

Face To Efface With The Pout

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The key emerges from the pout as if it will open us. I'm in a checkout queue looking at David Duchovny on the cover of last week's TV guide and he is everywhere in chains except for the freeing pout, the coy emergence of the key from between x-laxed lips. The celebrity is naked and bound and oh so dependent on my devotional browse, which has already fiddled off to other facial fare, Tom Cruise's profile on *Vanity Fair*, Travolta and spawn on something else.

The picture of Duchovny's face knows this. Its pout is a parsimony of appeal, it is the minimal pout possible and still be a pout. It lets itself off the hook it puts itself on, the barb of our attention. The *face* is out there. *We* are not alone. But the Duchovny pout pretends *it* is.

It isn't. David Duchovny's neurasthenic X-pout keeps company at the *amour propre* emporium of celebrity, with the Brad Pitt pout of preemptive whatever, the pouts wide shut of Cruise and Kidman, the in-spite-of-you pout of Courtney Love an ingratiating sneer if ever there was one.

Some of these are pouters who would be extracurricular to the culture of celebrity. They would be outside the frame but they can only reframe the pout. There is no parergonal pout. The pout is framed. Credit them though for their discomfort in countenancing the frame. Consider the embalmed puberty of poutophile Calvin Klein's ads. See the *haut colonic connoisseur* pout of Karl Lagerfeld's Karl Lagerfeld. Or remember Norma Jean.

Others are the middling faces, the sulk ingenues, as in the pout *noire* of Alicia Silverstone, and the Merchant Ivory pout of Helena Bonham Carter whose acting has all the signs of a brooding interiority, without the interiority.

The extremes of appeal and indifference that Duchovny would frame in one face have been framed together before, but it took a band. Mick Jagger's peristaltic pout needed the terminally smacked lips of Keith Richard's cryonic Yorick pout, as alpha supposes omega.

A pout is more than contiguous lips. Marilyn Monroe's pout was the pupa of a kiss, a kiss attenuated into a kissable. "Just kiss here." A pout is pneumatic passivity, not an imminent kiss. A pout is kissable, without the kiss. A momentary suspension of reciprocity, that's what we buss in viewing the pout.

"Her habit of speaking without using her lips was unnatural, obviously superimposed," acting coach Natasha Lytess said of Marilyn Monroe. Likewise, her habit of using her lips without speaking, while slurring her gaze, was denatured, superexposed.

She used her pout as cleavage for the face.

Monroe was a same-sex transvestite, so overproduced she was the camp spectacle of a woman pretending to be a woman. Her gift to the human portfolio was the lip embalm of passivity in the pout.

A produced, an advertent, pout puts a face in profile even when it faces you. The pout puts itself in full frontal profile, effects or at least affects a minimal self-abasement. The pout is a very advertent inadvertence.

Today's first-string pouters dissociate professionally, in a facial pull me-push me of availing versus indifference. But their faces suffer from premature irony.

For Duchovny, irony is the pout's collagen.

He says "ahh Channelhopper, if you can wipe this pout off my face with your remote before my prophylactic dispassion unrolls around it you are free to become a producer" in an acting technique one might franchise as the face made safe from the pursings of its mouth.

To learn the Duchovny technique study the Marilyn Monroe pout, how her whole face affected to be the deer in our headlights. Now abstract the rest of your face from the pout until only your mouth is the deer in the headlights. The rest of the face is proactively deadpan. That's the Duchovny pout.

Hollywood hasn't always been so up front with the male pout. Before the male pout came out of the closet it had to present itself in drag, as it were, masked in smoke. Bogart, James Dean, Sinatra. The cigarette was a pout surrogate.

Look at Bogart when he's not smoking, his trademark inversion of the upper lip like it's bridling from an invisible bit, or a latent pout. But Bogart's anti-pout was a pout as surely as your anti-Catholic is another sort of Catholic.

What might a pout be, before we put our lights on it? Before the fake there is the natural pout.

Darwin: "With young children sulkiness is shown by pouting, or, as it is sometimes called, 'making a snout.' When the corners of the mouth are much depressed, the lower lip is a little everted and protruded; and this is likewise called a pout."

In the genealogy of the oral, pouting is older than *amour-propre* and at least as old as *amour de soi*. The pout is as old as the first *fin-de-suckle* sulk of our mammalian mouths.

