

An End to Difference Imagining Amazonian Modernity at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century

JANET CHERNELA, *Department of Anthropology, University of Maryland,
College Park, MD 20742, USA. Email: chernela@umd.edu*

ESTER PEREIRA, *University of Stavanger, Norway. Email: esterp@aol.com*

This article considers a set of postcards purchased in the Amazonian city of Manaus between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The cards upend the prominent narrative suggested in most visual imagery of the period that depicts the Amazon basin as a wilderness peopled with uncivilized natives. The postcards, instead, portray a technoscape of urban modernity—orderly, not chaotic; domesticated, not wild. Missing from the sanguine depictions of prosperity and progress are the vast bulk of Manaus residents, members of the working classes, who were overwhelmingly non-white and impoverished. Rather than reifying Otherness, these postcards present an aspirational Europeanization of Amazonia—an end to difference.

Key words: Brazil, travel, photography, visual anthropology, urbanization

The rise of global awareness has been attributed, at least in part, to advances in photography and international communication at the end of the nineteenth century (Edwards 2012). In this regard, no photographic genre has been more powerful than the postcard. Capable of traversing political and cultural boundaries, the medium interpreted and assigned identities to produce a vicariousness not before possible. So it was with the postcards of Manaus (a.k.a. Manaos), whose discursive work reflected the aspirational goals of an Amazonian modernity as the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth.

Known as the Belle Epoque in Europe, the turn of the twentieth century was a period of burgeoning technological innovation, world trade, and communication. In the Brazilian Amazon, which provided most of the rubber used in the new industrial production, the period brought unprecedented wealth as well as sociocultural transformation. The accelerated growth has been called “the rubber boom” (*surto gomífera, ciclo da borracha*), referring to the culmination of a steep rise in rubber revenues.¹

In this paper we consider a collection of twenty postcards produced and mailed in Manaus between 1896 and 1909, at the height of the period. The postcards, from

Submitted November 11, 2016; accepted June 17, 2017; published online January 26, 2018.
Journal of Anthropological Research (Spring 2018). © 2018 by The University of New Mexico.
All rights reserved. 0091-7710/2017/7401-0002\$10.00

the collection of Joaquim Marinho,² and given to the authors for study, were mailed to France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Britain as well as locations in Brazil. The purchasers and senders of the cards were largely immigrants or visitors to Manaus. In our discussion, we place the cards in historical, socioeconomic context in order to unpack the symbolic work they accomplish. We are especially interested in the ideological role of the cards in branding and promoting Manaus as a site of modernity.

There is a substantial literature on the role played by visual imagery in defining place in the touristic imagination (Edwards 2012; Jaworski 2010; Lutz and Collins 1993; MacCannell 1992; Nugent 2007; Poole 1997; Sinervo and Hill 2011). For the end of the nineteenth century, at the inception of both commercial photography and the postcard, representations of the world outside of Europe were largely dominated by images of the wild and exotic. It was a world untouched by modern innovations.

This was especially the case for depictions of the Amazon basin. In his 2007 work, *Scoping the Amazon*, Stephen Nugent writes, “Amazonia is widely perceived as a region dominated by nature, not by culture. . . . The main images used to represent Amazonia . . . invoke a unified, dehistoricized domain of dolphin, Indian, jaguar and piranha” (Nugent 2007:40). Nugent attributes this to what he calls “the ‘green hell’ of Victorian naturalism” (2007:27). From the Victorian era in the mid-nineteenth century through the present, Nugent tells us, “There has been a significant immutability of representations of both the natural and social spheres, the persistent imagery of green hell, natural exuberance, and cultural parsimony such . . . [as] the image of the forest-dwelling hunter-gatherer” (Nugent 2007:69).

As in other discussions of photography and colonialism (Edwards 2012; Lutz and Collins 1993), Nugent points to the performance of ethnic identity in the service of an expanding colonial frontier. We refer to this reification of Difference in depictions of non-European peoples as “Ethnic Othering.” Nugent provides an analysis for such Othering: “[T]he Rousseauian idealization of a utopian state of balanced nature/culture grace was in part a critique of modernity of which the Indian was a vivid paragon. . . . [A] tropical frontier sparsely occupied by . . . simple foragers was well suited as a background against which the civilizing forces of European societies could pursue progress, in part (self-)justified by their willingness to ‘conquer the tropics’” (Nugent 2007:99–100).

This paper takes a different tack, complicating these generalities not by refuting them, but by contributing to the body of imagery a set of photographic postcards that contradict the representations of an untouched Amazonia. Instead of the clichés of “dolphin, Indian, jaguar, and piranha,” we find that the cards depict Amazonia/Manaus not as a site of wilderness and difference but as a bourgeois metropolis well integrated into the modern, Western, world. In portraying turn-of-the-(twentieth-)century Manaus, the cards in the collection privilege the artificial over the natural and the familiar over the different.

We begin by providing an overview of Amazonia’s role in the worldwide surge in industrialization, emphasizing economic, demographic, and social change. Next we will discuss two concomitant developments in the latter part of the nineteenth cen-

tury: the postcard and commercial photography. We then turn to the cards, describing them to identify prominent themes. We will also address, to a limited extent, the cards' senders and recipients. Finally, we will discuss the sociosemiotic work of the cards in order to arrive at a number of observations and propositions.

ULTIMA THULE

Located strategically at the point where the eastward-flowing Amazon River receives its largest tributary, the southward-flowing Rio Negro, the city of Manaus was founded in 1669 as a military stronghold to protect Portugal's South American holdings from Spanish incursion. For centuries the Amazon basin was depicted as a vast unexplored wilderness, remote from the advances of modern civilization. Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, visits to the region were limited to intrepid expeditioners on religious, military, or scientific missions. When he visited Manaus in 1867, the German engineer Franz Keller labeled it an *Ultima Thule*—a Latin expression that refers to a point beyond the borders of the known world. Its population, he claimed, led a “half-wild existence supported by hunting and fishing” (1874:vi). The Manaus of Keller's description dramatically changed several years later when transatlantic steam travel and worldwide demand for rubber catapulted Amazonia out of isolation. The transformative process was the rubber boom, the wave of prosperity that thrust this Ultima Thule onto the world stage.

