

◆ **Afterword**

Reframing Amazonian Images: Poetics, Visions, and Sounds

Ana Forcinito

The present volume takes as a point of departure the images used to describe the journeys of many British naturalists to the Amazon in the nineteenth century. Thus, it starts with a visual icon that places geography at the forefront, almost like a map whose lines give shape not only to space but also to its cultural meaning (Wylie in this volume). The visual regime is a point of departure (and return), so as to reflect on Amazonian literatures and how those literatures-respond to the many images about the region. In what could be described as a process of reframing, the volume stresses that not only our eyes but also what we see (culturally available images and frames) are intertwined with language, more specifically with the dominant languages that are used to interpret the Amazon, and therefore with the epistemology of modernity and coloniality—in the sense that Aníbal Quijano understands the coloniality of knowledge as both epistemic suppression and control over the production of knowledge (541–42).

Edward Said stated that what characterizes imperialism is precisely the primacy of the geographical. Thus, violence is, in first place, represented as geographical violence “through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted and finally brought under control” (77). Here imagination plays a crucial role, because it is through the imagination of anti-imperialism that nature can be recuperated. Both vision and geography are underscored in this volume in a series of reformulations of what Mary Louise Pratt has called “imperial eyes” to refer to the representations of travel writing as the “celebratory narratives of European Superiority” (xi). The images of wonder, tropical abundance, darkness, morbidity, and toxicity (see Wylie in the introduction) that originate in the imperial imagination

define Amazonia as a geography perceived through the lenses of the metaphors of excess and abyss. At the same time, these images are understood in terms of the opposition nature vs. culture: either as natural abundance or as intellectual void. This volume offers a response to the lack of recognition of Amazonian cultural production, underscoring the position of Amazonian literature “at the forefront of a mythology-infused ecopoetics that has at its center one of the richest natural environments in the world” (Wylie in this volume 13).

The volume’s other points of departure (and return) are a concern with nature in Amazonian literature and questions about the relationship between the human and the nonhuman, as well as questions that address the ecological crises of the present. Some of the essays explicitly offer a reflection about ecocriticism, while others focus on different understandings of human relations to nature without specific reference to ecocritical approaches. In any case, ecocriticism (and, I should add, an Amazonian ecocriticism that originates in the cultural practices of the Amazon and not in the ecological philosophies of the North) plays a crucial role in both the understanding and the interruption of the narrative of coloniality and modernity by making visible Amazonian artistic practices that are, in turn, concerned with the cultural discourse about nature and with the rearticulation of the relationship with the environment. Two main conflicting visions expose two different temporalities and senses of space. For the visions from outside, the region’s temporality is that of modernity, which seems to advance in the form of progress and development, and the Amazon is a space that is understood as a metaphor of the excess and emptiness that justify exploitation and extraction. For the vision from inside, there are a series of interruptions (myths, voices, languages) of the linear forms of representation as well as images that confront both the “opacity” of the Amazon and that of Amazonian literature (see Mark Anderson, in this volume).

The image of the empty space has served historically as a metaphor that both predicts and justifies penetration, appropriation, and genocide in the history of Latin American literature, and the rearticulation of many images of nature is linked to justifying exploitation and emphasizing the threat nature poses to civilization. Also, the image of women has occupied a central role. Pizarro noted that the references not only to Amazonia but also to *las Amazonas* are intertwined in different discourses: the paradisiacal and infernal images in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the more rational representations linked to scientific knowledge in the eighteenth century, and the “imaginary of enrichment” in the nineteenth century, with images associated with the extraction of rubber and with new manifestations of violence (see Willis in this volume). In addition, the cultural differences marked by the different nations (as seen in this volume with Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia) and different languages (including

indigenous languages) have an impact in the understanding of identities and of identity conflicts, not only in their visions but also in their interests (Pizarro 61).