Had Hegel produced a *Phenomenology of the Pout* it might have traced the engulfings of new by newer improved pouts through a series of *aufhebungs*, of *lippen aufwerfens* (pouts, upraisings of lips). From unselfconscious pout through to the most self-reflexive will-to-pout the sulk dialectic might have run something like:

1. **pout is** facial concomitant of ill humour 2. pout points to, declares, ill humour 3. pout dissimulates ill humour 4. pout dissimulates but advertises it does 5. pout whatever

Traces of the simpler pining-for-suckle pout remain in the sexy self-reflexive pout of popular images. The Ur Pout, the mouth's virtual murmur as it mulls the memory of mammary, has all but disappeared servicing those images of Total Availability. Think about it. The face's trace of lost suckle is inverted in the pout- as-spectacle, into the succulent thing-itself.

So common are the sulk simulacra of the modern pout, there was never a time, or so it seems, when pouting was not put on. But there was, there is. An inadvertent pout signals ill humour. I'm not happy, it sulks its self-consoling.

That's why the sexy pout unnerves, why the imminent suck in the sulk spectacle of the pout is so unhappy a thing. In the pout another's unhappiness is primed for my desire. Or the pout lip-syncs unhappiness, fakes it. Please pretend to be unhappy for me.

When you pout you place my ill humour before your own. Your pout ill humours me. My ill humour effaces you.

Why does pouting, when it is a mock-up of unhappiness, ever arouse desire? Why should someone else's sulk seem sexy?

Maybe in the pout, *eros* and *ressentiment* are too close for comfort. The lush stigmata of your pout serves as proxy for my unhappiness.

The pout can be a response to the imperative: you will be unhappy, for me, because I want it. You will at least appear to be deferring desire. More, I want more than is possible. You will appear to desire this deferring of desire, in deference to yours truly. I want you to want to put off your want and I want you to do it for me. At the same time. Or, since a pout will do, I want the appearance of your want. I know you want it.

Witness the porn genre, the "facial".

We even like the news to pout. Victims who evince trauma play better, even when "trauma" is inadequate to their situation (voraciously sympathetic CBC anchor to reporter framed by the Rwandan exodus: "Are they *traumatized?*"). It can't be long before the "smiling heads of state" photo op, as Joyce Nelson called it, becomes the pouting heads of state. It works for Putin.

There are of course degrees of concession in the currency of the pout. Not all pouts self-efface. The pout may pretend ill humour. Or the pout says "Look, I'm pretending ill humour and on your behalf." It wants its pretense known. Or, getting really gluey here, the pout pretends to undo pretending (ie. appeasement, pretending *for*). See Courtney Love's *kinderwhore* pout which appeases, even as it disses appeasement.

Self-refuting or not, the pout is the mouth's come hither. Duchovny's Mulder pouts with only his lower face, the rest exiting stage right into deadpan. This understatement is over the top. Irony and availing, the Janus profiles of celebrity today, vie in every frame of the Duchovny close-up. "Come hither" and "whatever" in one face.

Open lip pouting is the lotus position of his face. But it is more lotus than lotus. Lotus + irony.

The *deus ex machina* of the abstracting face has left the house, and locked itself out looking in.

Xtreme nexus of will and abulia, this is the countenance of a kind of vertical hemiplaegia, a selfsame face's south labouring its *Incisivii labii superioris*, its *Depressor labii inferioris*, and all the other muscles of its humiliation, while its north vacates, abstracts, disses appearance.

I phoned a few local cosmetic facial surgeons to see if any have a Mulder Makeover. None do, but you can get 1/2cc of collagen injected in one lip for \$225, \$375 for 1cc split between two lips. Time, however, is not on your side with this pout enhancement, which will give your lips the extra added "volume" you desire for only 3 months. If you want more staying power you'll have to spring \$2600 to have your own fat transplanted from some nether region to a pout that will have a 3-year life

expectancy, or the same \$2600 for lip implants which will probably survive your face. Irony isn't included.

To achieve the appearance of irony you might get injections of botulinin toxin (bo-tox), which, in small doses smartly divorces nerves from muscles, and in larger doses, Kurds from life in Iraq.

Irony is the saving face, if not grace, of today's pout. Duchovny, Love, Silverstone, Pitt. Irony is the default mode of the whatever-weathered face, even as the pout is saying "Put the organ of your attention here." The pout is *kapo* to the face, says the rest of the face, as if irony firewalls it from its own complicity.

Duchovny is not Marilyn because the rest of his face disavows in its deadpan, what the pout avails. His face is Corey Hart on a bo-tox binge, because he left his sunglasses at home.

The movie *Excess Baggage* has a couple of pouters in Benicio del Toro and Alicia Silverstone and neither of them is Marilyn. There is the lovable lout pout of Benicio del Toro, but he's only wearing it for this character. There is Alicia Silverstone who's face has perma-pout drag at the wingtips of the mouth. Her face looks knotted in a Gordian sulk older than origin, like it was *nevernewborn*. Just looking for the pout she had before the world was born.

