest, to perform the necessary juridical and symbolic rituals to claim the right over any eventual property. This appropriation act of space, regarded as *res nullius* (as Cassi, 2007), is the same as for example the very recent Russian formal seizure of the North Pole, or the British and Argentinean competition over the Antarctic’s possession, and the multinational industry’s self-authorized patent ownership of ancient and obviously unbound seeds and plants varieties like rice, maize, etc. Furthermore, the pragmatic aspects of Columbus’ discourse echo modern and contemporary development strategies, such as the international ‘conquest’ of the Amazonian regions, and the many deforestation schemes for colonial settlements, for extensive mono-culture towards contemporary biofuels production and cattle ranching pasture creation (and the so-called “hamburger connection” –Myers, 1981), for territorial or underground exploitation of fossil fuels and precious minerals, or for exclusive biodiversity pseudo-conservation. Throughout both LM and LS letters, there also are for example embryonic ideas of modern colonial use strategies, like the *encomienda* system, and an explicit plan about an Indian slavery system as a forced labour organization for mass production at the very end of both letters.

These matter-of-fact exploitation systems still have something in common with parts of contemporary neoliberalist pseudo-sustainable development policies, such as very ethically questionable mechanisms between ‘first’ and ‘third world’ countries like the international financial loans system and foreign debt diminution in exchange for monopolistic resource use, and the several environmental trade-off strategies such as the swap of carbon dioxide and contaminated materials storage for international economic investments. As Columbus forecasts in LS, his expedition will indeed lead to “*very great trade and profit*”.

7. The new islands: description and promotion.

In both LM and LS texts, seizing does not prevent Columbus from describing the new space. As Columbus arrives at the Indies, parallel to the pragmatic act of the conqueror there is also always the more descriptive act of the explorer. As his portrayal of the islands is primarily directed to promote his ‘discovery’ and the new findings to the Spanish kings in order to get promotions and further sponsorships, the descriptions are also strongly intended to advertise everything he encounters. The role that Columbus’ descriptive language and discourse played in shaping

American reality's semantic framing and the consequent human attitudes towards it, is critically important for a diachronic examination of today's global ecological situation. As the sociologist and comparative philosopher Saroj Chawla writes on the linguistic and philosophical roots of contemporary global environmental crisis,

...the way we arrange and interpret reality [has] a profound influence on all of our activities. The language habits of the community influence our perception and experience; they predispose us toward certain choices of interpretation and action. The 'real world' is to a large extent unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group. These language habits include more than simply language: they include all the analogical and suggestive values of the speech pattern." (Chawla, 1991:254). Moreover, it must not be forgotten how in the Medieval and Renaissance perceptions of nature, also traceable nowadays, language and its "images and metaphors were not considered to be surface ways of representing a deeper underlying reality, they were the reality. ... It followed, too, that language, ritual, spectacle, image and metaphor became active ways by which people could transform nature. (Pepper,1999:125).

After the first introductory paragraphs, in both LM and LS Columbus' facticity construction continues with several very long paragraphs of descriptions about the islands, with a general search for classification of their 'natural' and 'anthropological' elements. These paragraphs are differently inserted into LM and LS' texts, and the subsequent two similar discourses on the islands are constructed with a more organic structure in LS, while they are more scattered and juxtaposed with the above mentioned other discourses (see previous paragraph) on appropriation, religion and legal issues in LM. In LM and LS, the new lands' environmental narratives are set off by the concept and semantic universe of "*island*", that was anticipated in the incipits, and that also already was in the minds and expectations of the reader. The term "*island*", used 12 times in LM and 14 in LS, is a set for the narration and the semantic universes that, triggered by the lexical and rhetorical devices, carry a long history of mental echoes of longed-for edenic spaces (see Grove, 1990: 5;13), that will be also found in the land of Utopia and the New Atlantis concepts, more than a century later. Columbus' islands are depicted and advertised as "*much to be desired and, once seen, never to be left*" (LS). Columbus' systematization is quite precise. The vast number of ecological elements mentioned and described about the islands are their "*coasts*", "*hills*", "*mountains*", "*country*", "*valleys*", "*plains*", "*fields*", "*trees*", "*fruits*", "*vegetation*", "*flowers*", "*rivers*", "*waters*", "*harbours*", "*winds*", "*breezes*", "*birds*". The islands are also associated with their "*people*", "*spices*", "*gold and other metals*" throughout their descriptions – sometimes seeming to be more desired and promised than really in front of Columbus' eyes (see paragraph 9). Interestingly, the "*indios*" (12 times in both LM and LS) are described together with the other elements of the space Columbus is looking at, often in the same sentence or paragraph. Although the human presence is afterwards downgraded in a descending scale to "*naked*", "*fearful*", "*too liberal*", "*beasts*", "*idolaters*" and "*slaves*" in the text, the first lexical choice and categories applied to it are "*people*" (15 times in LM and 16 in LS) and "*inhabitants*" (2 times in LS and , 2 times as "*inhabited*"; interestingly never used in LM). They are thus perceived as 'human beings' (therefore different from 'animals' or 'plants') but part of the lands' elements, after the metals and before the mountains, thus more 'natural', less 'human' than the explorers. (In addition, Columbus once portrays women indios as more hard-working, writing that "*The women*¹² *seem to me to work harder than the men.*" - LS). It is well known how what is perceived as 'natural' is one of the most complex, ambiguous and culturally-bound human discourses, extremely dependent on its many and different contexts of use, a subjective mental universe formed by extremely diverse semantic worlds (see for example Mühlhäusler & Peace, 2006). In addition, many of the (conscious and unconscious) metaphors that have been globally established

