

This indeterminacy attains nearly overpowering proportions for travelers to the region, especially those who are accustomed to the long vistas, vertical spatial distributions, and clearly defined borders of more conventional geographies. For people intent on performing empirical observation in the naturalist tradition in particular, Amazonia presents a series of obstacles ranging from the discomfort of struggling with swarms of biting insects to the extreme mutability of boundaries between land and water during the seasonal flood cycle. As one traveler wrote after watching an Amazonian river overflow its banks:

Não era mais a corrente definida num leito. A água invadia o matagal à vontade, na inundação espreada e profunda. Por onde o olhar pudesse alcançar de través as copas e por entre troncos, era um oceano, mas sem arfadas, nem ondas, nem espumas, no brilho frio das ágatas negras. À alagação, penetrando por toda parte, só raro tino perceberia o rumo prefixado. (Rangel 86)

(It was no longer a current defined by a riverbed. The water invaded the thickets at will in that extensive and deep flooding. Wherever one's gaze could infiltrate through treetops and between trunks, there was ocean, but an ocean without sound, without waves, without foam, in the cold luster of black agate. Only a fine touch (rare sensibility) could perceive any set direction in the swamping, which penetrated everywhere.)¹

The empiricist's gaze is curtailed severely by vegetal entanglement—those trunks and treetops—and the opacity of the silt and tannin-saturated water; furthermore, few lines of sight are available, as movement is confined to the linearity (in terms of distribution of points of view, not the straightness) of navigable waterways. Stymied by entanglement, opacity, and restricted movement, the observing subject is unable to triangulate a spatial perspective of the objects s/he is attempting to apprehend. Everything presents itself to the observer superficially, as two-dimensional surface lacking depth.

Of course, this is always the case with sight, since the brain transforms everything we see into ocular image; depth is inferred from triangulated images taken from various points of view as well as visual cues within images including contour lines, angles, and gradations of contrast (Metzger 97–100, 114–21). Yet these markers of depth—and I use depth both literally and metaphorically, as the narrative of causality underpinning an image—are unavailable or severely limited in many Amazonian environments, and their absence calls into question the integrity of the image as a whole. With so many parts of the picture missing, any semblance of depth appears as just that: as optical illusion, as mere surface effects, folds or involutions within the image. This is why the author switches emphasis from sight to touch—

that “tino”—in the final line of the quote. With these restrictions on the normal primacy of sight, the observer is forced to rely on the imprecision of touch to divine Amazonia’s surfaces. Furthermore, “tino” also evokes intuition and inference: the mind must intervene to fill in the gaps left by the fragmented gaze. Finally, the allusion to the Amazon’s oceanic scale foregrounds the problems that the bioregion’s seemingly infinite extension presents to human cognition, which, again, relies heavily on vision. Even on a single plane or surface, infinity has no contours and, therefore, no image, a cognitive predicament that is only compounded by Amazonia’s vast biodiversity, which presents the additional problem of infinite (inapprehensible) historical depth or evolutionary variation over time.

This essay is concerned primarily with this foundational problem of the opacity of Amazonia to cognition, which affects not only travelers writing on the region but also those who grew up on Amazonian riverbanks. I use the term *cognition* in its broadest sense to describe the mesh of coetaneous physical perceptions, thoughts, and emotions that come into play as the conscious mind whenever an individual confronts material that resists immediate assimilation into an order of knowledge. I am particularly interested in the problems of sensorial perception that Amazonian environments posed to traveling Latin American writers Euclides da Cunha, Alberto Rangel, and José Eustasio Rivera in the early twentieth century. These writers were all involved in projects to modernize Amazonia following the regionalist model; they looked to assess its position within the modern nation and fix it as an object of scientific or cultural knowledge, economic production, and linguistic precision.² Each of them arrived in Amazonia armed with a toolbox of modern theoretical apparatuses only to find the implementation of modernity hampered by the Amazonian environment at the most basic level: that of corporeal perception.

These authors’ attempts to represent textually their sensorial experiences and reconcile them within the modern paradigm compelled them to perform increasingly intricate series of theoretical contortions or foldings within their texts that, despite their primarily naturalist or Spanish American *modernista* (in Rivera’s case) stylistic orientations, take on a seemingly out-of-place baroque texture. Since this baroque-ness appears disruptively, as turbulence, within other styles of writing, I argue that it does not owe its existence to a neo-baroque aesthetic or will to style preceding that of mid-twentieth-century Cuban writers Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy, or Brazilian Tropicália, even if it shares with them problematic relationships between perception and representation. Instead, I argue that these texts’ occasional baroque-ness emerges in response to moments of confrontation with the opacity of the Amazonian aquatic and vegetal surfaces themselves. These opaque surfaces refract the travelers’ gazes, provoking this seemingly baroque linguistic texture as the textual representation of the jungle’s impermeable entanglement as well as the

chaotic theoretical folding the writers' minds undergo as they try to make sense of an environment that is as vast as it is intricate.

I draw on the mechanics of baroque folding proposed by Gilles Deleuze to advance an explanation for the process by which perception unsettles certain modes of representation, leading to the intrusion of seemingly baroque wordplay and syntactic features in predominantly naturalist and *modernista* narratives. In *The Fold*, Deleuze revisits seventeenth-century mathematician Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's thought to elaborate a theory of baroque perception that replaces the abstract, Cartesian subject with the materiality of the "monad," a taxonomy that encompasses anything that could be considered individuated, including the human individual. In Deleuze's reading, the monad interfaces with the world not through the abstract mediation of symbols (language) but rather through a mechanics of folding, in which sensorial perceptions arise from interaction with folds (surface features or effects, what can be perceived) on the exterior of other monads ("objects" in theories of subjectivity); these folds are then replicated on the interior of the "perceiving" monad in miniature, so that it is completely lined with minute perceptual folds or involutions that are nevertheless only present unconsciously, in the way that we have traditionally imagined animal perception to occur (86). In this formulation, conscious awareness does not emerge as a single event—Descartes's "cogito ergo sum"—from which a categorical system arises that distributes attention toward objects on a preexisting scale of value; rather, it surfaces continuously in the differential interactions between perceptual folds. Those folds that emerge from differential comparison as anomalous enter our awareness as conscious perception. Material cognition—not some metaphysical consciousness—is thus generated continuously during encounters with perceived anomalies, rather than from any systematic order of identities. This Leibnizian notion of material perception leading to cognition is what Deleuze, following Christine Buci-Glucksmann, calls a baroque way of seeing (32).

In what follows, I argue that the anomalies that da Cunha, Rangel, and Rivera encountered in the Amazonian environment resisted incorporation into modern theoretical frameworks and stylistic conventions, relegating their narrators to subject positions located very near to what philosophers call naïve realism—that is, the problematic notion that what one perceives actually dictates, at least to a degree, how it is cognized. Since these authors found themselves in positions in which representation could not account fully for perception through theoretical abstraction, representation became dependent on the material object itself, but, being Amazonia, that object was highly convoluted and opaque. In this sense, the seemingly baroque passages in da Cunha's *À margem da história* (*The Amazon: Land without History*; 1909), Rangel's *Inferno verde* (*Green hell*; 1908), and Rivera's *La vorágine*

(*The Vortex*; 1924) mirror the Amazonian environments' own convoluted opacity to human cognition.