Manaus entered the nineteenth century as an isolated outpost in an agrarian monarchy and closed it as part of a new Republic and a player in global capitalism. The peak of the boom, from roughly 1880 to 1912, was short lived, yet the period was marked by major transformations in the nation and the city. Beside events and changes related to the rubber bonanza, the nation abolished slavery in 1888 and established a republican government in 1889. The period was one of redefinition and identity construction.

HEVEA

At the center of this transformation was *Hevea brasiliensis*, one of several neotropical tree species whose elastic sap provides the raw material for rubber, and the only one that can be sustainably tapped without harming the tree. It grows on the well-drained interfluvial soils of the Amazonian rainforest, and in Brazil, where it is known as the *seringueira*, it can reach a height of 130 ft (40 m). The white latex is harvested quite simply by carving shallow incisions in the bark to collect the liquid.

Europeans had long known of these tropical species and their elastic gums.³ In his 1542 account of travel down the Amazon, Gaspar de Carvajal described the use of rubber by the Tupian Omagua (Carvajal 1894; Markham 2010:175). Two centuries later the French scientists Charles Marie de la Condamine and François Fresneau de La Gataudière presented the first scientific paper describing the properties of rubber to the Académie Royale des Sciences. Fresneau noted its utility in waterproofing and predicted its use in tubing, boots, and harnesses (Hemming 2008:177). Over the next half-century, the gum was exported to Europe for use in rain gear and medical equipment.

Raw rubber, however, was of limited use in manufacturing since the unprocessed gum performed poorly under hot and cold temperatures.

It was only in 1839, when Charles Goodyear discovered a chemical process to convert raw rubber into a more durable material, that the product gained widespread utility. Concurrent with a conjunction of technological advancements, transportation, trade policies, and global communications, the stage was set for a burgeoning market for rubber. Boilers and engines benefitted from this new product that could stretch, protect, and seal moving parts. Amazonian rubber was suddenly in demand for hoses, belts, tubing, insulation, rollers, gaskets, pumps, packing, and other purposes. With its flexibility, impermeability, and electrical resistance, rubber became indispensable to the new industrial developments taking place in western Europe (Geer 1923). Worldwide demand for rubber soared.

MANAUS AND THE RUBBER BOOM

Although rubber had been a minor export along with other extractive forest products for some time, the thrust of the rubber boom was not felt until the mid-nineteenth century. When the British botanist Richard Spruce stopped in Manaus in 1851, it was a sleepy backwater called Barra, with a population of less than 10,000 largely reliant on hunting, fishing, and gardening (Spruce and Wallace 1908). Of that 1851 visit, Spruce was to write, “I showed the inhabitants the abundance of rubber trees they possessed in their forests, and tried to induce them to set about its extraction, but they shook their heads and said it would never answer [*sic*]” (1908:508).

Upon his return two years later, the town formerly known as Barra had become Manaus, the capital of the Province of Amazonas. Its harbor, he recounts, swarmed with canoes, and there was even a Brazilian steamship line. Spruce is said to have asked a friend, “What happened?” to which the friend replied, “Rubber happened!” (Jackson 2008:113). Considering the difference made by the two years, Spruce wrote,

All the way down the Rio Negro the smoke was seen ascending from recently opened rubber groves. . . . The extraordinary price reached by rubber in Pará in 1853 at length woke up the people from their lethargy, and when once set in motion, so wide was the impulse extended that throughout the Amazon and its principal tributaries the mass of the population put itself in motion to search out and fabricate rubber. . . . Mechanics threw aside their tools, sugar-makers deserted their mills, and Indians their *roças* [gardens] so that sugar, rum, and even flour were not produced in sufficient quantity for the consumption of the province (1908:507).

The transition witnessed by Spruce was due to the inauguration of steamships on the Amazon. Even so, the full impact of the rubber boom would be delayed another fifteen years while the Amazon River in Brazil continued to be closed to international traffic. The reasons for this isolation were political. During its three centuries of co-

lonial rule, the Portuguese Crown had restricted manufacturing of any kind in its American colony,⁴ as well as prohibited trade with other nations (Keller 1874:20–21; Souza 2009). When the Portuguese regent João VI transferred the court to Brazil in 1808, he opened all of Brazil’s waterways except for the Amazon. The Amazon River continued to remain closed to world commerce even after Brazilian independence in 1822, as the newly established constitutional monarchy (the “Empire”) perpetuated the highly protectionist policies of the colony (Gomes 1986; Marchant 1965). To promote and protect its economy at the expense of its rivals, in 1850 the imperial government enacted Law 586 authorizing a national steam navigation service on the Amazon and its tributaries (Marchant 1965:103–5). The subsidized *Companhia de Navegação e Comércio do Amazonas* was inaugurated with three small steamships, a number that would grow to ten steamships within a few years (Pontes Filho 2012:130). This state-private enterprise monopolized Amazonian commerce for 15 years (Caldeira 1995; Williams 2014).

As overseas demand for Amazonian rubber grew, Brazil’s trade monopoly became ever more difficult to maintain. In an attempt to undermine the monopoly, the United States pressured neighboring Amazonian nations to open their ports. Heightened competition among foreign investors for lucrative rubber contracts left the imperial government with few options, and in 1866 it enacted a law to end the monopoly and open the Amazon River to international commerce (Keller 1874:28; Souza 2009:253). Another four years hence, rubber would become Brazil’s principal export. In 1890 the region contributed 16,934 tons of rubber to European and North American industries, thrusting the formerly marginalized region into the vortex of a surging international economy (Benchimol 1995, 2002; and see Weinstein 1983). The so-called Era of Black Gold was underway.

