A CENTURY OF CHANGE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE AND
THE RHETORIC OF AMAZONIAN LAND DEVELOPMENT

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This thesis is dedicated to my mother, for her constant love, support, and sympathy, and to my father, for his wisdom, understanding, and ability to forgive my ineptitude for chemistry and mathematics.
ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

A Century of Change: National Geographic Magazine and the Rhetoric of Amazonian Land Development
by
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This discussion will focus on the ways in which the relationship between humans and the environment has been characterized. In order to examine this issue, I focus on two specific articles from National Geographic Magazine (NGM), one written in 1906 by Solon I. Bailey, and the other written in 2007 by Scott Wallace. The articles, published 100 years apart, both discuss the same subject, the harvesting of Amazonian resources, and so provide an ideal means to examine the ways in which discussions of a particular space have changed over the last century in NGM, and how they have remained the same. Each article takes a unique stance on the Amazon, and serves to represent the evolving story of Americans and their relationship with the earth. By analyzing the rhetorical approaches the two authors take on the Amazon, this study focuses on the rhetorical means used by NGM to render two polarized models of humans’ relationship with the natural environment, and the ways in which this rendering shifted to correspond with a changing national environmental perspective. In examining the rhetorical similarities and differences between the text and images in each publication, I seek to prove that NGM utilizes a form of rhetorical dichotomy to characterize the environment as standing in opposition to man, and though a shift occurs which changes the premise of this opposition, the essential man-versus-nature dichotomy created does not alter and terms do not change, but merely the way we judge the elements of the binary
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The world, we are told, was made especially for man – a presumption not supported by all the facts.

– John Muir

*The Pathless Way*

The public’s perceptions, of course, are primarily shaped by the media, which thrive on the four D’s: drama, disaster, debate, and dichotomy.

– Stephen Schneider

*Global Warming*

The Amazon rainforest is, or was, one of the last unbreachable bastions of nature. Because of the remoteness of the region and the sheer vastness of the area, which occupies the better part of seven million square miles of jungle, river, valley and plateau, the Amazon was, for most of recorded history, overwhelming to all but the most hardy indigenous cultures and intrepid explorers (Smith 15). However, with the dawn of the twentieth century, industrialized nations began setting their sights on the profit that might be obtained from the unharnessed potential of the area. Over the course of the last century, the Amazon rain forest has been much reduced in part due to human interference. According to one recent case study, “Ecologists believe that the whole of the forest could be wiped out within 30 or 40 years” (Branford and Glock 321). It is this controversial and disputed landscape that will provide the locus for this article; however, it is not the purpose of this paper to enter into the debate over deforestation and colonization, but instead to view this landscape rhetorically in order to better understand the ways in which humans depict themselves in relation to the Amazon.

In order to do so, this discussion will focus on the ways in which the relationship between humans and the environment has been characterized. In terms of discussing the environment and our relationship with it, there is perhaps no popular publication that can claim a more historically consistent environmental focus than *National Geographic Magazine (NGM)*. Since its inception in 1888, *NGM* has become one of the most popular
monthly publications on the planet. The magazine serves a variety of functions, both in terms of article topics and accompanying visual representation, and caters to a wide and varied audience. Founded by the National Geographic Society, NGM’s distinction as a leading publication in the fields of science and exploration is rarely questioned by its steadfast American audience. Referencing the publication’s readership of around 40 million people worldwide, Carl Thompson in his 2000 article “Neutral Gaze?” wrote, “An audience of this size confers immense cultural power” (46).

There are two reasons NGM is an ideal source for rhetorical study. The first is that NGM has long been considered America’s lens on the world, and therefore serves as an important source for mediating the rest of the world to an American audience (Lutz and Collins 1). Without understanding the ways in which such an important publication discusses the non-American—or non-Western—world, it is impossible to then understand the American conceptualization of other societies and cultures. The second, and perhaps more compelling reason for studying the magazine comes from the content that has made NGM so famous over the years: the earth. No other magazine has such a long and rich history of global exploration and documentation, both narrative and photographic. Stories and images from the pages of NGM have served to bring the world before the eyes of the American public, and in turn have shaped the way in which Americans “see” the world, or more specifically the way in which Americans imagine the world to be.

Several authors have worked exclusively with NGM in order to provide readers with an inside look at the magazine and the changes it has undergone over the last 125 years. Two works in particular are valuable for their in-depth analysis of the magazine: Reading National Geographic, by Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins; and Presenting America’s World: Strategies of Innocence in National Geographic Magazine, by Tamar Rothenberg. Lutz and Collins provide a historical look at NGM, focusing on the various technical and thematic changes of the publication over its long history. Rothenberg, on the other hand, examines the institutional world of the magazine—the photographers, writers, and editors—and their influence in helping “to articulate a particularly American identity for Americans” (Rothenberg 5). Both of these publications are instrumental in evaluating any work involving the magazine, but neither focuses on the rhetorical nature of the text and imagery.
In addition, there is a growing tradition of scholarship examining the rhetoric of texts considering the environment. M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Jacqueline S. Palmer explore the issue of framing the human relationship with the natural world in *Ecospeak: Rhetoric and Environmental Politics in America* by examining the rhetorical nature of the dichotomizing language that exists in the political realm of the environment. In terms of this divided political forum that surrounds the environment, the area is ripe for rhetorical analysis, and indeed has been discussed at length. The focus on the political influences is an obvious one for rhetoricians, with many speeches and written texts to examine (see Herndl and Brown; Cantrill and Oravec; Killingsworth and Palmer, etc.). In fact, Killingsworth and Palmer coined the term “ecospeak” to directly address the ways in which politicians and/or political groups seek to isolate their opponents into one category, which represents an issue they then stand opposed to (8). These analyses have served to identify environmental rhetoric not just as a subset of political discourse, but also as a field in and of itself worth discussing.