¹² "*muger*", an old version of modern Spanish "*mujer*", from the Latin *mulier, mulieris*.

to represent and talk about nature are deeply culture-based. The traditional Western separation and polarization between the 'human' and the 'natural' worlds (also named the 'environment' in many SAE languages, or what surrounds the human self), and the categorization of 'natural' inside the macro-area of qualitative negative 'otherness', imply an unequal power relation (van Dijk, 2003b; see also for example van Dijk, 2003a). 'Other', 'less human' (original peoples and first nations) and 'non human' (animals and plants) life forms have often been culturally downgraded in Western cosmogony, and classified as similar to the more natural, and thus other and lower, categories. Within the SAE language category, Chawla writes for example on the differences between English and the Amerindian languages: "The tendency [of the English language] to rank organic life and place human beings at the top of the pyramid is akin to separating the glass from the water. Human beings standing apart from organic life assume that they can exercise authority over the organic world." (Chawla, 1991:4). Columbus repeats and expands this 'natural' vs 'human' opposition, as well as the qualitative status categorization from a less to a more 'civilized' humanity.

Secondarily, in both letters all the descriptive elements are also almost always specified with connotative terms. There are numerous augmentative adjectives and expressions that specify all these elements, and portray the new islands as incredibly exuberant, inexhaustible and as the cause of infinite astonishment in both the writer and the readers. This is accomplished by a very heavy use of two facticity tools. The first one is extreme ease formulation (Potter, 1996), with the maximisation of the many ecological elements' dimensions and quantity: the lands are "*so beautiful and rich*", "*countless*", "*so many and full of so many good things which we need*", the "*open*" "*countries*" are "*beyond comparison in those of Castile*", the mountains are "*all of a thousand different shapes and are all very beautiful and fertile and accessible and covered in trees*", the "*trees*" "*seem to reach the sky*", they are "*broad and very beautiful*", there are "*huge palms of a thousand different kinds*", the "*rivers*" are "*copious*", "*good and wide*" and "*with good waters of which the majority carries gold*", "*rivers and harbours*" are "*so many that are better than those in Christendom, that is a wonder*", there are "*many*" and "*beautiful*" "*pine groves*", "*meadows*", "*honey*", "*fruits*", "*birds*", all "*so numerous and so fine that they have to be seen to be believed*", "*Española*" [Haiti] is "*greater than all of Spain*" and "*Juana*" [Cuba] is "*larger than England and Scotland together*". The other facticity device is vagueness, that sometimes is obtained through the same oversizing extreme ease formulation effect. Therefore, many adjectives and expressions referring to the islands and their environment echo absolute and countless object constituents, such as "*very many*", "*so large*", "*so fertile*", "*densely populated*", "*very flat*", "*very large*", "*countless*". Both these discursive devices are used to persuade the reader, to construct a semantic world of fable, allegory and expectations, as well as to enforce ideas and selectively inventing the world for the writer's pragmatic purpose of increasing his personal power and be socially elevated, avoiding too specific issues with the use of general although enhancing expressions. As Columbus writes in LM, before he arrive at the Indies "*... all this was unknown and only spoken about in the form of fables*". Columbus therefore starts its transfer and application of European ideals to the new space, possessing it but contemporarily with an amazed look at its natural wonders. He uses a novelesque aura and plenty of superlative expressions to describe them, as in a supernatural, magical world. The Mexican novelist and essayist Carlos Fuentes wrote that "If Renaissance conceived that the World was finally dominated, and that man, in reality, was the mean of all things, including nature, the New World revealed itself immediately as a disproportioned, excessive, hyperbolic, incommensurable nature." (Fuentes, 1992:50). Ecologically dangerous discourses' as well as literary narratives' roots, such as those regarding the "limitless" production and capacity of the planet, and those dealing with the "magic realism" definition and assessment in the second half of twentieth century's Latin American novel tradition, can be traced in Columbus' enthusiastic vision and myth creation (see paragraph 11). Fuentes writes, about Gabriel García Márquez' famous "*Cien años de soledad*" (Hundred Years

of Solitude, published in 1967), that “between nature and history, Márquez builds the answer of myth, of the narration of art.” (Fuentes, 1992:19; see paragraph 10), a choice that seems very close to Columbus and his historical context. In addition, contemporary global and production-centred world images and perceptions of non-Western areas still continue the myth of peripheral spaces that must be contained and rationalized, and that have also been created to produce never-ending resources, just like a god-made garden of Eden for an endlessly reproducing human species to use, or at least for the sectors who own it. This attitude is still very much applied, rationally and unconsciously, even in some twenty first century biological and ethno-linguistic diversity conservation schemes.