THE “BOOM”

The technological and market transformations were not only economic; they were also social and cultural. The port of Manaus was congested with visitors and immigrants. Transatlantic steam travel enabled European travelers to visit locations they had previously regarded as inaccessible and unknown. Among these was the Amazon. Numbers embarked on the “Grand Tour.” The first steam company to link Manaus with Europe was the British Booth line, which provided passenger, freight, and mail service between Liverpool and Manaus beginning in 1870 (Williams 2014). By 1900 its fourteen ships chartered routes that included London, Le Havre, Porto, Lisbon, Madeira, Belém, and Manaus.

With regular transatlantic crossings, ever more immigrants arrived from Europe and the Middle East. The newcomers headed to the city to open businesses or find employment in one of the many shops, import houses, warehouses, firms, or franchises owned largely by foreign investors (Pinheiro 2014:55). Domestic migrants, fleeing the weakened plantation economy of Brazil’s Northeast, also flocked to job opportunities in the city and in the rubber camps (Akers 1914; Godinho and

Lindenberg 1906). The 1888 Golden Law (Lei Áurea) abolished slavery, producing a new class of laborers seeking to gain economic and social footing in Brazilian society. Rural subsistence farmers (many of them indigenous or mestizo) from areas adjacent to Manaus abandoned their fishing, forests, and fields to find jobs in construction, including buildings, roads, waterworks, and electrification projects (Braga 1995; Godinho and Lindenberg 1906). The population of the city grew correspondingly.

The demographic and social changes were profound. For 1852, the period of transition identified by Spruce, a registration survey found a total population of about 8,500, composed of 4,080 Indians (48%), 3,140 caboclo or mestiços (36.9%), 900 whites (10.5%), and 380 Afro-Brazilian slaves (4.4%) (Bittencourt 1948:103). It is noteworthy that only 10.5% of the population was white (of European descent).

In the next two decades the population of Manaus more than doubled, reaching 17,686 in 1872. In that year, Brazil's first national census reported the composition of the population as 16.4% white, 12.6% black, and 71% Amerindian or mestizo (Monteiro 2012). Thus, in the intervening two decades, the percentage of native Amerindians and mestizos declined by 15%, whereas whites and Afro-Brazilians increased by 5% each. By 1896 the population reached 25,000, and it would double again by 1906 to reach 50,000 (Campos 1988, cited in Pinheiro 2014:55).

The Portuguese chronicler Lourenço Fonseca (1985) estimated that in 1896, the height of the boom period, about one-third of the population of Manaus was foreign-born. For 1907, eleven years later, Hermenegildo de Campos (1988) estimated 10,000 foreigners out of a total population of 50,000 (20%). Thus, while the indigenous population continued to decline as a fraction of the total, the portion that was of European descent increased; even so, whites never exceeded 30% of the population of Manaus.

IMAGI[-NINGS]: AN AMAZONIAN MODERNITY

The combination of new wealth and new democratic institutions contributed to a generalized optimism which fueled the ambitions of an elite to create a metropolis steeped in modernity and fully integrated into a new world order. Inflow of British and American capital could be directed toward the project. The windfall income from rubber bankrolled one of the largest modernization projects in the New World—a Paris of the Tropics on the banks of the Amazon River.

The acme of modernity in the European Belle Epoque was the “bourgeois city” with its designed street plan, connecting thoroughfares, suburban expansion, rail networks, and electricity. Manaus was to be no different.⁵ The Rio Negro, like the Seine, would provide the reference point for the city, with a fully modern port and marketplace.

Urban spaces were organized according to the paradigmatic principles of *alignement*: the arrangement of absolutely straight thoroughfares on a formal astral model. Wide boulevards, radiating outward from a unifying center, were arrayed with stately public buildings, graceful monuments, piazzas, and splendid fountains. At the center, visible from all points, was the Opera House, the quintessential hallmark of European civilization. Built in 1896, this immense neoclassical structure boasted a gilded dome, four tiers

of balconies, and was fitted out with European marble, crystal, and velvet—an implausible altar to the arts of the Old World. Also in the city center, adjacent to the modern port, lay the Adolfo Lisboa Municipal Market, a replica of the renowned Parisian marketplace Les Halles. The facsimile was built in Paris in 1882, entirely from European ironwork and hand-painted glass, before being shipped to Amazonia.

Imposing an orderly alignment in a city of flood-prone streambeds with steep embankments was no easy task. Earthworks were laid down at great expense to fill low-lying areas and prevent flooding. Forests were felled and replaced with orderly gardens of imported species arranged according to the cardinal directions. Statuary were encircled with flora native to Europe but untried in Amazonia.

The Manaus of the Eurocentric imagination celebrated the accomplishments of the second industrial revolution, with electrical lighting, indoor plumbing, motorcars, and trams. Financed by heavy international investment and steep export duties, Manaus enjoyed electricity before London, telephones before Rio de Janeiro, and electric trams at a time when New Yorkers were still riding in horse-drawn coaches (Burns 1965; Collier 1968; Davis 1996; Montgomery 2009). The city also boasted running water and indoor plumbing as well as one of the first high-capacity floating ports in the world. By 1895, five electric tramlines totaling 16 km ran along the boulevards from the central plaza to the periphery (Morrison 1989). The lengthiest of these, the Flores line, brought visitors to a small recreational park eight kilometers north of the city center, where they might behold the immense forest that surrounded the city. By 1896 the city had installed 222 streetlights along public avenues and additional lighting within several public and private buildings (www.Manausenergia.com.br).

Nearly all of the infrastructure on which the trade depended was financed by overseas firms whose influence on the market was extensive (Weinstein 1983). The British firm Manaus Harbour Ltd. designed and built the innovative system of floating docks. Charles Ranlett Flint, director of the US Rubber Company, installed the electric street lights in 1896 and a streetcar system in 1898. Fourteen American investors founded the *Manáos Railway Company* in 1898 (Morrison 1989).

The bonanza from rubber imbued the elites of the time with a euphoric sense of possibility, which manifested in pharaonic extravagance and ostentation. It is said that they lit their cigars with pound notes (Collier 1968), watered their horses with champagne (Kennedy and Lucks 1999; Nicholson 2012), and raised jaguars and electric eels in personal zoos (Burns 1993; Collier 1968; Davis 1996).

