Toward a Rhetorical Theory of the Face: Algorithmic Inequalities and Biometric Masks as Material Protest

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ABSTRACT

Despite calls to give greater attention to bodies and infrastructures, and despite the development of facial recognition software and face replacement apps, not to mention medical face masks during the COVID-19 pandemic and a long history of political faces in the news, rhetoric has not directly nor adequately dealt with the face. I offer a new materialist rhetorical theory of the face, drawing on the concepts of *hyle* and *iwi* to argue that the face is a bio-social conglomeration both human and nonhuman. I look specifically to biometric data collection and to artist Zach Blas's algorithmically designed masks from his project, "Facial Weaponization Suite," to illuminate how the face is rhetorical and how faces might resist facial recognition suppression. The study urges rhetoricians to think carefully and ecologically about the face.

Introduction

Captured on driver's licenses, passports, and health cards, logged at train stations, airports, and ball parks, the face is a flashpoint and a point of authorization.[1] The face is a synecdoche for identity and identification. The face is the paradigmatic front able to signal a threat or a safeguard (Little, Jones, and DeBruine). Indeed, the face adjusts. It does not stay in one immovable position. It can be used stealthily to express favor when the subject truly feels displeased or to feign excitement despite horrendous boredom. Sometimes, the face involuntarily contorts from sudden outrage, horror, or surprise. Some people seem not to be aware of their facial expressions at all; when confused, they quiver lips, and when judging, they look surprised. At best, the face is an approximation of a subjective experience.

In this paper, I consider the face as a bio-social-material conglomeration and strive to understand how we use the face and how it is used and abused by others. I turn specifically to artist Zach Blas's algorithmically designed masks from his project, *Facial Weaponization Suite*, to illuminate how the face is rhetorical and how faces might resist biometric data collection and facial recognition suppression. The study aims to start a conversation about the face and urges rhetoricians to think carefully and ecologically about the face in a particular context as a reactivity and material collectivity. The goal is not to diminish the human-of-the-face but to show how the human is also a

collectivity, and the face a significant locale for undoing liberal humanism's individualistic human-centrism with respect to rhetorical analyses of the body.

To move forward, I first detail past rhetorical and philosophical conceptions of the face, arguing that the face has been understood (1) as a semiotic, historical production or (2) as a rational thing largely under human-control. I suggest a third path: the face as a collective form, a composition, to some extent always outside of the body and with environmental dependencies. I argue that the rhetorical tradition offers a point of departure through the Greek concept of *hyle (λη)*. Like *hyle,* the face is a potential presence unable to fully determine the full suite of its capacitation (Pflugfelder 441-43). The rhetorical reuse of *hyle* is later complicated by enrolling the indigenous Rarámuri concept of shared breath called *iwí* as a way to make rhetorical theorization itself ecological and deepen it while recognizing that for just as long as the ancient Greeks—or longer— many peoples have provided rich articulations of what it means to live as a body with/in the world (Salmón 1328). Both *hyle* and *iwí* resonate with recent discussions about ontology in critical cultural theory, specifically Jane Bennett's "influx and efflux," or the idea that materiality perpetually enters "the interval" where a difference is being made such that things exist always in a "hover-time of transformations" (*Influx* x). The theory and the implications—of a face as *hyle,* or a visible point of transformation tied to material conditions, like a face as *iwí,* or a co-Becoming through breath—are explored through Blas's art project. His work offers rhetorical scholars a point from which to consider how the face transforms with/in the environment.

The case study also exposes how the face can negotiate the digital face of algorithmic capture by incorporating the environment and the face of the crowd. Blas's project, as a response specifically to facial recognition software on the streets of London, usefully illustrates how a play of faces not losing sight of the milieu might construct resistance. Blas's masks reflect the affective tenors of subordinated groups, illuminating just how crucial the environment is for composing a semiotic and material protest, a visual front that faces-up to power. Blas's masks also function ironically to underscore the importance of being able to show the face to enact democratic dissent—because the face is an encounter, because the face communicates affective dimensions as much as strategic ones, and because the face entails an embodied force that crafts exigences and invokes urgency about present conditions.

Benefits for Facing the Face in Rhetorical Studies

Situating the face as *hyle,* just as juxtaposing *hyle* with *iwí,* has several benefits for rhetorical scholars. First, doing so encourages scholars to extend traditional rhetorical concepts about material things out to the living body. Doing so, in this case, inserts nonhuman agencies right within the closest traditionally "human-owned" point—the subjective, phenomenal attunement to the face. Re-seeing the face as partially exterior and dependent, operating as a diverse coming together, participates in the drive to rethink rhetorical concepts like *hyle* in lieu of an extended and ecological human, arguing in favor of giving more focus to unintentionality (Rickert; Stormer and McGreavy).

Because *hyle* suggests change and yet potential, applying it to the face underscores the new materialist insistence on not presuming a dominating human agency having

total awareness of the vivacious scene (Bennett, *Influx*; Pflugfelder; Stormer and McGreavy; Stormer, "Rhetoric's"). A face as *hyle* resonates with the idea that the study of rhetoric is not about "persuasion" but about a material, aesthetic "disclosure … shifting our manner of being" (Rickert xii). Once the face is thought as *hyle,* the rhetorician might even extract the phrase "our manner" from Rickert's now famous line, lending centrality to the ecology and avoiding any inadvertent idea that the human is what is solely impacted by everything else. Caterpillars have their "manner of being" shifted by the rain just as by cuckoos and fertilizers.