The volume proposes a rereading of the Latin American literary traditions, in which nature (as void, or as threatening and abundant chaos) through visual metaphors enters both the *crónicas* of colonization and the literature of the now postcolonial nations in the nineteenth century, shaped as they were by positivism and its understanding of the environment and social relations as intrinsic parts of national imaginaries. The volume's premise is that the interpretative clues about the environment and its reorganization, and the visual frames for the depiction of the Amazon, created images of excess and of lack, of invisibility and abundance, and exotic images of the corporeal. The Amazon was conceived as the object, a land without writers, a space to be written by the centers of culture and onto which to project their imaginaries of civilization and progress. The present collection challenges the representation of the region as absent of literary culture and instead reads it in terms of what Gayatri Spivak has called the "cognitive failure." For Spivak, this failure—which becomes a representational success in the case of the historian—is at the basis of the construction of the subaltern through the absence of recognition of agency—in this case, the agents of culture and subjects of memory (6). The reference to two senses seems to condense the intersection this cognitive failure: vision and sound, the presumed "opacity" (Anderson in this volume) and "muteness" (Wylie via Lézy) of the Amazon.

Though vision has a central place in the volume, in the construction of knowledge—marked by positivistic understandings of modernization and development—the voiceless sound of the region points to another constitutive aspect of the collection: a gesture toward acknowledging the voices, languages, and systems of representation that have been silenced. When Wylie refers to literary muteness (quoting Emanuel Lézy), she does so in the debate about ecocriticism in Latin America (the reference here is *The Ecological Imagination in Latin American Fiction* by Laura Barbas-Rhoden), pointing also to the displacement of Amazonia within Latin America, and of Amazonian writers from ecological perspectives. Confronting Amazonian visions against the mirage effect of representations from outside involves a double exercise of challenging images (imperial, foreign, modern, global) and reviewing the duality and ambivalence of the images within the Amazonian visual tradition. In that sense, the same images used to reflect the desires and fantasies of foreign subjects of vision are repeated, appropriated, transformed, and also challenged by the Amazonian writers studied in the volume.

In her discussion of the relationship between the imaginary of and the discourse regarding Amazonia, Ana Pizarro has pointed to a Toulouse-Lautrec painting of Paris at the end of the nineteenth century to establish a

link with the Amazon that can be seen in the utensils made with rubber in a French factory that opened in Paris in 1803. The image portrays the elegance of Paris and the way the city expresses (and/or conceals, one might add) a distant universe (Amazonia, and more precisely the extraction of rubber) (68). The essays in this volume also point to the need to analyze Eurocentric visual images as a way to return to what remains invisible: both the ontological difference of “otherness” and the dismantling of the “oneness” of the visible. However, the literary and cultural practices discussed in this volume put the visual regime into crisis, and they do so by pointing to the effects of this Eurocentric visual regime on the invisibility of Amazonia and on environmental depredation in the region.

As suggested in many of the essays in the present volume, the crisis of vision proposed by Amazonian literature is located in a different place from the European crisis of vision (and the crisis of the paradigms of modernity). Martin Jay, who has studied what he calls the denigration of vision in twentieth-century French thought, uses the metaphor of “downcast eyes” to point to the disillusionment with the ocularcentric model of modernity. Through a study of philosophers and writers (André Breton, Michel Foucault, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Luce Irigaray, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida, among others), Jay stresses that the obsession with the visual has generated a response that he characterizes as “ocularphobic discourse.” In this volume, the crisis of visual images that has produced an erasure of Amazonia (and in particular an erasure of its cultural production, in which the duality of visions and its conflict were staged) implies, on the one hand, a revision of both the different historical moments in which these images were produced (and the economic and political interests that they represented) and an awareness of the social and environmental effects of a Western visual regime associated with exploitation and oppression—of the environment, the human, and the relation between the two. On the other hand, it implies a return to the Amazonian literary and cultural practices and the way they put Western visual regimes into crisis in order to affirm their own visions. Even if those visions involve the quoting of European images and models of knowledge, there is an ambiguity, a duality, that points in the first place to the question of the location of the eye, and in the second place (as I will discuss later in relation to the close-up and the acoustic) to the question of the relationship between the subject and the object. For Jay, recognizing anti-ocularcentrism has, among other things, “shown the costs of assuming the eye, however it is understood, is a privileged medium of knowledge or an innocent instrument in human interaction” (590). Mark Anderson suggests (in this volume) that anti-ocularcentrism takes the form of a dispute both over cultural meaning about Amazonia and over a construction of knowledge linked to the eye of coloniality and modernity. Anderson presents the visions of Amazonia as a

