INTERNATIONAL AMERICAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL AMERCINA STUDIES ASSOCIATION OF KOREA - IASAK

7TH IASA CONFERENCE - SEOUL - KOREA (17-19 August, 2015)

"CONSTELLATING AMERICAS: Ex-changes beyond Transnationalism"

# UNPREDICTABLE AMERICAS: RESIGNIFYING AMERICANESS UNDER A RELATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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C.G. Jung: "Just as the constellations were projected into the heavens, similar figures were projected into legends..."

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> http://jungcurrents.com/jung-constellations-projections

## **Foreword**

## Good morning every one!

It's my first time in a IASA conference and I'm very glad to here today./ I want to thank the International American Studies Association / and the American Studies Association of Korea / for this prestigious invitation/ that today allows me to address my Americanist colleagues from different countries/ who are/ in like manner/ invested in unraveling the unpredictability of the Americas./ I thank you again for such an honorable invitation/ and I wish my talk here,/ as well as the energy of our gathered reflections/ produced during the event,/ may enable fertile ex-changes/ and inspire the "constellation of power" conceived by Jung. That explains my epigraph.

# Epigraph

I will develop my arguments in five sections:

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The first one is

## 1. Visions of America

The iconography allegorically representing America as a savage,/ nude woman/ is abundantly known by all of us./ I go back to these images to remind you of painters as Marten de Vos,/ Jan van der Straet/ and Philipe (or Philips) Galle/ representing,/ on one side/ Europe as a woman richly >>>>>dressed,/ while >>>>>America is represented by a lack/ - of vests, ornaments and emblems of wisdom and power/ beyond the scenery where she is placed./ >>>>>While Europe inhabits a cultivated garden (grapes, flowers)/ and is surrounded by domesticated animals,/ America is

Thus,/ there is an ambivalent character in these visions of America,/ which at the same time scare and wonder Europeans./ In travel narratives written by its "conquerors",/ or through iconography, the images produced are marked by exoticism,/ by a superficial vision of an America yet unknown/ or known only by its coastline./ >>>>>> It would be necessary to penetrate its **inland** to deconstruct this initial stereotyped,/ superficial vision/ that associated the Americas to primitivism, wild nature, wide spaces, anti-intellectualism and,/ moreover,/ to "l'experience d'une privation et l'angoisse du vide",/ to quote expressions used by the Quebec theoretician Pierre Nepveu.<sup>4</sup>

Thereby,/ from the first contacts/ a mystified representation of America is drawn/ and inscribes itself in the social discourse/ and in the collective memory of several generations,/ after all,/ it was constructed from forged ideas/ and translated into preconceived images./ In this sense,/

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A. Thévet (1516-1590); H. Staden (1525-1579); A. Vespúcio (1454-1512).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> "...the experience of deprivation and the anguish of emptiness"... Cf Pierre Nepveu, 1998, avant propos, p. 7-11.

the whole history of literary ideas in the Americas will be a history of reappropriation,/ of attempts to take the reins of a foundation narrative that will be,/ at the same time,/ a narrative of deconstruction of the stereotypes and clichés which molded the first American profile revealed to the world.

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The second,

# 2. Recentering and the first transcultural practices

During the first five hundred years since the "discovery" of America/ we have been invested in deconstructing this feeling of supposed cultural dependency/ that makes us look far away (at Europe)/ in search of a *tertium comparationis*./ The most successful strategy has been to search for a long memory,/ not in Europe any longer,/ but in the autochthonous cultures./ The awareness of recentering/ points to transcultural practices initiated in the first centuries after the conquest,/ when the Guarani reproduce models from the European baroque/ with altered skin color,/ eye format and indigenous adornments/ added to sculptures that should merely replicate European models.

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The sculpture speaks for itself:/ between 1710 (seventeen hundred and ten) and 1735 (seventeen hundred and thirty five)/ The Seven Peoples of the Missions/ situated at the South of South America,/ in territories occupied today by Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay,/ lived their manifest apogee through architecture, music and sculpture./ The Jesuits offered the Indians models from the European baroque/, slowly subverted by the autochthones/ who introduced elements from their own reality/ and created the first copies of composite and transcultural art./ >>>>>In this

image of Saint Michael the Archangel one notices the substitution of the dragon/ – traditional in the European model –/ by the image of a "bandeirante" [FLAG BEARER] ,/ the name given to the Portuguese men who hunted Indians for slavery./ Though the model comes from traditional sources,/ >>>>> "The indigenous hand broke the aesthetic blockage imposed by imported patterns, in the saint's face/ - Saint Michael presents the features of the Guarani ethnicity/ - and in the substitution of the dragon for his predator" [BANDEIRANTE OR FLAG BEARER/also means explorer/trailblazer] (Trevisan, undated).