As a consequence, my hope is that a face theorized in this way compels rhetorical scholars to reconsider how bodies are discussed in rhetoric. Rhetoricians know well the call to attend to bodies (Chávez) and have strived to give "materiality its due" (Marback), but examining a body identified through computational, biometric processes that circulate multiple faces—faked, tracked, labelled, segmented, disregarded— means that the so-called "rhetoric of bodies" cannot easily presume "whole" bodies nor stable bodies. The face turns the critic's attention to the ways that facial recognition softwares categorize and segment, installing some tension with past scholarship discussing "the body" (Chávez; Dolmage; Hawhee) or "the rhetorical body" (Crable; Ratcliffe; Selzer and Crowley). Paul Achter notes that media outlets present images of injured veteran bodies from the U.S.-led wars as "whole bodies" and representatives of the "health of the State" (46). Perhaps, just as "whole bodies" are more easily fit into a logic of representation about strong veterans, so might rhetorical scholarship tend to talk about bodies as whole to recruit broader narratives—about bodies having presence in a rhetorical performance. Analytical habits, in other words, rely on representations of "a body" that engages "a technology" plus "an environment," excluding habits that blur such distinctions (64). The technical and algorithmic functions of biometric systems question an analysis that identifies "the body" independent of its local transformations.

Bodies are not the same "bodies" here or there. As Gayle Salamon says in a discussion of gender and gender dysmorphia, bodies are too often considered to be either present or absent, and the correspondence between "a subject's felt sense of a body and corporeal contours" is too easily assumed; bodies may not be "experienced as whole" and cannot necessarily be said to be "contiguous with the physical body" (3-4). Bodies are not simple. They are not composed always how we might dream, hope, or know. The face, although a part of the body and composed through environmental attunements and structural arrangements just like what we name "a body," does not, like the body, always fit easily into one category nor feel totally under our control.

Focusing on the face challenges scholars to adopt a pluralistic and "micro-rhetorical" stance toward bodies, that is, understanding bodies as shifting across material-virtual realms. In that respect, a theory of the face in rhetoric stresses attention to the situational and contextual. Bodies are not all inscribed equally nor composed of the same material enactment.[2] To see a face, then, is to see a simultaneity, a fixation, an algorithm, a medical record, etc., and possibly only the digital extensions of flesh. Accordingly, the face will certainly operate as a point of recognition of identity but also of mutually engaged transformative action. Events of the face move in both directions— toward identity and intra-active Becoming—allowing those in the polis to insist on

uniqueness while also evoking un-severable ties to others.[3] Consequently, the face is crucial to asserting contestation but also to avoiding all out conflict.

Overall, I hope to convince the reader that the face has not yet been adequately theorized in rhetoric. However, in an era of facial recognition softwares, medical face masks, laws against burkas, face transformation apps, and political faces smirking in the news, scholars must consider the face as worthy of rhetorical criticism. Examining when and how the face participates in what Stormer calls "rhetoric's diverse materiality" seems now crucial and unavoidable ("Rhetoric's" 216). Social media platforms like Facebook with massive picture databases and mining capacities, as well as facial recognition softwares heighten the exigence to think about the face and to study its impact on activism and democratic governance. What I offer here are deliberations on the face following from attention to an activist art project, which is to say that I remain open to rhetorical revision, theoretical reinvention, and local specificity, since the face, to be *a face*, must be filled-up and fluid and not perform like a digital face pursuing predictability, control, and stability.

Past Rhetorics of the Face

The face is not well understood, despite it appearing in front of us every day. Notably, Lacan asserts that the face enacts the first symbolic gestures and instills in the child "the Symbolic order," which leads to "the world of predefined social roles and gender differences" in the formation of Self (qtd. in Mambrol para 2). Emmanuel Levinas calls the face "an epiphany" because the sight of it requires recognizing the Other and moving in accordance to the Other's facial expressions (qtd. in Bergo Sec. 2.3.1). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue that the face is not a transcendent entity but subject to suppressive historical significations: "The face is the Icon proper to the signifying machine … The face is always facialized" (Deleuze and Guattari 115). Following obsessions with the face of Christ, they argue, the face becomes the point from which to measure "degrees of deviance in relation to the White-man face" (178). The face, then, is a creation and often a traumatic presence. To have a "schizo" face, to display multiple and unexpected faces, disrupts the semiotic system of faces being continually (re)constructed and circulating (179).

The first two of these theorizations treat the face as a material presence of an inner (albeit constructed, for Lacan) Self that taunts and haunts the mind. Deleuze and Guattari's theory focuses on remaking politics by locating oppressive social hierarchies, implying that because a face is subject(ed) to signification, a look into the history of domination can open up ways to alter or exchange faces. However, for all theories involved, the reader may wonder about the role of bodies. As Daniel Tutt says about Deleuze and Guattari's ideas, "the point of the essay is that the face is imposed on us," and we should try to escape, "but what of shame … internalized oppression" (para 15)? And the rhetorical scholar might add: what of asymbolic affectations and the environment? Indeed, the contemporary analysis of rhetorical agency is largely premised on the idea that human does not always nor easily act at will—rather, bodies engage ecologies that spur and constrain. Agency in this concept stands in some contrast to an individual

that can manage to drum up a "schitzo face" and strive for liberation amongst broader oppressions.

In brief, theories of the face have shortfalls, and the face has not yet been conceptualized *as rhetorical*. The absence is strange given the rhetorical tradition's engagement with bodies, gesture, and speech. However, when searching rhetoric texts, there is little specified theorization of the face.