Modern Opacity

Despite its fundamental opacity to full cognition, Amazonia has not always provoked baroque folding in literary representations of the region. It only became truly opaque during the late nineteenth century when modernity began to demand that objects—geographies as well as flora and fauna—explain themselves on their own functional terms, in accordance with universal natural laws or patterns. Before that moment, intellectual abstraction, whether rationalistic or mythological, was considered a legitimate way of systematizing objects that could only be apprehended partially or negatively.³ Until the nineteenth century, nobody had illusions of achieving total knowledge of the material universe; abstract representation was absolutely necessary to explain the unknown, which formed the bulk of knowledge, even if in the negative.

One notes few stylistic discrepancies, which is the metric I am using to estimate the degree to which Amazonia posed a problem for cognition within dominant modes of knowledge, and thus for representation, in early accounts of the region such as those of Gaspar de Carvajal and Cristóbal de Acuña, despite their historical proximity to European and New World baroque cultural production. Likewise, few if any baroque foldings disrupt the smooth texture of travel reports on the region produced by early European naturalists like La Condamine and Humboldt. Any cognitive problems that Amazonia presented to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century explorers were resolved through tropes of monstrosity and the novelty of the unknown (*lo desconocido* proper to the New World), while eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century naturalists were more preoccupied with fitting the region into their taxonomic schemes and cosmological geometries than in divining its own properties. For these early naturalists, Amazonia was of interest only in function of its positioning within the sum of all regions and all living beings—that is, the universe as sublime natural order.⁴ They had little interest in defining Amazonia as a distinct epistemological totality; any threat to cognition that its opacity presented was thus neutralized through abstraction in this grand scheme of rational taxonomies.⁵

From the nineteenth century on, however, the modern focus on the object as the repository of knowledge about itself invalidated theoretical abstraction that could not be immediately verified through duplicable empirical observation. It seems reasonable to assert, therefore, that Amazonia began to emerge as an object of knowledge with its own specificity precisely with the epistemological shift that, according to

Foucault, gave rise to the modern sciences and disciplinary divisions, a fact that is borne out by the dramatic increase in scientific expeditions to the region in the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact, I argue that Amazonia emerged as an object of science not solely as a product of what Pratt views as the neocolonial expansion of the imperial eye (the “sovereign science” of the nineteenth century) and its mercantile enumeration of resources available for exploitation, but also as its Other, as a key cognitive obstacle whose complexity so vexed available modes of representation that it forced a rift in nineteenth-century life sciences that could only be resolved through the invention of ecology.⁶ Only ecology in its recent conceptualization through biosemiotics has been able to reconcile the gaps between the organism, the ecosystem that it inhabits, and the culture that encodes it, giving rise to the notion of bioregions. But ecology itself only became possible as a theory of knowledge because a series of modern scientific disciplines—most prominently, organismic biology—failed to provide satisfactory methods for apprehending environments in their totality; in fact, these sciences’ empirical constraints rendered opaque what had been transparent to former generations for whom abstraction was more acceptable.

There are several reasons that the rift that Amazonia’s opacity provoked between modern scientific theory and empirical practice appeared precisely at the turn of the twentieth century and more prominently in works written by Latin American authors da Cunha, Rangel, and Rivera than in those of European or North American naturalists. The latter’s position as Western scientists invested them with a certain discursive authority that, together with Amazonia’s foreignness, provided a sufficient degree of geographical abstraction to sidestep the problem of naïve realism. They came to Amazonia purely in their capacity as foreign scientific observers to carry out very specific research projects within narrowly defined disciplines; any cognitive anomalies that they encountered outside the scope of their empirical studies were thus not their concern. Despite his interests in biogeography, foundational biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, for example, never strays far beyond the properties of the specific species he analyzes in works such as *On the Monkeys of the Amazon* (1852) or *Palm Trees of the Amazon and Their Uses* (1853), while his *A Narrative of Travels on the Amazon and the Rio Negro* (1889), though it provides a more extensive enumeration of species, makes little effort to theorize Amazonia as an environmental totality. The book’s objective is to recount and sell to European reading publics his travels as a foreigner, and he finds Brazilian culture just as exotic as the Amazonian natural environment. Like anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose *Tristes tropiques* (1955) made clear that he very seldom found himself in danger of feeling at home in the indigenous Brazilian cultures that he studied, these authors never ran the risk of identifying with Amazonian nature as *their* nature. They thus had little

cultural stake in the object of study, although the politics of colonialism did occasionally surface between the lines of their scientific discourse. This disinterest in local context allowed them to select their objects of study according to preformulated disciplinary criteria, extricate these objects from their surroundings, and view them in organismic isolation (under the microscope, as it were) without taking into account either the positions of the objects in question or their own positions within the Amazonian environment as a whole.

South American writers, on the other hand, found themselves compelled to situate their observations within modern science and natural history, but also nation-building projects including the writing of cultural history. For these writers, the scientific assessment of Amazonia became a matter of national and continental pride—a stage both for performing modernity and for refuting the frequently racist or denigrating social tropes that many nineteenth-century European scientists bundled into their biological theories.⁷ Organismic biology in particular had been used to affirm the inferiority of the Americas and their inhabitants, transparently supporting neocolonial ideology. For instance, leading eighteenth-century naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Count de Buffon, whom Foucault cites specifically as a key thinker in the shift from natural history to modern organismic biology due to his rejection of Linnaeus's taxonomic approach and his advances in biogeography, claimed famously that what he perceived as the relative lack of large mammals in the Americas was due to an impoverished environment unable to sustain complex organisms, including rational humans (Gerbi 3–4). In any case, the scientific expeditions in which da Cunha, Rangel, and Rivera participated were closely linked to postcolonial nationalistic projects to delineate borders, colonize sparsely populated areas, and assess natural resources available for industrial development, but they were also tied to the rise of national scientific programs and the desire to create national “natural” histories that would uphold the nations’ claims to sovereign, self-sustaining unity between territory, biota, and human inhabitants.⁸ At the same time, the rubber boom put Amazonian latex in a central position in the global commodities market; these authors’ presence in Amazonia and keen interest in the latex industry are thus also closely linked to nationalistic projects of economic modernization and development, as well as to concerns about the problems of deterritorialization and the near-complete lack of regulation in late nineteenth-century globalization following the liberal model. As their examination of the latex industry makes clear, it was truly *capitalismo salvaje* (savage capitalism).