As Marc Angenot says: simple repetition doesn't exist. When we copy or repeat a model we always add something new.

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Alejo Carpentier helps us see/ in *Los passos perdidos* (1953)/ the occurrence of the same phenomenon in a Mexican chapel/ on whose frontispiece there is the sculpture of an angel/ (a model from the European baroque)/ playing *maracas*,/ in an obvious imbrication of sacred European art/ (the angel)/ associated to popular,/ profane American culture/ (*maracas* or rattle). The processes of hybridization of cultures have just begun.

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These examples from the visual arts make evident the phenomenon of material hybridization/ and the subversion of ritualized models that gave shape to the art of the New World from its onset./ In this sense /the theories which defended the thesis of Latin American cultural dependency were groundless./ The subversion of models and the introduction of American "impurity",/ present from the first moments of our cultural formation,/ emphasize the tendency in American art of constituting itself "in-between" /(Europe and America),/ to use Silvia Spitta's expression.

These examples mark the beginning of what we today call **Americanness**,/ or the equivalent to turning our eyes to what is near us/ (the Americas)/ and that starts nourishing the imagination of our artists as an alternative source of inspiration/ (mostly sought on the other side of the Atlantic, in Europe).

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## Section three is about

# 3. Cultural anthropophagy and creolization

Within Brazilian modernism (1922),/ when he launched the *Anthropophagic Manifest* (1928),/ Oswald de Andrade pointed to the need of searching for our cultural ancestry among the Tupinambá./ >>>>> When Édouard Glissant referred to the supremacy of "archipelago" thinking/ (autochthonous)/(pensée d'archipel in French) over system thinking/ (European rationality)/ (pensée de système en français) as he advocated the creolization of cultures,/ he was walking in the same direction of the search for our long memory in the heart of America itself.

# >>>> abaporu

When he identifies himself with anthropophagy as a Tupinambá practice at the time of the arrival of our "discoverers",/ Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954) is making a turn towards practices from before the European presence in American soil./ *The Anthropophagic Manifest* advocates that the cultural formation in the Americas should be inspired in the anthropophagic practice/ which foresaw the "devouring" only of courageous enemies/ so that through the digestive process they could absorb their virtues./ Thus,/ anthropophagy was not practiced in Brazil only to satisfy hunger,/ but as a ritual to be imitated/ in the sense of absorbing

the cultures we admire /(European, Indigenous, African)/ as a conscious and selective process/ which passes through digestion./ What matters is transformed into vital energy/ and what does not matter is eliminated./ Such proposal from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century/ remains surprisingly current/ for it implies the surpassing of a reductive and binary vision/ (Europe vs. America),/ since it is founded on a complex process of identitary interactions and negotiations./ Cultural anthropophagy comprises a proposal for the construction of a Brazilian cultural identity grounded on heterogeneity,/ in transcultural passages among the diverse cultural heritages absorbed/ and in the acceptance of a necessarily hybrid character in American culture./ "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question" (Andrade, 1928). (Tribe form São Paulo area)



In the multiethnic and pluricultural Caribbean region,/ the tendency to essentialism which characterized Negritude/ will be substituted by Creolization,/ defined as "an interactional aggregate (of reciprocal influences)/ or transactional (reciprocal concessions)/ of Caribbean, European, African, Asian and Levantine sources/ united by the game of history in the same soil"/ (Bernabé et al, 1989, p. 26). Hence/ it is the fruit of a *maelstrom* of signifiers in one signified/ which constitutes an open specificity./ The authors of *Éloge de la créolité*,/ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant,/ distinguish Americanness, Antillanité and Creolité concepts that could,/ at their limit,/ cover the same realities. The processes of Americanization/ and the feeling of Americanness resulting from them/ are useful to describe different stages in the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> "La Créolité est um agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel des e'léments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunit sur le même sol. (1989, p. 26)

negotiations and adjustments among populations from different ethnic origins/ to the New World.

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In the wake of *Éloge de la créolité*,/ Édouard Glissant theorizes about Diversity and Relation/ in his *Poetics of relation* (*Poétique de la relation*, 1990)/ and recommends transcultural encounters in the Caribbean/ under a relational perspective,/ underlying constant transformations operating between one culture and the other./ Embodying the situation of cultural plurality in the Caribbean region,/ the author postulates crosscultural understandings as possibilities for an increase in inter and trans-American relationships./ These relationships do not imply loss or copy/ since they originate something new in the scope of inter-hemispheric mobilities (cf. Benessaieh, 2010, p. 235).

