



## Parasite Cinema

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# Martine Beugnet and Kriss Ravetto-Biagioli

## Parasite Cinema

### *Abstract*

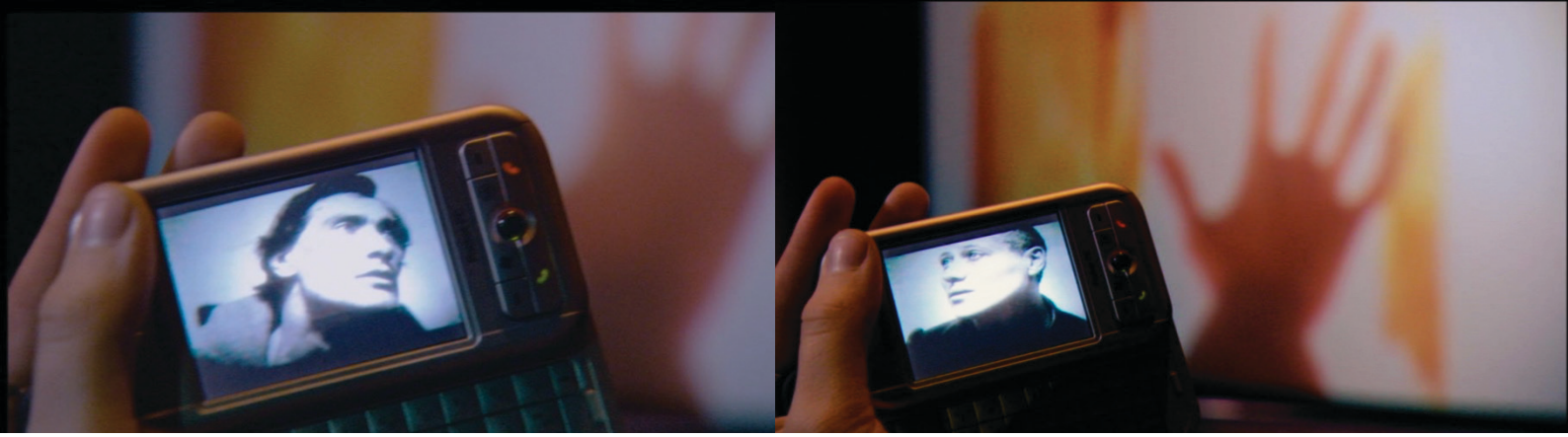
In *Theatre and its Double* Artaud explored how the plague communicates beyond simple contact, bringing death to those it touches, but also bringing fear, images, and the imagination, which transforms social relations, disorganising society and producing absurd anti-social actions. In this essay we would like to relate the emergence of a parasite-cinema, one that expresses itself through predatory forms of capture and communication, where images pullulate out of control (but do not destroy the body of the host), to Artaud's understanding of plague as a proliferation of communication.

### *Résumé*

Dans *Le Théâtre et son double* Artaud analyse la manière dont la peste communique au-delà du seul contact physique, apportant la mort à ceux qu'elle touche, mais apportant aussi la peur, des images et l'imagination qui transforme les rapports sociaux, désorganisant la société et produisant des comportements absurdes anti-sociaux. Dans cet essai nous nous proposons de mettre en rapport la conception artaudienne de la peste comme forme proliférante de communication avec l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme de cinéma, le cinéma parasite, qui s'exprime à travers des formes prédatrices de capture et de communication, des images qui pullulent en dehors de tout contrôle (mais sans détruire le corps de celui qui les accueille).

### *Keywords*

Antonin Artaud, parasite cinema, Atom Egoyan's *Artaud Double Bill*, pirated cinema, communication as contagion.



*Atom Egoyan's Artaud Double Bill (2007)*

Cinema has not completed its evolution. [It] will leave the screen and exist in [every] space... Magic characters will suddenly appear ... [to] turn houses up-side-down, break the walls, it will be progress forever! ... [A]ny amateur tourist of sound, smell or vision will carry with them something that will allow them to conjure up, next to them, the character of their dreams... However sublime the cry or the gesture, whatever the landscape one carries in one's pocket, the luminous effect that animates the slope of the hills... are all frozen-like, held in a mold that may be ingenious but is also forever fixed. Cinema is then comparable to these terrifying masks, that have lost their potency through time and use, and which the sorcerers themselves find fit only for the glass box in the museum.<sup>1</sup>

— Antonin Artaud

The cinema of the big screen may have lost some of its appeal to audiences accustomed to watching movies at home, downloading, or streaming them on mobile devices. Cinema, however, has not lost its potency. For the images projected on the big screen continue to circulate and shape our visual imagination. The scale and speed of this circulation has intensified with the spreading of a smaller, more pervasive version of the cinema which has found its way into every aspect of daily life. This is a clipped, parasitic form of cinema that recycles images and appropriates aesthetic conventions, forcing them to adapt to the restrictions of a new dispositif. With its small screen and limited storage space, it miniaturises and condenses film (like the reporting of the news or sporting events) to spectacular highlights, and as a result cinema, music videos, home-movies, and click-through native advertising fit into the same format. Thanks to these new portable devices, we can watch, but also capture, post, share, stream, and store clips that we carry everywhere with us. Virtual museums of luminous images are organised for us so that we can retrieve and display them on demand.

