Theatricality as Cruelty

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Abstract:

This essay suggests that theatricality is key to understanding Artaudian cruelty. I clarify this with reference to two films by Sergei Eisenstein and Abel Gance. The essay draws attention to the multimedia aspect of Artaud's aesthetic and proposes a pathway that can help us reconsider distinctions between theatricality and cinematic specificity.

Résumé:

Cet article se propose de démontrer que la notion artaudienne de cruauté ne peut être comprise qu'à la lumière de la théâtralité. À l'appui de cette thèse, on examinera deux films, respectivement de Sergei Eisenstein et d'Abel Gance. L'article attire l'attention sur la dimension multimédiatique de l'esthétique d'Artaud et propose une méthode à même de reprendre sur de nouvelles bases les différences entre théâtralité et spécificité filmique.

Keywords

Artaud, Cruelty, theatricality, Sergei Eisenstein, Abel Gance, Vsevolod Meyerhold.

In 1926, in one of his early manifestoes titled "Manifesto for a Theater that Failed", Artaud already signals his preference for moving away from the text-based way of thinking of theatre. As he says:

> We do not seek, as has been done before, as has always been characteristic of the theater, to give the illusion of what is not, but on the contrary, to present to the eye certain tableaux, certain indestructible, undeniable images that will speak directly to the mind. The objects, the props, even the scenery which will appear on the stage will have to be understood in an immediate sense, without transposition; they will have to be taken not for what they represent but for what they really are. Mise-en-scène properly speaking, the movements of the actors, must be regarded solely as the visible signs of an invisible or secret language (ASW, 160).[1]

Artaud here confers importance on theatricality, theatre's ability to communicate meaning through an emphasis on plasticity, physical relationships, and mise en scène. Such an insistence on eschewing literary dramaturgy in favour of a theatrical event that returns to the roots of the medium is a recurring theme in his writings. His preference for an iconoclastic dramaturgy can also be seen in one of his early writings in 1924 where he suggests that theatre needs to be stimulated by popular forms of entertainment such as the circus; for Artaud, this departure from text to visual attractions can lead to the intellectualisation of theatre: "I would rather say that one must intellectualize theatre, bring out from the feelings and the gestures of the characters their most unusual and exceptional meaning" (Ibid, 14). In this text, he goes so far as to suggest that the theatre he proposes would even abolish Ibsen, because this type of literary dramaturgy rests on a dubious division between mind and body (AOT, 14). Without a doubt, some key aspects of Artaud's aesthetics are the valorisation of the process rather than the finished product, and the aspiration to use theatre to address issues on a mass scale, since he repeatedly kept on emphasising that theatre is a collective institution that has lost its sparkle due to its reliance on psychological realism and individualism. In another text from 1931 he laments theatre's "psychological and spoken depiction of the individual" that has subordinated all the plastic elements of the medium to the reproduction of a text (Ibid, 63). Artaud's critique of verbal dramaturgy can be seen as part of the broader crisis of representation in modernity and is indicative of a desire to return back to the roots of theatre, a point made clear in another text written in 1932, where he proposes that theatre should go back to a "spatial language, a language of gestures" that does not privilege total understanding as it is the case with textual dramaturgy, but encourages associative thinking that leads the audience to perceive things sensually and intellectually (Ibid, 73); for Artaud, the intellectual and the sensual are not antithetical categories.

Artaud's concern with theatricality is plainly affirmed in another text written in 1931, where once again he refutes the individualist theatre arguing that the revitalisation of theatre can only be achieved through plastic means that can make it "espouse collective passions, mass opinion, tune into the collective wave-lengths, in short alter its subject matter" (Ibid, 88). One could retort that such a project is nothing but mere aestheticism, but as a letter written in 1932 demonstrates, his aim is to go beyond aestheticised spectacle and expose the audience to "a new concept of danger" (Ibid, 71). There is certainly an impression that this form of "danger"

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1 Notes to abbreviations: ASW= *Artaud Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988).
AOT= *Artaud on Theatre*, ed. Claude Schumacher and Brian Singleton (London: Methuen, 1989).
MOT= *Meyerhold on Theatre*, ed. Edward Braun, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).

is the marker for the renewal of perception; and remarkably one of the reasons why Artaud criticises the dominant text-based way of thinking is for its hollow moralism that avoids questioning the social and ethical system of society. As he says, "our theatre never goes so far as to ask itself whether by chance this social or ethical system is iniquitous or not" (Ibid, 106).