Labor: The Clarity at the Heart of Darkness

Tellingly, if da Cunha's *À margem da história*, Rangel's *Inferno verde*, and Rivera's *La vorágine* seem to focus initially on evaluating the Amazonian environment and its potential for territorialization within the nation, the labor economy soon emerges as the central theme in all three works. Da Cunha and Rivera were sent by their respective governments (Brazil and Colombia) to survey national boundaries within Amazonia, while Rangel's main project was to populate the Brazilian Amazon and foment economic development, in large part to legitimate Brazil's 1903 annexation of the formerly Bolivian province of Acre as well as in response to the threat of encroachment from Spanish American neighbors and would-be European neocolonialists. Rangel was transparently concerned with supplying Amazonia with workers and stimulating agriculture and industry to attract migrants to the region; it is therefore not surprising that the stories in *Inferno verde* foreground explicitly the theme of labor and the difficulty of implementing modern standards of efficiency and productivity in the Amazonian environment. His homesteaders, agricultural laborers, rubber-gatherers, and engineers are under constant attack from a hostile environment that strives continuously to undo their work, a situation that is captured masterfully in the symbol of the *terras caídas*—riverbanks undercut by erosion that collapse, carrying the protagonist of the homonymous story's homestead with them. José Cordulo's life work is destroyed in a single night; but, having no other option, he begins the Sisyphean labor of rebuilding the very next morning. Rangel's stories catalog the various types of labor that are performed in the Amazonia of his time, but they also reveal that these laborers are unequal to the task of nationalizing the Amazonian environment within the norms established by modern life in coastal southern Brazil. An unimaginably greater degree of efficiency in work will have to be achieved before Amazonia can be territorialized fully as part of modern Brazil.

Da Cunha and Rivera, on the other hand, traveled to Amazonia not as part of economic development projects but rather as members of binational expeditions sent to survey national boundaries. Da Cunha was sent to map the limits between Brazil and Peru along the Purus River in 1905, while Rivera participated in a 1922 expedition to demarcate the Amazonian border between Colombia and Venezuela. These authors' primary reason for being in Amazonia was to chart these borders and make observations on the climate and the natural resources available in these areas; nevertheless, both became firsthand witnesses to the abject working and living conditions associated with the Amazonian latex industry at that time.⁹ Horrified to discover, within their own nations, a labor regime akin to slavery, these authors shifted narrative modes from the naturalistic (more nationalistic in

Rivera's case) survey of resources to the social testimonial with the explicit goal of eradicating a labor structure that had no place in the liberal notions of citizenship that they espoused. Da Cunha goes as far as calling the rubber plantations "diabolical paradises" embodying the "most criminal organization of labor that unbridled egotism has ever dreamed up."¹⁰ This labor structure is criminal because of its reliance on debt-slavery, but also because of the exploitativeness of an economy of extraction that channeled profits to foreign shores rather than reinvesting them in Brazil. Indeed, da Cunha remarks repeatedly on the foreignness of Amazonia, underscoring not only its environmental distinctiveness when compared to southern Brazilian landscapes, but also that the Amazonian cities of Manaus and Belem teem with foreign adventurers, speculators, exporters, prostitutes, and performers hired to put on shows at the ostentatious Teatro Amazonas (*Paraíso* 312). Likewise, Rivera constructs a perspective of the rubber industry in which transnational trading conglomerates act without any governmental oversight, completely beyond the rule of national or international law. The lack of response that his protagonist, Arturo Cova, receives from the Colombian government when he appeals for its intervention to rescue its own enslaved citizens reveals that Amazonia is a denationalized, unregulated space in which transnational corporations such as Julio César Arana's Peruvian Amazon Company exercise an unprecedented degree of sovereignty, even issuing their own passports and militarily patrolling the borders of the territories they control (Rivera 164, 172, 198). In these authors' representations, at least, the latex companies appear to have established pirate fiefdoms in the midst of Brazilian and Colombian territories, a situation that is only possible due to Amazonia's position as a "translocal border" (Mejías-López 375).

Needless to say, neither an exploitative neocolonial economy of extraction nor a return to slavery fit in with the kind of modernization that da Cunha, Rangel, and Rivera had in mind for their nations, which required, on the one hand, inducting former colonial subalterns into political and cultural citizenship through civic education, and, on the other, the construction of a wage labor economy in which modern workers also became consumers sustaining the national economy. Despite its abjection, however, the labor economy in the rubber industry did not constitute an area of opacity for these authors' cognitive framework; it was transparently explicable through the optics of neocolonial resource exploitation and slavery, which had only recently been abolished in Brazil (in 1888). The causality is clear: the implementation of a modern economy in Amazonia is hindered by debt slavery's inefficiency and inhumane working conditions, which limit productivity; the lack of fair wages, which would ostensibly generate a consumer-based local economy; and the lack of reinvestment in infrastructure, since the rubber magnates seem to prefer to spend their cash on entertainment and ostentation.¹¹ Likewise, the nomadism to which the

rubber tappers are condemned precludes national territorialization, since they are unable to settle down and cultivate the national landscape, which would permit them to develop the love for the land that was key in nineteenth-century romantic formulations of nationalism. Finally, the absence of the rule of law—that criminality that both da Cunha and Rivera foreground—is shown to be the product not of unruly natives but of exploitative foreign occupiers and corrupt government officials from outside of Amazonia whose only reason for being there is to line their pockets as quickly as possible.

In short, the economic regime of the rubber industry was immediately explicable within modern economic and political theory through what Foucault calls biopolitics—that is, the meticulously coordinated relations between law, labor regimes, the labor environment (the jungle as workplace), and the body. Indeed, the discourse of eugenics, which was the apex of nineteenth-century biopolitical thought, surfaces frequently in all three authors' texts; they seem particularly interested in the notion of race-mending not through *mestizaje*, or whitening, but rather through incorporation into a modern, non-exploitative labor regime. Euclides da Cunha in particular promotes the benefits of what he calls “telluric selection,” in which formerly unproductive, mixed-race *caboclos* from drought-plagued northeastern Brazil become national heroes by migrating and adapting to the Amazonian climate, taming the wilderness through work, and expanding the nation during the war over the province of Acre, all with little to no help from the federal government (*Paraíso* 130–31). He envisions these evolved *caboclos* as forming the bedrock of an emerging “Brazilian race” that will reconcile colonial racial tensions and lead the nation into modernity through individual initiative and work, triumphing even over their enslavement in the rubber industry once the government steps in to restore the rule of law (133–35). Likewise, all three authors deal extensively with hygiene—that is, the problems that tropical pathologies such as malaria and beriberi posed for economic, cultural, and scientific productivity.¹²

As Foucault emphasizes in works such as *Discipline and Punish*, modern labor is conceived of as an orderly folding of environments, bodies, and time itself into forms that are compatible with industrial modes of production. In modernity, environments and their inhabitants—now distributed into different classes of workers—become interchangeable parts in a series of machines embedded within globalized circuits of production and consumption. In this scheme, the only differences that are acceptable must be compatible with their distinct functions within the production line. The analyses of labor in *À margem da história*, *Inferno verde*, and *La vorágine* fit perfectly within this paradigm. The micro and macro economies are described in meticulous detail, becoming highly legible to the reader, and all cultural differences (such as those of the Amazonian indigenous

inhabitants or the descendants of escaped slaves) are subsumed to class analysis along the clean lines of exploited/exploiters, which is the only acceptable distinction in labor theories of value.

