Writing New Worlds

Writing New Worlds:

The Cultural Dynamics of Curiosity in Early Modern Europe

By

Marília dos Santos Lopes

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Writing New Worlds:
The Cultural Dynamics of Curiosity in Early Modern Europe

By Marília dos Santos Lopes

Translation from the Portuguese (except for articles 11, 13 and 14):
Kevin Rose

This book first published 2016

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-9030-8
ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-9030-4

With the support of the Research Centre for Communication and Culture (CECC), financed by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), Portugal under the reference UID/ELT/00126/2013

CONTENTS

II Voyages, the Visual and the Arts

III Travel, Experience and Knowledge

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

THE CULTURAL DYNAMICS OF CURIOSITY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

Writing New Worlds seeks to analyse the different ways in which travel literature constituted a fundamental pillar to the production of knowledge in the Modern Era. Travel literature contributed to the discovery of both, the individual and the world around. It was subject to profound and deep reaching reflection and debate from the 15th century onwards for different reasons and interests in keeping with the prolific and diversified dissemination of knowledge.

The astonishing frequency of publication and the widespread locations of translations and editions account for a leading and essential contribution of travel literature for a better understanding and awareness about the dynamics and practices associated with the task of decoding the prose of the world (Foucault, 1966). These texts, some of them accompanied by illustrations, covered a broad and extensive panoply of languages, grammars and ways of seeing, translating and writing new worlds in their meaning and relevance. Thus, the present study aims at showing how the authors of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries responded to the challenges of modernity and at inquiring more precisely and specifically about the cultural and strategic dynamics underway within the framework of grasping and understanding the New.

Within this scope and based upon concrete cases, *Writing New Worlds* explores and demonstrates the role played by an important and essential characteristic of modern man: curiosity. Curiosity is certainly not exclusive to the modern era, but remains, as defined by the landmark work by Jacob Burckhardt, a central axis or, alternatively, a "crucial first or intermediate stage in a linear quest for knowledge" (2004, 165) that typified this historical period, as Neil Kenny states.

Even while Neil Kenny defends on various occasions that his work was not about presenting the role of curiosity as a paradigm (like in Blumenberg, 1973), his book on *The Uses of Curiosity in early modern*

France and Germany nevertheless highlights certain "narrating tendencies" in reporting on events and very "curious" themes, describing these "curiosities" in such a way as if they were revealing afore hidden knowledge. It would also be through this capacity to describe and narrate that the observer and the teller would become able to conquer and dominate the "curiosities" and thereby allowing for new achievements in the "Entzauberung der Welt" (Max Weber), in the disenchantment of the world that, little by little, and based upon its diverse narrative ways, would come to determine and shape a new state of knowledge.

Here, travel and voyage emerge as a particular cultural context highly relevant to the cultural dynamics of curiosity and testifying to its capacity to drive collections and narrations. The construction of modernity took place through travelling as Ján Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubiés affirm:

> The literature of travel not only exemplifies the multiple facets of modern identity, but it is also one of the principal cultural mechanisms, even a key cause, for the development of modern identity since the Renaissance. A cultural history of travel invites us to examine the relationship between modern subjectivity and the ancient and medieval past from, and against, which the modern West has constructed its set of self-definitions (Elsner, Rubiés, 1999: 4).

The cultural dynamics driving curiosity within the patterns of modernity and in the ordering of modern knowledge constitute the *leitmotiv* of this book.

Having first launched our research into the reception of Portuguese travel literature in Germany several decades ago, this endowed a singular characteristic on our work. On the one hand, the lack of knowledge on the plethora of Portuguese documental sources, with renowned exceptions such as the great names in travel literature and, on the other hand, the fact that the Germanic Roman Empire, according to many, simply had not played a leading role in the vanguard of the exploration and detailing of these new lands and realities and resulting in historiography not attributing the empire with any great importance within this scope, which we came to reject in our earlier works. In truth, not only did German printing presses play a decisive role in formulating a new image of the world, but we also know of active and defining participations and collaborations in the maritime endeavour itself. Thus, analysis of the less studied documentation and the scope for comparative or even transnational analysis on occasion proved both stimulating and, simultaneously, symptomatic of the aspects and *nuances* as to the ways in which the New

was approached and dealt with in the European modern period, especially as regards the cultural dynamics of curiosity, its strategies and models.

Back in 1982, Tzvetan Todorov published what would prove a benchmark reference work on the 'discovery' of the Other: *Conquest of America. The Question of the other*. The author accepted that in choosing to approach them, the resulting knowledge and the consequent "invention" he would consider as determining the ways in which he looks at and perceives the present. Subjecting the premises and typologies of intercultural understanding to question, Tzvetan Todorov then highlighted the discovery of the Other(s) as a timeless theme.