It is tempting to refer to what Antonin Artaud presciently described as a kind of pocket-cinema to describe how we now consume cinema on, and create it for, mobile devices and social media. But in so doing we need to also heed Artaud's warning that this experience of the cinema does not free us (or our spectacular companions) from commercial cinema and the marketing infrastructures attached to it that endlessly and obsessively sell us the same pre-packaged dreams so as to insure their own economic viability. Commercial film (and now media) industries continue to manufacture staid aesthetic masks that circulate at an accelerated pace, making

<sup>1</sup> All citations of Antonin Artaud are from *Oeuvres* and *Le théâtre et son double* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). Translations from French to English are provided by Martine Beugnet.

cinematic images accessible at any time. These images follow us everywhere, conjuring up and animating static representations of predictable relations between us and the characters of our dreams. As Raül Ruiz puts it: “Cinema in its industrial form is a predator” that feeds off the spectators’ longing to kill the “noonday daemon,” which Ruiz defines as the progeny of *tristitia* and *ennui* (Ruiz 1995, 73). Rather than exorcizing the daemon, commercial cinema kills time. But in the process this dream factory turns inconsequential actions, unconscious decisions, and chance occurrences into a normative system of meaning. Commercial cinema injects order and narrative meaning into the dreams it offers us—the manufactured dreams that infiltrate even our most private spaces.

As a means of loosening the grip that narrative film has on us, Artaud called for a different kind of cinema, what Naomi Greene called a “cinema of cruelty” “that would liberate all ‘the dark forces of thought’” (qtd in Greene 1984, 29). Many critics have been attracted to the notion of a “cinema of cruelty,” that modifies or parasitizes Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty,” as a way of resisting commercial cinema—in this sense, we are no exception.<sup>2</sup> However, rather than concentrate on the visceral effects of the cinema of cruelty that disorders the bodies by “acting directly on the grey matter of the brain” (Artaud 1972, 65), in what follows we propose to take a different approach. We will examine what Artaud found to be so radical about moving-images as modes of communication: their ability to parasitize, infect and contaminate their host, also to turn the host into a carrier of venial forms of art and a transmitter of endlessly regurgitated dream-images, gestures and expressions; and at the same time, their potential to disorganise and raze established relations between guests and hosts, predators and their prey, which opens a space for a possible renewal (Artaud 2004, 166).<sup>3</sup> Both outcomes produce their own forms of violence. Emergent communications and their technological platforms are not neutral, as Artaud pointed out, they are also radically destructive, they “turn our houses upside down,” invade our dreams, beliefs and condition our behaviours, in the name of so-called “progress.” The new technologies and the moving-images they bear perform acts of aggressive self-replication (infecting and taking over the host), but images transmitted through such technologies also have the potential to spin out of control, and therefore “cause the mask to fall, to uncover the lie[s], cowardice, baseness and hypocrisy” endemic to all forms of social (media) organisation (Artaud 1964, 46). Pocket-cinema breeds complacency, and a tacit acceptance of the ideological beliefs, models of identification, and social controls installed in the images we fetishise. Yet, another cinema, a para-cinema, accompanies this pocket-cinema. We want to turn our attention to pocket-cinema as both a parasitic form of image circulation and as para-cinema—a site of potential radical disorganisation invoked by Artaud. This strain of para-cinema is one of contagious delirium (*délire communautaire*) that doubles and redoubles images that, in turn, spin out of control (Artaud 1964, 38-9).

New modes of media appropriation and circulation do not just live *on* their hosts as predators would their prey but also *in* the host as a parasite. More than a predator—that sees its spectators as prey in the form of targets of opportunity, potential consumers, commodities, speculative futures to be mined for value—parasite-ci-

2 In addition to Naomi Greene’s essay (Greene 1984) that seeks to rethink Artaud’s call for a cinema of cruelty in conjunction with his interest in the concept of the double and with it subjective cinema, see (Koutsourakis 2016). He argues that: “Cruelty can be seen as a resistance to commodification and not as a way of putting forward abstract moralistic and transhistorical ideas related to the ‘inherent violence in human nature’” (Koutsourakis 2016, 67). See also chapter 7 of Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (Deleuze 1989); see also (del Río 2005); (Jamieson 2007); (Virmaux, Sanzenbach 1966); (Beugnet 2008); and (Ravetto 2012).