THE OTHER MANAUS

The official version of Manaus, however, is only a partial depiction. The narrative of grandiose European opulence in the jungle was intended to celebrate the achievements of Western civilization in such a remote corner of the globe. Yet the boom period was short in duration and limited in reach. During three decades of extravagant bounty, the benefits of its wealth were concentrated among a small subset of the population. The emphasis on entrepreneurs and traders (rubber barons) in the pop-

ular and even scholarly literature disregards the numbers of working poor and obscures the reality that 80–90% of the inhabitants of Manaus continued to live in poverty (Mascarenhas Dias 1999).

The diverse realities that had characterized Manaus before the boom—including socioeconomic, ethnic, and expressive variations of many kinds—were relegated to the periphery. The famed city center with its stately public buildings and splendid fountains covered a mere four square kilometers. Beyond this lay a vast expanse of urban squalor.

Some of the city’s most densely populated, impoverished neighborhoods were removed for reforms, as the center was vacated and colonized by a new mercantile bourgeoisie (Araújo 2013; Carmona 2002:289; Mascarenhas Dias 1999). Houses were razed to make way for public structures and the wide boulevards that linked them together. Outside the center, squalid neighborhoods with unhealthful living conditions remained and expanded. Portions of the city were plagued with epidemics of malaria and yellow fever; tuberculosis was widespread (Santos da Silva 2012). In the “other” Manaus, malnutrition, poverty, homelessness, and misery predominated (Braga 1995; Mascarenhas Dias 1999). Municipal records document the presence of beggars and vagrants (Araújo 2013).⁶ Illiteracy rates were high and wages were low, kept so by the steady in-migration of laborers from the countryside.

POSTCARDS: A BRIEF HISTORY

The incorporation of Manaus onto the world stage coincided with major advances in international communications, as transoceanic steam transportation sped up and boosted the circulation of international mail. Between 1850 and 1870 nations agreed on a common system of postage and the regulation of “unwrapped mail,” as postcards were called (Phillips 2000:15). In 1874 the newly created Universal Postal Union established international protocols for mail, including a uniform classification system for mailing anywhere in the world.

These events enabled the first postcards to enter into circulation. The picture postcard first appeared in Germany, where advances in chromolithography permitted the reproduction of high-quality color images at little cost. Unwrapped mail with photographs on one side and the address on the other increased exponentially. Early postcard images of the Eiffel Tower in 1889 and the World Columbian Exposition in 1893 celebrated new technological achievements and ushered in a “golden age” of the picture postcard in the mid-1890s.

From the outset, the picture postcard served two closely related purposes: as a memento and as a tool of promotion and persuasion. Commercial establishments, especially those in the tourism industry, disseminated the cards as a means of attracting clients.

The earliest cards bore an image on one side and a space for an address and stamp on the other (Phillips 2000:15). Senders could scrawl a brief message in the remaining space on the image side. Some, like the early postcards in Austria and Germany, carried the printed message “*Gruss Aus*” (“greetings from”), preceding the place name.

Substance of the written text was never primary in the early postcards. The space allotted for writing was minimal, allowing for only a signature and a brief pleasantry that would convey the sender's good wishes. Possibilities for text expanded only in 1902, when the address side of the card was authorized to carry a written message. Even so, the space allotted to the sender remained small. The principal sign vehicle carried by the cards, as Naomi Schor (1992) has pointed out, was the visual one. If the postcard was a Janus-sided courier, with a visual message on one side and a written one on the other, it was always the visual image that was the more powerful.

THE POSTCARDING OF MANAUS

Production

The rise of the postcard accompanied the development of worldwide travel. As Manaus received visitors from abroad, photography studios cropped up along the city's main thoroughfares. Principal among them was the Photographia Allemã (the German Photography Studio), established in 1895 by the German naturalist and photographer George Huebner and his associate, J. Charles Kroehle. As a native of Dresden, the world capital of photographic technology at the time, Huebner was well positioned to import the most advanced photographic and printing equipment into the Amazon (Schoepf 2005; Valentin 2008, 2012). At the height of the rubber boom the studio was a principal provider of postcards in Manaus.

In addition to his postcard enterprise, Huebner was an ethnographic photographer, specializing in the "visual documentation" of native Amazonians. For two decades Huebner maintained a collaboration with the German ethnographer Koch-Grünberg, supplying him (and the Ethnographic Museum of Berlin) with photographs, field notes, indigenous texts and word lists, plant samples, and ethnographic objects. Many of Huebner's photos were staged in his studio to show posed activities such as hunting. These photographs, among the first photographs of native Amazonians, might be compared with those collected by Franz Boas and George Hunt of the same period (Jacknis 1984).

The visual anthropologist Andreas Valentin, author of several definitive works about Huebner, had this to say about the photographs:

[W]hat is evident in this large process of visual capture of the "Other" is, first, the attempt to rescue and preserve peoples still considered "Primitive" and in a state of "racial purity" which the photographs sought to portray. Whether in the field or in the studio, it should be noted, however, that this look at the "Other" ends up being, in fact, a self-description, a self-portrait of the white person and westerner himself (Valentin 2009:37; translation by the author).

While this would appear to confound the contrast between depictions of the exotic native and the metropolis, and thereby contradict our argument, the depictions of the "Indian" as "Other" may be seen as yet another form of colonial production,

one that complements and reinforces the celebration of modernity found in the postcards discussed here.

An Ordered Eden

The postcards reviewed here were provided to the authors by the well-known Manaus art collector Joaquim Marinho. Mailed and franked from Manaus between 1896 and 1909, they were penned in Portuguese, German, French, Italian, and English, and sent to addresses in Brazil, France, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, and Britain. They would have been transported by steamship to Lisbon, and then by horseback, carrier pigeon, and even balloon to their destinations (Phillips 2000:15). They were very likely sold by itinerant vendors (possibly working children) and purchased by tourists to Manaus or by professionals employed in the rubber industry.