Hand in hand with political focus is media attention. The mass media serve in many ways to both foster the rise of environmentalism and to begin shaping the movement into what is has become today. Mark Neuzil and Bill Kovarik best sum up this relationship in their 1996 book *Mass Media & Environmental Conflict*:

> Perhaps nowhere is the significance of the environmental movement more noticeable than in the mass media…. As our views about environmental conflict shifted, the mass media reflected and participated in these changes, helping to control their direction and speed. In this way, the interdependency of mass media and society is not unlike the interdependency between humans and the natural environment. (198)

This interdependency is important, just as are the ways in which the media construct nature. For one, it is possible to conclude that mass media publications that focus on the natural world and environmental issues would be extremely influential on the general population. For example *NGM*, as a major scientific and exploration publication, would have great influence on society. With this much cultural power, the magazine is an ideal source to study, both for its influence and its reflection of popular environmental construction.

As characterized by environmental historian Carolyn Merchant, the twentieth century was the most environmentally tumultuous period in American history. She writes in her 2007 book *American Environmental History*, “An understanding of the changes that had taken
place in [America] over five centuries was contributed by the science of ecology as it emerged in the twentieth century…. The environmental movement resulted in a host of new laws, agencies, and environmental organizations that sought to limit human impacts on nature” (Merchant xxi). This emerging awareness had a massive impact on the American environmental ethos, and reshaped the ways Americans viewed themselves in relation to the environment they live in.

However, there has been little effort by rhetoricians to understand what techniques are utilized by the editors, reporters, and photographs of NGM to construct this relationship with the environment, or how this coverage changed along with the political and ideological shifts of the last century. In order to examine these issues, I focus on two specific articles from NGM, one written in 1906 by Solon I. Bailey, and the other written in 2007 by Scott Wallace. The articles, published 100 years apart, both discuss the same subject, the harvesting of Amazonian resources, and so provide an ideal means to examine the ways in which discussions of a particular space have changed over the last century in NGM, and how they have remained the same. Each article takes a unique stance on the Amazon, and serves to represent the evolving story of Americans and their relationship with the earth.

By analyzing the rhetorical approaches two authors take to the same subject, Amazonian resources, this study focuses on the rhetorical means used by NGM to render two polarized models of humans’ relationship with the natural environment, and the ways in which this rendering shifted to correspond with a changing national environmental perspective. In examining the rhetorical similarities and differences between the text and images in each publication, I seek to prove that NGM utilizes a form of rhetorical dichotomy to characterize the environment as standing in opposition to man, and though a shift occurs which changes the premise of this opposition, the essential man-versus-nature dichotomy created does not alter and terms do not change, but merely the way we judge the elements of the binary.
CHAPTER 2

NATURE AS OBSTACLE

Solon I. Bailey’s “A New Peruvian Route to the Plain of the Amazon” appears in volume XVII of *NGM*. Published in August of 1906, the 16-page article was one of eight articles ranging in topic from the gypsy moth to the shattered obelisk of Mont Pelee; but all of the articles centered around the subject of South America. Bailey, an associate professor of astronomy at the Harvard College Observatory, was sent to South America to determine the best site for the Southern station of the Harvard College Observatory. In the article, the author discusses the potential for harvestable resources in the Amazon in a straightforward, unembellished way: the region was ripe with rubber, timber, and other natural resources if a way might be found to access the materials and transport them from the jungle to the coast for export. Beginning with the first sentence, an oppositional stance towards the Amazonian terrain becomes immediately clear: “A commercial conquest of the heart of the South American continent is going rapidly forward” (Bailey 432). Immediately, the author uses subjugating language that creates a divide between man and nature. “Conquest” leaves little room for interpretation, and the fact that the conquest is rapid is inherently positive.

This androcentric viewpoint is indicative both of the dominant perspective towards nature at the time of publication, as well as the frank, unveiled rhetoric used to discuss the discovery and acquisition of these resources (Herndl and Brown). Bailey’s narrative is distinguished by similar dichotomizing language. For example, in discussing shipping means, Bailey states the inevitability of progress, “especially after the possibilities of the tributaries of the Amazon have been properly developed” (432). The term “properly” here simultaneously exposes the dichotomy as well as Bailey’s ethnocentric ideology, and serves to immediately disparage all “undeveloped” land, inferring that it is useless in its natural state.

In order to better understand this androcentric and ethnocentric viewpoint, Herndl and Brown utilize Kenneth Burke’s concept of “motive,” as he explains it in *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. For Herndl and Brown, “Burke’s
influential theory of rhetoric says that the motives and purpose of a document can be found in the ‘scene’ from which the document emerges, and that we can understand a text only if we understand the relations between the scene and the other elements of any rhetorical action” (10). For this account then, it is essential to understand that the author was operating through the “scene” that is *NGM* at the turn of twentieth-century. Therefore, Bailey’s focus on nature as a resource and of minor importance compared to the potential wealth to be obtained is typical motive produced from the scene, and by demonstrating this motive, the author sets nature in opposition to man. For example, when discussing the difficulty of transporting materials, he states, “Above the falls, steamships may again be used; but the danger and loss in passing the rapids are so great that, until this difficulty is overcome, another route is very desirable” (Bailey 434). The author glosses over the greatness of the falls in describing them as a “difficulty” to be “overcome,” and by marking the territory as a no man’s land, the article characterizes the location in opposition to humans.