3 For a discussion of the unsettling doubling or simultaneity of media—tele-vision and tele-communications—that give us the impression of being on the scene as we are sitting on the couch, see (Weber 1996, 114-115).

nema installs itself in the host, reorganising the content, thus, corrupting the meaning of the medium, and infecting all ancillary products with its singular goal of frenetic dissemination. However, as Michel Serres points out: “The host is not prey, for [s]he offers and continues to give... [W]hat is essential is neither the image nor the deep meaning, neither the representation nor its hall of mirrored reflections, but the system of relations. The relation is that of guest to host [hôte à hôte]” (Serres 1982, 7-8).<sup>4</sup> It is the parasitical relationships that ushers in what Artaud deemed the most radical form of communication: the plague. The plague communicates by rapidly replicating itself in its host, resulting in the host’s death or extreme purification. However worn out and repeated the terrifying mask of the plague, the Black Death or the dance of death may be, it is still a form of unruly communication that is not limited to simple contact. As Artaud explains, using the tale of the Sardinian city of Calgari, saved from the epidemic by its viceroy’s decision to close its harbour to in-coming boats, the plague travels with images and through dreams:

The boat, which passes within earshot of Calgari... does not bring the plague there, but the viceroy receives certain emanations from it in a dream; for it cannot be denied that between the viceroy and the plague a ponderous, if subtle, communication, was established, and it is too easy to blame the communication of such a disease to contagion by simple contact. But these relations between the viceroy Saint-Rémys and the plague, strong enough to liberate themselves as images in his dream, are not strong enough to infect him with the disease (Artaud 1964, 24).

Similar to the plague that already communicates a ponderous and subtle mode of communication before the epidemic strikes, parasitical images and dreams disorganise established social relations, without bacteria, rats, physical contact, and therefore, without the actual disease. Artaud explores how the plague communicates beyond simple contact, meaning that it does not simply bring death to those it touches, it also brings fear, images, the imagination, which transforms social relations, disorganising society and producing absurd anti-social actions. The expression, manifestation, and transmission of this immaterial or spiritual form of the plague occurs through spectacle.<sup>5</sup>

In what follows we would like to relate the emergence of a parasite-cinema, one that expresses itself through predatory forms of capture and communication, where images pullulate out of control (but do not destroy the body of the host), to Artaud’s understanding of plague as a proliferation of communication. Instead of rehearsing the debate on the end of cinema, we would like to explore how emerging technologies like social media and mobile devices not only remediate (through a parasitical relationship to) the cinema, but invigorate parasitic forms of the cinema, exposing, in the process, the underlying intimate relationships between predators, prey, and communication. We propose to treat Atom Egoyan’s short film entitled *Artaud Double Bill* (2007) as an illustrative parable of this parasite-cinema. *Artaud Double Bill* stages its own set of parasitical relations between big screen cinema and its miniaturised double (streamed on mobile devices and social media), and amongst a host of disorienting communications. As in Artaud’s vision for a theatre of the plague, this parasitical cinema disorganises the bodies of spectators as well as those bodies captured by the

<sup>4</sup> In English, host only means the person/organism that receives the one that visits, while in French “hôte” means both, and here Serres wants to emphasise the ambiguity of the word ‘hôte’. In the English translation Serres keeps the original French in brackets.

<sup>5</sup> In *Le théâtre et son double* Artaud writes: “Out of this spiritual freedom with which the plague develops without rats, bacteria, and without contacts, we can draw the absolute, dark performance of a spectacle that I will attempt to analyse” (33).

image, but it is itself beyond the affective experience of the individual body. Cinema, like the plague, depends on a chain of parasitic formations and processes (industries and infrastructures, the dissemination of images through replication and remediation, and their doubling out of context) and two types of carriers (those who are resistant to the plague, who act as hosts, and those who become its prey).

In the film, a young Artaud, acting in Carl T. Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc* (1928) is noticed for his striking appearance thus invoking the complicated system of parasitical relations (*hôte à hôte*) that turns beautiful images (like that of Artaud) into fetish objects to be recycled and replayed. But Artaud does not only play the role of a beautiful image; the film also conjures up Artaud's thinking about the plague and its ponderous communicability through the circulation of images. Egoyan's relation to Artaud is justly parasitical: the film bills itself under Artaud's name, appropriating his image, his vision of images that can be pocketed and conjured up at will. It adds to this list of parasitical relations the relation of spectators to the spectacle, author to auteur, auteur to cinéphilia, and the cinema of the big screen that feeds spinoff (parasitical) economies.