Taken syntactically, as an integrated and mutually signifying whole, the postcards constitute a celebration of Western civilization's victory over nature. The photos are framed so that the forest—the landscape feature that dominated characterizations of the Amazon basin through the end of the twentieth century—is absent or backgrounded. In these postcards prominence is given instead to European innovation, technological advancement, and commerce. That which is artificial—the products of technology—is foregrounded, while that which is natural is diminished.

The postcard portrayal of *Manaus moderno* discursively transformed the city into an unexpected spectacle of metropolitanism in the midst of the tropical rainforest. In the technoscape that is depicted, the artifact is the focus of interest. Forests are razed, gardens are delimited, and streams (*igarapés*) are tamed into canals or underground galleries. In this new Amazonia, promoted through the photographic postcard, it is civilization—not forest—that dominates. The new Amazonia is orderly, not chaotic; domesticated, not wild.

One of the most striking features in the images is the overwhelming choice of urban, rather than rural, themes. Unlike the many postcards that portray picturesque vistas of unspoiled spaces, these postcards from turn-of-the-century Manaus focused on the built environment. They display grandiose public buildings in neoclassic style, ornamental details such as friezes, stately monuments, imposing boulevards, splendid fountains, and open plazas.

The postcards in the study collection depict large, paved avenues with buildings and monuments. The designers of the cards favor icons of prosperity—demonstrations of industrial advances, European architecture, and orderly, manicured landscapes (Figures 1–8). Where trees are shown, they carefully accentuate the more important engineering accomplishments.

The photographers all follow European conventions regarding balance, symmetry, and visible vanishing points that in themselves communicate victory over chaos. Often the card is occupied by a single, prepossessing structure that fills the frame. The camera is angled upward so that the edifice takes on an inordinately raised angle, while the viewer is positioned below in respectful deference (see Figure 8). Size, sym-

metry, and solidity all contribute to a sense of rationality and harmony. These are tamed, domesticated spaces; they convey less the notion of a “paving of paradise” (cf. Coupland 2010) than a “paradise of paving.”

Multiple signifiers of modernization are often bundled into a single frame. This is especially notable in street scenes. The card bearing the place name “Commerce Square” (Praça do Comercio, Figure 1) depicts a broad, open expanse with causeways and a large building complex. A tram is stopped in front of the buildings at the far end of the plaza, while horse carriages, shown at the lower right, pause in the shade. An elaborate statue stands in the foreground in the lower left. The edge of the plaza is framed by a gated park with concrete paths and hand rails. The plaza is draped with electrical lines and dotted with walkers whose white shirts and skirts stand out against the tawny background. The card is addressed to Suffolk, England.

Unlike “Commerce Square,” the card labeled “Municipal Street” (Rua Municipal, Figure 2) is detailed in color with gouache. As we have seen, electric lines fill the lower center field of the card. Unlike the rest of the card, which is painted in pastel colors, the tram is a deep red. People are shown boarding and leaving the tram, conveying the sense of a city alive with activity. Men are shown in suits and hats. A blue awning with a seated attendant suggests a street vendor. The treed thoroughfare is lined with commercial buildings along one side and a tram platform on the other. A European-style decorative fountain is situated at one end of the platform.

Three cards (Figures 3, 4, 5), sent in the years 1905, 1906, and 1909, depict the principal avenue, Eduardo Ribeiro. The 1905 card, a memento of the carnival festival of that year, prominently displays an electric tram with passengers in the fore-



Figure 1. Manaus. Praça do Comercio



Figure 2. Manaus. Rua Municipal

ground (Figure 3). The streets are adorned in carnival decoration, giving a sense of gaiety. The avenue is lined with commercial enterprises, and tram rails and electric lines cross the photograph. The dome of the opera house (Teatro Amazonas) can be seen in the distance.



Figure 3. Manaus. Lembrança do Carnaval de 1905 Manaus. Av. Eduardo Ribeiro.



Figure 4. Manaus. Avenida Eduardo Ribeiro

The 1906 card (Figure 4) shows the same view of Eduardo Ribeiro Avenue with clusters of pedestrians in the center and lower right. Along the left side we see commercial establishments with benches, small ornamental trees, and street lamps. The tram tracks run across the center of the card, but no tram is shown. This card is ex-



Figure 5. Manaus. Avenida Eduardo Ribeiro

ceptional in displaying non-white residents as well as children, figures not usually shown in the cards. A cluster of persons at the center of the card appear to be engaged in casual conversation around a street lamp. The group contains women and children, and even a dog. A second cluster of people, recognizable by their darker skin tones and informal clothing, can be seen in the lower right-hand corner. Although a bench is nearby, they are shown sitting on makeshift seats such as bundles. By their clothing and posture we may surmise that they are laborers. The card was addressed to Barcelona.

The 1909 card (Figure 5) shows the same avenue. But whereas the 1905 card (Figure 3) depicts the street under the festive conditions of carnival, and the 1906 card (Figure 4) conveys a restful time such as noon or Sunday, the 1909 card presents the street under the bustling conditions that we associate with a workday. The cobblestone street covers the center field of the card, from the lower edge to the port, which forms a horizon at the center. Along one side of the wide avenue are neoclassical buildings of three or four stories. On the opposite side, a tall gate separates the boulevard from the adjacent park. A tram, again painted deep red to contrast it with its surroundings, runs along the right side of the street; its tracks and the line of electrical street lights follow the avenue toward the horizon. Horse carriages are seen alongside the tram tracks. In the foreground a gentleman in a black suit, hat, and tie crosses the avenue.

In keeping with the message of technological advancement and modernity, one of the most prevalent themes is electricity. Many postcards in the collection display the engineering triumphs of electrical streetlights, transmission lines, or turbines, as icons of civilization. For example, Figure 6 shows a hydroelectric dam alongside a Tuscan-



Figure 6. Manaos. Casa de Machinas–Cachoeira Grande

style powerhouse. Two gentlemen in suits (perhaps engineers?) pose above the dam, possibly inspecting the control gates. The card bears the inscription, in Portuguese, “*Recebe um abraço do irmão, Guilherme*” (“Receive a hug from your brother, Guilherme”) and the date 1904.