8. A marvellous space.

Therefore, everything is “*beyond belief*” (LS), “*beyond comparison*” (LM). Columbus semantically creates a distant, magic but realistic space, where nature is an exaggerated and amazing presence, although simultaneously always interpreted in a utilitarian and pragmatic way. Roughly one half of Columbus macro-discourse is an enthusiastic creation and description of the new space, as analyzed above, where Columbus’ key term that can summarize this other side of his reality perception and augmentation, is the Latin-rooted, Medieval *mirabile* concept, the “*maravilla*”, or “*marauilla*” used 6 times in the LM and 7 in the LS fifteenth century Spanish texts, that translates into English as “wonder”, “marvel” (also see Greenblatt’s fundamental research, 1991; Cipolloni, 1990). In LM, Columbus writes that the islands “*are so fertile that, even if I could describe it, it would not be of marvel to doubt it in its credibility*” (“*no hera marauilla ponerse dubda en la creencia*”, my translation). In LS, the San Salvador island is named so to commemorate “*His High Majesty, who marvellously gave all this*” (“*marauillosamente*”, my translation): the Christian god’s marvellous acts are here subtly compared to Columbus’ own creation of the new paradise.

The term “*maravilla*” and its derivations are used to refer to the islands and their natural elements: “*so many good, wide rivers that it is a marvel*”; “*There are six or eight kinds of palms which are a wonder to behold..., as too with the other trees and fruits and plants. There are marvellous pine groves and broad meadows*”; “*Española is a marvel*” (LS); “*so many rivers and harbours that are better than those in Christendom, that it is a wonder*”; “*marvellous huge palms*”; “*This island [Española] has marvellously temperate breezes, and marvellous plains*” (LM). In LS, the indios too are associated with this category, as they are negatively described as “*very fearful that is a marvel*” (“*muy temerosos a marauilla*”, my translation), but they also “*give a marvellously good account [“es marauilla la buena cuenta que dan”] of everything*”¹³, and give Columbus and his men food and drink “*with marvellous affection*”. Also in LS, there is one use of the “*maravilla*” category referring to the Iberian peninsula at the end of the text: “*I ran into this port of Lisbon*¹⁴ *today, which was the greatest marvel in the world, and I decided to write to Their Majesties*”. The mention of Lisbon as the past “*greatest marvel in the world*” (“*was*”) implies that the Indies are the contemporary wonder, and transfers the term’s semantic universe to the new spaces.

¹³ Regarding Columbus’ communication with the indios and his pretended understanding of their “habla” (“speech”), not analyzed in this article due to lack of space, please refer to Todorov, 1997.

¹⁴ The many questions that arise from Columbus’ first return to the rival Portuguese Lisbon capital instead of directly going to a Spanish harbour are not part of this analysis.

The Medieval aesthetic category of *mirabile* saw the world through a magnifying and deforming lens (see for example Le Goff, 2002), it was everything that is amazing and provoked bewilderment and awe to the spectator, something extraordinary, different, deformed, almost magic, between reality and imagination. It is applied in LM and LS to the new idealized space, provoking amazement but not confusion in its cosmogonic systematic classification. As Ife suggests,

Columbus uses the term both to make the reality exotic and to make the inarticulate expression of wonder stand in for the reality he is attempting to convey. ...The marvellous stands for the missing caravels laden with gold; it is - like the ritual of possession itself - a word pregnant with what is imagined, desired, promised. ... The conquistadores are drawing on literary sources to create prodigies in the text and a sense of wonder in their readers: and the novelists are witnessing the effectiveness of *energia* and *admiratio* at work in a non-fictional context. (Ife, 2002).

Relating to Columbus' "*maravilla*" imaginary of the natural elements is very noticeably his constant search for 'natural freak' phenomena, to add to his bestiary collection, as part of his marvellous discovery. Columbus' semantic imagination is full of the extraordinary zoomorphic and anthropomorphic creations, that form the *Physiologi* books for early Christian teaching through animal, plant and mineral examples (Papavero et al., 1995:17-27), arrive directly to the Medieval bestiaries' composition. As Italian biologists M. Zunino and S. Colomba point out in an interesting book on multicultural systematic classification ,

... sometimes in rhyme or in rhymed prose, [the bestiaries] are brief text anthologies on different animals, real or imaginary, with a symbolic, mystical or moralizing content. Their origin lies its roots in Aesopus' and Phoedrus' tales, and in that tendency, appeared in the Christian world since its origins, to read natural history under the light of the holy scriptures and the religious doctrine, even risking to deform the available information. ... What prevails in them is their anecdotic feature, the symbolic use of information, no matter if and how real or realistic, regarding existent or fantastic animals, from which obtaining moral lessons or the divinity's glorification. ... (Zunino & Colomba, 1997:57).