In this essay, I want to underline the argument that Artaudian cruelty is a euphemism for theatricality and this approach can help us rethink the ways cruelty can be applied to the art of cinema. My contention is that theatricality is not something antithetical to cinematically specific ways of representation. By contrast, I press on the argument that theatricality is not to be confused with the reproduction of filmed dramatic content; it refers instead to a representational strategy that departs from a literary dramaturgy and a script-based way of thinking. Theatricality can thus be understood as the employment of formal devices that privilege discontinuity, that is, the scenes as self-sufficient units that produce associations rather than fixed narrative meaning, placing emphasis on plasticity and physical relationships at the expense of dialogue-driven sequences. Before offering a definition of theatricality, it is instructive to note that Artaud belonged to a tradition that considered the cinematic and the theatrical (including theatrical forms such as the music hall, circus, cabaret, vaudeville, and amusement park) as corresponding categories. Christopher Innes and Laura Marcus have pinpointed that Artaud's privileged theatre of actions and gestures has parallels with film practices, and his writings provide sufficient evidence to this premise (Innes 1993, 79; Marcus 2007, 246).

In an article titled "Theatre and Cruelty", Artaud suggests that theatre can only be invigorated by reclaiming "from cinema, music-hall, the circus, and life itself, those things that always belonged to it" (Ibid, 121). The mainstay of his logic is that theatre needs an emphasis on dynamic actions that can redefine the relations between the actions on stage and the spectators. This is also evidenced in a draft letter to René Daumal, which focuses on cinema, but finishes by sustaining that the only theatre that has managed to defy psychological individualism is the theatre of the revolutionary Russia, because it has privileged situations and actions over dramatic coherence (Ibid, 64).

Certainly, Artaud seems to refer here to the work of Vsévolod Meyerhold, Nikolaj Yevreinov and Nikolai Evreinov.[2] These directors placed emphasis on mass actions and theatricality, while Meyerhold developed biomechanics, an acting system very influential on Soviet cinema. Eisenstein was a student of his Theatre Workshop and his training next to Meyerhold is evident in many of his films.[3] But in a manner that recalls Artaud's abovementioned comments, Meyerhold also called for re-theatricalising theatre by using elements from cinema, cabaret, and Commedia dell'Arte (MOT, 389-390). Meyerhold like Artaud thought that the essence of the theatrical event rests on plasticity, physical relationships and gestures rather than on the reproduction of verbal dramaturgy (Ibid, 65). His valorisation of theatricality and plasticity is encapsulated in a statement according to which "*words in the theatre are nothing but embellishments on the design of movement* (emphasis in the original)" (Ibid, 150). But interestingly, his penchant for a theatricalised aesthetic that privileges discontinuous sequences rather than ones subordinated to a textual logic has cinematic associations. At one point he even wrote that it is important to ""cinematify" the theatre" (Meyerhold 2005, 22). We can thus see how the very idea of theatricality espoused by modern theatre pioneers can be seen in tandem with the early cinematic

2 For more on the influence of Soviet theatre on Soviet cinema see (Tsivian 1996, 15-64).
3 Speaking about Meyerhold, Eisenstein stated once that "I never loved, idolized, worshipped anyone as much as I did my teacher", Cited in (Bordwell 2005, 4).

aesthetic, which, as Rudolf Arnheim suggests, relied on "the expressive power of gestures" (Arnheim 1957, 110-111).

This opens up a different understanding of theatricality that challenges previous arguments that place the cinematic in opposition to theatricality (Panofsky 2003, 17; Fried 1998, 164). Peter Brook's recollections of his Artaudian theatrical period are also a good case in point. Brook, who has also worked in cinema, refers to his Artaudian modus operandi suggesting that it was structured around fragmented scenes and a rhythmic use of language; as he says, these were theatrical elements consistent with the language of cinema (Brook 1972, 136). The aforementioned evidence critically interrogates facile distinctions between theatricality and cinematic specificity and can make us rethink the question of cruelty in Artaud's writings. To explore variations of Artaudian cruelty in cinema, I shall bridge the concept of cruelty and theatricality and in the second part of the essay, I will consider sequences from Abel Gance's *Napoléon* (1927) and Sergei Eisenstein's *October* (1928). My aim is to identify the correspondence between cruelty and theatricality, so as to demonstrate how Artaud's ideas can be detected in objects that are not Artaudian per se, but are part of a tradition committed to the re-theatricalisation of representation. But before moving to the case studies, it is indispensable to offer some definitions of theatricality that can clarify the backbone of my argument.

One of the most influential definitions of theatricality has been offered by Roland Barthes, who was a keen reader of Artaud.[4] Reflecting on Baudelaire's theatre Barthes poses the question of theatricality: "what is theatricality? It is theater-minus-text, it is a density of signs and sensations built up on stage starting from the written argument; it is that ecumenical perception of sensuous artifice-gesture, tone, distance, substance, light-which submerges the text beneath the profusion of its external language" (Barthes 1972, 26). For Barthes, theatricality refers mainly to the production of atmosphere generated from an emphasis on corporeality, props, and settings. Theatricality, is therefore a productive process that cannot be reduced to the reproduction of a pre-existing text. Jean-Pierre Sarrazac and Virginie Magnat point out that theatricality aimed to liberate theatre from its dependency on the text and in this respect it "reestablished the idea of theater as action" (Sarrazac, Magmat 2002, 66). This argument yields valuable insights into understanding that for representational practices stressing theatricality, the text is not the privileged producer of meaning. This idea provides a point of entry into thinking about the connection between theatricality and cinematic specific ways of representation.