Analysis of the intercultural relationship became, in the wake of this work, a decisive and important field of research and reflection as regards the diversity and multiplicity of contacts in different regions of the globe, between distinct and different peoples as is witnessed in the works of Anthony Pagden (Pagden, 1986, 1993) or, for example, in the work coordinated by Stuart Schwartz (Schwartz, 1994) under the title *Implicit Understandings, Observing, reporting and reflecting on the encounters between Europeans and other Peoples in the early modern era*, alongside the valuable contribution by Urs Bitterli, in his renowned *Die Wilden und die Zivilisierten* translated into Spanish with the title *Los Selvagens e los civilizados* (Bitterli, 1982, 1986), in which the author delineates a typology for meetings between European and non-European cultures, as published in English under the title *Cultures in Conflict* (Bitterli, 1989).

Here, we need to reference how interdisciplinary dialogue, which has long since been underway and formulating the shaping of history, takes on specific, concrete and innovative dimensions in this field of research. Understandably, the works of anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz (1988), Hans Peter Duerr (1985), Karl-Heinz Kohl (1982; 1993), James Clifford (1997), alongside the studies by Michel Foucault (1966), Edward Said (1979) and Stephen Greenblatt (1991) held enormous repercussions for the approaches made to these themes and especially on the reading and interpretation of texts such as travel accounts and narratives.

Clifford Geertz, in turn, highlighted the need for a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), in which man, in the wake of Max Weber, is the narrator of layers of meaning that he himself wove and, consequently, posited that culture resulted from different means of grouping and overlaying these same webs, renewing the contents of questions and opening up new debates about the producers of artefacts and texts, their designs and their

means of perceiving and writing about the reality observed. In *Works and Lives, The Anthropologist as Author*, Geertz draws attention to the literary or "subjective" narratives in the description of Others, in which the Other emerges as if the construction of a figure of art. Geertz stresses how this construction influences the gaze on and the representation of the Other as a constant factor in human cultural relations (Geertz, 1988).

Within this framework, we would also note how the works of Hans Peter Duerr (1984), in his then controversial book on the boundaries between "barbarism and culture", highlight how the route from understanding that other reality to its "translation", hitherto deemed simple and linear, turns out to be a long and hard process of apprehending knowledge. This represents a similar approach to the work by James Clifford entitled *Writing Cultures* (Clifford/Marcus, 1986), which certainly played its role in our title becoming *Writing New Worlds.*

In this mushrooming of innovative themes whether to History, Anthropology, Literature or Cultural Studies, especially in the wake of the *post-colonial turn* (Williams/Chrisman, 1994; Poddar/Patke/Jensen, 2008), many different approaches thrived, stemming, for example, from the need to know more about the ways in which communications got established between European and non-European peoples (Bachmann-Medick, 2006: 184-237). Within this scope, and naturally and significantly, there was particular attention paid to the writings that had come to fruition out of the desire and the will to tell of unprecedented and unique facts as in the case of travel literature (Bachmann-Medick, 2006: 258). The point would arrive when it stamped its mark as a credible and authentic source for the recognition and representation of new worlds (Harbsmeier, 1982; Neuber, 1991).

Based upon a wide variety of texts, travel literature did not always come in for acceptance by scholars as a true and authentic source (Brenner, 1989). In effect, only in more recent decades did travel accounts become a valid working tool to historical science given the hitherto prevailing suspicion of their more literary content. Studies such as that by Luís Filipe Barreto (Barreto, 1983, 1986) demonstrated the merit of these works that then entered into consideration as a perceptive mirror image of their authors and thus a priceless document on the spheres of thinking of the then Europeans. By seeking to represent the visited sites, travel literature presents simultaneously a witness to the prevailing "prefiguration" and the conceptions of their authors (Opitz, 1997; Nünning, 2009). 'Writing new worlds' is, after all, a way of world making (Goodman, 1978).

As regards the geographic chronicles and compendiums of the 16th and 17th centuries, we witness a similar case. In truth, these works spent a long period of time silenced, so to speak, due to their alleged lack of authenticity, originality and thematic objectiveness. However, these sources of 'lesser value', second or third hand, prove priceless in comprehensively and clearly unravelling the coordinating strands to a period. The recognition of such sources would therefore become step by step an acquired fact whether to the history of geography (Broc, 1986; Lestringant, 1993) or the history of anthropology as already demonstrated by Margaret Hodgen (1964).

A fundamental question would arise in the reading of travel literature, to wit how, given an unknown landscape and reality and without any opportunity for communication due to the lack of knowledge about the multiple languages, might contacts have been maintained, how might the sailors have engaged in negotiations in the lands encountered as they went about 'discovering' them? These sources make a diverse range of references to, for example, the signs, gestures, exchanges and words deployed and reveal a highly varied array of practices and instruments applied by voyagers as they attempt to communicate. And how do you tell of unknown realities? Which process of translation and mediation can be identified? Correspondingly, the accounts that emerged constitute 'translations' of a reality which in itself kept silent, inviting for invention more than for representation, following to a wide extend the patterns and norms of the target culture more than respecting the "silence" of the unknown.

This also represents the route taken by *Writing New Worlds*, which, beginning in the late 1980s, extended onwards in its constant search to respond to the central and underlying question to this journey: how did the European scholars and writers of the early Modern Age react, how did they adopt and appropriate the knowledge gathered and, simultaneously, what were the impacts of these experiences and inputs into the knowledge produced and elaborated in modern Europe?