The postcards also depict a city alive with leisurely diversions. In one, we see two well-dressed children in white facing away from the viewer toward what may be an artificial lake or canalized igarapé (Figure 7). The prominent placement of a privileged or bourgeois pair of children on an outing imparts a sense of security that may not have accurately portrayed this city with its giant port, numerous bordellos, and gambling dens. The white clothing—as with the white jacket and trouser-suits of the men and the spotless floor-length white skirts of the women—signal the cleanliness of the city, a testimony to the conquest of nature’s chaos. Scenes such as this signal the Comtean phrase “*Ordem e Progresso*,” which is about to become a national slogan. The card, mailed to Paris, bears the message, written in French, “*Tu déjà oubliée [sic] dela petite cheri*” (“You already forgot your little sweetheart”).

The postcards stacked into their depictions multiple accoutrements of urban civilization: overseas shipping, mass transportation, hydroelectric works, schools, cafes, arts houses, theatres, hotels, casinos, and more. By means of such semiotic resources the postcards eloquently and convincingly represented a city on equal footing with Europe rather than an exotic tropical outpost.

The Native Other

But if the cards were effective in presenting Manaus as a European metropole fully assimilated into the modern world, it did so at the exclusion of the majority of the



Figure 7. Manaus. Paisagem na Cachoeirinha



Figure 8. Manaus. Ed. Benjamin Constant

city's inhabitants. Aside from the one exceptional card, the masses of non-European workers are noticeably absent. Wealth in Manaus may have been abundant, but it was not well distributed. The rubber boom had amplified the great disparity between the small number of elites, many of whom were European-born or of European descent, and the majority of the city's inhabitants. The latter were predominantly poor, and often native American, Afro-Brazilian, or mestizo. Missing from the sanguine depictions of prosperity and progress were the vast bulk of Manaus residents—members of the working classes—who were unskilled, illiterate, and overwhelmingly non-white.

Thousands of residents of Manaus were living in and along igarapés in crowded, unhygienic conditions (Araújo 2013; Mascarenhas Dias 1999). It is known, too, that seas of migrants from the interior of Amazonia and from drought-inflicted areas along the Northeast Atlantic coast (including many recently emancipated by the abolition of slavery in 1888) set up squatter settlements without sanitation, water, or electricity. *This* Manaus—the Manaus of the ordinary citizen—was a poor advertisement for a city aspiring to join the North Atlantic world as a partner in modernity.

The Manaus of the Eurocentric imagination—the city with its opera house, stately buildings with indoor plumbing, elegant squares with sculpted fountains, and electrically lit promenades—belies the reality that 70–90% of the inhabitants, drawn to the city during the short-lived economic boom, continued to live in squalor. The Manaus of the picture postcard was, instead, orderly and clean, free of disfiguring poverty. It was, as the saying goes, “*Para inglês ver*” (for appearances' sake)—a city that would impress the foreigner; a scene for the outsider to see.

DISCUSSION: A PROPOSED END TO DIFFERENCE

Modernity is a discursive formation, an accomplishment that is as much a semiotic project as an economic one. Through constant promotion and uptake of symbolic markers of modernity and privilege, the postcards reviewed here construct a technometropolis, one that firmly establishes the city of Manaus as a peer among global trading centers. The designers of the cards strategically drew upon a repertoire of semiotic resources to depict a city altogether integrated into the world capitalist system, and, thereby, to instill a feeling of triumphant modernity. In this sense, the cards served as an ideological instrument through which an idea of Manaus was produced, interpreted, and experienced.

Jaworski (2010) and others have called attention to the role of postcards in portraying places as exotic and untouched. The postcards representing turn-of-the-century Manaus, however, were designed to *erase difference*, rather than *accentuate* it. They constructed a likeness, a similitude, placing Manaus within the modern global family. The assertion flies in the face of the presumption that Europe is the exclusive site of modernity.

The Manaus of the postcards constitutes a space undifferentiated from comparable urban spaces in Europe of the same period. In its modernity, the claim goes, it should be no different from Rome, Paris, or Budapest, European counterparts of the same time period. This *proposed end to difference* constitutes a counter-discourse to the trope, prevailing in Europe, of Amazonia as an untrammelled wilderness. Former narratives that depicted the Amazon as uncivilized would be turned on end.

The study postcards of fin-de-siècle Manaus were intended to showcase modernity in the gaze of a new world “citizenry” populated by elite travelers, rubber merchants, entrepreneurs, engineers, and investors. The cards reflect a discourse clearly inflected by the interests of commerce and privilege, revealing the ambitions of Manaus to become a worldwide capital. The depiction is highly idealized, rejecting and suppressing the city’s past while promoting an aspirational, optimistic future. As such, the cards represent the proclivities of the elites, many of whom were temporary residents working in the rubber economy.

Whereas in Europe the postcard reflected the general democratization and growth of literacy of the populace (Schor 1992), this was not the case in Manaus, where only a small fraction of the population benefited from the prosperity and participated in modernity. As literacy was generally limited to the elites, postcard use excluded the majority of inhabitants. It is unlikely that the photographers, purchasers, senders, or collectors of the cards were members of the society depicted by them. Overall, the cards were designed by elites for elites. As a body of imagery, then, the cards represent a detached, generic, globalized identity rather than a usable text for local participation.

Contrary to Nugent’s observation that “Amazonia is represented as a domain beyond the scope of . . . structural shifts, a domain that resists incorporation by virtue of its green hellness” (Nugent 2007:28), the images in the study postcards suggest

the opposite. Considered in the aggregate, these cards are testimony to the very sorts of structural shifts pronounced as impossible.

CONCLUSION: A BREAK WITH THE PAST

Modernity necessitates a fundamental break with the past. For the elites of Manaus, and their image-makers, the city's modernity hinged on a fundamental rupture between the past and the present. In his discussion of "The Modern as Heterology," Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2002) points out that "Modernity as a structure requires an other, an alter" (2002:224) against which it is contrasted. He continues: modernity's alter is the "perception of a past radically different from the present" (2002:224). In the case of Manaus, that which was rendered past and dismissed as bygone was the local. For Manaus, to reject the "past" is an explicit act of disdain for the native citizenry of the region. With the selective imagery of modernity, the ordinary person is erased and relegated to the status of an Other in his/her own city, alienated and outcast from the image of a Eurocentric city.