In nearly every case, the passages dealing with labor in these works come across as completely transparent: they are characterized by the straight-talking truth of the testimonial mode and its structuring of evidences as legal brief. Rivera's *La vorágine* in particular details meticulously the processes of subjectivation by which sovereign, racially and culturally diverse individuals (the stereotypically free-ranging cowboys and *indios* of the first part of the novel) are transformed into serialized workers living in abject conditions, subjected almost completely to the rubber barons without any possibilities for collective organization or governmental guarantees of labor rights. As the novel makes clear, this process does indeed parallel Herbert Spencer's notion of the "survival of the fittest"; but in the end this is shown to be due not to environmental determinism stemming from the Amazonian environment itself but rather to isolation and deterritorialization—that is, to the nations' inability to establish the rule of law in the region. The jungle working environment described in *La vorágine* is as metaphorical as it is real; it is as close to Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) as it is to the Amazonian environment. As Rivera states of one particularly exploitative rubber baron, "Y no pienses que al decir 'Funes' he nombrado a persona única. Funes es un sistema, un estado de alma, es la sed de oro, es la envidia sórdida" (245) (And don't think that when I say "Funes" I am talking about just one person. Funes is a system, a state of being, it's the thirst for gold, it's sordid envy). In this sense, the "jungle" stands in transparently for the labor environment under unregulated capitalism.

The chain of causality leading to the horrifying conditions in the rubber industry is thus easily distinguishable in these works, as are the steps necessary to rectify the abuses and modernize the local economy in the liberal model—that is, by establishing the rule of law, making Amazonia compatible with modern work environments by investing in infrastructure, and transforming local and migrant *caboclos* into modern workers through work, tropical hygiene, education, and ownership of private property. There remain few rough edges or tears in the fabric; baroque foldings intrude on this flawless narrative surface only in a few instances, usually occasioned by individuals who, like Rangel's "A Decana dos Muras" and Rivera's indigenous characters, live a subsistence lifestyle and therefore do not participate in the labor market. These figures inevitably involute into the forest, folding into nature, or, in a few cases, they serve as placeholders, maintaining the jungle at bay through tenuous agricultural practices until more efficient modes of production can be implemented.

The Natural Baroque

It is when humans step out of the workplace into the entangled thickets of the natural environment that opacity seeps in. The work environment, even that of the rudimentary *seringal* (rubber tree grove), is an ordered space, a “landscape with figures” readily legible within the context of economic theory and labor relations. Amazonia’s uncultivated wilds, on the other hand, resist apprehension as nature—that is, as a meaningful environment. Both scientific empiricism and the modern discourse of nationalism rooted in the romantic sublime encountered difficulties in encoding the Amazonian environment. It is not surprising, therefore, that the moments of greatest opacity in da Cunha’s *À margem da história*, Rangel’s *Inferno verde*, and Rivera’s *La vorágine* occur in naturalistic descriptions, often disrupting the straightforward march of the travel narrative. The role of those passages is to illuminate nature and humans’ relationships with it; the moments of opacity thus represent particular spaces in which rational empiricism runs up against cognitive obstacles, and words begin to pile up against each other in their search for an outlet. Losing their linear orientation, clauses become involuted, and adjectives eddy one behind the other around these impediments to the flow of expression, mirroring what Walter Benjamin described as “the endlessly preparatory, circumlocutious, self-indulgently hesitant manner of the baroque process of giving form” (183). In short, despite the explicitly naturalist or Spanish American *modernista* (in Rivera) narrative modes that characterize the texts as a whole, there are passages that undergo a process of linguistic folding that reflects at the representational level frustrated processes of cognitive folding and unfolding provoked by perceived anomalies in the Amazonian environment.

I begin my analysis with *La vorágine*, since the stylistic instability in Rivera’s text has already been widely commented on. I follow Sylvia Molloy and Elzbieta Sklodowska in affirming Spanish American Modernismo as the dominant aesthetic in Rivera’s *La vorágine*: Molloy calls the protagonist, Arturo Cova, a “dandy trasnochado” (exhausted/outdated dandy), “el último, gastado descendiente del soberbio José Fernández de *De sobremesa*” (Molloy 493) (the last, threadbare descendent of that arrogant José Fernández from [Colombian *modernista* author José Asunción Silva’s] *De sobremesa*). Likewise, I coincide with Molloy, Vicky Unruh, and Raymond L. Williams, among others, in underscoring the centrality of the discontinuity or oscillation between discourses and styles in the novel. The stylistic disconnect is particularly evident in the juncture between the Martí-like telluric Modernismo of the first part of the novel and the hellish descent into the jungle in the second, but it resurfaces periodically throughout the travel narrative wherever the narrator encounters environmental anomalies.

Critics have provided diverse explanations for the novel's stylistic schizophrenia. Luis Eyzaguirre describes it as an unstable oscillation between romanticism and naturalistic pathology that is provoked by the confrontation between idealism and reality, while Charlotte Rogers relates it to the author's own physiological bouts with tropical illness and fever.¹³ Williams portrays it as a primarily stylistic problem emerging from the complex dynamics between the writer, the narrator, and distinct reading publics in Colombia at the turn of the twentieth century, an assessment with which Alejandro Mejías-López concurs, adding the tension of masculine anxieties (see Williams 548; and Mejías-López 370). Randolph Pope, Unruh, and David Viñas locate its roots entirely in the social realm—an ivory-tower poet's dialogic encounter with the hard economic realities of the rubber industry and the incomprehensible nomadic culture of Amazonia's indigenous inhabitants, or the contradictions generated by the metropolitan literary appropriation of rural popular culture (see Pope 410–13; Unruh 55–59; and Viñas 7–8). Most recently, Jennifer L. French and Lesley Wylie have underscored the postcoloniality of these stylistic fluctuations, which they relate to strategies for establishing autonomy through secrecy and parody, respectively.¹⁴

Although I do not discount by any means the validity of a sociopolitical reading of *La vorágine*, which is the text's explicit orientation, I nevertheless take a position closer to Danion Doman and Molloy in reading these stylistic disjunctions as the direct result of encounters with the Amazonian environment. For Molloy, they arise from a process of contagion in which nature infiltrates and contaminates the self-contained discourse of Modernismo (495). I argue, however, that the trope of contagion is a metaphor rather than a process in and of itself, one that the author employs to describe a more complex problem in the relations between representation and perception: processes of desymbolization and baroque folding that occur in the encounter with Amazonian opacity.¹⁵

In purely textual terms, the jungle has no cipherable language that could “contaminate” Cova's narration in a way comparable to Bakhtinian heteroglossia. The creation and use of symbolic language is generally considered a uniquely human trait, even if biosemioticians have demonstrated in recent years that natural signs are ubiquitous in intra- and interspecies communication throughout all environments and at every scale of life. With a few exceptions, nonhuman, natural signs are indexical rather than symbolic in that they maintain a direct relation to what they represent—when a deer scents a predator, that smell not only evokes danger, it is danger.¹⁶ And traces of indexical nonhuman signs are minimal in *La vorágine*: beyond a handful of onomatopoeias reproducing nonhuman sounds, there are few detailed descriptions of animal communicative behavior, much less specific traits of plants that bear communicative markers. At the most material level of textuality, then, there is little direct

evidence of linguistic contamination leading to polyphonic discourse containing natural signs.