Cicero reports that Socrates was thought to be dimwitted because of his face (Cicero), and Aristotle was apparently obsessed with correlating the size of one's eyebrows and ears to character defects (Boys-Stone). But this does not tend toward any situated rhetorical theorization. In the contemporary tradition, analyses of the face focus on Levinas's revulsion of rhetoric. Levinas famously understood suasive speech as an "interruption," Diane Davis explains, because a rhetorician did not seek the Other but, rather, persuasion. Thus, the art of rhetoric could not allow direct access to the Other through "feeling the face" (203). Rhetoric, thus, committed a "violence" because it provoked a different kind of opening, not the one offered by the Other and felt through encounters (192). Davis, of course, thinks this idea to be ridiculous, since rhetoric "allows subjects to get things done in the world," and the face offers no genuine encounter with the Other; the face is embedded in symbolic interactions (208). Here she asserts that "the face is the effect of the figure rather than the other way around" (39b), suggesting that the constitutive process means that the face is a social presence and a projection, not essential but inessential (40-41b). The face is put "in the place of a missing essence" (43b). Accordingly, it is "a watery surface" and "a surplus" able to do more than any human rhetor intends, depending on discourses and human reactions (49b).

The face appears as a point of discussion in a few other pieces of rhetorical scholarship. Cara Finnegan, for example, argues that a popular picture of President Abraham Lincoln's face showed "a thirtysomething, well-groomed middle-class gentleman" that inspired broad claims about his amazing intellect and unwavering righteous judgement (62). Finnegan argues that "vernaculars of late nineteenth-century visual culture" were applied to his face "to make rhetorical sense of what they saw" (62). The face here demonstrates the power of socialized sight. Unquestionably, the picture is a puzzling artifact since, as Finnegan notes, Lincoln could easily be seen as lonely. The face in this instance is a symbolic surface from which to discuss popular myths. As a result, Finnegan foregoes any discussion of how environments or discourses in Lincoln's time might have found a way into his posture or his face.

The face is also mentioned in Dolmage's examination of métis and Medusa amid the argument that rhetoric "denounces the body … and lifts discourse from its corporeal hinges" (1). Dolmage sets out to examine connections among the symbolic face of Medusa and "the tradition of mestizaje [mestiza]" to reclaim the generative power of malleability as connected to the "cunning and adaptability" implied in the concept of métis (19). Dolmage's theorization does stress embodiment, but the final recommendation is to write again the body, to revise the repressive with new narration (13; 21). The removal of the head in a story that "always ends with Medusa's decapitation" is interpreted as a strike against female intelligence, so this perhaps stages a discourse solution, a speech act (16). However, the violent removal of the head considered corporeally

strikes not only against intelligence but also crucially against presencing, witnessing, accountability, co-being, and co-constructedness. In like manner, the "incessant power of change" implied in métis and mestiza is not discursive only; change and re-confabulation is the embodied condition, always to some extent within the face.

The critique of Dolmage's discourse-centric solution points toward racial and feminist theories of bodies that do attend to the claim that bodies are biosocial conglomerations. In "Making Faces, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras," Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "'Making faces' is my metaphor for constructing one's identity. *[U]sted es el modeador de su carne tanto como el de su alma.* You are the shaper of your flesh as well as of your soul" (xvi). Although that quotation puts emphasis on individual choice and empowerment, systems of power, community practices, and national narratives are active participants in subsequent discussions of identity construction. This is evident when the internalization of racism, even in communities striving against it, becomes a recurring theme (8; 29; 31). Thus, "Making faces" entails a structural recognition of the layers that faces embody and must face.

Lynn A. Casmier-Paz also considers the face to be a biosocial complexity. She investigates why portraits of former slaves must be traditionally published on covers of their own slave narratives. She argues that "the reader interprets the image within the contexts of historical, ideological, and cultural constructions" and that the images intend to give the authors "a likeness of a slave" while providing the credibility associated with a white literate class of the late eighteenth century (91-93). She concludes: "That desperate irony, or dangerous contradiction, which made property of human beings, is the pedagogy of the frontispiece slave-author portrait" (93). Accordingly, the face signifies a context and a humanity; showing the face hopes to construct a form of readability upon inherently racist groundwork while yet aims to undercut the categorization of dehumanization understood through presenting a face that has endured the suffering of slavery (95-96).

Works such as Davis's, Anzaldúa's, and Casmier-Paz's consider ways that the body does not always act of its own, on its own, or even in its own interests. Bodies are not disconnected from power structures and seem to be continually divided, picked apart, selected for an occasion, even judged and silenced beyond conscious awareness. The face per se may not always be very distinguishable from "the body" in each of these works, but the general effort to show unities among intersectionality and flesh anticipates new materialism to a much greater extent than any of the more popular prior theorizations of the face.[4]

The conclusion to the literature review is that the face is not entirely absent in rhetoric but not substantially fleshed out. The face *that speaks* or is *spoken about* traditionally matters the most. The observation may seem a little strange given rhetoric's historical ties to dramatistic analysis and performance studies (Olbrys Gencarella and Pezzullo), yet discovering no discussion of the face even among the eighteenth century elocutionists—who make great pains to discuss vocal inflections—probably means that constructing an exigence for the face has not been tenable. Perhaps, theorization of the face would risk denying that discourses shape the body or "write" the body for us. This view, however, might be a little strange—and stranger by the day—given the rise of materialist rhetorics of the body (Chávez; Hawhee; Marback) and the growing

investment in new materialist rhetorics. As Pflugfelder says, "rhetoric is positioned as an emergent, material force" within and beyond texts; things have agency, and a diverse "constellation of actors" always come together to move bodies (444-50). Potentially, the absence of the face is due to its unquestioned inclusion in the broader package called "the body" or to the dismissal of discussions in critical race theory and literature that have in one way or another considered the body as central to intersectionality. Yet, the face can now be examined in a way that avoids positioning it as an agentive presence or a symbolic structure alone.