The power to institute an image world that would supersede former ones and contradict strongly held beliefs and assumptions was made possible by the photographic image. The photographs shown here represent a highly mediated form of documentation, shaped by the social and cultural determinants behind the uses and goals of the photographs. The invisible photographer aligns his camera to determine that which will be rendered visible and total; in so doing he removes marks of the photographer. Because of the viewer's interpretation of the photo, the cards contributed to the displacement of one code of truth—"the Amazon as a realm of nature"—with another—"the Amazon as metropolis," and to the transformation of the natural and chaotic subject into the orderly and modernized one. In this instance, the native "other" is regarded as undesirable.

The power inherent in the visual "as evidence" convincingly succeeded in countering existing narratives on the Amazon. The case exemplifies the power of the photograph to serve as a window into "reality" (see Baudrillard 1983; Boorstin 1963). The photograph's mimetic power to appear to collapse signifier and signified (Tagg 1988:53) serves as an actual physical confirmation to substantiate such an unexpected reversal in imagery. Regarded by its viewer as objective "evidence," the photograph was capable of countering former beliefs, images, habits.

As a proxy for sentient experience, the photographic postcard provided an evidentiary, authorized testimony to a technologically triumphant, Europeanized, Amazonia. As such, it served as a powerful tool in dislodging former convictions regarding the Amazon. Once an untamed terra incognita, Amazonia would be transformed through selected imagery into an opulent, expanding metropolis with every modern amenity. In the service of tourism, the photography of the rubber boom mirrored the senders' own culture. The closer to "home" the image came, the more challenging it was to preconceptions about the Amazon, and the more alluring to visitors.

From this viewpoint, the postcards constitute a counter-narrative to former romanticized depictions of the Amazon as exotic and untrammelled wilderness. Instead, the postcards reframe Manaus as a technopolis of extravagance and luxury. By assembling emblems of progress—electric trams, streetlights, hydroelectricity, steam travel, and other nineteenth-century innovations—the cards insinuated the message of an unexpected tropical metropolis, as modern as any in Europe, in the heart of the Amazon rainforest.

EPILOGUE: THE END OF THE BOOM

The boom portion of the rubber years was surprisingly short-lived. It can responsibly be charted as beginning in the late 1870s and reaching its zenith in the 1890s. By the early twentieth century the economy of Manaus entered a downward turn, as managed plantations in Malaysia outperformed Brazilian forest extractors. Whereas in 1909 Amazonian rubber constituted 94% of the world supply, by 1918 it had fallen to 10.9%. The Amazonian rubber boom was over. Manaus's signature opera house was barely two decades old.

With no export commodity to replace rubber, the city entered a period of stagnation. The population contracted to a fraction of its former size, dependent for revenue on the export of a few raw forest products with limited markets. Many of the rural migrants who had been drawn to Manaus by its economic opportunities abandoned it once again.

NOTES

We thank Joaquim Marinho for his generosity in providing the postcards discussed in this article. We also wish to thank Suzanne Oakdale and Marnie Watson for the opportunity to participate in "Modernity and Amazonia" at the 2014 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, where this paper was first presented. Furthermore, we wish to thank the journal editors and external reviewers for their many helpful comments and suggestions.

1. Some authors date the so-called boom period to 1879–1912; others round the figures off to the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, a period in which major projects were realized. We consider acceptable any starting date after 1867, when Brazil opened the Amazon basin to international traffic, through 1912, when Brazil's monopoly over the rubber market came to a close.

2. The postcards are held in the collection of Joaquim Marinho, a prominent chronicler, writer, and sponsor of the arts in Manaus. His book of poetry, *Manaus, Meu Sonho* (2010), featuring Amazonian authors, presents a number of postcards from the same collection.

3. Columbus observed bouncing balls used by the Taino, but the rubber from which the balls were made was derived from a tree species other than *Hevea*.

4. The only manufacturing permitted by the Portuguese in Brazil was the fabrication of coarse cotton (Marchant 1965).

5. Manaus was not the only Latin American city to use the European model for nineteenth-century urban renewal. Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires are other prominent examples.

6. A registry of indigents maintained by the principal public hospital shows the high numbers of urban poor and homeless and the ailments from which they suffered (Araújo 2013).

REFERENCES CITED

- Akers, Charles. 1914. *The rubber industry in Brazil and the Orient*. London: Methuen.
- Araújo, Maria de Jesus do Carmo de. 2013. A pobreza na cidade de Manaus, 1880–1910. *Revista Labirinto* XIII (19):112–27.
- Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext[e].
- Benchimol, Samuel. 1995. *Navegação e transporte na Amazônia*. Manaus, AM, Brasil: Governo do Estado do Amazonas, Universidade do Amazonas, Associação Comercial do Amazonas.
- . 2002. *Desenvolvimento sustentável da Amazônia: Cenários, perspectivas e indicadores*. Manaus, Brasil: Editora Valer.
- Bittencourt, Agnello. 1948. Manaus: Sua origem e desenvolvimento. *Revista do Instituto Geográfico e Histórico do Amazonas* 7(7):93–112.
- Boorstin, Daniel. 1963. *The image, or what happened to the American dream?* Harmondsworth: Pelican.
- Braga, Genesio. 1995. *Chão e Graça de Manaus*. Manaus: Grafitec.
- Burns, E. Bradford. 1965. Manaus 1910: Portrait of a boom town. *Journal of Inter-American Studies* 7(3):400–21.
- . 1993. *A history of Brazil (myth and poetics)*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Caldeira, Jorge. 1995. *Mauá: Empresário do império*. São Paulo: Editora Schwarcz.
- Carmona, Michael. 2002. *Hausmann: His life and times, and the making of modern Paris*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.
- Campos, Hermenegildo de. 1988. *Climatologia médica do estado do Amazonas*. Manaus: Associação Comercial do Amazonas.
- Carvajal, Fray Gaspar de. 1894. *Descubrimiento del río de las Amazonas: Relación*. José Toribio Medina. Accessed September 11, 2015, <https://archive.org/details/descubrimientod00carvgoog>
- Collier, Richard. 1968. *The river that God forgot: The dramatic story of the rise and fall of the Amazon rubber barons*. London: E. P. Dutton.
- Coupland, Nicolas. 2010. “Welsh linguistic landscapes ‘from above’ and ‘from below,’” in *Semiotic landscapes: Language, image, space*. Edited by Adam Jaworski and Crispin Thurlow, pp. 77–101. London: Continuum.
- Davis, Wade. 1996. *One river*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Edwards, Elizabeth. 2012. *The camera as historian: Amateur photographers and historical imagination, 1885–1918*. Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press.
- Fonseca, Lourenço da. 1985. *No Amazonas*. Lisbon: Cia. Geral Tipográfica Editora.
- Geer, William C. 1923. *The reign of rubber*. New York: Century.
- Godinho, Victor, and Adolpho Lindenberg. 1906. *Norte do Brazil: Através do Amazonas, do Pará e do Maranhão*. Rio de Janeiro: Laemmert & C. Editores.
- Gomes, Gustavo Maia. 1986. *The roots of state intervention in the Brazilian economy*. New York: Praeger.