In the expectation of answering these questions, there are three particular moments in which we shall depict the ways of knowing. From the outset, we would highlight that these are not closed and sealed stages but rather, on the contrary, are profoundly interconnected whilst providing the framework for distinguishing between different moments in the processes of observation, collection, organisation and the ordering of the facts, experiences and teachings gathered and conveyed by the different actors

participating in the production, dissemination and construction of a new understanding.

Thus, the first stage, which we term here *Collecting News,* features case studies on the ways in which the art of describing, learning and presenting what was seen and heard became formulated as a narrative (Bal, 2004) that would define the pillars and conceptions about the world. The second moment seeks to delineate just how this collecting of news was associated with a permanent questioning, querying and restructuring that gained in significance, for example, in literary and visual representations, in keeping with how the arts reveal this crucial characteristic of swiftly grasping and recognising the vectors of changes and seeking out the tools and instruments able to give form, space and expression to them and thus entitled *Voyages, the Visual and the Arts*. As these two moments have already served to emphasise, this bountiful proliferation of facts and their visible and effective presence in the cultural and intellectual debate ongoing in modern Europe drove a new management of knowledge that strove to be thorough and global. Aware that the main source of knowledge stems from empirical experiences, the promoters of these new findings set out to produce other means of knowledge within a constant search to complete the shortcomings, silences and gaps. The varied examples articulating this production of a new order of knowledge make up the theme of *Travel, Experience and Knowledge.*

Collecting News

Alvise Cadamosto, author of one of the first texts on the marvels and surprise at encountering an unknown world, and recognised as such, a new world extending beyond the equator, stated that his work arose from the "many new things and worthy of reporting" that led him to decide to set off for the South Atlantic with the objective of unfurling this "other world". It is the "discovery of a new world" that embellishes the discourse of the Italian explorer in the service of the Portuguese Prince Henry and thus there did emerge that travelling narrator who, curious and attentive to the newness of what was seen, did not hesitate in picking up his quill to leave an account of his observations and impressions, and fully aware from the outset of the relevance as an act worthy of remaining alive in the memory of men.

The act of writing travel accounts in the modern era emerged with the eventual reader very much in mind; this was not merely some exercise in self-reflection even while, first and foremost, this was a personal account,

but their authors never forgot – and this aspect proves highly important – that their primary function and role involved conveying their experiences and alongside the real and precise knowledge acquired on the way to those who, not having travelled with them, nevertheless still wished to share in the adventure or the documental value of their writings.

Travel literature established a new cultural panorama. Mercenaries, diplomats, printers or traders were the authors of such texts, like Alvise Cadamosto, an entrepreneurial and active man who knew how to take advantage of the opportunities and experiences that life provided him. He very much represents an example of someone who, out of his awareness of the present moment, proved able to identify and diagnose the then ongoing transformations.

The extent to which this account conveyed and enthusiastically defined the newness of this new world reflects in the fact that in 1507 the humanist Francazano Montalboddo was already publishing the text by Alvise Cadamosto in a collection entitled *Paesi novamente retrovati...*, which was itself swiftly followed by further editions across the rest of Europe (Lopes, 1992: 55).

There is the sheer surprise caused by the discovery of another world, as highlighted by Stephen Greenblatt (Greenblatt, 1991), that led the Italian Cadamosto, in the service of Prince Henry, to write his account within the scope of collecting the new that might be observed and described on the voyage from Lisbon to the White Cape. Thus came about his notes on the voyage, on unexpected lands that proved surprisingly green and fertile with healthy looking and finely shaped peoples, curious men and good swimmers, with various never before seen fruits and animals such as that which oddly and interestingly appeared to be either a cow or a horse and yet would equally traverse the land and the water, and that would only a great deal of time later get termed the hippopotamus.

As with this particular traveller who visited these new worlds at a very initial phase on a voyage lasting from 1455 to 1456, many other travellers of the early modern times would also become, in addition to their own unheard of feats, authors of accounts and descriptions in what was perceived as an assiduous and vital task of gathering data and information on what they had had the opportunity to observe and witness. This attitude, which obviously extended beyond the new worlds themselves, may be recognised in both Europe and in each respective country through the appearance of novelties susceptible to undergoing collection, description

and finally set down on paper driven by the desire to leave behind a witness account and detailing a reality that would seem to demand its place in writing and thus in the collective memory.

The revelations that the explorers brought back from their travels through Europe to the Orient and from the maritime voyages (Reichert, 2001) amount to a substantial part of what would constitute the Renaissance and Modernity in Europe. The context of constant encounters and revelations led the travellers to formulate signs of change. Newness by newness, these men told of other lands, other peoples, other uses and customs. A vast and prolific textual production bore witness to all the major news. It does not come as any surprise that one of the main characteristics of these writings stemmed from the effect of the first person. The narrator or raconteur (the *Reiseschreiber* as Alfred Opitz baptised him; Opitz 1997) conveyed the person who had gathered the data, the observations, the events and the reflections and who is informing the reader. In these texts, we enter into contact with the 'I' who saw, did or encountered – in a permanent *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Greenblatt, 1980).