Facing the Environment through *The Facial Weaponization Suite*

In facing a future of not being able to display a dissenting face, artist Zach Blas builds a *Facial Weaponization Suite* of masks designed to undermine facial recognition systems ("I Was"). The masks make obvious a plot against the face by obfuscating the plotting of the face, performing a social action of protest against algorithmic vision and trackable contours, as is evident in Figure 1. The project announces the need to confront facial recognition with gear—a materialist response to oppressive politics—and Blas gains credibility through the fact that the masks work; careful attention to the technical systems suggest that protestors need to know how technologies actually operate in order

Figure 1. On Left: Zach Blas Mask - Facial Weaponization Suite 2013, San Diego, CA. Painted, vacuum-formed recycled polyethylene terephthalate. On Right: Mask - 2014, Mexico City, Mexico. Painted, vacuum-formed recycled polyethylene terephthalate. Courtesy of the artist.

to resist them. Yet, perhaps more to the point, the masks push attention back toward the face as an iteration happening in a mutuality with the local environment. Seen in this way, the masks indicate how the face can still be a face when looking around through a mask. The masks might obscure the face, but they also re-assert the face as *hyle,* a presence finding shape through being emplaced.

The artwork asks Londoners to look at each other's faces and consider whether or not they imagine facial recognition to be appropriate and freeing. Does the mask feel freeing? Blas's designs scream "Absolutely not." His masks hide the face to resist oppressive visibility and denounce the ways that biometric data is being collected and used to police. The masks foretell that Londoners will not be forever free to use their faces to unmask corruption, violence, or oppression—but the obfuscation announces that they will not stand for it. In this, *The Facial Weaponization Suite* entertains the need for combating facial recognition as well as the need for hiding, before one's face is captured. Yet, the *Suite* asks audiences to look at the face and not at the mask—because the very act of refusal to show the face implies the power of identity in dissent.

The contours of each mask indicate how facial recognition systems are deployed to monitor only certain groups. For example, Blas crafts one mask called "*The Fag Face Mask,*" which he says is "generated from the biometric facial data of many queer men's faces" ("Zach"). Another mask in the *Suite* explores "a tripartite conception of black-ness" where the color black is used on a mask to call attention to "the inability of bio-metric technologies to detect dark skin as racist" and to draw lines of connection between "black in militant aesthetics" and "black as that which informatically obfuscates" ("Zach"). A third mask entails fleshy vertical folds reminiscent of a veil or a curtain or a vagina to invoke "feminism's relations to concealment and imperceptibility" as women around the globe struggle against patriarchy and masculine power. A fourth mask appears silver and hard-edged as a way to recognise the U.S.-Mexico border wall and the "nationalist violence it instigates" ("Zach"). Taken together, these masks expose how facial recognition systems will be geared for political ends and built to target non-dominant groups. The most vulnerable will, accordingly, be those needing ways to resist or simply survive.

The *Suite* does not support an individualistic response to facial recognition software, but the project more holistically identifies pre-existing structural oppressions in the development and implementation of facial recognition software. The "Fag Mask," for example, challenges the very idea of having scientific studies that aim to make systems "determining sexual orientation through rapid facial recognition techniques" ("Zach"). The mask works both to resist personality categories or identity applications made from biometric detection as much as recall suppressive homophobic attitudes and legislation in many countries forcing LGBTQ individuals to mask their identities or hide their bodies from public view. The black mask also turns toward structural oppressions. It implies that white people inordinately design and control software programs, calling attention to what Grace Dobush calls white, male domination of Silicon Valley "by design" in so far as the history of computing technologies perpetuates myths about great white men hacking and building technologies such that they inordinately represent the industry and determine design processes (para 3-5), an observation made also by Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe and others (Amrita; Selfe and Selfe). The feminist mask

suggests that software systems can be used to target specific groups of women such as those Islamic women in Europe who cannot wear veils ("Zach"). Each mask becomes a material instantiation of uneven social applications and intends to call out historical injustices spanning dimensions of race, class, and gender that continue in algorithmic design.

Consequently, the masks foreground how the digital algorithmic face frame was always "not a face" and not only for being another representation. This digital face was a division from the body and environment—here returning to the earlier theorization—when it made the face a computational set and applied power structures over the face in a monstrous way. The word "monstrous" is used because the individual did not have a say in this face, said to be its own, and likely could not recognize it once circulated as code, laden with surveillance artefacts. The tagging work of facial recognition software has twisted the face into a mask, Blas seems to say, which must be worn by those resisting such singularity; however, ironically, the masks also display the diversity of the city. The masks in this way become both beautiful and monstrous—precisely because the surveillance environment necessitates it and forces a no-face even while the design calls attention to beautiful faces of diverse groups seeking freedoms. Here, we note again that the face being masked reasserts itself *as face in facing the world* of technological systems, of cityscapes, of people, showing itself as a collective assemblage but also a social action. Thus, the mask reverses the direction it presumably constructs, turning attention not toward the loss of face but toward the living queer, black, and feminist faces that it implies and seeks to protect.