## Section four takes us to

## 4. Americanness and transcultural mobilities

The notion of Americanness,/ Americanité in French,/ Americanidad, in Spanish,/ Americanidade in Portuguese,/far from proposing the existence of a large, homogeneous narrative,/ seeks to analyze displacements and resemantizations of myths throughout the three Americas/ and points to the work of reappropriation which characterizes American cultures/ beyond the narrow notions of nationality./ To think of Americanness today as a heterogeneous construct/ implies leaving aside bynarisms as civilization/barbarism;/ center/periphery,/ characteristic of most American studies until virtually the end of the twentieth century/ – which did not free

us from the fixation on European cultures - / in favor of including the Diverse and the excluded third.

During the nineteenth century/ American countries were so committed to defining their national identities/ that they forgot their belonging to America/ and stopped calling themselves Americans./ Perhaps because the United States took the appellation "Americans" for itself,/ in a self-evaluation metonymy designed only for USAmericans./ Speaking of Americanness nowadays is,/ in a certain way,/ the awareness of belonging to America/ and of proclaiming ourselves Americans,/ despite the heterogeneity characteristic of our continent./ Bell Galé Chavigny and Gari Laguardia assert,/ in *Reinventing the Americas*, that the "reinvention of the Americas must begin with exposure of the rhetorical incoherence we commit each time we designate the United States by the sign America,/ a name that belongs by rights to the hemisphere..."/ (Apud Laroche, 1992, p. 195)

When we talk about Americaness we need to bring out Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallersteins's article "Americanity as a Concept or the Americas in the Modern World-System", from 1992. For them, Americaness/ or Americanity/ corresponds to the definition of America's identity.

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Americanness in Latin America begins with the processes of transculturation and hybridization,/ with the added value of unpredictability./ When speaking about Latin America,/ Gérard Bouchard speaks of unfinished Americanness (Américanité inachevée). We believe incompleteness is an advantage/ since identification processes are in permanent becoming:/ the conclusion of the process is not exactly what

matters, / but the fact that exchanges,/ interpenetrations and dehierarchyzation processes continue to happen /and the idea of a shared Americanness between North and South/ may create conditions for the Relation(ship) to which Glissant refers.

Maybe it is in the framework of the American mythical imaginary that we are going to find the codes to decipher and reinvent Americaness./
It will be necessary,/ as Mignolo points out,/ to wait for the emergence of new *loci* of enunciation/ to bring to the surface knowledge considered subaltern during colonization (Mignolo, 2000, p. 3-45). /To rediscover in orality,/ in popular wisdom/ and in border *gnosis*/ new ways of inhabiting the Americas/ and of defining our belonging to them/ may be a way to access Americanness as resistance and as recovery of colonial difference.

The definition of Americaness is, then, linked to the originality of our cultural experience, "through a continental history that takes us to the knowledge of our own selves,", as specified by Jean-François Côté (2008, p. 36).

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# The final section brings us back to constellations

## 5. Reconstellating Americas

In this last section, we would like to discuss the validity of the concept proposed in the framework of this meeting/ – that of constellations –/ to go beyond the concept of transnationalisms./ Let us examine, then, the polisemy and the avatars of the expression.

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To begin with, constellation, from the Latin *constellatio*, points to a set of stars/ and at first was used in astrology./ In current astronomy it points to "an area around an asterism in the celestial sphere,/ that is, a pattern recognized as that of stars." <sup>6</sup>

Seen from earth the stars in a constellation seem close together/ but they may/ in fact/ be light years away from each other./ To see formations as the Southern Cross or The Big Dipper,/ we have to demarcate a constellation with frontier lines that delimit the figure it names./ Constellations may also slowly change configuration until they disappear.

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The term "constellation" was used more than once as a scientific metaphor./ We will mention two examples,/ Carl Jung and Gilbert Durand./ To Jung the collective unconscious seems to consist of mythological motives or images./ Thus, mythology may be taken as a sort of collective unconscious projection./ We can see it more clearly if we look at celestial constellations/ where original chaotic forms were organized through the projection of images./ That explains the influence of stars as proposed by astrologists./ These influences are nothing more than unconscious, introspective perceptions of the collective unconscious activity./ As constellations projected in the sky,/ similar figures are projected into legends and fairy tales/ or in historical characters./ Constellation is,/ them,/ a Jungian term referring to the "activation of a psychic personal complex or an archetypal content".<sup>7</sup>

Gilbert Durand,/ in *Champs de l'imaginaire* /called constellations,/ or "semantic basins" (bassins sémantiques),/ the images belonging to the same semantic field/ "identified by specific imaginary regimes and privileged

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constellation

A Glossary of Junguian Terms. http://www.terrapsych.com/jungdefs.html

myths"./ So we can understand that constellation may be used as a metaphor concerning certain syntaxes of the American collective imaginary./ >>>>> In that sense/ we would be close to Patrick Imbert's proposal,/ in his last book, *Comparer le Canada et les Amériques*; des racines aux réseaux transculturels, 2014,/ where he talks about social networks/ (*réseautage*)/ under the perspective that culture should favor the encounter of individuals through sharing/ for "it allows the exchange and management of knowledges/ in globalization processes of networking (réseautage/network)" (2014, p. 238).