“specific bioregion—that is, a South American river basin that encompasses a common climate and biota, as well as a quotient of distinctive human cultural characteristics structured around the fluvial environment” (57). Through the words of the Amazonian poet Max Martins, he points to its *erasure* precisely through the use of visual images, arguing that one of the fundamental problems to be confronted when conceptualizing Amazonia is its representation “as a landscape, or cultured environment” (57). Lesley Wylie underscores in her introduction an important effect of artistic practices in the dismantling of foreign visions. For Wylie, it is the literature written by Amazonian authors, rather than writings that represent Amazonia from the outside, that ultimately confronts those images of abundance and emptiness through the use of other images and other memories.

In terms of vision, the crisis of the Western ocularcentric model is staged through a study of the aesthetics of Amazonian writers. The volume proposes to take a closer look at the Amazon through the images and sounds that point to subjectivities marked by duality, hybridity, and the wound of colonization and Western logic while simultaneously producing points of escape from colonized identities and to the different, even conflicting perspectives that not only dismantle previous images of the Amazon but also rearticulate the frame through which Amazonia is perceived (or erased). Thus, there is a questioning of the visual regime, and in particular of a long tradition of dominant Western, hegemonic visions (a distanced imagination associated with exploitation and control.) Instead, the volume puts forth a plurality of points of view and sounds that in Amazonian cultural practices (particularly in literary practices) are conceived as close-ups, which, along with a strong emphasis on the acoustic register, underscore a sense of proximity. This proximity interrupts the marked distinction between subject and object of vision, and implies a revision of a set of relationships (humans and nature, nature and culture), forming a central aspect of the present volume.

As Nielson suggests (in this volume), global and regional environmental crises have affected both scientific investigations and humanistic approaches and have led to a rethinking of human relationships with the environment. Nielson argues that “[a]lthough those working in the hard sciences have typically led these efforts, scholars in the humanities, and namely ecocriticism as a humanistic discipline, are making a significant contribution to the conservation movement by helping both reframe and historicize human relationships with nature” (17). In the introduction, Lesley Wylie makes references to images of abundance (the “largest river in the world,” “the largest forest”) and to the silence about the urbanization of Amazonia in favor of emphasis on its emptiness, in terms of human beings but also in terms of the “lack” of writers and therefore of its own representations (1). The question of the gaze as foreign, distanced, and imperial is intertwined in

this volume with the question of voice, and more precisely of a supposed “literary muteness,” in both cases challenged not through negation but through a doubling of voices and visions that suggest an/other temporality and spatiality. In “Amazonia Dreaming,” for example, Arantza Mayo (in this volume) underscores the centrality of vision; in this case, conflictive, perhaps irreconcilable visions from the distance that reveal a mirage effect through the projections of travelers and visitors, foreign to Amazonia. Representations are also marked by translations; the encounters are “translated” for the discursive construction of Amazonia. Mayo draws attention to the Bolivian writer Pedro Shimose, who was awarded the Casa de las Américas prize in 1972. Critical attention to Shimose’s work overlooked his production regarding Amazonia, in part as an insider, although his poems offer a different type of distance, marked by a nostalgic representation that signals a sense of loss and exile. In clear contrast with dominant visions that produced subalternity as the exotic and dangerous other, Shimose denotes an “intimate knowledge” (Mayo 36), a proximity but also a gap, a disjunction that becomes present as loss through the poetic voice. In Mayo’s essay, the discussion of vision confronts not only the distance of the gaze associated with representations to be consumed, but also the distance that in Shimose arises from a nostalgic view of the Amazon, and in particular a sense of proximity that only the poetic language expresses. Mayo understands vision in terms of the temporal or spatial distance that produces a displacement in representation, a sense of “otherness” that in the case of the explorer takes the form of the gaze of “discovery,” and in the case of Shimose takes the form of nostalgia, and therefore, permeated by a sense of loss. For Mayo, vision and memory are interrelated in the different stages of Shimose’s work. The wound of trauma (of colonization, of exile) is expressed through a return to myth as a recovery of the past, while at the same time interrupting the notion of time as progression.

