

***Visual Pleasure and Nasal Elevation: A Television Teleology*, by Taryn P. Cursive-Waters**

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For over twenty years Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" has been fervently and ubiquitously applied by scholars of the celluloid arts. Her focus on the eye as the center of the viewing experience-through the gaze of character, cameraman, and audience-has served as an explicatorial key for hundreds of authors of hundreds of books and articles on film and television. One such scholar has boldly asked the question: "If the eye, why not the nose?" The resultant work is *Visual Pleasure and Nasal Elevation*, by Taryn P. Cursive-Waters. Oxford scholar Cursive-Waters, a student of John Fiske who has since repudiated that luminary's techniques of content analysis, has written a work which is eclectic in approach and sweeping in scope. This soon-to-be-seminal text covers applications which are sociological, Freudian, and Lacanian; Jungian, Bakhtinian, and Baudrillardian; of course, Feminist; and, to conclude, she offers an audience study which, in its sheer inventiveness, offers a retroactive construct of the ordered nature of television-in effect, a television teleology.

Visual Pleasure and Nasal Elevation begins with a sociological analysis of the straightforward nasal presentation of *Dragnet's* Joe Friday. The raised nostrils of his cohort Detective Gannon (played by Harry Morgan) expose a sublimated primitive masculine contest for place which, in the case of Frank Gannon, is merely failed display. While Gannon is in one sense Friday's cohort on the series, the sociological cohort Gannon represents-those men who have never made it to the level of supervisor, to the ranks of control, to the top rung of the corporate ladder, to the heights of the hierarchy-this sociological caste can only aim their noses at higher places, as Gannon lifts his toward his taller partner. Sergeant Joe Friday-the man named after the last day of the work week, a time which hints at freedom, which forecasts autonomy for workers-Friday represents that socioeconomic group which controls workers. His "full frontal nasality," as Cursive-Waters has termed it, is a blunt representation of one who has nothing to hide and nothing to fear. A more recent police drama presents a similar pairing. In *Hill Street Blues*, Capt. Frank Furillo is aided by Lt. Henry Goldblum. Whose is the more prominent nose? Again, the naso-sociological correlation is clear: Furillo's nose is unquestionably more prominent. And, indeed, he offers his own variation on "full frontal nasality"; often when he addresses his men, he raises his eyes but flattens his voice while making sure not to thrust his nose forward, carefully avoiding the primitive contest for place that, in *Dragnet*, Gannon's nostril's unsuccessfully gesture towards; thus Furillo disarms his men and maintains his place in the sociological scheme. Cursive-Waters notes in passing an intertextual irony: Frank (the Failure) Gannon's name is echoed in the name of the man who always ends up on top despite successive power struggles-Capt. Frank Furillo. Can this be coincidence? When one considers the fact that Harry is traditionally a nickname for Henry, and that therefore Harry (Henry) Morgan's name is recalled by the name Henry Goldblum, the likelihood of coincidence seems miniscule. But the names merely reinforce the overarching nasal pattern.

In contrast to Gannon's false naso-sociological elevation, Cursive-Waters applies Freudian analysis to the frequently elevated proboscis of *Star Trek's* Vulcan Mr. Spock, which (in parallel to the famous raised eyebrow) represents genuine intellectual and physical superiority over the stereotypically masculine Capt. Kirk, whose response of frequent retractive facial gestures (or "nasal retreats") suggests to Cursive-Waters a classic castration fear. The traditional equation of nose and phallus plays a large part in Cursive-Waters' analysis. Given that Vulcans are not only twice as strong as humans but also intellectually more well-endowed, the Captain's subliminal reaction to Spock's nasal elevation is understandable. The underlying elements of the "nasal retreat" are perhaps most blatantly displayed in the episode "Amok Time." The normally restrained, logical Vulcans are not only immensely strong and intelligent; they also, every seven years, turn into sexual maniacs. When Kirk unintentionally comes between the sex-mad Spock and his betrothed, Spock wields a Vulcan lirpa, a combination slicing and smashing device, in direct sexual contest; and Kirk, in shock, retracts his nose as he attempts to avoid Spock's

weapon and, almost simultaneously, looks down at his own chest to see that Spock has indeed drawn blood. (Some of you may remember the scene.) In terms of phallus, weapon, and nasal elevation, Spock is dominant. He ritually "kills" Kirk, conquers him. The fact that Spock later feels guilty for doing so, the fact that ship's doctor Leonard McCoy had "faked" the captain's death to ensure his survival, does not palliate Spock's genuine and dangerous triumph. Just as the female elements of *Star Trek* fandom tended to focus on Spock as a sexual object, so this episode plays out the sexual power which at most times in the series is sublimated in the series in the apparently supercilious gesture of nasal elevation.