Networks allow us to share our memories/, our competences,/ our imaginations,/ our projects,/ our ideas,/ and to make our differences,/ and singularities reflect on each other,/ become complementary,/ in sinergy (1998).8

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Les réseaux permettent de mettre en commun nos mémoires, nos compétences, nos imaginations, nos projets, nos idées, et de faire en sorte que toutes les différences, les singularités se relancent les unes les autres, entrent en complémentarité, en synergie. (1998)

Lévy even discusses the formation of comunities of knowledge/ (communautés de savoir)/ and questions the possibility of these communities to merge into a "universal conscience"/ (conscience universelle)<sup>9</sup>/ and of "connected intelligence"/, to quote Derrick Kerckhove,/ who created this expression

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thought is no longer hierarchic today, but interactive.

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Most probably,/ neither the choice of the "constellation" metaphor,/ nor that of "connected intelligence"/ will be final solutions for scholars of literatures of the Americas./ It is of interest,/ however,/ to point to the current need for reconfiguration,/ since nowadays "migrant and transnational" taxonomies/ have stopped contemplating a whole range of writings that go beyond certain conventions and boundaries.

Studies of the Americas under a comparative perspective that tries to identify points of convergence/ and to observe the diverse trajectories of founding myths that will constitute different constellations in their migrations through the Americas,/ are relatively recent/ and have given origin to theses as Americanness,/ creolization,/ transculturation,/ migrancy/ (migrant literatures)/ and transnationality/ (transnational literatures)./ These concepts emerge when we start to understand the precariousness/ and the insufficiency of the concept of national literatures to cover the cultural mobilities/ characteristic of the American continent./ Spatial, temporal, migrant, transnational and nomadic mobilities of all

<sup>9</sup>http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligence\_collective\_sur\_Internet#Internet.2C\_le\_r.C3.A9seau\_c .C3.A9r.C3.A9bral\_plan.C3.A9taire kinds/ rendered useless limiting practices/ usually associating literature and culture to national space.

It has been very important to think in terms of passages,/ transcultural movements/ and their reciprocal fertilizations that gave origin to new cultural products outside traditional classifications,/ as those based on the concept of nation./ These literatures came to be called migrant/ (mainly in the francophone space)/ and transnational/ (mainly in the Anglophone space)/ and call attention to dislocations,/ to cultural hybridization/ and to the fact of having originated in contact zones.

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American literatures originating from the friction between two or more cultures/ constitute new cultural facts/ that no longer belong to the cultural horizon of the country of origin/ or to the cultural horizon of the host country,/ engendering original and challenging cultural landscapes./
The cultural mobilities of late modernity challenge us to take our reflections beyond transnationalisms/ and to propose new terminologies able to span the variables of a globalized world./

Pierre Ouellet,/ Quebec writer and theoretician,/ and

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Kenneth White,/ Scottish poet and essayist who lives between Brittany (La Bretagne) and Montreal,/ have recently published respectively *The migrant spirit* (*L'esprit migrateur*, 2005)/ and *The nomad spirit* (*L'esprit nomade*, 1987)/ where they claim for non-migrant and non-transnational writers,/ that is,/ those who have been born and are writing inside the same territory,/ the condition of **intellectual migrants**/ or **spiritual nomads**/ for having the freedom to choose their intellectual ancestry/ and to dialogue/—without leaving their offices/—with cultures farther away and more diverse.

I wish to stress that if we are all migrants in this globalized and "googlelized" world,/ the concepts of "migrant"/ and/or/ "transnational literatures" rest emptied,/ lose their meaning./ Thus,/ the proposal of this conference of thinking beyond transnationalisms is timely and instigating in a meeting of Americanists./ To think in terms of constellations may be enriching in the sense of rupture,/ in a more definite way,/ with the concept of nation, for even when we talk about transnationalisms,/ we are still stuck to the idea of nation,/ although we are apparently breaking with it./ To speak of constellations and/or connected intelligence/ or knowledge communities/ may correspond to a more radical change,/ since it allows us to imagine a projection of "families" or "communities" of authors/ and/or works/ that share a common memorial stock,/ that is,/ communities of authors inside which works constitute similar forms of organizing/ and of ordering the American collective imaginary.