However, the purpose of Bailey’s article is not merely to discuss subjugation of the Amazon per se, but instead uses this tactic as a means to convey the financial possibilities to be had from this land. Thus, as the details begin to unfold of the perilous journey through an inhospitable landscape, the story becomes one of man traversing, and therefore gaining dominance over, an area that was previously unconquerable. Bailey’s description of the passage seeks to heighten the trials he endured, and downplay any mitigating pleasantries. For Bailey, emphasizing the grandeur of the mountain ranges or the lushness of the jungles would have been self-defeating for his goals. Instead, he focuses on the harsher aspects of the land to reaffirm the dichotomy and the need to tame the landscape in order for it to become useful; all other discussion that might cast the Amazon in a positive way is therefore omitted or ignored for clarity of purpose. In discussing his crossing the Andes, Bailey’s method is clear:

Snowy mountains and enormous glaciers are mirrored in the waters of the lakes, which change their colors with every whim of cloud and sky. More often, however, the traveler is wrapt in blinding snowstorms, which shut out every glimpse beyond the narrow limits of a few feet. Hour after hour he clings half frozen to his mule, his discomfort heightened by the mountain sickness, which is one of the terrors of these lofty regions. To lose his way under these conditions may mean death. (439)
The beautiful views to which Bailey was treated are eclipsed by the dangers inherent in nature. By introducing and then overshadowing the majesty of nature, Bailey is able to build his ethos as a seasoned explorer who has seen the world in all its splendor while simultaneously subjugating nature to the role of antagonist and obstacle.

This emphasis on the danger rather than the majesty of nature, realized through the author’s choice of wording, could be considered what Burke would call a terministic screen, because it “directs the attention” as “any nomenclature necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than others” (45). The author continues to use this terministic screen in order to silence the positive aspects of the environment to further dichotomize the issue. This oppositional language can be seen throughout the article, and the frequent recurrence of its use serves to steadily build upon the dichotomizing framework that was apparent from the opening of the article. In his discussion of traversing the jungle, Bailey states, “A man without a path may force his way with difficulty a mile a day” (439). To “force” suggests violence and conquest, one side seeking dominance over another.

Also evident in the text is the inherent superiority of the Western, civilized man. Bailey frequently refers to the indigenous tribes as “savages,” which was a customary stance for explorers of the time period. As Gustav Jahoda states in his 1999 book, *Images of Savages*, the tradition of superiority was long-standing and complex:

There was, however, an asymmetry stemming from the fact that the Europeans usually arrived as explorers or conquerors. In both roles they almost invariably saw themselves as superior–as indeed they usually were, at least technically–and often came to be perceived as such by the Others. This enhanced the probability that Europeans would view them as less than fully human, more like animals or children, and accordingly treat them as such. (10-11)

Bailey, as a Western male of European descent, made several observations that further separated his Anglo-American world from the indigenous peoples. Local dwellings were “unsightly huts,” his boat crew was a “motley crowd of various colors,” and the local tribe, the *Chunchos*, were “simple and well-disposed, if treated fairly, and surprisingly intelligent” (Bailey 439-440, 445). If Bailey was surprised by their intelligence, he once again utilizes a Burkean screen to direct the reader’s attention away from any positive (and therefore more human-like) aspects of these individuals to undermine his positive comment and further relegate the indigenous tribespeople to subservient status: “From almost every standpoint,
however, they are mere savages….They have no metal implements…no proper household utensils…their ideas in regard to propriety were satisfied by a loin-cloth….They have a curious combination of rather bright and ‘taking’ ways and of low and filthy habits” (445-446). For Bailey, the indigenous peoples were “nothing more frightful than jaguars and monkeys” and his language suggests that he considered them with little more regard than wild species co-inhabiting the forest. In making such remarks, Bailey characterizes the tribes as a part of the natural environment, and therefore sets them up as mere obstacles (like jaguars and mountain passes) to obtaining resources. Although this seems to be disharmonious to the establishment of his man-versus-nature dichotomy, Bailey is able to rhetorically downplay the humanity of the only “people” who might oppose the harvesting and deforestation that accompany Western conquest by characterizing them as savages who are little better than the other jungle creatures which inhabit the Amazon. In this sense, the Amazonian tribes do not function as “people” in the dichotomy, and Bailey is able to exclude them with impunity.

In order to successfully make such a characterization, Bailey imbues his narrative with pragmatism. The author discusses nature only in a detached manner, and characterizes the region in an ethnocentric fashion. This tactic serves to dichotomize the issue and sets the author—and by proxy the Western world—against the Amazonian environment and its indigenous peoples. In his closing sub-section, entitled “Is It a White Man’s Country,” Bailey presents perhaps the most obvious and profound example of rhetorical dichotomy at play in the article:

At present in these endless forests insects swarm in countless millions and malaria doubtless is prevalent; but, with the forests cleared away and with the comforts of civilization, the conditions would be much improved. The altitude is some 2,000 feet above sea-level and the heat by no means extreme. During our journey on the rivers the highest temperature recorded was 96° F., and a temperature above 90° was extremely rare. One hesitates even in imagination to picture what manifold industries may be found among these foot-hills in coming centuries, and what millions of prosperous dwellers may be clustered on the plains at their feet. (448)

The West, which he represents in this quest, is his only concern; all other lands, peoples, and cultures are considered either as oddities to be casually remarked upon, or as potential aids or obstacles in the quest for resource acquisition. Mary Louise Pratt defines this tactic as a “strategy of innocence,” which she discusses in Imperial Eyes as “representation whereby
European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment they assert their European hegemony” (7). Pratt defines the European (or in this case, American) abroad as a “seeing-man” whose imperial eyes possess all he sees. As a “seeing-man,” Bailey’s quest is one of acquisition and possession, and as obviously dichotomizing as his final remarks are, the forest clearing and civilizing he speaks of serve as a foretelling for what was to come for the Amazon, though perhaps not in the way that Bailey had foreseen.