Columbus' vision of the marvellous as abnormal and peculiar, also echoing Ulysses adventures with cyclops and mermaids, is reified as he finds beautifully deformed plants ("*There are palm trees of six or eight manners, that is admiration to see them, for their beautiful "diformidad"*¹⁵, as much as the other trees and fruits and herbs" - LS, my translation), zoomorphic human creatures ("*in one of the two provinces I have not visited, which is called Faba, everyone is born with a tail*" - LM), and the mythological Amazon women ("*the women of Martinino [Martinique], which is the first island on the way from Spain to the Indies, and on which there are no men. These women do not behave like women but carry bows and cane arrows like those I have already described, and they arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have a great deal.*" - LS). With a rhetorical device, Columbus also finds anthropophagites: "*On these islands until now I have not found any monstrous men, as many expected...So I have found no monsters, nor heard of any except on an island here which is the second one as you approach the Indies and which is inhabited by people who are held in all the islands to be very ferocious and who eat human flesh*". In LM, he specifies their name: "*The second [island] they call Caribo, ... here live the people of whom all the rest of the Indies are fearful; they eat human flesh, are great archers,*

¹⁵ The original fifteenth century Spanish term "*diformidad*" (from the Latin "dis" and "de", meaning "without", "outside", and "forma, formae" meaning form, shape) transformed into "deformidad" ("deformity") or something disproportioned and anomalous, but it may also lead to a different meaning of "variety of forms" without necessarily including the connotation of abnormality. Ife translates it with "variety".

have many canoes...”. The Carib or Canib group, depending on the different LS versions, originated the new term cannibal for anthropophagites - see also paragraph 11.

The “*maravilla*” makes the European discoverer, even when America will be invented, use his own cultural references, categories and words to describe the new reality, a procedure that is obviously found in Columbus as well. For example, he uses the Arcadic imagery word “*nightingale*” (“*ruiseñor*”), that was “*singing in November*”, therefore setting one of the significant precedents for what will be called the New World Dispute of the eighteenth-twentieth century (see for example Gerbi, 1955, 2000). The practice of using European names for non-European flora and fauna species is very traceable for instance in the sixteenth to nineteenth century botanical and zoographical systematics, and resultant description chaos (see for example Pratt, 1992). Hence, Columbus is part of a European narrative on Nature that has its continuity with its Medieval and Latin bases, full of marvellous and incredible presences, as UNESCO’s Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue authority Edgar Montiel writes,

Europe did with Renaissance a double discovery: of the Greek-Roman antiquities, and of America. ... afloat surfaced all that world of heroes, sailors, sylvan creatures, nymphs and naiads. And it was with this knowledge and these images all gathered together, we must not forget, that Europe looked at and believed to understand America, as that was back then, with the wise, erudite knowledge, that made *auctoritas*. (Montiel, 2005).

9. Things of value: new lands for planting, raising cattle and building towns.

In the second half of both letters, there is a further shift in the categorization of the natural elements’ descriptions used in the early environmental discourse on the Indies. All the described and mentioned ecological and anthropological elements seem to become something else, more neutral, less enthusiastically described. There is a reification process of the landscape elements, that go from immediately seized beautiful objects to even more pragmatically material symbols of economic gain. The islands, their mountains, rivers, trees, birds become “*a thousand other things of value*”, and is finally portrayed as a list of aseptic goods, as vast resources aesthetically neutral to be put to use as soon as possible. The aesthetic marvel is reduced to the sub-category of ‘infinite’, nature is still huge but deprived of the quality of beauty for its own sake, it is a “*thing*” that is beautiful for its economic “*value*”. The previously marvellous lands, mountains, rivers, trees, men and women are now very rational priced objects. The visually delightful inhabited islands become infinite useful produce containers of economically worthy ‘resources’, of “*spices*” (today’s ‘crops’, ‘harvest’, ‘food’, ‘biofuels’), of “*gold*” (oil and other fossil fuels, and minerals like coltan), of “*cattle*” (‘livestock’, ‘breeding machines’), of “*slaves*” (‘labour force’, ‘human resources’, even ‘collateral damages’). Columbus writes in LS that “*... the sierras and the mountains and the plains and the fields and the land are so beautiful and rich for planting and sowing, for raising all kinds of cattle, for building towns and villages.*”, and in LM he states that “*... the land is delightful, ideal for everything, for sowing and planting and raising cattle, of which I have seen no sight on any island.*” The programme that he has had in mind since his departure from Palos is finally, and quite early, explicit in his action slogan: “*for planting and sowing, for raising all kinds of cattle, for building towns and villages*”. This is a further movement, overtaking the previously analyzed mental action of possessing. Columbus is immediately planning the Indies’ subsequent settlement and colonization acts, their modern extensive mass production and utilitarian, discriminatory and disruptive land use. His discourse seems to contain some of the still current visions, actions (and disruptions) of the ‘peripheral’ and