Whilst, on the one hand, this is the dynamic of individual discovery that shapes and models these texts, on the other, there is the impulsive strength of the newness that pressured these men into writing. In fact, the realities that they come to present shall, as may be found in the vast majority of the texts subject to study, throw the reader permanently into surprise, into astonishment. This is the nature that proves a hallucinating novelty along with the peoples who, despite the similarities, countered expectations in proving so different and intriguing, or the very world, that in the surprise of revealing another, was itself renewed. This was the "wonder of the new" as Stephen Greenblatt (Greenblatt, 1991) put it. In his perspective, and based on texts belonging to the same genre, awe and amazement are core characteristics to this Renaissance world. *Wonder* is, in his opinion, the expression of surprise towards the others. According to Greenblatt, the voyage of Christopher Columbus triggered a century of intense awe and wonder. However, what does it mean to have this experience of the miraculous? In practice, the difficulty of conveying this reality encapsulates this act of marvel, an act of such excitement. The miraculous makes up a central theme to the complex system of visual, aesthetic and philosophic representation through which the peoples of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance learned and therefore either possessed or dismissed the non-familiar, the strange, the terrible (Greenblatt, 1991: 38-40).

In effect, the absolutely New – and even before the voyage of Columbus, as is the case of Cadamosto – is a constant presence in the texts of these authors striving, mostly through writing, to record that which amazed and marvelled them. Lacking both in knowledge and in vocabulary, they ended up making recourse to metaphors that quite certainly would also formulate "deceptions of the gaze" (Hélder Macedo, in Gil/Macedo, 1998: 203-212) but which then seemed the only option for defining this extraordinary newness, whether in terms of the discoveries in nature or the encounters with other individuals.

The image of the world as it was hitherto known did not correspond to this recently drafted sketch. The contemporaries revelled in the new discoveries about the layout of the world. However, how might the witness accounts of these voyages best be interpreted? Did these new discoveries from across the seas represent an unexpected new world or were they a hitherto ignored part of the old world? The voyages along the then unknown African coastline bore witness to a strange and unknown world, hence new. The accounts of the voyages, the chronicles and compendiums, brought to the public marvellous and unprecedented news about previously ignored regions and their never before seen peoples.

This climate of creating new cultural frameworks would reserve a privileged place for the reporters of this newness. Within this environment of *curiositas*, observation and knowledge about the human being became one of the sectors receiving the greatest impact (Krüger, 2002). The information about these other human realities, about different ways of living, different institutions and different behaviours triggered an intensive and broad reaching civilizational dialogue; the gaining of knowledge about other forms of governance, other beliefs, other habits and customs, other forms of policy not only provided the scope for learning about some new and different realities but also completed that which was already known.

The confrontation with the Other unconditionally generated a gaze, or better, a comparison between the reality of the observer and that which was new (König/Reinhard/Wendt, 1989). And what proved a still greater surprise, this other was in turn not unique. On the contrary, the terrestrial orb would throw up in discovery a diversity of other realities with different facets and nuances, as Hans Staden demonstrated on his voyage to Brazil, where he would encounter a different natural habitat but also populated by peoples with strange habits and customs. In reporting on this land, Staden, as did other travellers and explorers, included descriptions of its peoples, the Brazilian Indian, and, along with the nature, also a source of great

amazement and curiosity. In fact, he also proved responsible for setting down many and long pages dedicated to the "invention of the Brazilian Indian" (Pinto, 1992), which, in opposition to prodigious nature, proved able to continuously and generously convey new and marvellous details for which he would not miss out on requesting hymns of praise and congratulations with his descriptions of these people oscillating between awe and admiration. This theme of discovering nature will remain, for century after century, a symbol of Brazilian uniqueness with the same theme having soon been taken up by early modern travel literature. Indeed, in the case of the description of Brazil, this would figure as one of the most high profile of all themes (Seixas, 2003). On sighting uncharted lands, sailors such as Amerigo Vespucci or Pero Vaz de Caminha set their gazes on the leafy and multi-coloured nature, feeling protected by the temperate airs that made them feel of this "lodge" a pleasant and welcoming garden apt to softening the unpredictable gales of the Atlantic, with attention and regular contact confirming to them the prodigious qualities of these lands. In sum, this proves one of the key drivers behind the emergence of writing dedicated to the physical realities of Brazil.

The awareness of the experiences these explorers gathered over the course of their voyages reflected in their sense of responsibility in leaving behind a witness account testifying to the often strangely disturbing differences. The maritime voyages thus brought back with them the problematic issue of the New and the different to European culture. With the portraits defined by those who had seen such newness for the first time and with their own eyes, these works constitute a priceless contribution to analytically profiling and interpreting these other lands, their peoples and societies.

However, just how best to share such knowledge, such experiences? This necessarily involved drafting new strategies, new models or being able to, as happened in many cases, reformulate, add on or adapt the structure inherited from the legacy of classical antiquity, itself undergoing a rediscovery. The cases vary as to their respective scholars and hence we cast our attention over the different examples and realities.