Despite Blas's well-intentioned performance of face aiming to undercut algorithmic social dominations, it is important to note that each mask might also elicit unintended interpretations. For example, a critic could easily read the project to highlight vulnerability as also built out from vulnerability: the "Fag Mask" uses vulnerable people's bodies to critique surveillance states, raising a question about how much freedom is actually endowed when those bodies have been melded into an artist's algorithm to make the mask, and then in some sense grouped together and erased. Likewise, the black "militant aesthetic" of the black mask risks drawing yet more attention to negative stereotypes of black individuals. Reinforcing that semiotic alliance may reconcretize black resistance as something violent while white resistance is situated in contrast as harmless or acceptable. Similarly, the striking silvery mask representing a border wall might be viewed as a fashion accessory, not an actual lived reality that causes suffering; although this mask may also productively suggest that the political Right covers the suffering of the face that results from harsh immigration policy with a sheen that blocks, a sheen of sheet metal. In brief, the point is that Blas's stated desire to craft a democratic artwork is not immune from an unintended outside able to compose other relations that bear on its democratic function. Nevertheless, it is difficult to argue that the project does not call attention to the face—and the crucial need for greater freedom for human facial representation in landscapes of algorithmic governance.

Another way to think about the project is to understand each mask as *a face* in as much as it foregrounds local engagement. Each mask aligns with democratic values by noticing its environment and then shaping the (protected, subterfuge) means to enter public space and express a contestation. And importantly, Blas's masks make a case

against suppression of the face without damaging infrastructure or inciting conflict. In this, the project can recall Robert Ivie's discussion of a dissent that must balance division with unification to be beneficial to democratic processes. Ivie says: "Purporting to defend democracy by silencing dissent undercuts democracy," yet the dissenter must discover ways to avoid demonizing the opposition and continue the engagement, pointing toward the complexity of adversaries for politics not to descend into war. Ivie astutely notes: "Points of identification … sustain political relations without effacing the boundaries that mark separate and opposed identities" (278-79). Artistic works, in particular, can push toward this function; they invite dialogue amid exhibition and encourage debate. Blas's masks, for instance, highlight effects on communities, asking for a discussion as the designs reveal what gets inculcated into facial recognition systems; the masks operate as a kind of challenge to anyone believing that facial recognition will be a "neutral" technology. The masks seem to ask algorithm designers to stop pretending—to consider where their test data comes from, how their algorithms might be applied. Indeed, the masks' un-face-like appearances—rejecting the nose, mouth, and eyes as indicators of categories—show activists' awareness of the oppressions of the information architecture and how surveillance systems will silence and limit democratic discourse.

Perhaps the most obvious message performed by the *Suite* is the need to stand face to face in a democracy. Masking the face asks a question about the capacity to forge a rhetorical identification with an Other who must hide or wear a mask. The artwork argues that democratic technologies will enable embodiment, closeness, and material forms of identification, sympathy and care, a point of connection with non-dominant groups who should be assured the same voice and accessibilities. In the case of Blas's *Suite,* the viewer can recognize in the mask's physical form a real face of a potentially vulnerable person without seeing the face. In this way, the masks strive toward the democratic ideal while also creating a short-term solution to authoritarian encroachment.

This turn toward others allows the *Suite* to complicate Hall, Monahan, and Reeve's suggestion that hiding the face might simply act as a privatized response to a structural problem (154). The *Suite,* however, compiles the faces of the crowd in a particular lived situation, and as a response to facial tracking, the project resists privatization. The *Suite,* rather, draws attention to what Monahan later calls "the problem space" or arenas sustaining surveillance apparatuses, and the masks work productively as a mode of resistance precisely because they cannot be understood outside of the particular structural arrangement, or "the problem space" (561).

Discussing the artwork's freeing implications is not to ignore that the masks also have militant aesthetics, which may not appear to advocate purely democratic action. But if the masks in "the arsenal" are in any way weaponing, then they are in two performative ways. First, they perform resistance in being a pseudo-armour that announces how people will need to protect the face from the definitions of criminality ordered by the digital face's application. I say "psuedo-armour" because of the shiny glean of the masks in Blas's *Suite*, which catch attention and read as designed objects, techno-sculptures that are clearly meant for museum display, not actual battle action. Second, the *Suite* creates a prop to raise awareness about social injustices and the populist

demagoguery synonymous with racism, homophobia, and sexism, which gets inculcated into technocratic systems of governance. The "weapon" then in the *Weaponization Suite* is the design and the way the thing raises voices and shouts back.

The metaphor of the weapon also underscores how much is at stake. Facial recognition software likely cannot be stopped except through disruptive structural interventions. The weapons metaphor might also underscore how biometric data collection, as a strategy of policing, restricts dissent at its very origin, disallowing protest right at the outset of its deployment. Not much will change, in other words, by showing faces in the city square, since the face that protests would be subject to the digital face and from that point on be unable to do what a face does—perform a social action. So if the mask is a "weapon," then it is because a facial recognition system, from the start, was weaponizing the body against itself.

The mask acts as a face, responding to specific contextual conditions. This face directs attention and expresses the loss of a democratic situation. It is a collective performance in touch with the milieu. In stark contrast, the digital face of the scan is already inscribed. It hopes to grab the face to hold it still. The digital face demands photographs of a straight face fitting to overlays and calculations. Accordingly, the digital face can return the same face over and over again for all manner of situations, which is not a return of a face of any kind. The face exposes this rigidity as oppression, inherently against living with/in society.