If the anomalies that provoke *La vorágine*'s stylistic discontinuities cannot appear directly as "natural signs" within a narrative created by a speaking subject whose humanism will not admit direct (indexical) contamination from "natural" sources, it must be perception that provokes the linguistic effects that seem exogenous to the symbolic order, and that perception is a process that occurs internally through a mechanics of material folding, as in Deleuze's reading of Leibniz's monad.¹⁷ The baroque narrative surface is thus generated in the process by which symbolism attempts but fails to recuperate fully the perceived anomaly into the symbolic order, sedimenting two elements that do not resolve or conjugate into a clear representation: a residual image of the object itself that can be read as an outward projection of internalized perceptual folds (as in naïve realism) and a series of empty shells comprising the successive forms through which symbolism attempted to apprehend the object (as in Benjamin's notion of allegory as the ruins of symbolism, which I discuss in greater detail below). The turbulence that I am calling the "natural baroque" emerges precisely in the incommensurability of these discontinuous, ruined forms with the residual object-image, which provokes renewed folding in an attempt to account for the persistence of the anomaly.

The second and third parts of *La vorágine* abound with apparently out-of-place passages in which language seems inadequate to capture the object, folding in on itself in crenulated chains of adjectives that encompass the object only peripherally, in elliptical folds akin to those described by Sarduy in his writing on neo-baroque aesthetics; however, the process of baroque folding itself is theorized and exemplified more explicitly in Euclides da Cunha's writing on Amazonia. In contrast to Rivera's romantic/modernista style, which provides a certain amount of wiggle room to negotiate the disjunction between perception and representation, da Cunha professes the desire to apprehend Amazonia empirically, and he carefully backs up his observations with secondary evidence cited from nearly all the scientific literature on the region published up until that point. It comes as somewhat of a shock, therefore, when da Cunha uses vocabulary that anticipates Deleuze's baroque perceptivity to describe his friend and fellow engineer Alberto Rangel's *Inferno verde*:

O escritor alarma-nos nas mais simples descrições naturais. O que se diz natureza morta, agita-se-lhe poderosíssima, sob a pena; e imaginamos que há fluxos galvânicos nas linhas onde se parte a passividade da matéria e as cousas duramente objetivas se revestem de uma anômala personalidade. . . . São a realidade ainda não vista a despontar com as formas de um incorrigível idealismo, no claro-escuro do desconhecido. ("Preâmbulo" 26–27)

(The writer alarms us with the simplest natural descriptions. What we usually believe to be a still life (static landscape) agitates powerfully from the bluff; and we imagine that there are galvanic flows in the lines separating passive matter, and the hard objectivity of things is coated with an anomalous character. . . . These are reality, still unseen, waiting to blunt the forms of an incorrigible idealism, in the chiaroscuro of the unknown.)

That “incorrigible idealism” is the faith in the objectivity of realist/scientific representation, which simply does not suffice for apprehending the immensity of Amazonia as object. As he writes in the introductory paragraph, “Escapa-se-nos de todo, a enormidade que só se pode medir, repartida; a amplitude, que se tem de diminuir, para avaliar-se; a grandeza que só se deixa ver, apequenando-se, através dos microscópios; e um infinito que se dosa a pouco e pouco, lento e lento, indefinidamente, torturantemente” (“Preâmbulo” 23) (That enormity, which can only be measured through division, escapes us all together; as does that amplitude, which must be diminished in order to evaluate it; that grandiosity that only reveals itself, belittling itself, through the microscope; and an infinity that can only be handled in small doses, little by little, very slowly, indefinitely, torturously). Folding is thus an absolutely unavoidable operation, as much as it may distort the object itself, putting mere surface effects in the place of depth and causing the “doloroso realismo” (painstaking realism) of objective representation to take on the appearance of fantastical poetry (“Preâmbulo” 26). It is the only way to reduce the vastness to manageable proportions and endow this seemingly formless (infinite) surface with form and the appearance, at least, of depth, multiplying two dimensions into three. Da Cunha insists that “Amazônia, ainda sob o aspecto estritamente físico, conhecemo-la aos fragmentos” (“Preâmbulo” 23) (We only know Amazonia, even in its strictly physical aspect, through its fragments), or folds as I have called them, since none of them are severed from the others—they are all part of a single, enmeshed environment.

The Amazonian environment thus provokes a baroque proliferation of cognitive fragments that can never add up to a whole, fragments whose *telos* as systematic scientific knowledge is denied them due to their embeddedness within the fabric of the ecosystem. As Benjamin points out, “it is common practice in the literature of the Baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, and, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification” (178). In the natural baroque, the miracle that is awaited is not that of divine unity of meaning—what Benjamin would see as the reconstruction of symbolism from the ruins that are allegory—but rather the revelation of the unity of all material under natural laws (those “stereotypes” intensified

through repetition or repeated observation), which is nevertheless also a reconstructive process since science works backwards to assemble fragmented observations into general theory. Da Cunha's frustration comes from realizing that none of the folds maintain a metonymical relationship with the whole; and even the impossible task of unfolding all the partial folds into one general theory would fail to capture the reality of Amazonia, since unfolding itself simply constitutes another act of folding.¹⁸ In other words, despite its evident continuity, there is no miraculous way to unfold Amazonia as smooth surface, as continuous text.

This proliferation of folds casts shadows over the clarity of scientific or nationalistic discourse, resulting in baroque plays on light—the chiaroscuro to which da Cunha alluded in his description of Rangel's writing and which Deleuze, again following Buci-Glucksmann, views as the prime formal characteristic of baroque perspectivism (32–33). As Deleuze writes, “The Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds,” and those folds generate chiaroscuro, where “clarity endlessly plunges into obscurity” as matter becomes infinitely cavernous or pitted with light-absorbing cavities (Deleuze 3, 32). Thus Rivera's architectural descriptions of the Amazonian jungle as a façade turned in on itself, as a “cathedral of sorrow” whose arboreal arches are infinitely riddled with shadow and broken promises of luminosity (105–6). In these representations, the Amazonian environment emerges as an inward-facing façade whose interior—its heart or essence—exists only without, in the external observer, as a unifying image, an immense, theoretical fold encompassing those minute, sensorial folds. This is the material mechanism by which Amazonia is internalized, an internalization that feels something other than material when the subject, in order to maintain itself as such, projects that theoretical fold back out over the environment.

Amazonia as a whole *becomes* endlessly—“*está em ser*” (it is in the process of being), da Cunha writes (*Paraíso* 125)—through continuous processes of aquatic folding and unfolding, its geographic features and even flora and fauna the unique yields of the rivers' flows, even as each of them leaves its imprint on the rivers' own surfaces. And, in da Cunha's reading at least, the rivers' aesthetic is baroque rather than rationalistic; there are few clean lines or symmetries in the folding they perform, and their currents eddy back on themselves, undermining the land that crashes into water, creating their own resistances, earthen dams that must be folded anew in order to continue the flow. And anyone who, thinking to escape the problem of surface folds and cut to the heart of the forest, leaves the river to penetrate into an *igapó* (flooded forest), as Rangel's narrator does in “O Tapará” (the Tapará River), simply finds the surfaces multiplied as the play on light and dark intensifies. What was from the mainstream of the river a two-dimensional wall of vegetation that, though tangled, nevertheless found definition against the sky and the river's water, multiplies into infinite

vegetal surfaces—leaves, trunks, branches, vines—whose only definition comes from the contrast provided by the shadows and leaves of other plants that cut across them, illuminated by a brief ray of light: “A luz, no entretanto, não consegue nunca encharcar a floresta, aproveita apenas os desvãos, em que espraia e se derrama, logo contida, porque tudo afinal reveste a consistência de um vasto conglomerado de pórfiros” (Rangel 38) (Light, meanwhile, never manages to bathe the forest floor, it barely makes it into the canopy, where it pools and spills over only to be contained immediately, and everything takes on the consistency of a vast conglomerate of porphyries). Light and shadow, the leaves and trunks of thousands of species are intertwined, folded up against and over each other.