Mark Anderson (in this volume) argues that Amazonia is more a cognitive problem than a concrete object of knowledge. Vision—and knowledge—are challenged as “the empiricist’s gaze is curtailed severely by vegetal entanglement” (58). The “opacity” as difficulty to see is followed by a mirage effect produced by the refraction of the observer’s gaze that leads to a cognitive failure. Anderson’s essay analyzes the perception of Amazonian environments in Euclides da Cunha, Alberto Rangel, and José Eustasio Rivera. For Anderson, the images in these texts are linked to projects of modernization that fix Amazonia as an object of scientific or cultural knowledge. The opacity to modern forms of perception and apprehension affected the way Amazonia was represented (as a disconnection between perception and representation). For Anderson the “baroque-ness” of the texts by da Cunha, Rangel, and Rivera surfaces as a response to the confrontation with opacity. Their visions (and struggles to see) cannot be thought of separately from their involvement in scientific

expeditions, linked to national projects and to the demarcation of borders, projects of expansion to underpopulated areas and of exploitation of natural resources. Anderson uses the term “natural baroque” to describe the “cognitive folding” performed by these authors, involving a production of knowledge that comes from ecology and from new frameworks to address what he calls a “more transparent opacity” of Amazonia.

The essay in this collection that deals most explicitly with the concerns of ecocriticism is that of Rex P. Nielson, who returns to Euclides da Cunha’s representation of the Amazon in order to argue that, though grounded in positivist scientific frameworks, it constitutes a poetic gesture that represents political and social inequities in relation to the geographical imagination, and offers “key insights within Brazil’s literary and intellectual history . . . that . . . might contribute more broadly to a deeper understanding of ecocritical thought” (20–21). For Nielson, the new humanistic (and scientific) approaches that address the relationship between the human and the environment, as a response to global environmental crises with a strong effect in local realities, also involve a reframing (in visual terms) and a historicization of this relationship. The contribution of ecocriticism to the conservation movement implies, for Nielson, a theorization from the field of Brazilian literary studies, not as an expansion of ecocriticism in Anglophone cultural studies but as an acknowledgement of a literary tradition that has been concerned with framing and reframing the relationship between the human and the environment. Ecocriticism, as a new epistemology, offers a critical position for reformulating the question of the cultural agency of the Amazon, and therefore of Amazonian writing and the intellectual imagination of its writers. This essay sets out to examine Euclides da Cunha’s representations of nature and human history as contributions to an area that has been under-theorized in Luso-Brazilian studies. Ecocritical readings can, Nielson argues, reopen the Brazilian literary canon by “revealing an ignored or misunderstood ecological imagination” (18). For Nielson, ecocritical thought comes precisely from this zone in which the violence of the wound of exploitation of the environment (and the human) cannot be ignored. His essay proposes a dialogue between the Anglophone theories of ecocriticism and representations of the relationship between the human and the environment in the Brazilian literary tradition.

Moving to the Peruvian Amazon, Lesley Wylie analyzes *Río Putamayo* by Jaime Vázquez Izquierdo. Her essay focuses on the relationship between the text (and Vázquez Izquierdo himself) and the generation of writers gathered under the name Bubinzana. Their depiction of the Amazon, argues Wylie, is concerned with discovering “la sensibilidad de lo mágico” (magic sensibility) through a rejection of artistic influences from Europe, the United States, and Lima, and through a focus on the Amazonian cultural tradition. Wylie studies the tensions between Vázquez Izquierdo and the Bubinzana

group, exploring the ambiguities present in the novella itself. She notes that the echoes of literary representations of the Amazon (such as those of José Eustasio Rivera and Euclides da Cunha) are present in Vázquez Izquierdo, but as the point of departure for a transformation: not only does the magical sensibility in *Río Putumayo* represent the human and nonhuman relations in the Amazon, but it also reconfigures them, with an emphasis on proximity rather than destruction. Through the consideration of the human as part of the ecological environment, argues Wylie, the magical and the mythological correspond not to the difficulty of transcending former visions of the Amazon but to the presence of those cosmologies in the text, and therefore a presence of nature and human as intertwined.