Many of the travel accounts emerged out of the need to inventory the facts and the arguments regarding that which the Portuguese poet again asked in his epic *Lusíadas* (I, 45): "Que gente será esta?" – "What people shall these be?"

The revelation of the existence of peoples south of the equator, documented by the statements of sailors, would cause doubts and uncertainties as to the realities observed and hence the importance attributed to observing, detailing and describing in order to, following a due period of close and continuous contacts, draw lessons and write summaries.

The discovery of lands populated with previously ignored peoples resulted in multiple different reactions. The witness accounts of peoples, who were after all Adamites and hence no different to those hitherto known, contradicted the prevailing idea of anthropoid monsters living in far distant and remote lands. Instead, these were peoples with habits, often strange, but simultaneously fantastic and marvellous enough to attract the attention of any European. The exhaustive knowledge built up on the different cultures and civilisations dotted around the world constituted one of the areas with the greatest impact on the dialogue with the new, as the account of the German Hans Staden testifies in relation to Brazil or that of Otto Friedrich von der Groeben on the West African coastline, as well as the representations of the ways in which the Hottentots were perceived and described in the accounts written by voyagers travelling between 1498 and 1708.

However, this group of authors also contained those who had not themselves embarked on voyages of discovery but nevertheless felt just as impelled by the newness as the explorers themselves and strove to gather information and news from those able to provide such accounts. This is the case not only with the chronicler Gomes Eanes de Zurara who, in writing his work based on the observations gathered in Lisbon, would go on to formulate one of the first Portuguese texts on the new discoveries made along the African coastline, but also with the Moravian printer Valentim Fernandes who, as a fellow resident in the Portuguese capital, grasped the unprecedented and unique details told by the sailors and reserved some of the titles published by his typography to report on these news as a core priority. However, while his great curiosity and desire to spread the knowledge led the humanist printer Valentim Fernandes to issue publications on the new discoveries in the early 16th century, a century later and certainly by the late 17th century, these themes and news had spread and gained the front pages of the first magazines and newspapers published in Hamburg, a city always attentive and well connected with other parts of the known globe and especially with the Iberian Peninsula, as detailed in *Relationes Curiosa*e by the erudite writer Eberhard Werner Happel.

The actors engaged in the collection and ordering of details and facts naturally include various of the sailors and explorers but also men of letters from different national backgrounds, cultures and languages, and their exercises, experiments and experiences display correspondingly different emphases and nuances even while all embrace the same motivation or "passion" (as Stephen Greenblatt set it out), that is to say *curiositas*. Curiosity would condition the search for elements and dynamics capable of clarifying the revelation of another world that was steadily becoming known, with each observation and reading proving far broader and more diversified than might otherwise be imagined. Collecting is an act of apprehension that becomes steadily clearer and most decidedly a practice and way of being that took root and expanded in the modern period, but not only in this period, as James Clifford points out in presenting such a *modus* within the scope of the European identity as "a strategy for the deployment of a possessive self, culture, and authenticity" (Clifford, 1988: 218).

The concrete work of mapping and describing, first undertaken by the different voyagers, resulted in the commonly recognised singularity of travel literature: rendering the world visible through new news and information.

Voyages, the Visual and the Arts

The recognition of the information collated by travellers would subsequently trigger new practices for experiencing and thereby rendering visible the knowledge acquired. As has already been highlighted, such new means were required precisely because such details came from unknown boundaries and immediately declared themselves as new, a fact very much stressed in the travel accounts on the new worlds. These sought to raise the interest and curiosity of others who were not able to see these worlds with their own eyes and wanted them deciphered for their understanding and characteristic of "a wide variety of acts of 'making' in the Renaissance". And, furthermore, both artists and scientists were inherently involved in this creating of "virtuous" knowledge so crucial and of great value to scientific practice (Spiller, 2004: 39). In this sense, news brought up by travel literature would take on different forms of expression and the data gathered and processed would begin to take its place and prove of relevance not only to texts but also to multiple creative languages. Hence, also in cartography, in striving to trace these new horizons and categorise new territories and regions, it is the images that, whether in isolation or as a fundamental and integral component of the printed works, would live on

through the multiple editions churned out by the most renowned typographies of modern Europe as well as the capital *fundus* of 'possible worlds' so necessary and essential to the literary constructions recreating the ambiences and figures in accordance with the recent revelations that continued to render this newness visible.

In fact, the visual arts, or artistic language in more general terms, constitute an important feature in the translation of new realities given the capacity to formulate notes, facts and structures revealing the physical and evident presence of these new realities that enable knowledge to become unquestionably knowledge. On many occasions, art produces knowledge even before many other forms of learning have proven able to formulate and define a new interpretative grammar as has already been duly signposted by Svetlana Alpers, specifically in terms of the cartography contained in her work *The Art of Describing* (Alpers, 1983). However, this also held for other areas of knowledge, especially art and the works of a still inaugural science as duly highlighted by Pamela Smith and Paula Findlen in their work *Merchants and Marvels. Commerce, Science and Art in Early Modern Europe* (Smith/Findlen, 2002).