Far from being the “lungs of the world,” in these early twentieth-century representations, Amazonia is an overcrowded, asphyxiating space that smothers the empirical subject under the density of its hollow layering of surfaces. There is hardly space for humanity, as Rangel writes: “O bananal apertava a barraca; a floresta sufocava o bananal; e, por sua vez, o céu esmagava a floresta” (151) (The banana grove squeezed the shack; the forest suffocated the banana grove, and, in turn, the sky crushed the forest). The only seemingly unfolded spaces, the only openings available for perspective-taking, for the emergence of Cartesian subjectivity or Heideggerian being—in short, the only spaces free from sensorial overload amidst the overwhelming materiality of Amazonia—are the open water of the rivers and lakes. Rangel describes the immense relief one feels upon entering one of these aquatic clearings after traveling through the endless entanglement of the *igapós*: the lake appears just when one is about to succumb to “a idéia deprimente de que não tem hiatos na sua espessidão, e deste modo o lago desafronta. É uma aberta, um descanso. Na continuidade infinita do túnel, o espiráculo por onde entre a luz interessa, porque desafoga da impressão do enterro. Lembra que no alto há ainda o céu—a visão constante dos murados em abóbadas e sombras” (42) (the depressing thought that there are no hiatuses in [the jungle’s] denseness, and, therefore, the lake comes as quite a relief. It is an opening, a respite. In the infinite continuity of the tunnel, any aperture where light can enter is of interest, because it relieves the impression of being buried alive. It reminds one that there is still sky, somewhere above the endless sight of ramparts in arches and shadows). Rivera describes a similar situation when his protagonist enters a lakeside crane rookery after navigating for days on a dark, silent river that “daba la impresión de un camino oscuro que se moviera hacia el vórtice de la nada” (109) (gave the impression of a dark path leading to the vortex of nothingness). For Heidegger, the illuminated clearing (*Lichtung*) is where objects become visible to cognition; it is a pause or hiatus from the animality of material existence and the constant need to react to sensorial stimuli (53). Rangel and Rivera clearly attribute this function to the lake as well, since it becomes a space for reflecting on their narrators’ positions with respect to

the forest. Tellingly, Arturo Cova experiences a resurgence of the sublime immediately upon entering the crane rookery even though the renewed visibility reveals that he is completely surrounded by caimans, piranhas, and electric eels (Rivera 115–16). In the end, however, these clearings provide no position above or beyond the surface from which the observer may cut through the layers of perception and situate himself as sovereign subject: they are themselves simply larger folds created by the river, or the convergence of a series of aquatic and vegetal folds. This may be why both Rangel's and Rivera's characters, when they finally stop to reflect, experience a moment of horror: the horror of their own unmediated materiality and the opacity of their own being—of being human—within the Amazonian environment (Rangel 44; Rivera 196).

The baroque is a way of seeing, but what it sees is that, rather than holding a causal or sequential relationship, perception and representation are coordinated on the same surface—that of the image. In that sense, perception, whatever its refinements, can neither legitimate nor unmask representation; there can be no unmediated perception. This unsatisfactory realization leads to all kinds of evasive maneuvers that appear textually as linguistic folding. The stylistic shifts in da Cunha's, Rangel's, and Rivera's writing on Amazonia thus indicate folding that occurs due to cognitive disruptions in the pathways from perception to representation; these disruptions provoke unexpected patterns of theoretical folding, which are then reflected as baroque language.

The End of Nature and the Emergence of Ecology

Somewhat surprisingly, the stylistic lapses in Rivera's text are patently less baroque than those of his Brazilian colleagues, in large part because Spanish-American Modernismo and romantic nationalism were more flexible theoretical frameworks than the Brazilian authors' scientific naturalism. The romantic recourse to the sublime and the negative sublime allowed Rivera a certain amount of leeway in navigating the gap between perception and representation. Tellingly, at its most opaque, Rivera assigns Amazonia a face through apostrophe, ostensibly taming it as a humanized but mute interlocutor: “¡Oh selva, esposa del silencio, madre de la soledad y de la neblina! ¿Qué hado maligno me dejó prisionero en tu cárcel verde?” (105) (O jungle, wife of silence, mother of solitude and mist! What evil destiny left me to rot in your green prison?). This is not, however, the clear-cut case of anthropomorphism that it initially appears to be. The face of Amazonia—which only appears when Cova is delirious with fever—is featureless, characterized solely by absence and abandonment. It signifies, yes, but what it signifies is the lack of humanity, the absence of culture, the

collapse of the symbol into “soledad” (no culture, and thus no symbolic order), “silencio” (no signifier), and “niebla” (an immaterial signified). The face of Amazonia is thus no more nor less than the allegorical disintegration of the human face and its human(ist) features.

In this sense, the reading of Rivera’s representations of nature as “subjective” is overly reductive, if ultimately accurate. The negative sublime is here a last-ditch effort to ward off the disintegration of sovereign subjectivity in its encounter with opacity, with the jungle’s resistance to territorialization through inscription within a particular symbolic order—that of nationalistic Modernismo. The degraded allegories to which Rivera appeals (the inverse of those normally associated with “mother” and “wife”) are transparently the ruins of symbolism that Benjamin associates with the baroque aesthetic (177–82). Thus, what appears as the subjective representation of nature actually emerges as the failure of Nature (in its Spanish American *modernista* conceptualization) to materialize or inhere within the Amazonian environment. It is hardly a coincidence that the most cited passage from *La vorágine*—“¿Cuál es aquí la poesía de los retiros, dónde están las mariposas que parecen flores traslúcidas, los pájaros mágicos, el arroyo cantor? ¡Pobre fantasía de los poetas que sólo conocen las soledades domesticadas!” (197) (Where is the pastoral poetry here, where are the butterflies like translucent flowers, the magic birds, the singing brook? Impoverished fantasies of poets who know only domesticated wilds!)—underscores the failure of representation to account for either perception or experience.

There is a further complication, however, for Benjamin argues that “where man is drawn toward the symbol, allegory emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it” (183). Allegory emerges from somewhere other than conscious (intentional) man, the human, or the (Western) anthropological machine, as Giorgio Agamben calls it in *The Open*. Yet, in a materialist (monadic) reading of being as cognition, allegory cannot come from metaphysical (external symbol-generating) sources either; there is no beyond for the monad. If allegory is not generated intentionally, it can only surface differentially through the mechanics of perceiving and folding I have been discussing. Allegory, as the ruins of symbolism, thus belies representational intentionality—that is, the will-to-style that reconciles representation with perception through the ratification of the symbolic. A few lines on, Benjamin underscores that “if it is to hold its own against the tendency to absorption, the allegorical must constantly unfold in new and surprising ways. The symbol, on the other hand, as the Romantic mythologists have shown, remains persistently the same” (183). The symbol attempts to cut across perception’s immense flows, to dam them, to channel them into clearly defined meanings and identities, while allegory breathes new life into the anomalous, drawing attention to it in its conspicuous failure to encompass it, and provoking endless, ever more

frenetic cognitive folding. In this framework, Nature is the ruin that signals the decay of the symbolic apprehension of the environment; it is an allegory that sublimates or brackets unsuccessfully and endlessly those aspects of environments that resist symbolization. The natural baroque is thus the realization that Nature, even in its scientific conceptualization as the totality of natural phenomena, is mere convention. As Timothy Morton puts it, “Far from being something ‘natural’ itself, nature hovers over things like a ghost” (14). It is the ruined allegory of environment.