## Artaud Double Bill

Commissioned as part of an anthology of short films (*Chacun son cinéma / To each his own cinema*, 2007) that commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Cannes Film Festival, Egoyan was asked, along with thirty-six other world-renown filmmakers, to make a film that is set in a movie-theatre, lasting only three minutes. While the three-minute instruction recalls the limited format of early cinema—the short, actuality films of Auguste and Louis Lumière that ran for the duration of the film strip—it also points to the fact that more video consumption takes place on online media-hosting platforms (YouTube, Facebook, and Snapchat) than in a film theatre and, on average, these videos last less time than an early 50-second Lumière film.<sup>6</sup> A good amount of the content on media-hosting platforms is “freebooted” (a nuanced way of saying, pirated) copyrighted material that is uploaded to a site for the sole purpose of accumulating viewers so as to garner commercial profit through advertising revenue. Because it is miniaturised and truncated it allows cinema to go viral. While offering itself as possible target of such freebooting, *Artaud Double Bill* asks us to think about the relationship between citing, pirating, and pocketing cinema as a parasitical relation.

The film follows two characters, Anna and Nicole, who were supposed to attend a screening of Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre sa vie* (*My Life to Live*, 1962) together. While Anna shows up to the screening, Nicole decides to see another film, Atom Egoyan's *The Adjuster* (1991). *Artaud Double Bill* alternates between two auditoriums and two other film screenings, following the to-and-fro of text messages that Anna and Nicole exchange in the course of their respective screenings. But the characters of this film remain obscure, we only see images

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<sup>6</sup> The most popular sites for watching film, video and moving images Youtube (with are 4 billion viewings per day), Facebook (with 8 billion viewings per day but the average content is watched only for thirty-seconds), and Snapchat (with 10 billion viewings per day but the site only supports ten-second-long clips). There is some controversy about what constitutes “watching.” See Hank Green who argues that Facebook cheats about viewing and steals its content from other sites, <https://medium.com/@hankgreen/theft-lies-and-facebook-video-656b0ffed369#.sfjnz2mg>. (last accessed on 23 August 2016) and the study conducted by researchers at Duke University who provided the results of their test at <http://www.slideshare.net/CaraRousseau/facebook-video2015-slideshare> (last accessed on 23 August 2016). But the industry consensus is that the average production for an online format watched on a mobile device is to be consumed in a minute and under.

on the screen of the films they watch and the mobile devices they use. Unlike the characters in the films they watch, the two protagonists of *Artaud Double Bill* are shot indirectly, from above or behind, giving us little information about who they are, what they are doing, and what they make of the films they are attending. It is only through their SMS messages and the small gestures of the hand that we understand their relation to each other and their reactions to the films they (and we) watch (with them). The film asks us to think about what it means to be connected through SMS, when such a connection not only implies a strange sense of intimacy that is both immediately present (as new texts flash on the screen) but physically at a distance (across two different locations). And communication is, at the same time, subject to corporate (telecommunications) regulations and monitoring but still allows for users to copy and circulate pirated images.

This entangled communication is further emphasised by the playful mise-en-abyme that Egoyan orchestrates through an intricate assemblage of films within the film. Anna watches *Vivre sa vie*'s Nana (Anna Karina) sitting in a cinema watching Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, at the same time Nicole witnesses film censor Hera (Arsinée Khanjian), the central character of *The Adjuster*, watching (and, surreptitiously, filming) a pornographic feature she has to assess as part of her job.<sup>7</sup> Carol Jacobs points out that this is "at least a 4-D situation" (Jacobs 2012, 11): we see at least six locations in the two film theatres; two of those locations are the film theatres where Anna and Nicole sit; the two other locations are the film theatres where Hera and Nana sit; and the last two locations are the sets of Dreyer's and Egoyan's respective films. In addition, we look at two spectators, which are in turn looking at a movie wherein the leading actresses are again looking at another movie.<sup>8</sup> But our sense of location is completely disoriented by the fact that we do not know what film we are looking at, nor do we know from whose perspective we are meant to be seeing. For instance, when the film cuts from Anna seated in the theatre watching *Vivre sa vie* to Nicole who watches *The Adjuster* we do not see Nicole, rather we watch Hera, who also enters a film theatre (just as Anna had in the previous shot). But, not only do we see Hera's face, we are made to understand that what we see on the screen is from Hera's perspective. However, instead of watching the film with Hera, the next shot shows Hera on the screen facing us. Rather than providing us with any establishing shots, Egoyan continues to cut directly between close-up images—from the tear-stained face of Nana who looks at (or mirrors) Jeanne's (Renée Falconetti's) tear-stained face as she declares her own martyrdom to the screen of Anna's mobile phone (where she types, "What are you watching") to the face of Hera who pulls out her video camera from her bag to record the raciest scenes in the porno film she watches. The introduction of piracy, pirated images, citations of iconic films, and text-messaging multiplies screens and perspectives, but makes it difficult to understand the context in which these images emerge or to whom they belong.