The visual descriptions thus translate the descriptive accounts in images or representations of a new order of knowledge as well illustrated by Stefanie Leitch in her work *Mapping ethnography in early modern Germany: new worlds in print culture* (Leitch, 2010). There was a need to map new territories, present different natures, describe plants, animals, peoples and habits, all unprecedented and unimaginable, and which, despite all the major difficulties in reaching the appropriate designations and vocabulary, gradually built up into a fundamental component of a *documental fundus* about the world and its circumstances.

The justification posited for the translation of Portuguese travel literature into other European languages generally refers to the great *in loco* experience that the accounts make available and that this world could only ever be rendered through reading the narrative that came from the quills of the travellers. Translators and publishers both recognised and swiftly praised this *ad vivum* work and published throughout all Europe news and information from these curious and interested observers. However, this does not apply only to the case of the Portuguese accounts, as whenever it came to translating there was a constant and enormous interest that led to the dissemination of information or even to the ambition to possess such new objects and artefacts all over Europe in the *Wunder- und Kunstkammer* collections. Collecting represented a "habit of curiosity" (Benedict, 2001:

2) that started out with seeing, one of the most valued of all senses. However, seeing would duly transform into an appropriation of both objects and knowledge fostering a line between seeing, possessing and controlling, which would turn the individual into a master of knowledge.

However, while the *Wunder- und Kunstkammern* were private collections and hence restricted to those who were able to allow for this "luxury" of collecting evidence and pieces representing the diversity of the world, the arts and global visual cultures went about making a major contribution towards the proliferation of new data and information about the globe. Hence, there are no doubts as to the great power that the typographic sector, particularly in Central Europe, played in the formulation of the images and engravings that profusely illustrated the texts published by different ateliers and workshops. Therefore attention has to be paid to the ways and means by which the resonances of the iconographic forms and supports emerged in contemporary works. In truth, the travel accounts, whether Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German or Dutch, entered into the public domain throughout Europe in editions of great value and of artistic and cultural merit. Hence, an emphasis of the role played by this mediation is required that, as Roger Chartier (Chartier, 2014) highlights, strengthens the very conceptualisation of the written text. Alongside their original authors, these translators are mediating agents as both constructers and inventers of the knowledge undergoing visualisation and conceptualisation.

In fact, the European artists, scholars and editors of the 16th and 17th centuries did not remain indifferent to the remarkable maritime reports and reflected in their own editorial programmes the active aim of providing the public with significant works on these other worlds and realities. We correspondingly encounter cosmographies, historical, religious, scientific and literary works that, as with the travel accounts, serve as mirrors onto this newness. Emerging out of the continent's typographies, they would join the *Wunder- und Kunstkammer* in providing their readers with insights into the exotic landscapes, plants and unusual animals, peoples from far distant regions in their traditional clothing with weapons and products in a colourful and different panoply of unknown and picturesque environments. Very often, and certainly in a majority of cases, the artists were not the travellers, but across all of Europe there appeared outlines, works, publications that collectively formulated a graphical discourse complementary to the personal and individual witness accounts of texts and amounting to a rich iconographic archive of unquestionable value to the formation and management of knowledge in Europe. Alongside the written sources, the visual arts also narrated and visualised these curious

and surprising new findings and set down prevailing documents on the construction and conceptualisation of the world.

The pages of many publications in Europe filled with portraits of a world, as if some kind of album that had suddenly become boundless and featured a hitherto unimaginable diversity and variety. Thanks to the work of the engravers, who set down information as regards the human types, their clothing (for example, Christoph Weiditz in his *Trachtenbuch*), activities and professional and cultural practices, fleshing out and spatially rendering the contours and profiles of an apparently unknown world, this new world was able to emerge from obscurity. Hence, it should come as no surprise that iconography took on the role of a source revealing fundamental information and details – and even the role of creator of genuine means of representation such as what was known as *Turquerie* in the iconography of the 16th century. The engravers, and also the editors, deciphered the texts, decoded the information into images and, as with other men of learning, undertook a creative task in reformulating the boundaries and limits to the world. The silhouette that they outlined of the world and its inhabitants conveys the conscious affirmation of a work done out of a clear sense of duty.

Whilst these cultural agents had yet to explicitly formulate, as David Hume would do at a later date, "(…) that love of truth, which (is) the first source of all our enquiries" (in Benedict, 2001: 1), they were also already striving to ground their work in the credibility of those who saw, *ad vivum.* Hence, the iconography correspondingly endowed visibility on the very agents enabling the awareness of this new information. They serve as the representational go-betweens in the words of Alida Metcalf, especially mediators such as Amerigo Vespucci who would become the prototype of the scholar or missionary in his double role as explorer of new lands and as symbol of a European presence, bearing witness to the authenticity and credibility of the revelations made. In this sense, the artists are also dedicated to the visualisation of a reality hitherto unknown and thereby complying with a decisive role as mediators.