Regardless of Bailey’s prognostic abilities, the author would surely have been satisfied with the Western expansion that occurred in the years following his publication. Over the course of the twentieth century, American- and European-backed groups increasingly targeted many of the previously remote and pristine areas of the world (or at least those areas that the Western world considered remote and pristine). As Tamar Rothenberg states in Presenting America’s World, the magazine played in integral role in this development: “It was not until the wake of the United States’ 1898 plunge into overseas imperialism that National Geographic began its renowned embrace of ‘the world and all that is in it,’ basking in the curiosities uncovered and the economic potential of European and American imperialist endeavor” (2). This awakening, or “planetary consciousness” (9), to borrow a term from Pratt, was the beginning of a steady process of exploration and reconnaissance, which inevitably led to U.S. resource acquisition in many foreign locations, not the least of which was South America. The nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American attitude towards this process might best be summed up by early twentieth-century explorer Harriet Chalmers Adams. After her return from an expedition to South America in the 1920, she recounts, “Uncle Sam’s white magic…has turned a backward people from tribal quarrels and primitive ways of living into the path of unity and modern progress” (qtd. in Rothenberg 158). The “modern progress” she identifies was the result of Bailey’s predictions, namely forest clearing, for timber as well as to provide space for agriculture and cattle raising (Branford and Glock 32).

However, as the century progressed, an emerging ideology, brought about by scientific discovery and progress, began to alter the way in which Americans positioned themselves within the environment. According to environmental author Victor Scheffer, the environmental movement that took place in the latter half of the twentieth century was a “social revolution” (4). He states, “In the 1960’s, ecology became a household world. It was
introduced by biologists who, having identified the abuses of the environment, cried alarm at what they saw” (4). He goes on to say, “Although professionals introduced the word ecology to the people, it was the people who demanded the impressive political improvements who were to characterize the environmental age” (5). This “environmental age” was one of fluctuation, and brought about a great number of changes in America, not just concerning the political forum. During this period, the basic nature of the environmental ethos in America began to shift, and so too did the ways in which Americans, and especially the American media, presented themselves in relation to the environment.
CHAPTER 3

NATURE AS VICTIM

The rhetorical shift that occurred changed the motive from ethnocentric to ecocentric, which reversed the focus from humanity and Western society to an emphasis on the spirit and fragility of nature. Herndl and Brown eloquently express the nature of this shift in the preface to *Green Culture*, where they make an effort to compare the evolving relationship between writer and environment. The original configuration, which I have demonstrated, represents the politicized discourse: “The political power of this discourse comes from its institutional context, but its rhetorical power emerges from the rhetorical notion of ethos, the culturally constructed authority of the speaker or writer who represents these institutions” (Herndl and Brown 11). This starkly contrasts the poeticized discourse that resulted from the changing national attitude towards the environment:

> The poetic discourse model refers to the language we use to discuss the beauty, the value, the emotional power of nature. In this discourse, nature is usually regarded as spiritual or transcendent unity. Because this discourse largely considers nature and seeks to locate human value in a harmonious relation to the natural world, we call this an ecocentric discourse. (12)

The motives enacted by writers from these periods both utilize rhetorical dichotomy; however the ways in which they polarize the opposition are basically antithetical in every way.

This shift in the means of polarization is exemplified by a second article from *NGM*, published 100 years after Bailey’s account, which features a uniquely altered stance on the harvesting of Amazonian resources. This ecocentric approach focuses on the land as a victim of human interference. Whereas the previous discourse is detached from nature, the latter article, “Last of the Amazon,” is rife with concern for the environment and marshals both spiritual and scientific arguments to explain this environmental destruction. Written by Scott Wallace, a journalist and contributing editor to *NGM*’s sister magazine *National Geographic Adventure*, the article, no. 1 of vol. 211, was published in January of 2007, and at 31 pages was considerably longer than Bailey’s article. Also, where Bailey’s account was one of eight
articles all discussing some aspect of South America, Wallace’s narrative was one of six articles on a variety of subjects that ranged from humpback whales to mechanical hummingbirds. In his account, Wallace ignores cultural, geographical, and social contexts; the Western world is no longer normative and is indeed entirely ignored in favor of depicting humankind as a single, malignant force enacting wholesale destruction upon a victimized region. Like Bailey, the author enacts dichotomy; he forces the issue into two camps. Unlike Bailey, Wallace’s article presents readers with a devastated natural environment and implicitly blames modern industry for the destruction of irreplaceable resources. Structurally speaking, the authors share some commonalities, the first of which is an immediate statement to clarify the author’s position. Akin to Bailey’s introduction, Wallace’s opening line lets his audience know what to expect: the prognosis isn’t good. He states, “In the time it takes you to read this article, an area of Brazil’s rain forest larger than 200 football fields will have been destroyed” (Wallace 40). Again, the opening language is antagonistic, but whereas Bailey was challenging nature, Wallace seems to be condemning mankind on behalf of nature. In what can only be viewed as a direct reversal on the issue, this new dichotomized stance emerges and is repeated throughout the article as Wallace identifies the travesties human activities have wrought upon an environment helpless to protect itself.

