

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13. Print.

The Nonface in *Class Picture*

By Adrian D. Mendizabal

[This article was published in *Kino Punch* (Issue 3), U.P. Cinema's Film Critique Magazine. The magazine was successfully launched last March 28, 2015. The published form of this article has jumbled its footnote section, which is, to me, a curious result. I constructed the footnote section with its own politics. It stands as a threat to the main text, a supplement, inseparable yet removable from the text. The footnote section is the marginalized sector, the subaltern, the silenced, the underground. The dominance of the main text is, in many ways, threatened by the marginalization of the footnote. It is the main text's undoing. Hence, this online version will preserve this political relationship. It is a modified form of the printed text.]



*The class picture.*¹

In writing about *Class Picture* (2011), we begin, as in any experimental work, in the middle, *the between*. The between is a space of liminality, the space where the image resists to ground itself in any given time, in any predetermined space. In writing and in reading about *Class Picture*, we inhabit this space. And we proceed by saying: an experimental work is always on the verge of transformation, never arrested by space, never stopped by time. It is always speeding towards the future, taking the present and the past with it. The tenuous forces of becoming within its body - their very placement in this space of liminality - jettison various rules of representation by transforming the image of experimentation into an unreadable set of intensities. Each image is a new island, a place to be, a dangerous strip of time and space, a rupturing force of possibilities. Each experimental image is an object of a 'question' that ceases to 'be' (if 'be' stands for being). For each is always a 'becoming'.

¹ My interest in *Class Picture* (2011), an experimental film by Gym Lumbea and Timmy Harn, is strewn from a memory of haunting. In the last days of 2014, I was writing at length about another monstrosity - Raya Martin's *Ars Colonia* (2011). During my peripheral engagements with Martin's complex figures, a thought came to me: the face of soldier in *Ars Colonia* is withheld just like in *Class Picture*. Consider this writing as a periphery, a writing 'around and about' my other essay on *Ars Colonia* appearing in *La Furia Umana* film journal on April 2015. Consider this writing a preface, a supplement, an outwork.

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13. Print.

Capturing the image - this is the task of every critic. We capture the image with words. We use language to stop its ceaseless becoming. Language has mastered its mode of reinscribing *life* itself in its own way - a form of regulation. Writing, any form of writing, is a form of 'colonialism'. Its apparatus of capture is made of various sets of predetermined concepts that man has mastered through time - the traditional, commonsensical, habitual expressions in dominant language. Film criticism, as a discourse-forming machine, is populated by 'capturing devices.' Phrases such as 'beautiful shot,' 'ugly lighting,' 'tremendous intensity,' 'great frame composition' circulate in film journalism as 'catchphrases' that hold various images in captive. These 'catchphrases' resituate the image in a new plane of existence - the realm of dominant language - in order to achieve meaning. Only during this moment of linguistic capture can the image produce meaning. Production of meaning is always a result of image-to-text transformation. Also, we can only interpret an image the moment it reaches language.

Why do we have to capture the image? The task of the critic, in writing criticism, or maybe in the act of writing itself, is to *transmute*² the image, to exteriorize it, to expedite its intensities from its cinematic enclosure. In criticism, we 'colonize'³ the image through language prior to its dissemination across various plateaus of knowledge.

Colonizing the image is not a passive operation; it is productive, a power struggle of forces. The process of capture via colonization works under the premise that the image is a foreign land, as all percepts are. An image is an affective chain of non-significations (asignification, according to Gilles Deleuze) or, in simpler terms, a chain of intensities irreducible to language. Given this premise, an image is an impersonal object, which, at first, is a set of intensities, a set of attenuated light from the screen prior to becoming a describable expression. Image-as-intensity is image in its pure state - an attenuated light.⁴ The linguistic habit of description, in this sense, is language rendered as a photographic device. Description captures the image and, under various mechanisms, transforms the image into its legible form/s. The mind, the ally of language, is the colonizer, the *conquistador*, the *dispositif*, whose ruling power over the image is an exercise in juridical, spatio-temporal and territorial regulation - a biopolitics at work.

In the process of colonizing the image via the apparatus of capture, which I will conveniently call the cinema-brain machine (a machination inspired by Deleuze&Guattari's machines), the *asignifying* intensities of the image are converted to signifying blocs of legible sensations. Legible forms of the image venture further into the cinema-brain machine, reaching a gated passageway where value judgments serve as a filtering medium. This gated passageway separates the *recognizable* images from the *nonrecognizable* ones. The recognizable image is checked and balanced against stored visual memories in search of similarities and differences, parts-to-whole relations, and, at some point,

² The original term is 'transvaluation of values' from Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Anti-Christ*. Arizona, USA: See Sharp Press, 1999, p. 13.

³ The author's use of the words 'colonialism', 'colonize', 'colonization'... is a self-conscious 'misuse', but it is nonetheless a strategic misuse - a reworking of a concept. The whole text is haunted by the predatory presence of the postcolonial discourse. As to why such a haunting persists, the reason shall be made unknown. '[I]t remains silent, secret and discreet like a tomb: oikesis' as in Jacques Derrida's essay "Difference." *Margins of Philosophy*. Sussex, U.K.: The Harvester Press, 1982, p. 4.