‘developing’ world’s nature, seen as an endless space to use for consumption, production and profit, and the consequent anthropocentric and exclusive space management systems. Echoes of this vision may be traced in the legal and illegal ‘slash and burn’ practices on forests, for colonial settlement, extensive agricultural mono-cultures (and often with GM crops), biofuels, and cattle ranching pasture creation. Biodiversity and its beauty still nowadays tend to be considered and evaluated for other purposes than also for their intrinsic and vital values of variety, richness and carbon storage-oxygen release. In Columbus’ letters, many of the colonial ideological attitudes towards the indigenous peoples and their removal from the land, either for territorial or underground exploitation, or for pseudo biodiversity conservation (see for example Adams, 2001) are traceable. In this discourse there can be echoes of others, less distant in time, such as the international late fourteenth century ‘conquest’ to use the Amazonian regions, as it can be exemplified by this excerpt from a 1980 book on Peruvian development:

... on the Eastern part of the country, the extremely fertile lands of the Amazonia are found, which is the most extended, richest and most beautiful part of Peru, and that is still incredibly unexploited. ... And any colonization intent of the Peruvian Amazonia will result in a total failure, if it does not count with a vital economic scheme: 1) Permanent connection with the centres of consumption; 2) Planned settlement of the colonizers... 3) Technical and economic planning of the sown fields, and of the harvests’ commercialization. ... (Cortázar, 1980:64-65).

Even the international governmental and financial institutions like the Inter American Development Bank still often tend to repeat and maintain a partial discourse, where five centuries’ old initiatives towards possession and economic use of the natural wonders coexist with a mainly top-down attitude of ‘first world’, ‘developed’ (more ‘civilized’) countries.

The forests of Latin America and the Caribbean have the potential to fuel the region’s economic development, while still preserving their natural integrity and tremendous biodiversity. ... There are few uncontested forestry policy successes in Latin America. Utopian ideas and grand goals have often dominated the rhetoric to save tropical forests. ... In the past, many groups have emphasized environmental losses and dangers, rather than focusing on how to ensure sustainable production and protection of forests through market-based approaches. ... Further research is essential in lesser-known areas, such as the development of forest valuation methods and new techniques for management of natural forests. (Keipi, 1999:230-235).

Within contemporary economic discourse and political debate on nature seen as a valuable resource to price, and to powerfully use, there can still be traces of fifteenth century’s unbalanced and utilitarian vision. Nature is both seen as marvellous (biodiversity is described as “tremendous” in the general media discourse), and as an anthropocentric strictly-economic resource sometimes above any ethical issues (how can protection be realistically reconciled with production? Can a market-based approach be assigned to monetarily evaluate life’s inter-dependent existence on the planet?). The recent vague, often ambiguous and astray-leading greening of global discourses and of industry, that is also trying to trade pollution and pollutant substances’ financial and health-related costs, is one of the newest contributions and developments of a very old discourse, of which Christopher Columbus proves to be a leading participant and epitome.

10. Temporal benefits, for solace and profit.

Finally, Columbus writes that, although “*the whole of Christendom should be joyful and hold great celebrations and give solemn thanks to the Holy Trinity with many solemn prayers for the great exultation they will have when so many people return to our holy faith*” (LS), it is the “**temporal benefits**” (modern natural and human resources) that “*will bring solace and profit not only to Spain but to all Christians*” (LS). Even though “*all of Christendom should hold great celebrations ... at the finding of so many multitudes of people grouped together ready with very little effort to be converted to our Holy Faith*” (LM), the celebrations have to be performed for the finding “*of so many lands full of so many good things which we need, and from which all Christians will derive comfort and benefit*” (LM, my translation). Inside these exteriorly religious sentences, the adjective “*temporal*” connotes the term “*benefits*” with a strong secular sense, illustrating the supposed religious joy and exaltation as merely material “*solace and profit*”, “*comfort and benefit*” derived from objects’ acquisition and economic return. The deriving and totally immanent “*comfort and benefit*” are also claimed to be extended to all Christians, therefore possibly implying the Christian wannabes Indians to be converted. In the meantime, in every island the Indians “*received me with this respect*” (LM), and all “*brought something to eat and drink, which they gave with marvellous affection*” (LS). With a deeper analysis, in both texts there have been clues of Columbus’ utterly exclusive plan, scattered since both letters’ beginnings. He had already seized some people as parts of the islands (“*.. some other Indians I had already taken*”, “*at the first island I found I took some of them by force*”), and then he had given them “*thousands of pretty things... so that they would be well disposed and, moreover, would become Christians, inclined to the love of Their Highnesses and the whole Castilian nation*” (LS). The Indians are already part of the ‘not-us’ category, planned to “*help us by giving us the things they have in abundance and of which we have need*”. The “*comfort*” and “*benefit*”, the “*solace*”, what “*we need*”, is really the “*profit*”, the “*gold*”, the “*cattle*”, the “*slaves*”. The “*countless people ready to become Christians*” (LM) maybe are not really so inclined to become Christians, or the Christians are not too prone to include them. Finally, in his final list goods to bring back to Spain, Columbus adds “*as many slaves as they may order to be shipped, and who will be from among the idolaters*” (LS), “*so many slaves that they are without number, and will be from among the idolaters*” (LM). The religious pretext has again unveiled deeper practical reasons and discriminatory attitudes.