The theme of victimization is common in the piece. For example, Wallace says, “Market forces of globalization are invading the Amazon, hastening the demise of the forest and thwarting its most committed stewards” (40). Wallace is not alone in his rendering of nature as the victim of human interference. As Dennis Desroches states in his discussion of Sir Francis Bacon’s relationship with nature,

> Contemporary questions concerning the ecological, technological, and even social disposition of humanity inevitably come to depend on some understanding of the manner in which we manipulate nature. From the perspective of many intellectuals, such innocent-sounding ‘manipulation’ has been replaced—and not without warrant—by the language of violence: nature, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has become a victim. (304)

Desroches’ point about the transition from “manipulation” to “violence” is central to understanding the altered nature of the variety of dichotomy employed by Wallace in the text. He lays the blame squarely at the feet of humanity, who have turned from the triumphant Western conquerors of the dawn of the twentieth century, to ruthless tyrants at the
dawn of the twenty-first. In speaking with one of the tribesmen, named Pimentel, he offers this account to forward this claim:

A dozen giant mango trees lay on the ground, toppled by chain saws and left to decay under the blistering sun. "We never would have sold it if we knew what this guy was going to do," Pimentel said. He hoisted himself onto the stump of an old mango. "My grandfather planted this one a hundred years ago," he said, looking out across a desolate, empty field. Pimentel buried his face in his hands and began to weep. "It was beautiful here," he said. "You should have seen it." (Wallace 63)

The dichotomy is clear; Wallace would have his readers believe the land was beautiful before it was sold to outside conglomerates—backed by Western dollars—who razed the natural state, and thus began to deface the beauty of the region.

In order to emphasize this defacement, Wallace utilizes what Killingsworth would call “ecopoetics” in order to further the dichotomy of victimization. Killingsworth, in his article “The Case of Cotton Mather’s Dog: Reflection and Resonance in American Ecopoetics,” defines ecopoetics as “the theory and practice of a creative relationship with the processes and products of one’s world expressed in writing” (498). Wallace utilizes ecopoetics in order to reflect upon the plight of the Amazon by attempting to bring the reader along with him as he views the destruction first hand. In his account, Wallace ignores the cultural, geographical, and social contexts that were such important issues for Bailey; for Wallace, the Western world is no longer normative and is indeed entirely ignored in favor of depicting humankind as a single, malignant force enacting wholesale destruction about a victimized region. For example, he states,

Brazilians are not the only people profiting from soybeans. Along the 500-mile paved stretch of BR-163 between Cuiabá and Guarantã do Norte, there are no fewer than five John Deere dealerships. And at harvest time, fleets of the trademark green-and-yellow combines rumble across the fields flanking the highway, pouring rivers of golden soy into open-bed trucks bound for shiny new silos belonging to ADM, Bunge, and Cargill—all American multinationals. (Wallace 45)

Unlike Bailey, Wallace’s article presents readers with a devastated natural environment and explicitly blames modern industry for the destruction of irreplaceable resources.

To effectively demonstrate this human-induced devastation, Wallace marshals ecopoetics to enact Michelle Kennerly’s idea of “civic phantasia,” which she defines as “rhetoric's ability to ‘bring before the eyes’ absent or unapparent persons, places, or things,”
in order to articulate “a mode of distance collapse whereby rhetors move subjects or objects so as to enable or impede particular judgments” (269). Wallace utilizes civic phantasia in order to both reflect upon the destruction and force the reader to see the damage that has been done through graphic description and poetic lamentation. For example, when discussing the devastation he witnessed while traveling with a local rancher, he breaks the litany of atrocities in order to provide a contrasting scene, which transports the reader and further dichotomizes the issue:

On his property, we headed uphill through fenced-off pasture and entered the darkness of the forest along a two-rut road made by grileiros. We crossed a stream, so clear and inviting that we stopped for a drink. As I beheld the green cathedral that towered above us, I had the sense that we were day-tripping in a sacred place that should have taken weeks of arduous trekking to reach. An iridescent blue morpho butterfly lilted past, one of a million wonders still harbored by this primal forest. But for how much longer? Recalling the murky stew I’d seen in streams already overrun by farmland farther south, I figured it would be only months—not even a year—before these deep, mysterious shadows were exposed to scorching sunlight and the cool, clean water no longer fit to drink. (Wallace 43)

Here, Wallace’s use of phantasia is similar to a long tradition of nature writing, wherein authors such as Muir, Emerson, and Thoreau have transported their readers to the likes of Yosemite and Walden Pond in order to instill clear imagery and place natural beauty as the focal point. The readers cannot help but imagine themselves standing within the “green cathedral” as butterflies flit past. And then, true to form, Wallace reemphasizes the dichotomy by imagining the same area in the future once humanity, in some form or another, has gotten their destructive hands on this virgin land. The phantasia, coupled with the reflective style inherent in ecopoetics, is a powerful tool that Wallace wields to forward his claims of wholesale Amazonian destruction, and which was entirely absent from Bailey’s account.