Thus, just as Mulvey concentrates on the male gaze as the normal delimiter of visual pleasure, so Cursive-Waters codes nasal elevation as, in most cases, essentially masculine. In one chapter, however, she indulges in a daring variation on her pattern. In the section entitled "The Warlock Lacan," Cursive-Waters cites the vertical "frisson de nez" of Samantha the witch as a recurrent Lacanian epiphany of identity: in Samantha's case, the Lacanian mirror is constituted by the glazed eyes of her husband Darren, eyes which are themselves objectified by Samantha's insistence on her own essence. The fact that Samantha is always emerging, and never completely emerged, from the infantile state is indicated by her frequent appearance in nightgowns or negligees. As Jane Gaines says, clothing can be an "emblematic restatement of character traits" (21); and Anne Hollander points out that the traditional garment of the female intellectual is the black turtleneck. In contrast, Samantha dresses in pallid pastels. Far from being sensual or sexual, this clothing is the apparel of one who is not yet ready to leave the sheltered world of home and enter the outer world, Darren's world of business. Like Kim Novak in *Bell, Book, and Candle*, Samantha has chosen to inhabit the infantile interior domestic world here represented by the Darren Stephens household, the womb of becoming. Nonetheless, the infantile Samantha engages in a fantasy of complete power, changing the laws of time and space through her private nasal gestures. And it should be noted that her evil twin cousin, the ironically named Serena (of whom more later), does dress in black turtlenecks, does hint at sexuality, and does also exercise her own brand of nasal elevation-the brief, intermittent elevation of the "frisson de nez."

Psychological criticism would not be complete without a visit with Carl Jung, and Cursive-Waters once more proves her theory's pertinence. In a study of the precedents for nasal interplay in television, she returns to the age of radio drama. This reviewer must note that in a work which purports to be about visual pleasure, a discussion of radio drama must perforce be classified as a digression. However, Cursive-Waters does make a case for the intellectual evocation of the visual nose-for what she calls "virtual nasality." In a complex argument based on a comparison of Jung's dream analysis to the response of radio audiences to auditory stimuli, she explicates the radio mystery drama called *The Shadow*. With the dark and brooding hero of this drama, the importance of Jung's concept of the Shadow Self could hardly be more strikingly displayed. And "who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows/nose."

Another diversion into auditory explication is perhaps more justifiable in terms of the overall text and the history of scholarship. Taryn Cursive-Waters has long been an admirer-indeed, one might say a follower-of Kaja Silverman, whose well-known work *The Acoustic Mirror* discusses the representations of and reactions to the female voice in cinema. It is perhaps not inappropriate for this reviewer to reveal that, as a result of informal collaboration with Cursive-Waters, Silverman is about to publish a sister volume to *The Acoustic Mirror*-a new book entitled *The Acoustic Nostril*. The central text which the book studies is the work of Howard Cosell. Given that Cosell's work has been disseminated in a very erratic fashion, the simple establishment of the text has been almost Shakespearean in difficulty. Once past the textual difficulties, however, the application to Cursive-Waters' thesis is apparent, and she takes advantage of her prior knowledge of Silverman's work to offer a brief discussion. The indirect aggression of Cosell's expansionist vocabulary, the occasional forays into social commentary (e.g. Muhammad Ali and military service), the intrusively rhythmic cadence, and, above all, the sheer nasality of Cosell's tones, make him the epitome of the masculine sound. His is the elevated voice of nasality.

In contrast to the lonely sonority of Cosell, Cursive-Waters describes a multiplicity of tongues-in fact, a version of Bakhtinian heteroglossia-represented by the nasal variations of the sitcom *Barney Miller*. This series made perhaps a more thorough-going attempt at the inclusion of

various racial and ethnic types than any other, possibly even including *Star Trek*; indeed, it might even be said that *Barney Miller* is the *Star Trek* of comedy. Incidentally, while Barney Miller can be considered ethnically heteroglossic, a socioeconomic heteroglossia can be perceived in the characters of *Gilligan's Island*, ranging from the millionaire Thurston Howell III to the deck-hand Gilligan. Readers of the internet essay "L'Isle du Gilligan" are likely to have already made this inference. Those familiar with Bakhtin's theories will understand that he argued that the novel was a breakthrough genre because it could contain within itself the voices of many worldviews, many sociological entities. This "heteroglossia," Cursive-Waters maintains, is visually signified by Barney Miller's nasal variations. The Asian nose of Jack Soo's Nick Yemana is countered by the Aryan nose of Steve Landesberg's Arthur Dietrich; Abe Vigoda's Jewish "Fish" is balanced by Ron Glass's African-American Ron; Gregory Sierra's Chano; Max Gail's Wojohowicz; and so on. There is even an echo of the Harry Morgan/Henry Goldblum type in the short-nosed Ron Carey's Carl. But Cursive-Waters rightly notes that, rather than being genuinely variant voices of the people, these characters offer only the claymation of stereotype. On *Barney Miller*, no nose has a genuine encounter with another. Ironically, this dissociation of real nose from stereotypical nose may be the correct way to finally valorize the text: as Cursive-Waters points out, knowledgeable viewers would realize that the whitebread Barney Miller, the representative of the WASP head of the hierarchy, was in fact portrayed by the Jewish Hal Linden. The visual stereotype which Cursive-Waters terms "the Vigoda Nose" is undercut by Linden's nominally mainstream sniffer. And in the distinction between the actors' noses and the characters' noses resides the true heteroglossic element. One must distinguish between the private nose and the public nose-in Cursive-Waters' words, the "Publius Naso."