It is as Anna and Nicole start texting each other, that Egoyan superimposes the screen of the mobile phone in close-up onto the cinematic images deployed on the large screen in the background. As Artaud appears in Dreyer's film, watched by Nana (Karina) and by contemporary spectator Anna, Anna is struck by his beauty and texts Nicole ("Artaud is beautiful..."). When Nicole asks for proof ("how beautiful?????"), Anna shoots a sequence with her mobile phone and sends it on. However, as Francesco Casetti points out, Anna's aesthetic realisation "causes sensation, not meaning"—by placing the image of Artaud under the banner of "the beautiful" Anna prohibits Nicole's identification with the character of the monk (played by Artaud), leaving her only

7 See (Beugnet 2015, 570-589).

8 See (Jacobs 2012, 211-13), who discusses this 4-D situation in detail.

to look at Artaud (the person) as an object of beauty (Casetti 2011, 4). Artaud's image (along with Falconetti's) appears doubled and redoubled—cited by Godard in *Vivre sa vie* that is in turn cited by Egoyan—but the image is also pirated, captured on Anna's mobile phone and sent to her friend Nicole who looks at Artaud against the background of the finale of *The Adjuster*. These images appear to drift across theatres and contexts, confusing citation with pirating. But this drift also injects the narrative and mood of one film with another. Just as the image of Artaud that travels across theatres transports and cuts *Jeanne d'Arc* into *The Adjuster*, remixing the tragic with the obscene and the traumatic, so does Artaud's concept of doubling that carries with it the radical potential to communicate its own contagious delirium, which becomes central to the film. In the process of this doubling and reshuffling, the film's tone of quotidian banality belies its own perversity.

Nicole watches, (on her own tiny screen), these images of Artaud and Falconetti extracted from the scene where the young monk played by Artaud tells Jeanne she is to die (by fire) at the stake. Simultaneously, in the background, we see the scene from the end of *The Adjuster* where the hand of Noah (the adjuster played by Elias Koteas) reaches out to the flames of his burning house. Most of us will not remember that Noah uses this dwelling (which might not be his own) to house a family whose own house burned down in a fire, and thus he inserts himself (like both a parasite and a host) in the grieving family. While the notions of collecting needy people and “playing house” maybe lost to viewers unfamiliar with Egoyan's previous film, citations from both films double the gestures of the hand, handiwork, human action, and fire resulting in a complex image of destruction, contagion, and purification—a vision that recalls Artaud's description of plague. The images of Artaud and Falconetti set against the background of the fire are immediately followed by the intertitle “la mort”—which is Joan's (Jeanne's) answer to the monk (played by Artaud) who asks her: “Where is your great victory?” and “how will you be delivered into martyrdom?” These lines are repeated in *Vivre sa vie* but also in other films made by Godard—notably in *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989-1998) and *Notre Musique* (2004) where Godard also plays with cited (pirated) images and juxtaposition. However, “la mort” seems to take on a host of different meanings at the end of Egoyan's film since this pristine title card (from Godard's film that is divided into themed sections) is in turn juxtaposed to credits that resemble the degraded look characteristic of analogue film (itself a highly flammable material). “La mort” becomes more of an indexical shifter than a title card, pointing to the possible death of cinema and of cinéphilie, but also foreshadowing the death of characters like Nana (at the end of *Vivre sa vie*), Joan (at the end of *Jeanne d'Arc*), Bubba and Mimi (at the end of *The Adjuster*), and signalling the end of the film(s) we watch.<sup>9</sup>

“La mort” replaces the more traditional intertitle “Fin” (the end), but in Egoyan's film the face of a martyr is also already presented on a screen alight with flames, carefully framed by the outline of a hand that seem to hold up or touch the image of the face as much as it reaches out to the flames in the background. This conclusion reads like a warped rendering of Artaud's bleak comment on the demise of artistic creation in a world deadened by petrified forms of expression. All that remains for artists when conventions have drained the life out of art is to stand “like martyrs being burnt at the stake, and wave from the pyre” (Artaud 2004, 509). Yet, under certain conditions, destruction and creation go hand in hand: one has, Artaud explains, to break the existing forms in order to touch life. And though such a process should not become exclusive, it is important to re-

<sup>9</sup> For a definition of an indexical shifter see (Benvineste 1971, 237-238). Benvineste argues that language communicates, in that it transmits a sense of intersubjectivity, exchanging one subject for another, but what shifts here is not just a linguistic subject, but a perspective understood as subjective and embodied.

cognise that not anyone can do this, that it requires preparation (Ibid., 509). Interestingly, Egoyan's humorous *mise-en-scène* both celebrates and ultimately recoups the process of destruction of the classical cinema by new regimes of interventionist viewing and imaging (enthusiastically embraced and activated by amateurs, but no less prone to the deadly effects of standardization than its older cinematic counterpart). For if *Artaud Double Bill* documents a process of pirating and doubling, it does so in the form of a film authored by a well-known filmmaker, but also as a film that calls for attentive spectatorship and a cinéophile's knowledge.