These cultural dynamics, which led some to describe, others to map and establish categories to order and classify whether according to words, schemes, sketches or in works of art, all express the mental will to learn and reflect, a characteristic of the emerging modern Europe. In different parts of Europe, we may encounter artists, authors, translators, editors, publishers, scholars commonly gathered around the printers' workshops and frequently and actively interconnected in networks enabling the

identification of the places and/or groups driving the production and management of knowledge (Burke, 1997).

However, this desire for visualisation which highlights vision as the most important of the senses does not mean that writings, images or even maps represent reality. As we know, and as Stuart Clark warns in *Vanities of the Eye. Vision in early modern European Culture*, (Clark, 2007), what we see is also a construction of the ways of looking and understanding the object under observation. The looking is also a process of apprehension and appropriation that may be trained, exercised and rationalised. Thus, and just as Voltaire would later come to state, just as we learn how to speak then so do we learn how to see with the exercise of this sense influenced by different variables, nature itself, external impulses, personal understandings or experiences. Though there might not be a linear history of perception, one has to recognize the efforts and the intentions to build up a visibility of what was observed. This indeed represents one of the criteria underlying the works produced, whether in writing or in image that both projected and rescaled that which was acquired through seeing.

Hence, reflection and the consequent learning also extend to the narrations, the tales told about the distant, far-off but equally feasible worlds. This encapsulates the success of Fernão Mendes Pinto, whose work, as with many travel accounts, initially elicited certain doubts as to the veracity of its information and details but that would in any case swiftly spread across Europe as demonstrated by the countless translations, and always carried out by men bound up with modernity, by the constructive spirit and the scientific content and which increasingly proved a text that extended beyond its literary qualities to stand as an important source of knowledge.

Furthermore, there were new literary genres invented or inaugurated as happened with the already mentioned poly-historian Eberhard Werner Happel. As in a *Wunder- und Kunstkammer*, Happel exposed and placed before the eyes of readers, in an ordered sequence of curiosities and curious accounts, a narrative of more knowledge and science as well as the products and realities of a world revealing its full extent and that wished to be understood given that its works, as if storehouses of curiosities, were a genuine and authentic place of curiosity (Frühsorge, 1974: 200). Within the scope of meeting the challenges set down by the material and by the need to ponder on them came long and intricate novels, many of them over a thousand pages long, written out of the desire and the passion to satiate the curiosity of the many readers avid for seeing and knowing more about

this world and the other possible worlds. Acquiring such knowledge then was simultaneously useful and a matter of pleasure.

Travel, Experience and Knowledge

In this "art of describing", the physical and human representation of the globe takes on great relevance and reflects from the outset an essential facet and characteristic of the management of knowledge in the Modern Era. Thus, it was not by chance that the first projects expressed their clear and open homage to a new art: geography.

Recognising the world and mapping the many regions that were only now revealed to the eyes and the knowledge of Europe stemmed from the perseverance, courage and confidence of many young men who thus gave "new worlds to the world" (Luís de Camões) and were, to their contemporaries, a reason for great rejoicing as demonstrated by many of the geographic works of the Renaissance (Lopes, 1992: 104-131). Thus, it was no accident that, alongside a major proportion of the illustrated travel collections, much of the cartography was printed in the North of Europe with the atlas above all the object of an unprecedented level of production and profile. Known as "that which describes the world" or as "descriptions of the world", the atlas presented a macroscopic image of the world to its readers and observers who, in turn, recognised in such sources an attitude of "amazement" at this singular and unprecedented portrait of the world. Map engravings undoubtedly constituted a highly effective instrument deployed in the discovery of the "causes of things" and in the consequent dissemination of the knowledge therein contained and an essential means of representing the spaces of the world. This also stands out as a theme that authors approached in their texts, with their descriptions striving to progressively complete those areas still left empty by the cartographic knowledge then existing.

Courtesy of these observations and their respective descriptions, it steadily proved possible to attain this feat of conquering and dominating a new *mappa mundi*. The history of an open world and all the intensive communication ongoing between the different spaces derives from the completion of the voyages of exploration and the euphoric writings set down in the early Modern Age.

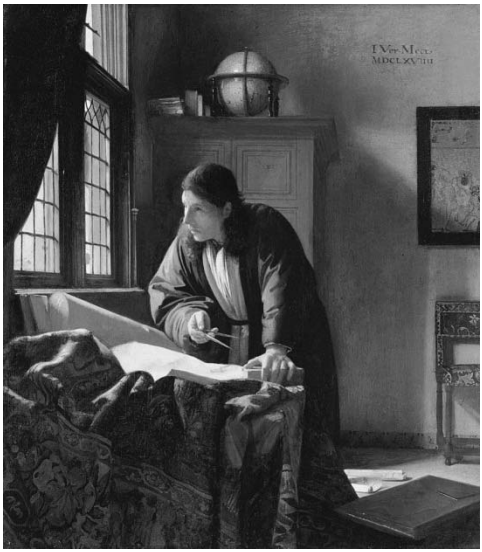

Fig. 1 Johannes Vermeer: *The Geographer*, c. 1668–1669

We would note how these *mappae mundi* emblematically portray the ongoing discovery and revelation of a contemporary world as indeed clearly expressed by the Dutch painter Jan van Vermeer in *The Geographer*, one of his works dedicated to representing this new field of knowledge. With his compass in hand, a symbol of knowledge and possession, this builder of the world undertakes preparation of yet another map: the distant gaze certainly recalling the zones and the lines requiring drawing. In the background, on top of a wardrobe, a globe and books blatantly reference this new knowledge and learning gathered by cosmopolitan and curious men, and such men who had described, measured, mapped and finally drawn with every confidence and mastery. This clearly embodies one of the greatest conquests of the Renaissance man: mastery of the world. That this was not a sense of pride exclusive to geographers may be confirmed by considering how, in a significant proportion of the paintings by Vermeer, we may identify various maps hanging on walls that, beyond serving as a decorative feature, bear witness to the geographic revolution of his time.