La vorágine's descriptions of Amazonian nature are objective in the sense that they expose the cognitive processes underlying subjectivity by calling attention precisely to areas of opacity in which the lapses between perception and representation become most apparent. The negative sublime attempts to patch up this gaping hole in representation, sublimating opacity itself as the mysterious or enigmatic (following the *modernista* tradition). This resolution is unsatisfactory, however; by the time *La vorágine* was first published in 1924, the romantic negative sublime had given way to the scientific (positivist) sublime, which is what led many of its earliest readers to reject the novel's romanticism as an anachronistic stylistic failing.¹⁹ The theoretical maneuverings that Rivera had to perform to pull together the edges of that massive abyss and stitch them up into a single representational surface created dramatic folds that many readers saw as uneven.

Paradoxically, though, Rivera's use of the negative sublime ended up opening a clearing for a return to cognition. The horror that Cova experiences upon finally contemplating the jungle without poetic filters leads to a kind of spiraling descent into the material that, without renouncing completely its sublimating pretensions, nevertheless anticipates an ecological understanding of Amazonia. As Rivera writes:

Por primera vez, en todo su horror, se ensanchó ante mí la selva inhumana. . . . Por doquiera el bejuco de “matapalo”—rastrero pulpo de las florestas—pega sus tentáculos a los troncos, acogotándolos y retorciéndolos, para injertárselos y trasfundírselos en metempsicosis dolorosas. Vomitan los “bachaqueros” sus trillones de hormigas devastadoras, que recortan el manto de la montaña y por anchas veredas regresan al túnel, como abanderadas del exterminio, con sus gallardetes de hojas y de flores. El comején enferma los árboles cual galopante sífilis, que solapa su lepra supliciatoria mientras va carcomiéndoles los tejidos y pulverizándoles la corteza, hasta derrocarlos, súbitamente, con su pesadumbre de ramazones vivas. (196–97)

(For the first time, the inhuman jungle rose before me in all its horror. . . . Everywhere the “treekiller” liana—creeping octopus of the forests—grips the trunks with its suckers, collaring them and twisting them, grafting and transmigrating into them in painful metempsychosis. The

anthills vomit their trillions of devastating *bachaco* ants that cut the greenery from the hillsides and return to their tunnel in wide paths, like the heralds of destruction, holding leaves and flowers aloft as battle flags. Dry rot infects trees like raging syphilis, covering them with torturous sores as it riddles their tissues and pulverizes their bark until it brings them down, suddenly, with their grief of shattered but still living branches.)

More than regression to a romantic gothic aesthetic, the horror that Cova experiences here stems from recognizing his own emplacement within the hostile environment; his body is inextricable from this intricate web of depredation.²⁰ In the inhuman environment of the Amazonian jungle, the “human” is revealed to have no existence outside of the materiality of the body. The soul—the repository of humanity—is thus shown to be no more than a tenuous subject position constructed through the cultural practices of humanism, that pastoral poetry that Cova found to have no place in Amazonia. Unable to constitute a “Nature” against which to locate itself as the heir to culture, the romantic/*modernista* subject collapses into materiality, into the monad.

The death of the romantic subject does not mean the end of individuation in *La vorágine*, however. The monad continues its folding; life goes on without the sublime, completely embedded in the cycles of perception, recognition, and the flow of energy through the environment: “Entre tanto, la tierra cumple las sucesivas renovaciones: al pie del coloso que se derrumba, el germen que brota; en medio de las miasmas, el polen que vuela; y por todas partes el hálito del fermento, los vapores calientes de la penumbra, el sopor de la muerte, el marasmo de la procreación” (197) (Meanwhile, the land fulfills its successive renovations: at the foot of the fallen giant, the seed that germinates; pollen floats amid the tropical miasma; and everywhere the breath of fermentation, warm vapors in the dusk, death’s lethargy, the torpor of procreation). The collapse of the empirical, sovereign subject and its ability to isolate and manipulate distinct objects in a hierarchical distribution of identities thus leads to awareness of the flow of energy through the Amazonian environment in ecological carbon and nitrogen cycles, an immense flow in which the individual organism is no more than a temporary barrier or diversion, like da Cunha’s *sacado*. Through coming into ecological knowledge, the subject is thus reconstituted as a posthuman material entity emplaced directly within the Amazonian environment. Cova and his cohorts are devoured by the jungle, but they may live there still.

Conclusion

I have argued that Amazonia's fundamental opacity to modern modes of apprehending environments, whether through nineteenth-century science or romantic nationalism, led to a breakdown or disconnect between perception and representation that presents itself in da Cunha's, Rangel's, and Rivera's texts as a disruptive baroque linguistic texture. My use of the term "natural baroque" to describe the kind of cognitive folding that appears in these authors' works may seem incongruous, even when the linguistic texture evokes immediately the neo-baroque style of writers like Carpentier and Lezama Lima.²¹ Not only are these authors far removed from the cultural context of the historical baroque, their pretensions to naturalistic representation, in which the word is supposed to hold an almost one-to-one relationship with the object to which it refers (as in scientific nominalism) seems diametrically opposed to the baroque aesthetic of authors such as Cervantes, Calderón de la Barca, Góngora, Gracián, and Quevedo, which is usually viewed as the apex of cultural artifice—the farthest that art had ever been from nature, at least up until the twentieth-century avant-garde movements. Traditionally, these baroque authors' privileging of conceit and multiple layers of symbolism over empirical representation has been viewed as an artistic emancipation from nature and the strictures of realism.

Notwithstanding, it seems reasonable to argue, as Benjamin does, that this kind of emancipation only becomes possible when the symbolic order binding representation to perception at a specific historical moment becomes degraded, and with it the particular forms of subjectivity it constitutes. Furthermore, Deleuze's examination of baroque thought suggests that new modes of knowledge arise when differentials between perceptual folds surface, causing anomalies to become apparent and then mobilizing theoretical folds to envelop them. In this conceptualization, the baroque way of seeing emerges at any point where an order of representation is altered, whether by a new environment or by changes within the subject's own perceptual apparatuses. In baroque aesthetics, then, the culture/nature binomial is neither here nor there. What is at issue is more fundamental still: the cognitive mechanics of encounters with opacity and the emergence of new modes of knowledge through the unraveling of the perception/representation dialectic.

Amazonia embodied this situation in the works of Euclides da Cunha, Alberto Rangel, and José Eustasio Rivera. The anomalies that these authors encountered in Amazonia forced them to undergo a series of foldings that were never fully successful in apprehending the object, leading da Cunha to proclaim, simultaneously despairing and hopeful, that the human mind must evolve to become capable of comprehending the region: "a inteligência humana não suportaria, de improviso, o peso daquela realidade portentosa.