Columbus’ final list, a summary of the temporal benefits he has just found and is bringing back to the Spanish court, is present in both LM and LS in two slightly different versions (for an analysis of the various specimens of goods and their relative accounts in Columbus’ four travels see for example Vilches, 2004). In LM he writes that from these islands he “*hopes to bring many ships full of temporal goods: interestingly, he does not use a verb of physical but of mental action, just as in LS he writes the list of “what has been achieved” during his first expedition, or better of what he “will give” to the monarchs in the future. The action of hoping and some of his listed items will remain mental, as several plants that he name-drops for his usual advertising purposes are only wishful thinking and semantic trigger words, as they are not American. Thus, apart from the “gold” and the “slaves”, in LM Columbus mentions that he will bring “spices from one pepper”: Columbus writes “pimienta”, which in modern Spanish still means “ground pepper”, therefore referring to the Asian spice, and not to native American “chili pepper”, that is called “chile” – with a náhuatl term - or “aji” – a Tahino word - in Latin American Spanish, and “pimentón” (the spice) and “guindilla” (“pepper”, only in its meaning as “chili pepper”) in Spain. He then lists “mastic” (*Pistacia lentiscus*, a Mediterranean tree cultivated in the Greek island of Chios), precisely specifying that “to this day mastic has only been found on the island of Chios in Greece where the authorities sell it for as much as they like, and I believe that they produce more than forty-five thousand ducats’ worth of it every year”; “aloe” (the genus *Aloe*, of the family Asphodelaceae, is native of Africa and the island of Madagascar; Ife writes that Columbus*

possibly mistook it for the agave, genus *Agave*, family Agavaceae, native of tropical America. It should be also pointed out that the genus *Yucca*, of the same family Agavaceae, also looks quite similar to aloe); “cotton” (genus *Gossypium*, family Malvaceae, with different species that are native of India and of America); and he believes he has found “rhubarb and cinnamon” (rhubarb is a plant of the genus *Rheum*, family Polygonaceae, original of Asia; *Cinnamomum verum* is an Asian plant native of Sri Lanka). In parallel, in LS Columbus writes of “spice and cotton”; “mastic...which until now has only been found in Greece, on the island of Chios, and the Genoese government sells it for whatever it likes”; “aloe”; and that he believes to have found “rhubarb and cinnamon”. This mix of real and wished items to be shipped to Spain precedes Columbus’ assertion that he “will find a thousand other things of value” (LS text).

In the LM section of the listed items to ship, Columbus also writes that “above all I hold all the above-mentioned islands to be possessions of Your Highnesses to do with as you wish and as you can and do most properly with the **kingdoms** of Castile”. The islands are indeed legal royal possessions, and their propagandistic semantic process of conquest, if not the actual seizing, is finalized in their association with the term “kingdom”. The new islands are part of the Spanish kingdom since Columbus’ first vision of them, and their legal possession frame is already set for Columbus’ and is the Spanish commercial expedition’s aim. Additionally, Columbus ends his climax systematization of the new space with a last revealing expression. The previously described “marvellous islands”, where the ecological elements are immediately possessed and become a compact whole of “things of value” and “temporal benefits”, causes of economic “comfort and profit”, are now visualized inside the “kingdom of Castile”, and ultimately are included in the closing formula “No more, except may the Holy Trinity protect and promote, Your Highnesses’ **royal estate** [“estado”], in its holy service”. The LM text and narrative on the Indies and Columbus’ findings terminates with the term, “estate”, that in its Spanish original “estado” does not only mean “situation”, “domain”, “land” of a prince or feudal lord. The modern meaning of “estado” is “state”, in the modern sense of “order, class, hierarchy and quality of the persons that form a rein, a republic or a people” (RAE, 1984:601), from the sixteenth century start in the creation of larger unions of feudal properties onwards. A modern unified “state” is what Spain is going to become, almost four hundred years before Italy, starting with Isabel and Fernandos’ marriage, their conquest of the Moros and expulsion of the Jews, the centralization of their reign under Catholicism and the Castilian language, and Columbus’ expedition. With Charles I of Spain and V of Germany, son of the Catholic kings’ daughter Juana and of Philip of Habsburg, the sun will famously never set over his transoceanic empire.