Wallace uses civic phantasia not only to create a picture of the natural environment for his readers, but also the people who inhabit the space. In order to show a contrast between Western-influenced land acquisition and local small farms, Wallace utilizes detailed narration to show the reader the plight of the small farmer who respects the land: “Rosa, in his grimy red sport shirt and battered hat, didn’t look the part of wealthy fazendeiro…. Getting to his land required a two-hour drive east from town, down a dirt road and across flat
plains and rolling hills, where blocks of forest still stood amid brilliant green fields of rice and soybeans” (43). To follow the narrative, the reader must conjure up an image of the dirty red shirt, a simple dirt road, and a simple picture of natural land and agriculture in harmonious existence. This could be linked to Catherine Lutz and Jane Collin’s idea of the “Idealization of the non-Westerner,” whereby indigenous non-Western peoples are beautified along with their natural environment (95). In this sense, Wallace performs the same maneuver as Bailey in his characterization of the small, indigenous tribes as a part of nature, and therefore maintains the human-versus-nature dichotomy. However, unlike Bailey, the article implicates non-Westerners and Westerners alike in exposing the causality of destruction. In the opening paragraph, Wallace states, “In this Wild West frontier of guns, chains saws, and bulldozers, government agents are often corrupt and ineffective—or ill-equipped and outmatched. Now industrial scale soybean producers are joining loggers and cattle ranchers in the land grab, speeding up destruction” (41). This example suggests an attempt on the author’s part to present a more unified humanity as the cause of the Amazonian blight, and furthers the dichotomy to mark the environment (and the indigenous tribes) as victim, and Western-influenced humanity as the oppressor.

Aside from the contrasting narrative voice, Bailey’s account also differs from Wallace’s in the diction used to name the indigenous culture of the area. Whereas Bailey’s article presents a contrasting account of cultured Western explorers interacting with curious savages, Wallace opts for a more universal account of humanity in an effort to not place the blame solely on Western influences, but to suggest that a combination of local and international parties are responsible for the destruction of the Amazon, while only a tiny group remain active in the fight against the inevitable environmental downfall. For Wallace, tribes are dropped in favor of “communities,” unspecified savages are given the correct nomenclature (crileiros, fazendeiros, etc.), and colonizers become “timber mafias,” “land sharks,” and “absentee elites who raze forest for agribusiness against family farmers who clear small patches for crops but still depend on intact forest around them for survival” (40-44). Unlike Bailey’s subjective, personal account and simple language, the article written by Wallace suggests an entirely new kind of writing featuring a mix of vivid narration, researched facts, and personal interviews.
CHAPTER 4

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE SILENT SAVAGE

Any discussion of *NGM* is incomplete without including at least some discussion of photography. The publication has set the standard for photojournalism long before the invention of color photography. For *NGM*, images have a way of collapsing distance and bringing their readers to the scene through excellent photographs in addition to graphics and tables. The magazine therefore has much more than written or verbal text to bring to bear in terms of rhetorical power. As stated by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, the object of rhetorical analysis is not to consider verbal text and photography as separate, but instead as one simultaneous rhetorical move: “We do not seek to see the picture as an ‘illustration’ of the verbal text, thereby treating the verbal text as prior and more important, nor treat the visual and verbal text as entirely discrete elements. We seek to be able to look at the whole page as an integrated text” (183). For *NGM*, the integrated text is even more powerful than for other publications due to the dependably high-quality reporting and photography which the magazine is able to bring to each story. In this sense, it is not just the author of a story who chooses how to interpret or frame an issue discussed, but a whole gamut of additional factors and rhetors which must be kept in mind for a rhetorical analysis. A. M. Todd, who wrote about *NGM* and its treatment of African tourism, discussed the integrated text in terms of lenses:

Indeed these pictures are viewed through multiple lenses: an article’s author or section editor chooses from the photographer’s images. An executive editor then approves these choices with an eye for the layout of the entire magazine. These articles and captions interpret the photographs for us, adding further lenses to the viewfinder, until the actually (sic) object in the image is rendered invisible by the layers of representation. The interplay of text and images in these pages constructs a nuanced discourse: the text aids in interpretation of the visual, while the image often enhances the meaning of the rhetorical. (212)

With this in mind, the authors of the text are merely the first of a great number of rhetors that shape and “enhance” these articles. But in order to construct a cohesive text, each additional lens (such as photos, layout, and captioning) that the article passes through must in some way
support or add to the original dichotomy created by the author, or the piece loses strength as an integrated text.

By necessity, then, Bailey’s account includes a great number of photographs that promote the remoteness of foreign locales, the oddness of non-Western cultures, and the inherent superiority of the “civilized” man. These images serve as devices to enhance the verbal text, and provide the reader with a visual to go along with the harrowing account of Bailey’s travels. An excellent example of this can be found as Bailey discusses the local Amazonian tribes. In Figure 1, a group of 15 local Amazonians are pictured facing the camera above a caption, which reads, “A Group of Chuncho Savages on the Bank of the Tambopata” (Bailey 447).


In the image, the “savages” are arranged by height, with the tallest falling in the middle to create the focal point. However, it is evident by the faces and stances of the individuals that they are unaccustomed to the act of photography: few are looking at the camera but are instead gazing in various directions or have the faces covered; the stances of the individuals violate Western conventions (as exemplified particularly by the woman
standing on one leg); the placement of individuals seems foreign to the subjects, with the confused expressions seen on most of the faces as evidence of this alien configuration. Clearly, the photographer has imposed a Western idea of arrangement upon the group without clearly explaining the nature of photography. After all, without ever having seen a camera or a photograph, how would one be able to understand the concept with no frame of reference?