- Hemming, John. 2008. *Tree of rivers: The story of the Amazon*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Jacknis, Ira. 1984. Boas and photography. *Studies in Visual Communication* 10(1):2–60.
- Jackson, Joe. 2008. *The thief at the end of the world: Rubber, power, and the seeds of empire*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Jaworski, Adam. 2010. Linguistic landscapes on postcards: Tourist mediation and the socio-linguistic communities of contact. *Sociolinguistic Studies* 4(3):469–594.
- Keller, Franz. 1874. *The Amazon and Madeira rivers: Sketches and descriptions from the notebook of an explorer*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Kennedy, Donald, and Marjorie Lucks. 1999. Rubber, blight, and mosquitoes: Biogeography meets the global economy. *Environmental History* 4(3):369–83
- Lutz, Catherine, and Jane Collins. 1993. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- MacCannell, Dean. 1992. *Empty meeting grounds: The tourist papers*. New York: Routledge.
- Marchant, Anyda. 1965. *Viscount Mauá and the empire of Brazil*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Markham, Clements R. 2010. *Expeditions into the Valley of the Amazons, 1539, 1540, 1639*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Originally published in 1963)
- Marinho, Joaquim. 2010. *Manaus, meu sonho*. Manaus, Brazil: Editora Valer.
- Mascarenhas Dias, Edinea. 1999. *A ilusão do Fausto: Manaus 1890–1920*. Manaus: Editora Valer.
- Monteiro, John M. 2012. Mr. Hunnewell's black hands: Agassiz and the "mixed races" of Manaus. The Mirror of Race Project. <http://mirrorofrace.org/monteiro/>
- Montgomery, Sy. 2009. *Journey of the pink dolphins: An Amazon quest*. White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green.
- Morrison, Allen. 1989. *The tramways of Brazil*. New York: Bonde Press.
- Nicholson, Rob. 2012. The last Victorian. *Botanic Garden News* 15(2):7–8.
- Nugent, Stephen. 2007. *Scoping the Amazon: Image, icon, ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Phillips, Tom. 2000. *The postcard century*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Pinheiro, Maria Luiza Ugarte. 2014. "Portugueses e Ingleses no Porto de Manaus (1880–1920)," in *Portugal e as migrações da Europa do Sul para a América do Sul*. Edited by Fernando de Sousa et al., pp. 52–73. Porto, Portugal: CEPESSE.
- Pontes Filho, Raimundo Pereira. 2012. *História do Amazonas*. Manaus: Editora Cultural da Amazônia.
- Poole, Deborah. 1997. *Vision, race, and modernity: A visual economy of the Andean image world*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Santos da Silva, Júlio. 2012. Adoecendo na Cidade de Borracha (1877–1920). Master's thesis. Manaus: Universidade Federal do Amazonas.
- Schoepf, Daniel. 2005. *George Huebner, 1862–1935: Um fotógrafo em Manaus*. São Paulo: Metalivros.
- Schor, Naomi. 1992. "Cartes postales: Representing Paris 1900." *Critical Inquiry* 18(2):188–244.
- Sinervo, Aviva, and Michael Hill. 2011. The visual economy of Andean childhood poverty: Interpreting postcards in Cusco, Peru. *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 16(1):114–42.
- Souza, Márcio. 2009. *História da Amazônia*. Manaus, Brazil: Editora Valer.

- Spruce, Richard, and Alfred Russel Wallace. 1908. *Notes of a botanist on the Amazon & Andes; Being records of travel on the Amazon and its tributaries, the Trombetas, Rio Negro, Uaupés, Casiquiari, Pacimoni, Huallaga, and Pastasa; as also to the cataracts of the Orinoco, along the eastern side of the Andes*. London: Macmillan.
- Tagg, J. 1988. *The burden of representation: Essays on photographs and histories*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2002. "The otherwise modern: Caribbean lessons from the savage slot," in *Critically modern: Alternatives, alterities, anthropologies*. Edited by Bruce M. Knauft, pp 220–40. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Valentin, Andreas. 2008. George Huebner e Theodor Koch-Grünberg: Diálogos na Amazônia, 1905–1924. Trabalho apresentado na 26ª Reunião Brasileira de Antropologia, realizada entre os dias 1 e 4 de junho de 2008, Porto Seguro, Bahia, Brasil.
- . 2009. Os "Indianer" na fotografia Amazônica de George Huebner (1885–1910). Tese de Doutorado. Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
- . 2012. *A fotografia Amazônica de George Huebner*. Rio de Janeiro: NAU Editora.
- Weinstein, Barbara. 1983. *The Amazon rubber boom, 1850–1920*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Williams, Ken. 2014. Booth Line to the Amazon. *Iquitos Times*. <http://www.iqitostimes.com/booth-line.htm>. Accessed May 25, 2017.