Terá de crescer com ela, adaptando-se-lhe, para dominá-la” (“Preâmbulo” 24) (Human intelligence would not be able to bear, all at once, the weight of that portentous reality. It must grow with it, adapting to it, in order to dominate it). The excessive anomalies in the Amazonian environment gave rise to the baroque contortions that appear in da Cunha’s, Rangel’s, and Rivera’s texts, but that frenetic baroque folding also heralded the rise of a new, systematic mode of knowledge that would allow Amazonia to be apprehended once again, if not as object, as environment—as a bioregion in which people and culture are not abstracted in opposition to nature. The human mind may not have evolved biologically since da Cunha’s days, but thought has certainly progressed: in the intervening years, ecology has emerged as a transdisciplinary mode of knowledge to address precisely these interspecies entanglements that stumped organismic biology and romantic humanism. If Amazonia’s opacity has not disappeared altogether, it is once again transparently opaque: the emergence of an ecological framework for approaching Amazonia now means that the constraints on individual and collective knowledge of the region depend more on the limits of memory than they do on those of disciplinary or discursive methodologies.

Notes

1. All translations are my own, unless noted otherwise.
2. Although neither Carlos Alonso nor Jennifer L. French includes these Brazilian authors in their assessments of Spanish American literary regionalism (they do both discuss Rivera), there are multiple points of connection between Spanish American and Brazilian regionalisms, from the ethnographic search for nationalistic “autochthony” in the countryside to the assessment of the position and possibilities for these regions within modern cultural, economic, and political structures. Indeed, Brazilian critics such as Antonio Candido and Roberto Ventura view da Cunha and Rangel as the culminating writers of a second moment of naturalistic regionalism (initiated by Inglês de Souza) that replaced the romantic mid-nineteenth-century regionalism of authors such as José de Alencar and Gil de Castelo Branco and prefigured the critical regionalism of José Américo de Almeida, Rachel de Queiroz, and Graciliano Ramos in the 1930s.
3. I am working here with Michel Foucault’s thesis in *The Order of Things* that the rise of modernity as the dominant cultural paradigm depended on a broad theoretical shift away from the ostensibly pure rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries toward an empiricist or object-oriented historicism dedicated to unearthing the natural laws governing the properties and behavior of all phenomena, from the physical to the social.
4. As Cañizares-Esguerra points out in chapter 6 of *Nature, Empire, and Nation*, Humboldt follows a long a tradition of viewing the vertical succession of environments in the Andes, for example, as bearing a microcosmic relation to the world’s environments as a whole.
5. Nevertheless, scientific abstraction was not always completely successful as a method for negotiating these anomalies. As Jorge Marcone points out, Humboldt

became frustrated with his inability to reconcile the romantic aesthetics of sublimity with scientific exposition: “The greater was his wondrous reaction to the marvelous, the greater his disillusionment with his own attempts to achieve the desired unity” (76).

6. I dialogue here with Mary Louise Pratt’s take on the synchronicity of the rise of modern science with the nineteenth-century boom of European colonialism. She goes as far as calling the international scientific expedition “one of Europe’s proudest and most conspicuous instruments of expansion” (23).
7. Tellingly, Neil Safier remarks on the pride that Simón Bolívar felt upon going beyond where Humboldt and La Condamine had reputedly reached in his ascension of Ecuador’s Chimborazo volcano in 1822. As he writes, “For Bolívar, no activity was more pregnant with dramatic symbolism than scientific exploration” (xiii). See also chapter 5 of Safier’s *Measuring the New World*.
8. See Lesley Wylie’s *Colonial Tropes and Postcolonial Tricks* regarding the postcolonial bent of Latin American writing on Amazonia and the so-called *novela de la selva* in general. In her first chapter, Wylie focuses on the parodic stance that many of these novels assume toward European modes of representation such as ethnography and travel writing. Within the Latin American postcolonial project of reimagining the tropics as autonomous, national spaces, parody becomes a key strategy for engaging colonial tropicalist discourse in debate without validating its stereotypes (Wylie 16). Of course, the presence of postcolonial parody in these works only augments Amazonia’s opacity to cognition, since it inherently questions the relationships between representation and perception. Not coincidentally, parody is ubiquitous in baroque and neo-baroque writing.
9. Although the Amazonian rubber boom had largely subsided by the 1920s, when Rivera traveled to Amazonia, he nevertheless claimed to have witnessed these labor conditions firsthand, an assertion that Wylie problematizes in her study of the novel (24–27).
10. See “Impressões gerais” (109) and all of “Os caucheiros” and “Contra os caucheiros” in *Um paraíso perdido*.
11. Tellingly, da Cunha was one of the first to suggest constructing a Trans-Amazonic railway to link together river basins. See “A Transacreaana” in *Um paraíso perdido*.
12. Consult Rogers’s *Jungle Fever* and chapter 5 of Wylie’s *Colonial Tropes, Postcolonial Tricks* regarding the discourse of tropical pathology in the *novela de la selva*.
13. See Eyzaguirre (83) and chapter 3 of Rogers’s *Jungle Fever*.
14. See chapter 3 of French’s *Nature, Neocolonialism, and the Spanish American Regionalist Novel* and chapter 2 of Wylie’s *Colonial Tropes, Postcolonial Tricks*.
15. I use the term “desymbolization” to denote the breaking up or loosening of the relations between sign and object that occurs when representation cannot account fully for perception, here because perception provides only an incomplete image of the object, leading to a state in which the object itself, rather than the sign, becomes ambiguous.
16. I am referring to C. S. Peirce’s distinction between iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs here. See Hoffmeyer and Kull for brief overviews of biosemiotics and the way in which they work within environments.
17. As Deleuze points out, there are no doors or windows in Leibniz’s monad; “all activity takes place on the inside” (28).
18. As Deleuze writes, “folding-unfolding no longer simply means tension-release, contraction-dilation, but enveloping-developing, involution-evolution” (8).

19. Tellingly, one of the first reviewers of the novel, Luis Eduardo Nieto Caballero, began his predominantly positive review with: “Tiene un defecto este libro: demasiada cadencia” (29) (This book has a defect: too much poetic cadence). See also the first two pages of Eyzaguirre’s “Patología” and those of Williams’s “La figura del autor” for summaries of early reactions to *La vorágine*, including contemporaneous Colombian author Tomás Carrasquilla’s description of the novel as “una lata” (a drag) and Peruvian novelist Ciro Alegría’s critique that it lacked logical causality.
20. French associates these passages with Engel’s notion of the “dialectics of nature.” While I find her arguments highly persuasive, I want to step beyond them to examine the mechanics of the “vortex” itself: that is, the mechanisms leading to the dissolution of the sublimely humanist subject and its reconstitution as a material being that relates to the world through perception rather than symbolic mediation.
21. On the other hand, George B. Handley argues that Carpentier’s neo-baroque aesthetics themselves do not represent a pure will to style but rather a mode of discourse that “inherently recognizes nature’s unpredictability and strangeness,” thus proffering a “sense of ecology that is a kind of decentered humanism” (120).

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