This unfamiliarity with Western culture and technology leads to a characterization of the people as both “savage” and “innocent.” As Rothenburg explains, the magazine often used this framework to inextricably link local inhabitants with their natural environment: “People living in tropical places in particular had long been described in European and neo-European travel literature as ‘children of nature,’ a trope based on both romantic and evolutionary notions and which was used comfortably in the National Geographic Magazine for many years” (115). Thus, the picture of bare-breasted women and bow-toting men fits in perfectly with the idyllic, almost Edenic imagery that was then associated with exotic locations like the Amazon. By accompanying the picture with descriptions that invoke imagery of menial hygiene, immodesty, and uncivilized living conditions, Bailey has simultaneously cast the Amazonian natives as icons of the non-Western world, and rhetorically silenced them; they may be seen, but have no power to speak. For, as Thomas Mann states, “Speech is civilization itself. The word…preserves contact—it is silence which isolates” (Mann and Porter 518). Bailey, by photographing the indigenous tribes without endeavoring to interview them, has effectively yoked them with the natural environment in which they live.

In order to enrich this characterization, it may help to first understand the connection between indigenous cultures and the idealized image of these cultures that persists even today in Western society. Much of the American understanding of these exotic indigenous cultures is based on the traditional imagery evoked by indigenous cultures found in America, namely Native Americans. According to Daniel Morley Johnson, “Since early colonial times, Indigenous peoples have been represented via the imaginations of the invading European settler-colonists. Not surprisingly, such typically distorted representations have long been a part of the popular press and news media in the United States and Canada” (104). Johnson goes on to state that this pervasive representation has led to what he defines as “Anti-
Indigenous rhetoric.” For Johnson, Anti-Indigenous rhetoric is “a mechanism that attempts to
denationalize and eradicate the political and cultural sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and
nations” through a process which he calls “dysconsciousness,” or the “uncritical habit of
mind (i.e., perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and
exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given” (110). Dysconsciousness is an
important concept here, and is exemplified in Figure 1 as well as in another photo from
Bailey’s article, reprinted in Figure 2.


This image, which is accompanied by the caption “Curing Rubber by Smoking It. A Native Hut, Eastern Peru,” may be viewed as an example of dysconsciousness in pictorial form. The focal point, the rubber ball, leads the eye left along the vector of the spit to the man performing the curing process. Again, the indigenous tribesman’s gaze is removed from the photo, and the shabbiness of his clothing, combined with the visual and textual denotation of the poor quality of the “native hut” he is operating within, serve to both dehumanize the figure as well as justify the exploitation of such people. Rothenberg, in his examination of NGM photography, discusses such photos as evidence of “type photography.” He states, “In the early decades of the twentieth century, The National Geographic Magazine often
identified the local inhabitants of particular places as “types.” Functioning as cultural synecdoche—a part standing for the whole—individual people were stripped of their personal identity and made to don the mantle instead of their perceived cultural/ethnic/racial identity” (Rothenberg 89). The entire image and caption suggest that if this “type,” a man slowly turning the rubber over a rudimentary fire, is representative of all Amazonian tribesmen, then civilizing and industrializing the region would certainly benefit all parties. Rhetorical silencing is again visible here, and there is no effort on the part of Bailey to interview any of the indigenous people to allow them to speak in the article. And because *NGM* was the only publication focusing on the area, it then serves as the only lens with which an America audience might be able to view the Amazon and its people, therefore monopolizing and reinforcing this dysconscious, “typical” mediation.

The emergence of environmental awareness that so affected the latter verbal texts also had an effect on the imagery. In order to underscore the victimization of nature, Wallace utilizes photography to both complement and extend his account of Amazonian deforestation. Whereas the images in Bailey’s article were focused on the brutality of nature and savage-as-icon, the photographs in Wallace’s account serve instead to cast blame on humanity for destroying “the green cathedral” or “sacred place” that was the Amazon (43). To show this destruction, Wallace again utilizes civic phantasia. The images depict wanton destruction resulting from unlicensed logging, scarred earth and ugly machinery, “timber mafias,” “land sharks,” and “absentee elites who raze forest for agribusiness against family farmers who clear small patches for crops but still depend on intact forest around them for survival” (Wallace 40-44). Each picture serves both to emphasize the narrative and enhance the account in a way that mere words are incapable of. As Lutz and Collins state, the rhetorical importance of photography in the magazine cannot be understated: “We are captured by the temptation to view the photographs as more real than the world or at least as a comfortable substitute for it” (215). This statement exposes the extent to which the viewer is susceptible to imagery, and shows the power that lies behind photography as a lens to shape conceptions of “other” places, especially for a media source as prominent as *NGM*.

As he transports his readers to this new Amazon, beset by humanity in a race for resources, Wallace discusses the indigenous tribes in a more human fashion than Bailey (naming the tribes as opposed to referring to them as savages, and refraining from identifying
cultural ineptitudes). Yet Wallace’s narrative essentially performs the same manipulation as Bailey’s account. For example, Figure 3 shows a group of Manoki Indians wandering through a ruined landscape.

![Manoki Indians displaced from their ancestral territory](image)


The picture is accompanied by a caption that reads, “Manoki Indians displaced from their ancestral territory—a fate shared by many of Brazil’s 170 indigenous Amazonian peoples—return to reclaim the land ritually and lament its degradation” (Wallace 58). Of the four tribesmen pictured, none are looking at the camera. The eyes of the viewer are immediately drawn to the broad, bare chest of the man at the left of the image, whose eyes are just out of frame. From there, the viewer reads right, and sees the central figure, an old man wandering dejectedly through the barren area. Though Wallace seems to show how the land has been taken from these natives against their will, he has again removed the gaze from the tribesmen, effectively silencing them and categorizing them as part of the victimized “nature.” By doing so, Wallace is able to categorize the native inhabitants of the Amazon with the land itself, and therefore lend additional agency to the rhetorical dichotomy he creates.