11. The ‘discovery of America’ between magic and realism.

To conclude this analysis, Columbus discourse macro-levels may be divided into essentially two categories, constantly cross-feeding, that with an anachronistic expression for Columbus’s times could be defined as ‘magic’, and ‘realism’. The original ‘magical realism’ (‘realismo mágico’) category definition was created by art critic Franz Roh in 1925, and then applied by the Venezuelan lawyer and writer Arturo Uslar Pietri (Parkinson Zamora & Faris, 1995) to describe some 1960s and 1970s Latin American writers’ works, such as Mexican Juan Rulfo (1955 *Pedro Páramo*, for example), Guatemalan Miguel Angel Asturias (1949 *Hombres de maíz*, Men of maize) Colombian Gabriel García Márquez¹⁶ (from 1955 *La hojarasca*, Leaf storm, to 1967 *Cien años de soledad*, One hundred years of solitude, and 1985 *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, Love in the time of cholera, for example) and the literary tradition they opened. A similar

¹⁶ See paragraph 6.

expression was also used by Cuban Alejo Carpentier in the prologue of his 1949 novel *El reino de este mundo* (The kingdom of this world), to describe his own writing. The Latin American 'magical realist' literary current is mainly defined by its use of what is generally perceived as surreal, uncommon, magic, as something factual, ordinary, truthful, destroying the imaginary boundary between what is in the world, or verisimilar, and what is dreamed to be real. This idea and use of 'magic' is quite similar to Columbus' "*maravilla*", although in the twentieth century case the magic is of course consciously and literally used for an intentional narration of a novel, which is also and by definition fiction, and not for a report (the letters) of what the writer considers to be facts (his arrival at the Indies). Some of the twentieth century Latin American 'magical realism' features are identified as continuation of the pre-Hispanic traditions and typical of the Latin American writer, such as the circular perception and description of time in the plot's action. This is evidently not present in Columbus' Western linear conception of the arrow's chronology of time, and of - still anachronistically intended - 'evolution', 'progress'. Nevertheless, Columbus' projection of his marvel category into the new reality, and his many expressions on the spaces' fairy tale vastness, are surely part of the formation as well as the future developments of many narrative genres and literatures, like the natural, historical and ethnographic in the chronicles written by the many friars, conquerors and explorers until the fourteenth century, and the chivalresque-heroic, the epistolary, the picaresque, the exotic. In Ife's analysis (Ife, 2002) of the reasons why the novel is born in sixteenth century Spain, and of Columbus' links with Miguel de Cervantes' Felipe de Carrizales character of the 1613 *El celoso extremeño* (The jealous man from Extremadura) short story, he highlights that

When Columbus writes in the prologue to his Journal that he intends to keep a detailed daily record of the voyage, noting everything he may do, see or undergo,²⁰ he is not responding to purely administrative pressures. Columbus knew that deeds are not enough when one is working at the edge of the known world and the rewards are to be found at the centre. ... The way out of this impasse ... was to ... invent new genres or to make new versions of old genres, to combine chronicle, autobiographical narrative, natural history and legal deposition... (Ife, 2002).

Consequently, in Columbus' magic realist universe the role of the text's discursive narrator, and the novelist, is that of the first creator of both myth and reality. This is again very modern, and also part of a diachronic context of multicultural cosmogonies. In LS' excipit, just before signing "*Your obedient servant*", Columbus writes that his letter is "*a brief account of what has been achieved*". Columbus closes the letter writing that his has been a "*victory over things which appear impossible, and this was a very notable example. For, although these lands may have been spoken of or written about, that was all conjecture, without eye-witness...*" Columbus is a creator of worlds, of real things that appeared impossible, of lands that only needed an eye-witness to speak and write about their reality to be believed: the explorer is also and foremost the narrator, and the advertising writer. According to Carlos Fuentes' analysis of the European inheritances in the fourteenth century Latin American cultural situation, the novelist in Latin America is similar to a discoverer, caught between reality and dream: "The discoverer is who desires, who has memory, and who uses his voice. Not only does he want to discover reality: he also wants to name it, desire it, talk about it, and remember. Sometimes, all this sums up to another purpose: imagine it." (Fuentes, 1992:46). For Fuentes, the novelist is a modern explorer, who needs to create new spaces, and to describe them: "...in the new world, literature transforms itself into a vital and urgent fact, a life and culture factor, denominating *verbum* ["verbo"]" (Fuentes, 1992:281). These conceptions of discoverer as novelist and as creator may also be quite appropriate to define some of Columbus' multiple features. It is not unsuitable to see Columbus as one of the greatest narrators, myth-creators and cosmogoners of all times. America, or better the Indies, are first and foremost a conception of his own personal and historical moment in time. Columbus did not discover America, but he created its proto-narratives, set in the semantically