One striking connection with debates in film studies can be identified when considering the use of the theatrical term mise en scène in cinema. As Frank Kessler cogently suggests, the popularity of the term coincides with debates in auteur criticism (Kessler 2014, 11). It is instructive to identify here the parallels between Barthes' idea of theatricality and mise en scène criticism. Barthes' definition of the term has allusions to the work of modern theatre pioneers such as Artaud, Meyerhold, and Brecht who did not consider theatre as the reproduction of a set and unchanged text, but privileged instead the theatrical process/experience as a way of producing meaning.[5] Similarly, mise en scène criticism favoured filmmakers, who did not understand the script as the dominant story-telling vehicle. Frank Kessler explains that auteur criticism in post-war France valued filmmakers who could produce meaning using the language of mise en scène and this stood at the anti-

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4 See (Murray 2014, 6).
5 Silvija Jestrovic also identifies signs of convergence between Barthes' understanding of theatricality and writings by Artaud and the Russian formalists, whose view of theatricality refers to all these elements that cannot be represented via words and dialogue. See (Jestrovic 2002, 43).

podes of the hitherto dominant understanding of the director "as an illustrator of a scripted text" (Kessler 2014, 11). From this perspective, we can identify elements of theatricality in: 1) films that do not simply rely on the script, but produce meaning by utilising several mise en scène materials; 2) as well films that foreground a highly stylised acting, drawing attention to physical relationships rather than psychological consistency.[6] Peculiarly, one may infer from this that theatricality infuses a diverse body of films, from Eisenstein, German Expressionism, Tim Burton, slapstick comedies (favoured by Artaud as his writings on cinema demonstrate), as well as the work of filmmakers who persistently denied any connection between cinema and theatre, such as Robert Bresson.[7]

Retrospectively then, we can reconsider Susan Sontag's perceptive argument that the widely-held assumption that theatricality is antithetical to cinematic language is far too simplistic (Sontag 1966, 24). Following Sontag, I suggest that such an outlook confuses theatricality with literary dramaturgy, whereas theatricality opposes the idea of representation grounded in literary tropes. It is not accidental that early filmmakers like Eisenstein, Gance, and Chaplin employed representational practices that had their origins in the theatre – after all Eisenstein talked about the montage of attractions, a term with de facto theatrical connotations. In this context, András Bálint Kovács' argument that early filmmakers fought against "the theatrical influence" (Kovács 2007, 238) is correct only if we equate the theatrical with the naturalistic tradition of dramatic art, which relies on an intelligible text, psychologically defined characters, and dialogue driven plot, but not with theatricality per se. By contrast, much of pre-sound cinema relied heavily on strategies of theatricality utilising excessive gestures, aggressive poses and glances as well as artificiality in sets and lighting. Samuel Weber's point that the very etymology of the word theatre privileges the act of seeing over other senses is also relevant when it comes to the connection between theatricality and films made before the transition to sound (Weber 2004, 3). But the most important aspect is the favouring of formal discontinuity – this chimes neatly with Eisenstein's concept of attractions – aiming at the production of associations that aim to re-establish the communication between the director and the audience.

Josette Féral's definition of theatricality permits a clearer insight pertaining to the connection between cinema and theatricality. According to Féral, theatricality designates representational schemas that acknowledge the inability to produce absolute meaning. At the heart of this argument is the idea that theatricality does not produce narrative harmony, but what Féral names as "cleavages", and it is by means of these cleavages that artists aim to re-establish communication with their audience, to make them see familiar things in a different light. Féral judiciously observes that theatricality is a process not restricted to the art of theatre but applies to diverse artistic forms. In his words, "if the notion of theatricality goes beyond the theater, it is because it is not a "property" belonging to the subjects/things that are its vehicles. It belongs neither to the objects, the space, nor to the actor himself, although each can become its vehicle. Rather, theatricality is the result of a perceptual dynamics linking the onlooker with someone or something that is looked at" (Féral 2002, 105). This view of theatricality as a dynamic connection between representation and audience is something that can be identified even in new forms of communication and Weber rightly remarks that contrary to popular belief, the emergence of the digital media has not reduced the employment of theatrical practices; instead the very logic of theatri-

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6 See also Adrian Martin's discussion of "arch-theatricality" (2013, 82-83).
7 I would like to note here that I disagree with Richard Rushton's argument that Eisenstein's films are "anti-theatrical." This point is refuted if we take into account Meyerhold's influence on Eisenstein's films, but also the whole theatre culture of mass pageants that was very influential on Soviet cinema as a whole. See (Rushton, 2004, 226-244).

cality abounds within the new media landscape (Weber 2004, 1).