## Performing the role of the audiovisual tourist

*Artaud Double Bill* points to an intricate set of relations contemporary spectators have to cinema beyond homage to old fashioned cinéphilia (its citation and gestures toward iconic images and auteurship) and its ability to promote an absorbed spectatorship as opposed the inattentive and fragmented forms of "hands-on" (interactive) viewing practices displayed by Anna and Nicole. As Casetti points out, Nicole and Anna, the spectators in Egoyan's film engage in a "performance" of watching rather than an act of attendance. Casetti describes this performative form of spectatorship in *Artaud Double Bill* as a shift from a passive viewing to a series of prescribed actions, "sensory doing" "cognitive doing," "emotional doing," "technological doing," and "relational doing" (Casetti 2011, 7-9). In this performative model, the display of the attendant's technical competences replaces the immersive experience of the film afforded by attentive watching to the exclusion of all other activities and of the world outside the auditorium. As opposed to the cinema of the big screen that makes our surroundings disappear when the theatre lights go down, Anna and Nicole are dividing their attention between large and small screens, as they continue to "keep in touch." However, in Artaud's words, they can also be seen as "tourists" of images and sounds rather than creators of a new type of cinema. In the end, for Egoyan, Anna and Nicole are doubles—they are not simply tourists or spectators, they are two uncredited actresses performing the role of tourists and spectators.

Still, where Nana, Godard's character, becomes prey to the image, absorbed, like the classic female spectator, in the spectacle of Falconetti's face to the point of over-identification, Anna and Nicole view their respective films with sufficient detachment and technical competence to select, circulate and comment on images in the course of the screening. Nana never gets to "live her life." She wants to become an actress, but as if predestined by the name who connects her to Emile Zola's tragic heroine, she becomes instead a prostitute to make ends meet in 1960s Paris. She cannot go the cinema without being subjected to unwanted male company—we watch as an unknown man puts his arm around her—and, ultimately, she ends up dying in the crossfire between two pimps who want to claim her as their exclusive property. Dreyer's Jeanne is an innocent youth scrutinised and tortured by male judges, and condemned to death by patriarchal religious intolerance. Egoyan's Hera is a professional film censor who is shown being sexually harassed by two of her male colleagues while watching films in which other women are being explicitly and even violently sexually exploited. All three characters represent different facets of female oppression considered to be the by-product of male economies that treat women as prey (to be consumed and disposed of) in the process of reaffirming their own authority and viability. On the face of it, one might rejoice at the sight of two young women (Anna and Nicole) who not only enjoy a harassment-free film screening, but also can exchange appreciative com-

ments about male beauty and collect iconic images of men. But Egoyan's film is too unsettling to simply read it as freeing women from the roles that commercial cinema (and now social media) makes them play, namely, sexual objects, prey, images that offer themselves up for men's visual pleasure and sexual excitement. In the interactive (parasitical) relation to the cinema, spectators reverse their relationship to the cinema (*hôte à hôte*), but in the process they become carriers of those very images that exploit them, and fall prey to new forms of misogyny (stalking, trolling, and bullying on social media). For all its radical potential, this new *dipositif* seems to have done little to "liberate" women from the images and roles they have been inscribed, nor does it liberate this new interactive user who carries with her just another form of organisation and ordering of her actions in the form of "smartphones" and "personalised smart devices"—those same devices we see in the film already anticipating, guiding and autocorrecting Anna's and Nicole's SMS messages.

*Artaud Double Bill* nonetheless offers itself as an explicit illustration of the contemporary replacement of the spectator by the "user" and the domination of the "interface" over the traditional mode of screening—a contemporary reclaiming of the visual that kills the host's (the big screen's) power of fascination.<sup>10</sup> Nicole and Anna do not merely copy, clip, and circulate Dreyer's film, they can also insert their own intertitles, and thereby appropriate the images and change their meaning through the creation of a new set of captions or "anchor" texts. A gap opens between the original context (the poignancy of the scene in which Artaud, as the more compassionate of Joan of Arc's judges, tells her the news of her impending death), and the triviality of the comments that the two young women exchange alongside the images. This gap is further underscored by the vision of Nana, the heroine of Godard's film, who cries as she watches the same images. In perfect rehearsal of the Godard/Marker defense of the big screen,<sup>11</sup> Nana gazes up at Falconetti's face, and in turn, Godard intended for his spectators to see Karina's absorbed face as a massively enlarged close up. By contrast, Nicole and Anna are looking down at the small illuminated screen of their telephones. In Egoyan's *mise-en-scène*, the close-up of hands holding a mobile-phone replaces close-up shots of character's faces—the very ones that conventional cinema uses to identify and reveal characters' emotional expressions. Affect and the emotional relation to images is rendered disposable in the new immediate circulation of images. If there is any affective expression to *Artaud Double Bill*, it does not come from Anna's and Nicole's disaffected response to the films they are watching, rather it comes from the protagonists of other films or the films within these films.

10 See (André 2016).

11 Jean-Luc Godard comments: 'Cinema is larger than us; you should have to raise your eyes to the cinema screen. When you start lowering your eyes on a smaller display, cinema loses its essence (...) On television, you see the shadow of a film, the nostalgic memory of a film, its echo—never a film' (quote from Chris Marker's DVD rom *Immemory*, 1997).