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As we move to the confusions I'd like to introduce Pierre Ouellet's concept of "memory communities" (communautés de mémoire)/ proposed by the author in his 2012 work, *Testaments.Le témoignage et le sacré Testimony and the sacred .*/

It is not about a common (or collective) memory/because it belongs to several traditions with different histories/developed in different places,/ but about the fact that all this people/ (immigrants from different origins)/ participate of Québécois or French Canadian society now/ and that makes us live in a community of memories.<sup>10</sup>

Today,/ to speak of literatures from the Americas would be to speak/ not of a common narrative/discourse,/ d'un grand récit des Amériques,/ not even about a American collective memory, in the sense of Maurice Halbwachs, but of different communities of memory (Ouellet)/ or communities of knowledge (Lévy)/ that adopt and share different memories/ in a true anthropophagic feast.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Entrevista realizada com Pierre Ouellet por Ana M. Lisboa de Mello, Zilá Bernd e Marie Hélène Parret Passos, publicada na revista *Letras de Hoje*, PUCRS, v. 50, n.2, abril-junho, 2015, p. 229-240.

Não se trata de uma memória comum (ou coletiva) porque ela pertence a várias tradições, com diferentes histórias, desenvolvidas em diversos lugares, mas o fato de que pessoas de diferentes origens participem agora da sociedade quebequense, faz com que vivamos em uma comunidade de memórias.

Ce n'est pas une mémoire commune (ou collective) parce qu'elle appartient à plusieurs traditions, plusieurs histoires différentes, plusieurs lieux où elle s'est développée, mais le fait que tous ces gens [immigrants de différentes origines], maintenant, participent de la société québécoise, ou canadienne française, fait en sorte que l'on vit dans la communauté de mémoires.

## In conclusion:



I want to mention Dany Laferrière<sup>11</sup>/ who is one of the main authors of the so called migrant literature in Quebec/ and winner of many literary prizes, even in France./ He is one the most read francophone authors of our day/ who published,/ in 2008,/ a book entitled *I am a Japanese writer* /(*Je suis um écrivain japonais*).<sup>12</sup>/ The novel begins with the narrator,/ who lives in Montreal and is a frequent reader of Mishima and Basho,/ telling Japanese journalists that he will write a book following the style of the Japanese masters./ With his ironic and humorous style,/ D. Laferrière once more discusses the labels critics and literary historians stick to writers./ He refuses to be considered a Québécois,/ Haitian/ or even migrant writer./ He prefers to say he is an American writer/ (in the large sense of designating the three Americas)/ who writes in French.

About this novel/ the author comments questions from journalists about whether he considers himself a Haitian,/ Caribbean/ or francophone writer./ And he answers that he assumes the nationality of his reader:/ when the Japanese read me,/ I immediately become a Japanese writer ("Ce qui veut dire que quand un Japonais me lit, je deviens immédiatement un écrivain japonais" (Laferrière, 2008, p. 30). <sup>13</sup>

He's against hifenated identites and labels.

It is time to think beyond transnationalisms, /to think about exchanges and sharing./ It is not exactly the Americas that are in suspension (Cornel West, 2209)/ or unfinished (Bouchard);/ it is the processes of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Nascido no Haiti em 13 de abril de 1953; é escritor e jornalista radicado na província do Quebec (Canadá).

<sup>12</sup> Sou um escritor japonês. Esse livro ainda não possui tradução para o português.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> "Êtes vous un écrivain haïtien, caribéen ou francophone? Je répondis que je prenais la nationalité de mon lecteur. Ce qui veut dire que quand un Japonais me lit, je deviens immédiatement un écrivain japonais" (2008, p. 30).

AMERICANESS that needs to be **reinvented**/ in terms of interactivity and complementarities, /producing the synergies of which Pierre Lévy speaks.

To share knowledges and experiences in the space of the Americas/corresponds to resignifying AMERICANNESS in a transversal and relational perspective./ Here is our challenge for the years to come.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

You may also address your questions in Portuguese, French or Spanish.

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Marten de Vos, Europa

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marten\_de\_Vos\_Adriaen\_Colla ert\_Europa.jpg

Philippe Galle (1579-1600) – Alegoria da América

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Jan van der Straet – América (ou América e Vespúcio), 1638

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ARTE MISSIONEIRA, imagem de São Miguel Arcanjo (séc. XVII)

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