pre-established Indies. And historically his discourses and their mass diffusion have left an important legacy in today's globalized conceptions of the planet and its ecosystems. Columbus' intransitive greenspeak's inheritance is lexically easily noticeable in today's common use of his "new names" and categories, that he created in his first documents on his first travel. America was still generally called Indies during the period of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century explorations, and the West Indies are still called so in English. Its related terms, such as the Spanish "indio" for the original inhabitants of pre-Columbian and for the ethno-linguistic groups that survived in colonial America (in English, "Indian", to indicate the American first nations) are still used, but often avoided as they bear quite racist discursive connotations. Moreover, the largest island of the Antilles is still called Hispaniola, the Latin version of Columbus' Española, that comprehends the Republic of Haiti (as the original Tahino's island name, "mountainous land", reported by Las Casas in his comparative ethnographic work *Apologética Historia Sumaria*) and the Dominican Republic. Two other terms, "Caribbean" ("Caribe" in Spanish) sea, gulf, islands, and 'cannibal' ('canibal', previously known as 'anthropophagites', just like it recently happened to 'hoover' for 'vacuum cleaner'), both originate from Columbus' 'magic realist' encounter with the Carib or Canib ethnolinguistic group (see paragraph 8).

Columbus' narrative use of the "social magic" (Bourdieu, 1991; also see Potter, 1996), and the socio-cultural and environmental realities he creates with his use of the language, have interesting historical echoes, and it will also be still powerful throughout the centuries. Columbus simultaneously links a pre-Christian memory (Greek and Roman mythologies, his 'magic') with a modern, but also very Latin and religious, conquest and expansion ideology (the realistic part of his texts). This is a juxtaposition and connection of two discourses, a more constructive one where nature's beauty still retains its wonders, reflected in its descriptions, and a second and greatly disruptive economic discourse, of possession, economic profit and extreme ecological manipulation, of hegemony and consumerism. Columbus' prevailing idea of nature as property is an antecedent to some of today's destructive visions of the neoliberal system, where the ecosystem and its parts are seen as a valuable capital to economically use, very differently from the sustainable idea of a "natural capital" (Hawken et al, 2000) that has to be employed to support ethno-biodiversity conservation.

Around the Spanish and American Columbian fifth century celebrations, Columbus' a-critical inheritance in modern communication and reality construction was finally started to be questioned. The 1992 intercultural discourse from the two sides of the Atlantic marks the historical turning point for a critical re-thinking of the 'discovery' term and discourses, and the following historical and linguistic uncovering of the ecological and anthropological changes and disasters they created in both the Indies and America. Just before 1992, Edmundo O' Gorman wrote that

"It will not be difficult to agree that the fundamental problem of American history consists in finding a satisfactory explanation of the appearance of America within the Western culture, because this issue even involves the way in which the being of America is conceived, and the sense that has to be given to its history." (O' Gorman, 1986:15).

In 1492, Columbus started the invention and creation of a new reality, with a mix of old narratives, new constructions, diverse discourses and action plans, always shifting to and from the mystical and the practical stances. His communication highly contributed to the creation of the global ecosphere idea, and the resulting human actions on it. Halliday (1990, in Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001:179) underlines how

...the categories and concepts of our material existence are not 'given' to us prior to their expression in language. Rather they are constructed by language, at the intersection of the

material with the symbolic...our 'reality' is not something readymade and waiting to be meant – it has to be actively construed; and...language evolved in the process of, and as the agency of, its construal....Hence language has the power to shape our consciousness; and it does so for every human child, by providing the theory that he or she uses to interpret and to manipulate their environment.

Is there still hope for change into a global language that is ecologically sustainable and promotes inclusive, nourishing and long-term safeguarding action strategies? Global and individual ethics have to be reappropriated, with a general stance of what the Italian political philosopher Antonio Gramsci, writing in 1929, would have suggested as a mix of pessimism of reason, and optimism of will (Gramsci:1993). As Arran Stibbe points out analyzing the outcomes of the twenty first century ecologically disruptive economic discourses, "There is cause for optimism, however, because if the current environmentally destructive system is socially constructed through the magical use of language, it can also be re-constructed along lines which contribute to ecological harmony." Stibbe (2005b:5). Indeed, this much needed search for explanations and constructive change can be greatly expanded, by the active use of multidisciplinary research with innovative standpoints and methods like the critical Ecolinguistic analyses.

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Christopher Columbus is credited with the discovery of the Americas in 1492, though Leifr Eiriksson explored the North American continent centuries prior. First landing of Columbus on the shores of the New World. Christopher Columbus kneeling in front of Queen Isabella I. (Credit: Library of Congress). Map of Voyages. Click below to view an example of the explorer's voyages. Fun Facts about Christopher Columbus. Columbus was first buried in Spain, however his remains were later moved to Santo Domingo in the new world and then back, again, to Spain. Columbus brought horses to the new world on his second voyage. In his original calculations, he thought that Asia would be 2,400 miles from Portugal. He was way off.