Toward A Rhetorical Theory of the Face

As a response to an environment, Blas's artworks expose how making sense of the face's fleshy collective requires considerably more than seeing the cartilaginous parts. The face is indecipherable by itself. The eyes stream tears in response to a family trapped in a terrible war; the mouth hangs open over a delicious cake set out for display. A rhetoric of the face then requires the "dislocation of the individual," as Nathan Stormer says when discussing situated rhetorics as "articulations" across human and nonhumans things ("Articulation" 259). The idea here applies also *within* the human, such as when Kalin and Gruber describe the "metabolic environment" as a suasive force, a collection of "active actants"; what bodies feel and do is always in some way capacitated by "bodies that eat" and live through "microbes that eat bodies" (270-71). Like the gut, the face is just as much composed of the nonhuman as the human. Blas seems to suggest as much when a face is a wall, an erasure, a composure. The complete rational control of the individual cannot be presumed.

Considering Blas's work, we must assert the face as a diverse multiplicity that undergoes "moments of transformation" in relational encounters (Stormer, "Articulation" 257). Accordingly, the rhetorical critic, to comprehend the face, faces outward to better see the face. Looking toward those places where a face gathers and projects its look, just as to where a face cannot bear to look, brings the face being a face into view. Indeed, Blas's artwork compels us, as critics, to attend to faces by studying an outside composing the shifts, temperaments, and predispositions amid a rhetorical event where the face plays a role or is constructed as a face and comes into view.

The face is rhetorical then in being part of "the on-going disclosure of the world" and a point through which an event can be explored, as Blas skillfully shows (Rickert xii). The rhetorical critic simply cannot presume that the face can be manipulated with never-ending skill, and not because some facial expression fails to always provide insight into a subject's motivations or maneuvers. Instead, the face is rhetorical because the face is set as face through encountering social, symbolic, cultural, material, and biological conditions at moments. Saying that the face is rhetorical places it amongst its "ambient environs" (Rickert x) and asserts that the face sits at the "influx-efflux intersection" (Bennett, *Influx* x); here, the rhetorical concept of *hyle* proves illuminating.

As *hyle*, the face is likened to amorphous "matter," or what Aristotle describes as an indeterminate thing with an endowment coming always into it from an outside to shape it, to enliven it, and to revise its frame, potentiality, and mode of engagement (1029a18–20). *Hyle* is a relativity, Aristotle says in *Physics,* able to transform into basic elements, depending on the situation. In that sense, *hyle* is a matter/energy taking shape from and within the context (194b9). The face *as hyle Becomes* a face, always and over again. Thus, as *hyle*, the face is a potential inseparable from an outside enabling its action and simultaneously marking it as engaged, without the face itself having any one essential form to which it can survive every encounter (Leclerc).

As a principle, Madison Jones suggests that Aristotle understood *hyle* to be like wood, something that can be worked or burned, a raw material (65). Yet, as Dennis Polis points out, Aristotle may have intended *hyle* to mean "an active potential" and not only "passive potential" (225). Reid calls *hyle* "a potentiality of corporeal creation," pointing to a generative quality of matter, indicating a potential to transform and ultimately endow the non-particular with the particular (75-76). In this way, *hyle* names a "space" for things to Be and to Become (76-78).

When the face is understood in this way, the face is a potentiality in a suspension, one that gets caught up. The face instantiates a readable form, like *hyle* that moves into some material actualization, yet without exhausting the potentiality in many possible body-world co-Becomings. The face in so many words is like an undulating sea. Here, the "influx-efflux" description again assists with sketching out the idea: the face attunes and then draws back, like the tide (Bennett xi). The face has something a body's own, some matter and psychosocial production in the mattering, but is never expressed as a kind of face, as something recognizable, without the gravity of the moon, so to speak, the foam of the sea, or the surge of sand within the crashing wave.

The smallest shift in the eyes—that flicker of light—or the second needed to swallow—a throat suddenly clenching—exposes the body's complicated suspension. The face makes known in those moments its connection to the world. The face toggles between the mind's wandering attention and the body's other intervening interactions. All told, a face can attempt "facework," or the protective staging of a self-image (Oetzel and Ting-Toomey), but it is always a coming-together of heart rates, hairs, hoots, hankerings, and hordes of relational impositions, some of them unknown to the bodies in action.

Jane Bennett's usage of "influx and efflux" as a description of ontological transformation is highlighted here because she wants to answer the question: where is human agency when the world is "teeming with powerful nonhuman influences?"[5] The answer is that the human brings about "something new" as a pluralism. Thus, we can now

make an important note: similar ecological concepts involving human-nonhuman engagements have been part of the thinking of various non-Western people groups for an incredibly long time. Bennett's work seems to build broadly on the ecological thought common to indigenous knowledges, as Zoe Todd and others have suggested (Hunt). Recognizing such connections strives to embrace ecological existence and to compose a mutual, dependent face that looks for revised rhetorics. However, because "education proceeded along colonialist lines, with virtually total disregard for indigenous knowledge systems," the critic, if the same as myself, may not always be sure how to treat related concepts with the necessary complexity (Makoba). As Kai Horsthemke argues, the experiences of traditions, local affairs, and landscapes in other cultures may be of a very different quality than the sort of distanced, Western philosophical assessments of "beliefs" like those offered by Aristotle wanting a debate (32-34). In the case of *hyle*, noting how indigenous knowledge systems have taken seriously environmental influences illuminates just how much Aristotle ignores the transformative political and personal potentials of what he himself describes as *hyle* while he attempts to organize the world into stable categories. *Hyle* does not burrow into his ways of being and the concept is not self-applied. His own world engagement is not challenging his view of himself nor altering his psychology or opening up his philosophy. An indigenous concept like *iwí*, I propose, goes much further, challenges us much more in presuming that the kind of face that is being described by someone as "*hyle*" would have to be a face that changes over its life and is not the kind of face totally independent nor intent, as Aristotle seems to be, to face down an opposition to maintain its course. That is to say, all faces must necessarily embrace revision to actualize what is entailed in *hyle*.