In "The Aesthetic Significance of the Face" Georg Simmel said "The fact that in the face mere bodily weight need not be overcome to any noticeable degree strengthens the impression of its spirituality." *Gravitas* rather than gravity proper, freights the face at its best.

But gravity will do to a pout what it does to cleavage. Alicia needs a pout bra. Her pout is Stevie Nicks minus a decade's dissolution, or Sally Struthers without orphans. But she isn't Marilyn. She isn't Marilyn because she also has this way of licking the inner rim of her pout to signify savvy disgust, little hints her own pout tastes like an ashtray to her, intimations of a hurl. But she pouts anyway.

Pout bra is what Nietzsche thought culture itself was, at least the culture rooted in Christianity. For him, Christian *ethos* is *ressentiment's* trainer bra. In Christ, the inimitably proximate proxy, we figured for the human portfolio the pouting apotheosis of suffering. Read as *the* ordinary proxy, Christ is more Marilyn than Marilyn.

Pitt is not Marilyn because he pretends he's not putting out for anyone but himself when he pouts. Pitt is his own Pout Club. In one Annie Liebowitz photo he wears the

middle-distance-is-mine pout, where with Marilyn that middle distance was always for you and nobody else but you.

There's also Pitt's *uberpout* giving succor to the 14th Dalai Lama, the bodhi of insuperable compassion, in one more panorama where history pouts histrionic. It offers the fantasy of the egoless and the ego finding common ground, in the ego. This is *Seven Years in Tibet*, more aptly *Seven Years of Pout Elocution*.

Still, Duchovny remains the pout laureate (and he's also, in fairness, a passable poet). The Duchovny pout is so noncommittal it can be a *koan* of the sulk, the sound of one lip pouting.

The ancient Greeks considered us impelled by desire for recognition, by *thymos*. Modern celebrity is a kind of thymotic cull, the interest compounded on others' interest. At its pseudo-inadvertent best the Duchovny pout is such a cunning linguist of thymotic cunnilingus (!?) that even I want to put the *cunnius* of my interest there.

Much work has been done in the last decade studying facial recognition processes and it serves at least two purposes. One is the understanding of *prosopagnosia*, the inability to recognize faces, caused by impairment of face sensitive cells in the inferior temporal cortex and elsewhere. ("Greek *prosop* [face] + A + Greek *gnosis* [to know]") The other is the development of facial surveillance/ identification systems such as *Eigenface* ("After acquiring an initial training set of images, they calculate the eigenfaces (eigenvectors) for the matrix and use those to define a 'face space'"[Sukthankar, 2000]) and *FaceIt* which can "automatically locate faces in complex scenes, track and identify who they are totally hands off, continuously and in realtime."

Face recognition software is a subset of the "sightless vision" Paul Virilio saw in the emergent wares of "visionics", and *FaceIt* is in fact a product of one Visionics Corporation. The recognition tool is the mienless means. We are becoming recognition tools.

This machination of recognition is symptom of a sort of sociosomatic *prosopagnosia*, or is it vice versa? We lose our ability to recognize faces and begin to see only potential pouts. Even when we're not consciously critical, we read the pout of celebrity for the *eigenvectors* of capitulation and resistance, how the famous face veils itself with availing. And the face that presents is the one that answers this audience of our cynicism. Ours is the age of the *eigenschafted* face, the face as proxy It, as pout. "Continuously and in realtime" we are become failsafe *flaneurs* of faciality, and the pouts *celebre* are what we thereby countenance.

We devalue that unequalled unity of a complexity of parts, which Simmel found characteristic of the aesthetically regarded face, and we degrade the infinity of responsibility which Emmanuel Levinas argued others' faces signify in us. A *prosopagnosia* that veils both aesthetic unity and ethic infinity is, well, hard to face.

Pouts never marry well, so I rented the *X Files* movie last year expecting any kisses to be virtual. There are two, and they are.

One is the pout-to-pout rescucitation of Scully by Mulder's xtreme kiss of life. The other pout *de deux* is a spectacle of two deadpans fading towards a passion as they make their separate passes for our attention.

Two kissables do not a kiss make! If two pouts meet in an ostensive kiss (try it), their passivities keep each other exterior, rather than sharing an interior between. No kiss, but lots of fuss, when two kissables concuss.

Parallel pouts never meet.

Put that in your pout and sulk it.

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Steven Whittaker is working on a book titled *Things Hidden Since the End of the World*.