Here again, the yoking of tribesmen to the natural environment is seen. In offering this view of the homeless tribe, whose land has been destroyed by Western-influenced
resource acquisition, the image provides a specific lens through which to see these people. The lens is one of helplessness, much the same as Bailey’s “Chuncho Savages.” The eyes have been removed from the image, and the obvious scattering and confusion of the tribesmen is immediately apparent. Despite the hundred years separating the publications, Wallace’s evidence suggests that little has changed for the tribesmen in terms of “becoming civilized.” The indigenous people are pictured in the same iconic fashion: shirtless, spear wielding, bodies painted, noses pierced. The imagery fits in with the perceived notion of the exotic savage, and is in fact not much changed from Figure 1 of 100 years previous. The viewer is able to see these indigenous people as they are expected to appear, while the Manoki, in turn, are not given vision or voice. The difference between Figure 1 and Figure 3 can be seen in the way in which Wallace has effectively linked the local tribes to the natural environment. Unlike Bailey, who saw the indigenous culture as another part of the Amazon that would be civilized by Western expansion, Wallace links the tribesmen to nature through the theme of victimization by implying that just as the forests that are being cleared at will, so too are the indigenous tribes helpless to stop the colonization and dispersal that faces the Amazon.

To underscore this fusion of indigenous tribes and the lands they inhabit, it is interesting to apply Roland Barthes’ concept of “punctum” to better understand the rhetorical significance of linking the plight of the land to the plight of the Amazonian tribes. According to Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Barthes coined the use of the term punctum to characterize the affective element of those certain photographs that pierce one’s heart with feeling” (18). An excellent illustration of the rhetorical effectiveness of punctum can be seen in Figure 4.

The caption in the image reads, “When the paving of BR-163 is complete, land speculators may pressure 300 surviving Panará Indians in their village of Nánsepotiti. Once scattered in nine settlements in southern Pará, the Panará were decimated by diseases in the 1970’s, when the road was built” (Wallace 62). The eye is immediately drawn to the image of the child in the foreground, then follows the vector of the ladder to the right to the second naked child, and then upwards and left to the third and fourth children, respectively. As the eye tracks the running figures, the viewer is forced to recognize the bare ground that the
village is set on, and coupled with the caption describing the road that has caused the village to become such a desolately open space, the punctum of the image becomes obvious.

This allusion to progress (i.e. the building of logging roads into virgin jungle) causing disease amongst the indigenous tribes is undeniably similar to the link between progress and deforestation, which can easily be interpreted as a disease to the environment. The connection evokes Barthes’ “heart piercing remorse” in the reader, and serves to “indicate a kind of mortality, evoking death in the moments in which they seem to stop time” (Sturken and Cartwright 18). The imagery emphasizes Wallace’s sad narrative, and the combination creates a powerful unified rhetorical appeal, vis-à-vis Kress and Van Leeuwen’s concept of the integrated text, which elicits a clear and irrefutable connection between the indigenous people and the jungle that was their home.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Both author’s texts epitomize the dominant form of rhetorical antithesis employed during their respective time periods, and the juxtaposition of the two articles elucidates how this dichotomy shifted over the course of the century. Originally, the magazine utilizes an antagonistic rhetorical stance in relation to the environment. The attitude is one of conflict, categorizing nature to an object in opposition with man that needs to be conquered, and in turn tamed. This attitude is visible both within the text itself, as well as the imagery linking the local tribesmen to the land they inhabit, and thus silencing them. During this period of transition, the dichotomy shifts and the rhetorical framework of the language used in describing nature shifts with it. From this change, a new polarized stance emerges, and the association between man and nature becomes one of defenseless nature beset by destructive man. Again, dichotomy is evident, and though the nature of the dichotomy has shifted, the effect is the same: nature vs. man. The greatest difference between the two articles is apparent in the shift in perception of this contest as inherently positive to inherently negative. By analyzing the rhetorical tactics by which the two authors discuss the same subject, Amazonian resources, this article seeks to provide a lens for understanding the ways in which the relationship between humanity and nature is constructed rhetorically. More specifically, the article attempts to demonstrate that *NGM* constructs a dichotomized narrative, through both text and imagery, to create an integrated text in which man and nature are often at odds.

Though these articles are indeed interesting to compare, and may be considered to represent the changing rhetoric of the magazine, they are still just that: two articles of the many thousands *NGM* has produced since 1888. Rothenburg as well as Lutz and Collings have produced groundbreaking work on the magazine, and though their accounts are edifying in terms of quantitative data and history of the magazine, they largely overlook the specific details of the underlying rhetorical dichotomies at play. By delving into the text, both verbal and visual, I hope to forward the notion of the importance of such a study to a broader range of examples. Underestimating the role of the media in rendering the human relationship with
the environment, especially a particular outlet as important as *NGM*, limits any attempt to understand the effect environmentalism has had on our relationship with the natural world.

I would also ask a few questions that have arisen through researching and writing this article: What is the tipping point at which this dichotomy has shifted and what were the causes of this shift? Are such dichotomies harmful or useful in helping us understand our relationship with the environment? And now that we know these dichotomies exist, what should be done about them? In continuing with this research, I would suggest broadening the scope to incorporate other media outlets, including other magazines as well as television and internet sites, in order to gain a better understanding of how the media utilizes rhetorical dichotomies to create a divide between the natural and anthropomorphic worlds.
WORKS CITED