The face as *hyle* should be one that looks around and adjusts, realizing that the face that is one is also many. Thus, in the process of thinking *hyle*, the critic must notice how unquestioned reliance on Greek histories and terminologies risks relegating multiple other cultures to irrelevancy, even while most North American scholars are well aware that "there is not a university in this country that is not built on what was once native land" (Gould 81). As Malea Powell says, "any vision of the future for rhetorical history must acknowledge this fundamental relationship in order to ethically be in relation with how colonialism is still being worked out both inside and outside of academia" (115). If the face does something for rhetorical scholarship here, then it compels scholars not to wait any longer for rhetoric to expand constellations of rhetorical theory, since we turn to face our ecologies when theorizing the face. We thus recognize the reality that should be well known already, which is that "there is among the Rarámuri a concept called iwígara … the total interconnectedness and integration of all life in the Sierra Madres … it also means to unite, to join, to connect. Another meaning of iwí is to breathe, inhale/exhale, or respire … a whole morphophysiological process of change" that is entailed in *iwí* as the sharing of breath (Salmón 1328). Concepts like this likely paved the way for Bennet's "influx and efflux," so we must then ask whether or not rhetorical studies can think the face as *iwí*.

This face described as *iwí* encourages recognition of the "morphophysiological process of change" happening when the face that breathes necessarily shares breath.[6] In this way, *iwí* seems to underscore how rhetoric must embrace other peoples and shift from unending reliance on the ancient Greeks. In addition, in the context of this paper,

iwí encourages recognizing where ideas come from as well as calls attention to the complexities of enrolling what is outside of our own experience. Are we truly facing *iwí*? The question admits self-reflexive questioning and allows for critique, recognizing on the one hand that concepts like *iwí* inform relational ontologies so popular today and are not our own, while on the other hand encourages us to "share breath," to craft an openness to what indigenous cultures offer, putting their concepts on par with rehearsals of what the ancient Greeks offer.

In the case of facial recognition surveillance systems, we might recognize that the embodied and historical complexities of *iwí* are beyond us but also be inspired to ask how digital techno-authoritarianism has been breathed in, or how it folds us in—and what that co-developmental dynamic means for who we are and what we choose to do. Zach Blas's resistive face mask artworks help to make this intra-active process visible. Those masks insist that we need to call attention to mutual engagements and not imagine ourselves composed as entirely unique or separate entities. Blas does not imagine any outsider capable of being fully banished but one that is enrolled in this or that way through the entailments of the technological system, which are also not fully exterior to the body. He then uses this insight to his advantage in crafting rhetorical activist responses.

Here, the historical, symbolic dominations that concern Deleuze and Guattari return in the sense that a face must not ignore but must be aware and be adaptable, as they say, to confuse the face of power. Deleuze and Guattari's solution of surprising reanimation, however, now stretches beyond an individual's strategic revisions of the face. The face does not surprise a social milieu on its own. The face has always been too confined by its colliding and colluding exterior to enact a self-sealed revolution born of the individual. The era of surveillance technologies make present how an activist's rhetorical maneuver requires more—more than individual action and more than a face planned in advance. The face today requires a whole collective, a reactive apparatus. The face has to account for the terrorizations of the digital face that function in a sweeping way as a tracking and ordering action.

Indeed, Blas's artworks suggest that the digital composite (as a psuedo" digital face") aims to make faces obedient to an outside that it dictates. The "digital face" in this sense despises alteration and the relational ontology where co-Becoming is the rule. By disregarding the expressions of an individual's face, taking only bone structure and hair growth to cast the face as machinic, the face is reduced to non-presence. As a result, the face cannot rely on strategic rhetorical performance to save itself from this digital face. There is no smiling one's own way out of the digital face's glare. A face cannot overcome a bad night with a face of sincere apology. The task of redemption for a face—that is, of revival and of giving life to the face—the whole body must do working in tandem with others, with the environment, with the infrastructure. A face cannot, on its own, alter the digital face's direction or application.

Considering Blas's project, the face that can instigate political change is likely to be a material conglomeration that implicates power structures and their dominations. In this, the affective politics of the face demand a less humanistic commitment and a dedication to performances of co-being. A face undermining the digital face necessitates a plural. Thus, the face embraces tactical moments of non-individuality that function

strategically as a turning outward to face the civic situation. Only when rhetoricians attune to the many bleeding lines muddying the supposed subject/object formation will the face be treated once more as *the face*.

Conclusion: Counter-Materialities and Making the Face Rhetorical

Facial-recognition software will not be easily disrupted and not dismantled with an individual snarl, stare, or grin. The masks in Blas's *Facial Weaponisation Suite* suggest two ways for a face to resist the digital composite face. The first involves communicating the social urgency felt within the polis, which cannot be erased by the digital composite face, despite being ignored by it. Blas constructs masks that look as disturbing as the algorithm, an aesthetic monstrosity, underscoring affective horror and anti-human materiality. This is the face (mask) as a social action. The second rhetorical counter is the obfuscation of the face. In losing sight of the human face, the masks take advantage of face-ness by expressing the inhumanity that faces of the city see when staring into the glaring surveillance lens.