*Atom Egoyan's Artaud Double Bill (2007)*

Béla Balázs posited that the face on a screen provides the viewer with a sense of intimate proximity and privileged access to the interior workings of the person behind the face (Balázs 1970, 43-5). Roland Barthes, on the other hand, famously described the sublimating power of the close up that transforms the face of the star into a mask with the power to enrapture the spectator.<sup>12</sup> But the remediated, parasitized close-ups of *Artaud Double Bill* no longer produce such an emotional connection: for Artaud, the human face has become “an empty force, a field of death (...) the human face hasn’t yet found its face” (Artaud 1970, 1534). “The assemblage (of affect to image, image to close-up, and close-up to face) implies a set of specific relations: between the close-up as a cinematic device that privileges, captures and magnifies micro-movements; the face (gesture, close-up image, or even, screen of the mobile device) as both a space of reflection and an act of expression (Ravetto-Biagioli forthcoming 2017).” Miniaturisation creates a different form of intimacy and fetishism, one that pertains to ownership (the image as collectable) rather than recognizance or sublimation.<sup>13</sup> Communication further increases the parasitical relation between the spectator’s sentiments and the luminous faces on the screen that transmit the illusion of intimacy and identity. In the case of *Artaud Double Bill*, the face, removed from its specific context, becomes a sample, collectable, interchangeable and reusable (as in the old Kuleshov experiment). Similarly, the signification of the face—the fact that it can stand in for a feeling (sexual arousal, catharsis, or passion) or a concept (like beauty, martyrdom, or death)—is up for grabs. Through their ability to circulate is redoubled, the close-ups lose their force as affect-images,<sup>14</sup> they become, in Artaud’s words, masks that have “lost their potency through time and use, and which the sorcerers themselves find fit only for the glass box in the museum” (Artaud 1970, 380).

## Contagion’s Many Masks

In Egoyan’s film, images quoted from his own and other filmmakers’ works are caught in a web of material and immaterial dispersion: a multiplication of devices and screens, a cross breeding of genres, from art cinema to pornography, and a montage of shots and perspectives in an out of diegetic and infra-diegetic worlds. The introduction of messaging and piracy, the citations of iconic films from distant periods of the history of the

<sup>12</sup> Roland Barthes talks in particular of the face of the star in the silent era, “filled with the profound secret that we implicitly associate with beauty when it does not speak” (Barthes 1953, 1-11).

<sup>13</sup> See (Beugnet 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Gilles Deleuze argues, “the affect-image is the close-up and the close-up is the face.” See (Deleuze 1986, 87).

cinema, and the mirroring effect of graphic cuts linking different films through similar visual motifs, further unmoor the gaze from an identifiable perspective, thus complicating the spectator's journey. *Artaud Double Bill* may be a short film that humorously accounts for the introduction of the distracted gaze at the heart of the cinematic experience, but for its short duration, it requires the utmost and sustained concentration from its audience. Nicole and Anna, the spectators/actors in Egoyan's film, might be distracted, but the spectators of Egoyan's film are expected to be attentive. In effect, for most of us, to make sense of the intricacies of Egoyan's three-minute exercise in applied cinéphilie and virtuoso montage probably requires several viewings. Not only does *Artaud Double Bill* call for an attentive spectator, one who is versed in the history of the cinema, but (and there lie the limits of the interventionist approach that Nicole and Anna incarnate) the spectator watching Egoyan's film has little need for an additional recording and screening device: there would be no point in the further manipulation and fragmentation of *Artaud Double Bill*'s already intricate, patchwork-like assemblage of images. And ultimately, a distracted, interventionist viewing would not allow us to engage with the aesthetic pleasures offered in Egoyan's treatment of its material.

For there is undeniable pleasure born out of the superimposition and collage of the heterogeneous body of images and sounds that the film assembles and disassembles. Egoyan plays on scale, textures, on variable focus and depth of field to produce contrasts and continuations both between and, through the internal montage of multiple screens, within shots. The soft typing noise from the mobile phone keyboard accompanies the soundtrack of the film that plays in the background, and the tiny, luminous screen superimposes itself to the large cinema screen. Soon, a miniaturised face appears in focus (and moves!) in the small frame held between Anna's fingers whilst an enormous hand moves dimly in the blurry background of the theatre screen. We read the screen as text messages slowly unravel, and then we let our gaze float in the obscure space of a darkened theatre. Caught within and by the changing layers of images, the eye may delight in the changing quality of the images—the movement between black and white and colour images, the definition of miniaturised images that play against their monstrous, projected counterparts, and the sudden, thrilling plunge into the cinema image itself, the face to face with the enlarged close-up that looms from the cinema screen above.