⁴ The phrasal remark "an attenuated light" attains a refrain. Therefore, it must be repeated. But the repetition doesn't guarantee that the preservation of meaning from one sentence, which, in our case, the previous sentence, to the other.

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13. Print.

topological and mathematical relations with the world prior to its embodiment in the brain's deep conceptual networks. Whereas nonrecognizable images go directly to the imprinting machine where they are reinscribed and stored as *events*, suspended from the circulation of the recognizable. Nonrecognizable images like shock photographs and figures of trauma dampen the movement of time because of their sustained and complex emission of high-intensity signals. It takes time to *processthem*, or to come to terms with them.

In this order, we return to *Class Picture*. In its traverse across the cinema-brain machine, *Class Picture*'s asignifying intensity disrupts the schema of categorizing recognizable from nonrecognizable images. It stops at this stage by breaking down the categorizing apparatus. As a demonstration, let us begin first with the image of the sea.

The image of the sea, its perplexing and ineluctable visibility, located at the first few frames of the film, creates a legible, recognizable sign similar to a given set of signs that says: 'this is a sea like any other sea'. It is a generic image, a recognizable image. The horizontal sea, which sets the geographic index of the film, legibly contains recognizable surfaces. We cannot disentangle it from any representation system. Although for those who have not seen any representation of the sea, this image is a new affective construct, a nonrecognizable one. But for the greater part of perceiving human world, the sea is just like any other sea - a vapid body of water that traverses beyond the horizon. The pivoting image in *Class Picture* is not the sea, but the faceless figures (nonface) arranged in a 'photo-op' position. This nonface destroys the recognizant-nonrecognizant filtering apparatus by producing a *shock to thought*, a blinding signal. The nonface disarms the classifying machinery by rendering its recognizable form as ambiguous or obscure - an altered state.

This is where the image resists the capture of language. For only in this moment, upon rupture of the schema of visual classification between recognizable and nonrecognizable images that the notion of the 'outside' is at work. The outside is the between, the space of liminality, the gestural ambiguity of the body that suspends the linguistic inscription of the image. The presence of liminal bodies, as embodied by the nonface in the film, arranged as if emulating a *class picture*, shifts the temporal order of the film from *linear time* to *surface time* - a Flusserian rupture⁵. From a linear chronological model, a one-dimensional way of looking at the world taught to us by historians, developmental scientist and economists, the *shock to thought* in the presence of a nonface 'redistributes the sensible'⁶ in *asurface*. As in any surface, the image invites us to *look* at it, along with its circumstantial movement, as a two-dimensional world. *Surface thinking* is a nonlinear way of looking at the world. It is anti-Cartesian, highly exploratory and always looking out on the edge of every image, every boundary, and every space in between. The Fluserian rupture of the nonface changes the temporal order of thinking because it (the nonface) stipulates a kind of anti-linear *surface time* where 'disseminatory' and exploratory [two-dimensional] thinking predominate over developmental, hierarchal and historical [one-dimensional] thinking.

⁵ Vilém Flusser. "Line and Surface" in Andreas Ströhl (ed.) *Writings: Vilém Flusser*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 21.

⁶ Jacques Ranciere. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, [2000] 2004, p. 12.

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13. Print.



The nonface: the void.

The nonface operates as a force without the constituted and visible identifying marks of 'being'. It effaces language by undoing the representation of the face or the body. It is marked by a certain phantasmal gesture which plays with invisibility - a masking-at-work. Herein lays the anxiety of knowing. The ghostly presence of the nonface in *Class Picture* resists colonial grasp of the mind. It remains a foreign land, undiscovered, withheld, 'unrationalized,' unevaluated, an 'outside' of language. As a spectre, it introduces another lens of looking - the *lens of incompleteness*. Liminality, as a between-force, creates an incomplete figure. This force of incompleteness destabilizes the 'wholeness' of the figure by adding or subtracting a supplement.⁷ In *Class Picture*, the supplement to the image of a nonface is the degradation of the image itself. This chemical process supplements the face by replacing it with a new region, a vacuous one. Supplementation becomes a process of re-inscription, of re-circulation of intensities away from the schematic sorting of conventional forms towards the incomprehensible region where time is out of joint (Gilles Deleuze's *time-image* haunts this writing). This may require us to rethink the idea of ambiguity of experimental images in spirit of haunting and invisibility.

Class Picture deserves a closer look to assess its disruptive forces, to disseminate its intensities, and to look at its relation to invisibility and haunting. We have already settled the presence of the sea as a generic image, a geographic index of the filmic event. But in the outwork, we are also a witness to the grand swift of nonbeings in the film - the nonface. A nonface resists identity. It robs us of the 'future' by disseminating 'time' in the surface. It haunts the crevices of language in a form of a suspended questioning: 'who are we?' implicating the 'outside.' Or, in a Deleuzian sense, it folds the 'outside' within it by transforming its image into an *open space*, its time into an *open time*.

⁷ Jacques Derrida wrote: "But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which takes-(the)-place [tient-lieu]. As substitute... it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness..." *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997, p. 145.

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13.
Print.

CITATION

MLA

Mendizabal, Adrian D. "The Nonface in Class Picture." *Kino Punch* 3 (2015): 10-13.
Print.

APA

Mendizabal, A. D. (2015). The Nonface in Class Picture. *Kino Punch*, (3), 10-13.