Indeed, the maps symbolised the construction of a new awareness about the world and its physical and human representations. Travel accounts established new readings of the world and were, therefore, interpreted as

the first geographies (or proto-geographies) on Africa, Asia and Brazil. For the first time, these accounts described the lands and peoples that had never before been seen, across different continents, and cartographically setting out a new map of the earthly planet. This is a source of great knowledge to the Renaissance world (Barreto/Garcia, s/d: 18) which quickly translated into European society and arts (Brook, 2009), fostering interactions and communications between different geographic areas and cultures and thereby projecting a *World in Movement* (Russel-Wood, 1998).

In learning of the geographies and the unknown continents, the accounts firstly formulated a recognition and a record of the different signs in the world. Whether in Africa, in India or in Brazil, the desired goal remained the same: recording and presenting the new "prose of the world" (Michel Foucault). Seeking out landscape and human similitudes within the scope of decoding this world, these texts and their observations prove essential supports to the making of new *mappae mundi* whether drawn or in text. Hence, these writings prove irreplaceable revelations about knowledge of the new world and correspondingly legacies of the capacities of the human being to search beyond the boundaries for the mysteries of the terrestrial orb as we may indeed encounter, e.g., in *Mapping Goa.*

Understandably gaining equal reference is the art of navigation without which the observations, experiences and knowledge in the meanwhile disseminated would never have been attained. The sailors thus came in for consideration and portrayal as true and significant scholars as without their intent, their wisdom and bravery they would never have engaged in the voyages they planned, structured and undertook. Amerigo Vespucci represents one such case, without ignoring many of the controversies bound up with his name, who would in graphical art particularly perpetuate the image of a student of the skies and the seas and able to stand alongside many of the other inventors of the modern world. Furthermore, whether their works be on-board diaries, route maps or descriptions, they constitute the earliest attempts to order what was seen. Structuring their view so as to rebuild routes, lines, these nautical works from the outset defined a desire to identify and classify.

With this passion for collecting, mapping and rebuilding the practice of experience arose. And these men with their maritime ventures are an example of just how knowledge gets acquired through invention, through the risk of the unknown or through the power of fiction. Elizabeth Spiller seeks in her book *Science, Reading, and Literature. The Art of Making*

Knowledge, 1580-1670 (2004) to draw attention precisely to the role that fictional works always held – even today whenever not seeking to duly recognise – and in particular in this period, over both creative acts and scientific undertakings. Science does not just result from the facts – it needs demonstrating and proving to which writing and the narrative are certainly an important, where not fully decisive, resource and an essential framework. Furthermore, Spiller defends the greatest of proximity between science and literature as we may duly witness in the case of the works by Garcia da Orta. Orta's *Colloquies* constitute one of the first encyclopaedias of oriental botany written in dialogue between two characters, Ruano and Orta, symbols of a meeting between two orders of knowledge, the classical and the modern. In a long and articulate text, which may be taken as a philosophical work, the reflection extends across the most recent observations and experiences of the oriental botanical world. This book, given its accuracy and detailed information, was picked up by Carolus Clusius, who translated it into Latin and rendered it an unquestionable source of knowledge on oriental botany and the discovery of plants.

The theoretical reflection resulting from the innovative practices and experiences does not in fact mean that the knowledge inherited and prevailing lost its value. As in the case of Garcia da Orta, the weighting of the facts acquired *in situ* along with the knowledge he inherited from the classics during his studies in Salamanca still persisted just as German cosmographers, within a humanist context, also made recourse to establishing relationships and parallelisms with the Greco-Latin authorities. Not always particularly well grasped, this humanist attitude displayed equal interest and curiosity in the discoveries on classical antiquity as in the new revelations made by the day-to-day developments, with the modern era scholar basing himself both on philological studies and the sources whether drawn from the Greco-Roman world or produced recently as in the admirable gaze over the newly encountered lands and their peoples. Such is the case with the renowned geographer Sebastian Münster who does affirm to gather in his cosmographical studies old and classical knowledge with new experiences (Münster, 1964: 159).

Whilst at first sight it would seem somewhat paradoxical to conciliate both realities, what is certain is that this does prove the means to open up ruptures and identify the scope for interjecting other facts, other ideas and then lead onto new reflections and new searches of nature, history or humanity, as indeed the German geographer does end up doing when introducing information on the different peoples of the world with these