Yet there is a more perverse side to the cohabitation of the cinematic images and their parasitical, miniaturised counterpart: there is also a contamination of texts, contexts and films that corrupts expressions, sentiments and responses. This contamination of one film by another is clearly augmented by Egoyan's mixing of tracks and use of sound bridges in *Artaud Double Feature*. For example, when Artaud first appears on the screen we hear a rather complex layering of different soundtracks from *Vivre sa vie* and *The Adjuster* that are laid on top of the continuous purring of a film projector that becomes more and less audible throughout the film, the light clicking of keyboards as the two protagonists exchange text messages, and the films own haunting musical soundtrack counterposes slow melodic strings with a single piano playing in a higher key. The piano echoes the sound of the two women typing, while the elegiac sound of the strings reminds us of the *tristitia* of noonday daemon. It is the soundtrack for the pornography films that Hera watches that seem to interrupt the otherwise melancholic mode of the film, and seep into our reception of the images before us. When Anna's messages are transmitted to Nicole for instance, we hear (but do not see) the soundtrack of the porno films Hera watches. In one soundtrack, a woman tells a man: "I want you to take your cock out... I want you to jerk off." The sound of the woman's voice not only plays over Anna's message ("Artaud is beautiful") and Nicole response ("how beautiful?????"), but we still hear the woman's voice as the film cuts back

to the image of Artaud. By extending the soundtrack from *The Adjuster* onto both *Vivre sa vie* and the silent film *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc*, Egoyan perverts (and possibly comments on) Anna's evocation of Artaud's, Falconetti's, and Karina's beauty.

Beauty and the relation of the spectator / collector of images has suddenly changed tone from one of reverence to a rather graphic sexual fantasy. While the juxtaposition of *Vivre sa vie*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, and *The Adjuster* produces a sharp sense of contrast between religious passion (which is deeply felt by the prostitute, Nana) and the theatricality of sexual excitement, the continuous overlaying of sounds and soundtracks from one theatre to the next, corrupts all of the films' narrative meaning. In fact, Artaud, playing the part of the monk, seems to be sighing not in response to Joan who declares her own martyrdom, but in response to the sexual demands made by off-screen voice. Clearly, the pious image of Joan and the monk have been perverted by sounds of pornography and then the seeming near and then more distanced sound of fire. The fire shifts from what sounds like diegetic sound to extra-diegetic sound, as we watch the fire that burns the adjuster's house, and then watch as Nicole watches this same image on the screen. But both fire (the near and the distant one) remind us of Joan's own impending death by fire. These sound-bridges do not simply attach themselves to the corresponding images on the screen, constantly interrupting the emotional cues we are given by each film, performing its own form of violence on both the image and the viewer's expectations of how to read and understand such images. The sound design in *Artaud Double Bill* also functions like the theatre of the plague, "not because it is contagious, but because, like the plague, it is a revelation, driving forth, bringing out, the buried fundament of a latent cruelty through which all the perverse capabilities of the mind concentrate on an individual or on a people" (Artaud 1964, 44). The bleeding of sound into the image, and the collision of images, therefore, infects filmic relations on multiple levels, mixing the obscene (the pornographic film), with the traumatic (the burning of the house and death by fire), and the tragic (Joan's martyrdom), and revealing an inherent cruelty in the circulation of images out of control.

As Egoyan's film demonstrates, the encounter of new and old technologies, does not necessarily mummify images, relegating them to the museum glass box, as Artaud feared. Nor does it turn the technologies themselves into mere prosthetic extensions of user-interface commands, familiar to the point of ubiquity. On the contrary, the encounter of new and old technologies, their cohabitation of the same space and the congruent and incongruent treatment of the same images, makes their operations strange, noticeable again, as when they had first appeared.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, not only does the meeting of the minuscule and the gigantic bring us back to the realm of the grotesque and wonder characteristic of early cinema<sup>16</sup>, but their travel through space and time reanimates the magical nature of the film images. Yet, at the same time, the gesture of montage undermines and confounds not only spatial and temporal coherence, but systems of meaning, identification and emotional catharsis, religious sentiments and sexual proclivities, thus effectively capturing the "latent cruelty" that emerges through the parasitical cohabitation of the old and the new media. What is presented here is not a seamless transition between old and new media but an unmasking of the "latent cruelty" that such relations of desire, consumption, parroting, profiting, pirating, killing, feeding, exponentially proliferate and disseminate—*hôte à hôte*. It is the cruelty of seemingly ubiquitous and banal modes of communication that shines through with all

15 See (Mulvey 2006, 57). Indeed, to give Egoyan's film precise temporal borders proves difficult, for whilst the protagonists are equipped with portable devices, these devices already appear outdated to our 2016 spectators' eyes.

16 On the subject of screen size and the grotesque, see (Beugnet, van den Oever 2016).

its perversity and nastiness, turning houses upside down, or burning them down so as to consume the beauty and abjectness that lives within them.

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