Memory, and in particular the construction of memory, are also articulated in many of the essays, as they underscore aesthetic practices that are present in contemporary Amazonian literature. This persistence of memory is also a persistence of transformation, as Candace Slater suggests (in this volume) when she examines how the Enchante and the indigenous visions of traditional stories are reframed in *Órfãos do Eldorado*, a 2008 novella by Milton Hataum. For Slater, the rewriting of the folk and popular stories of enchanted beings and the representation of the cities they inhabit at the bottom of the river are not representations of the past but contemporary images that speak to the present. Magical storytelling bridges personal vision and community images as a form of resistance to narratives of globalization and in particular to environmental devastation. The rewriting of folk stories to talk about the present is cast as a way to explore and understand the disenchantment with modernity and the liberating effect of such disenchantment in Amazonian stories. The process of retuning to those folk stories (as an exercise of memory that follows the path of different layers, as Walter Benjamin suggested with the image of the excavation) involves also a transformation. Slater argues that while oral narratives underline the ambiguity and the vision of the underwater realm as potential source of joy, Hataum's novella works with the sense of loss, almost like an obsession. The use of the myth of Enchantment comes to dismantle the myths of modernity and the place of nature in them, and it serves simultaneously as a point of return to other ways of seeing.

Michael Uzendoski (in this volume) addresses the challenges to the dominant visual regime. He explores Amazonian storytelling and music “as practices that connect people to each other, the past, the landscape, and cosmology in complex experiential and social ways” (125). Native Amazonian storytelling, notes Uzendoski, points not only to “oral literature” or “oral poetry” (as Western interpretations of orality) but also to an interruption of those understandings. He argues that the relationship between ecocriticism and storytelling is not only about memory but also about a continuous creation, a text as “a lived practice of analogical flow” (126). Through an exploration of Amazonian storytelling and music as alternative

forms and practices of textuality and creative expression in two songs from the Ecuadorian Amazon embedded in the Kichwa tradition, Uzendoski rethinks the very definition of the human, where animals, humans, spirits, and landscape are thought to share a common “humanity” through a sense of interconnectedness. The body, as a metaphor that condenses ambiguities (for example, life and death), and in particular the maternal body, present in both songs, points to the continuity of life and to caring.

The maternal as a category places the feminine in a privileged space in understandings of the relationship to nature. It is one of the most important categories for French feminism, a tradition that has theorized extensively about women and their bodies as space for dismantling—often through writing—dominant cultural constructions (a position taken by authors such as Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva). Because in the dominant representations of patriarchal thought the “feminine” is understood as being closer to nature and far from culture, women have, for Irigaray and Kristeva, an unstable and foreign relation to languages (paternal languages as those related to “culture”). “Nature” has its own language (the maternal language) that, for these feminists, is untranslatable into the dominant languages. This language (and their position has been rightly criticized for its essentialism) has, nevertheless, the possibility of exceeding the frames of the paternal law and its Reason, of subverting its limits. In Uzendoski’s essay the maternal body responds, as textuality and orality, to a different framework and, as with the crisis of vision, rethinks the maternal body from a different epistemic location. Maternal bodies are, for Uzendoski, about reconstruction (with parts of other bodies) and about engagement in co-mothering. In his analysis the relationship to landscape is through kinship, and at the same time kinship is understood as a textuality that points to the constant transformations of the body.