Resistance tactics—such as performing what a digital face does in a context or obscuring the face—may also find productive analyses through the first, second, and third persona (Wander). The first persona describes the face intended, or Blas's stance against facial recognition systems made apparent in the form and material choices of his masks. The second turns to the audience, looking at the attendees who celebrate the art exhibit, joined together in reasserting the face and its crucial role in democratic action and social justice. The third persona looks to how the protestors themselves position the problem. As Philip Wander tells us, the third persona references the "interpretive strategies" and seeks "the implications and the silences" (202-03). Blacking out the face, for example, adopts a strategy of appropriating the color black as resistance, recalling racist uses of "black face" and denigrations of blackness in hopes of arguing that facial recognition is racist. Black in this deployment finds a point of significance between the social and the material—the color makes visible blindness to non-dominant groups' struggles as much as blindness to the CCTV camera. Another "third-persona" reading could note how a face rejecting human expression implies a protestor willing to totally disappear to preserve identity, freedom, and/or co-Being. Or, perhaps the project implies that the individualism of the face must be destroyed to resist the glaring look of policing apparatuses integrated into consumer devices and soon operating at every street corner. The no-face imagines a multitude of sad and angry faces arguing that authoritarianism will not uncouple from sociocultural inequities or infrastructures. A system that leaves no room for dissent leaves no option but dissent. Each are "third persona" possibilities, and I encourage rhetoricians to expand ways of understanding and engaging faces.

In the case that I examine, the *Suite* covers the face to find an avenue for democratic action amid surveillance, breathing-in the algorithmic environment to resist it. The *Suite* also announces that non-dominant groups see clearly the power implications of surveillance systems. The masks in the project expose how the digital composite face cannot fool people into believing that it ever really captures a face. In those masks, the human face is a togetherness, which no algorithm can capture. The irony perhaps is

that the masks are unable to liberate the faces behind them even though the masks enable free movement. Yet, being "trapped" in a mask that is also a composite of faces heightens the solidarity. The masks thus serve an "ego function" for protestors, crafting a collective face to see out difficult days in unity (Gregg 71).

Here, we pivot to field-specific discussion to say that rhetoric must come to terms with the face's capacities and capabilities. Scholars must notice the times and places where the face is extracted from lived context, limited in its expressions, or ruthlessly replaced. Indeed, investigating what a face does or can do fits with the broader call that Chávez lays out: to "resist forms of dominance such as white supremacy and misogyny" by "grappling with bodies" (242). Thinking from facial recognition software, we might add to the quote and say that resistance comes through grappling with *bodily-ecologies*, not always with *a body* whole, stable, or carried through and accessible in the same way across iterations. Given the specificities of technological systems in this or that environment, the body may not be treated as a face or delineated as the same body—digital cultures divide and distribute the body for capitalistic and governance imperatives, to serious effect.

Overall, new materialist perspectives open up opportunities for analyses of bodily ecologies. Likewise, racial and feminist scholarship attending to the biosocial porousness of bodies encourages scholars to entertain the non-division of bodies from rhetorical constructs and systems of domination that restrain and divide. Indigenous scholarship also offers new avenues and refracts a rhetorical tradition shaped so much by colonization. Multiple ideas about ecologies, I hope to have shown, have the potential to offer alternative inflections and lines for revisions. Theoretically, the face as *hyle* turns at the moment of its theorizing into a rearticulation, as a face better theorized in the terms offered by *iwí,* which presents for consideration a more holistic and body-implicating concept than what the Greeks ever offered, questioning the priority of the dominating tradition. We are reminded: to be a face, the face will be dispersed, moved, and always to some degree operating outside of itself, even when psychologized and internalized. The face will always then, as a dependency, entail the risk of being managed and manipulated, but the face will also always be productive and tied to the formation of another ecology.

Given the proliferation of emojis, of face swapping apps, and of face tracking systems, there is an exigence for the face and no shortage of it. Greater attention to the face in rhetoric requires situated analyses of material arrangements composing faces for identification, circulation, and monetization. Methodologically, the rhetorical critic studies body ecologies to discover what a face turns away from and attunes with to be *a kind of* face and what a face *does* once acting as a face. Here, once more, we recognize that the face is a massification, a presence, and an exposure. In this, the face becomes a point of departure more than an endpoint. The face is never finalized, even if it feels that way. The face is like a wave that crashes in and drags out operating with/in "a world of urge and urge and urge" (Bennett, x-xi). The face breathes in and out. The face faces us now.

Notes

1. I'd like to thank *RR* reviewers, Chris Mays and Alex Reid, for their insightful comments and feedback.
2. For discussion of the "micro-rhetorical stance," see Pflugfelder, 2015.
3. "Intra-active" derives from Karen Barad, 2007. Her usage refers to a mutual co-developmental relation with all things such that we are "Becoming," in the sense that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari use the term, but specifically emphasizes how we are always transforming and changing into something new, so the terminology is a reference to emergence.
4. For more on intersectionality, see Crenshaw, 1989.
5. See the promotional introduction to her book, per the cover text.
6. I start with *hyle* to appeal to the Western rhetorical tradition and to avoid presuming too much about Rarámuri experience even as I hope to propose another way of thinking about the face and invite new ecologies of thought to expand the field. The risk of colonizing iwí must be given attention, however, and this is why I set out to use iwí in a self-reflexive but substantive way that shows the inadequacies of the Western tradition; I invite reflection and revision.

Notes on Contributor

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