In another of her many erratic vectors of organization, Cursive-Waters proceeds to advance her nasal thesis by further pursuing the Barneys of television. Having discussed *Barney Miller*, she moves on to analyze the trembling nasal intrusions of Barney Fife, another of the Frank Gannon cohort of failed nostrils. She plunges deep into Freudianism once more with her discussion of children's television hero Barney the Dinosaur. She notes first that, in a gesture of self-deprecation, Barney frequently raises his stubby hands to his face, in the process pawing his nose. She then recalls the phallic-nasal correlation and points out that, despite the purported restraint of the hand gesture, the whole figure of the dinosaur can be seen as phallic: purple, trembling Barney hops up and down on stage and changes in size from small to large and back again. Your reviewer must here venture an aside: self-deprecating nasal gesture or no, do we really want our children watching this?

In her next chapter, Cursive-Waters examines more benign television texts. She identifies a tacit acknowledgment of Baudrillard in the nasal simulacra of the Olsen Twins of *Full House*. She grants that nasal simulacra have had their roles in earlier series; for instance, *The Patty Duke Show*'s Patty and Cathy clearly played on the unreality of their nasal identity. Samantha and Serena of *Bewitched*, mentioned earlier, also serve as simulacra, with focus on their essential nasal gestures. But Cursive-Waters argues that, in such series, the overt admission of the existence of simulacra weakens the ultimate power of the audience's own recognition of the pairs. In contrast, she says, there is a much subtler intercourse of signifier with signified in the text known as *Full House*. While for many television series young children are played by twins, in most cases the audience is unaware of that fact. The Olsen Twins of *Full House*, however, have become celebrities in their own right; and the audience's cognizance that the supposedly singular character "Michelle" is actually two entities, two entities which deny their own Saussurean "difference" while they attempt to serve interchangeably as signifiers of an unreal signified-such cognizance immeasurably enriches the text for the millions of *Full House* viewers. We are all aware of the distinction; but who among us can really tell those two noses apart?

In her final section of textual analysis, Cursive-Waters makes clear (if she had not done so already) the feminist applications of her theory. In this chapter, she deals with a variation on nasal elevation which she terms "nasal extension." Why is it, she asks, that a strong woman character such as Barbra Streisand (and she does claim to deal with Streisand as a character, as a public persona)-why does such a character as Streisand appear only in so-called "specials"? A woman of extensive talent whose power can unquestionably be seen to be represented nasally is a threat to patriarchy, Cursive-Waters argues; hence such as Streisand must be ghetto-ized as different. As women at large have been restrained by the supposed compliments of men, the

purportedly complimentary term "special" is revealed to hide a reality of merely token representation. Where is the woman with a nose of power? When she appears at all, she appears as a figure of mockery. Compare *The Brady Bunch's* Ann B. Davis with Florence Henderson, and ask yourself, "How long is Florence Henderson's nose?" And who is cupped within the hand of patriarchy? Clearly, the restricted nasality of the short-nosed woman represents her restricted place in the world. And the story of nasal dominance can be read again and again. Is Mary Tyler Moore's nose longer than Dick Van Dyke's? Is Cybill Shepherd's nose longer than Bruce Willis's? Can we even say that Scully's nose is longer than Mulder's? The pattern, as Cursive-Waters declares, is clear.

In the final segment of *Visual Pleasure and Nasal Elevation*, Cursive-Waters confronts the teleology of television. In what others have seen as a haphazard concomitance of patterns, Cursive-Waters has described a design which represents the whole of our culture in any given television series—a design which may not be conscious but, like Kant's forms of perception, is so elementally part of our existence as to be organically part of our natures—or, in Cursive-Waters' pithy phrase, "as plain as the nose on your face." Yet her audience study takes a surprising direction. Ethnographic audience scholars such as the pioneering Camille Bacon-Smith, author of *Enterprising Women*, have spent years coming to know and carefully to record the audience of a particular series. Cursive-Waters, in contrast, has chosen to speak to no viewers whatsoever. She asserts that audiences do not know themselves and that, further, this refusal of knowledge is part of their essential relationship to the television text, as well. This "aesthetic agnosticism," as she puts it, defines the nature of the television experience. I conclude this review with her own final words: "Viewers, in fact, abort the signifying nature of the medium by their own chosen distance from the text, by their refusal to press their noses against the screen of meaning."

Recommended for graduate programs in feminism and popular culture and for general interest libraries.