Shifting the discussion to theater production in Manaus and, more specifically, to the works of Jorge Bandeira, Bruce Dean Willis (in this volume) studies the visual relationships as well as the traveling of the images that become reframed, from the imperial gaze to marginal ways of seeing. Willis explains that the casual way in which London’s Kew Royal Botanical Gardens refers to the theft of seedlings for propagation in British colonies is a point of departure for rethinking the importance with which this episode, forgotten in England, is remembered in Northern Brazil, where the theft was understood as the act that led to economic ruin in the Amazon. Ecocriticism is here understood in relation to an economic system of subjugation. Within this matrix of subjugation, the representation of humans and animals, in terms of solidarity between the two (animalized people, anthropomorphized animals) and the representation of the body (as the most intimate environmental reference), is intertwined with corporeal extractions and corporeal exposure (110). Through the analysis of visual images of the performances, Willis discusses the representation of the body in relation to

nature. In Willis the maternal body serves as a counterpart to the rhetoric of domination, but it also raises the question of vulnerability, as a critical category, at the forefront of the debate about the relationship between humans and the environment. The presence of maternal bodies entails simultaneously an allusion to the vulnerable body and a different understanding of relations that is based on generosity and solidarity.

The questioning of the imperial eyes that marked the representation of Amazonia (and its reformulations to the present) is a constant point of return in the volume as a way to propose a movement of detachment from those images while providing, as is the case in many essays, a history of different contours of vision related to specific economic interests. The visual regime is not completely questioned. Rather it is transformed, and thus the imaginary projection, central to identitarian affirmation, is not only understood as environment but also as the cultural constructions defined by narrations that address a new relation to that environment, and, at the same time, a memory of the myths and stories that shape a sense of identity and belonging.

This volume entails a challenge to the mirage effect produced by images created by the dominant gaze (in its different reformulations) and by the projections of foreign theories of ecocriticism and ecological studies. I return to the beginning and to the crisis of the visual regime proposed in Wylie's introduction, with a gesture that could be thought of as being akin to the close-up in cinema: an invitation to see an image from a closer distance, and an interruption of the narrative sequence in order to focus on one object or one detail that could not be fully observed in the images that preceded it. The volume starts with a vision from the distance and invites us to get closer and closer to the region, to its literary production, to its myths and the visions that inhabit them. There are different theories to understand the effect of the close-up in film. Here I follow Gilles Deleuze, for whom the close-up implies an abstraction of the represented object, which becomes an entity in the process of abstraction from time and space (96). While maintaining the emphasis on the visual, close-ups produce two effects that are particularly relevant to this volume. In the first place, a close-up stops the narrative sequences of the moving images, and if we are to agree with Deleuze, the process of abstraction of the object and the erasure of the idea of space both imply a stillness (and therefore a suspension of the narrative images related to the imperial gaze) and a sense of simultaneity (and therefore the addition of another form of temporality that is not based on the concept of progression.) In this volume, for instance, the history of the images of excess and abundance associated with imperial eyes is interrupted by a gesture of getting closer to the images produced by Amazonian texts (such as, for example, the maternal body or the enchanted beings). Here I see an interruption of the narrative sequence associated with extraction and exploitation, exposing, along with the violence of such representations,

images that involve a different relationship not only to the land and the environment but also to ways of seeing. Second, the close-up in cinema, like the gesture proposed in this volume, creates a sense of proximity that awakens other senses, and depending on how close the camera gets to the object, the spectator cannot see the object anymore, so the visual regime is called into question to open up to other senses, especially sound. The proximity emphasized in these essays through the visual representations of Amazonian writers underscores, first, their voice, and then the rhythms, the music, the songs, the languages that point to the acoustic register and that attempt to undo the “literary muteness” that was also one of the points of departure of the volume. The sense of proximity that blurs the clear distinction between subject and object calls into question the marked distinction between the human and the environment, not only aesthetically but also epistemologically.

This volume also reformulates ecocriticism through the framework of Amazonian studies. In that sense, and as Ileana Rodríguez has suggested, ecocriticism in Latin America is a critical force of developmentalism against the politics of extraction (30). The volume reclaims ecocriticism as part of Amazonian cultural practices and underscores a poetics of the Amazon. It points simultaneously to a new relationship between the human and the environment, and it also underscores an ethical relationship between the human and the vulnerability of nature, and a poetics situated in the interstices of visual representations and discursive constructions that brings to the forefront other poetics, other epistemologies, and other relationships to vision and sound. The reframing of the relationship to the environment implies a revision of its cultural interpretations and an exercise of memory, an ecological memory concerned with the destruction of natural resources and the erasure of the cultural agency of Amazonian intellectuals.

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