These definitions bring some counter-perspectives to the issue of theatricality. The logical question is, what is specific to the Artaudian conception of theatricality and how does it apply to cinema? To begin with, one needs to underscore that Artaud's writings on cinema also privilege the representation of disjointed situations/ attractions at the expense of narrative coherence and psychological motives, the abandonment of well-rounded characters, whom he considers to be a product of literary rather than visual traditions, and an emphasis on intensified expressivity aiming to reinstate what he calls "the pure work of thought" (AOT, 60). Taking these into account, I propose three theses that can illuminate my understanding of cruelty as a euphemism for theatricality and the ways this aesthetic can be applied to the art of cinema. On this account, Artaudian cruelty applied to cinema features:

1. Episodic sequences that encourage the emergence of associations rather than the production of fixed narrative meaning.

2. Thus, representation aggressively aspires to connect the onlooker with the material on screen. This can be achieved by an excessive emphasis on gestural acting and by strategies of formal fragmentation and discontinuity.

3. Character typage replaces the novelistic trope of psychologically defined characters. Fragmented situations form the backbone of the film's narrative architecture.

Underpinning these theses is the understanding of Artaud not as a maverick, but as a product of his time, since many of his proposed ideas for the revitalisation of representation are not necessarily new, but are evocative of broader debates of the time. Martine Beugnet persuasively suggests that Artaud's writings correspond with diverse film practitioners such as Luis Buñuel, Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac, who emphasised cinema's ability to influence the audience through the production of shock effects. As Beugnet explains, for these practitioners the power of the medium did not rest on the subordination of form to diegetic requirements; instead they favoured visual impressions that could lead to defamiliarising effects and thus re-establish a link between the audience and the material on screen (Beugnet 2007, 23).

I would like here to consider an emblematic sequence from Abel Gance's *Napoléon*, a film in which Artaud performed the role of Marat. The sequence begins with Napoleon on a boat while fleeing from Corsica. A series of tilted camera angles add a dramatic tone to his escape from his Corsican enemies; the camera captures the dark clouds in the sky and images of Napoleon's agony are followed by visuals of the aggressive waves. The intertitles interrupt temporarily the sequence to announce that Napoleon "was about to begin an epic battle with Fate." This is followed by images of Napoleon battling with the stormy weather and the waves. The camera moves frantically from left to right registering the enormous waves as they break on Napoleon's boat. At times, the waves approach so close to the camera that the image blackens so as to magnify the affective impact. Cut to an intertitle that informs us that "another mighty storm was unleashed at the Convention." Now we move to the National Assembly in Paris and we witness the Montagnards denouncing the Girondists of treason. The passages in the National convention are pictured by means of expressive camera movements that fragment the space framing the crowd from a distance, and then suddenly closing-up to quick shots of Marat, Danton and other Montagnard leaders. When the debate heats up and the two fractions start challenging each

other, an intertitle suggests "the assembly was thunderstruck", only to return to Napoleon while struggling with the severe weather. Henceforth, Gance employs parallel editing linking the commotion in the Assembly with Napoleon's ordeal. As the tumult in the Assembly increases, the camera cuts forcefully to Napoleon's crucible in the Tyrrhenian Sea; the waves he has to face are now fiercer. When it returns to the scenes in the Assembly, the camera expresses the political gridlock by zooming in and out very fast; the movement on the screen parallels the movement of Napoleon's boat. The images from the National Assembly and from Napoleon's ordeal are intermingled frantically and at some point, a superimposed guillotine appears indicating the defeat of the Girondins and the reign of terror that ensued. The sequence culminates in a passage in which a high-angle shot panning from left to right and back captures the agitated crowds in the Assembly. The camera movement here draws an analogy to the tempestuous waves faced by Napoleon in the preceding paralleled scenes. It concludes with two intertitles: the first one informs us that numerous revolutionaries were unfairly executed; behind the intertitles we can see the agitated collective, a superimposed image of Marat while orating, images of the waves – they have now totally merged with the scenes in the Assembly – drowning the Girondins, and a guillotine. The concluding intertitle praises Napoleon's survival and triumphantly anticipates his new political role.

Evidently, there is a reactionary celebration of individualism in the aforementioned passage that serves to justify the subsequent Napoleonic rule. But what renders this sequence noteworthy, is the expressive combination of images, their hyperbolic gaze and the ways they somehow return the gaze to the audience. To recall some of Féral's argument mentioned above, the essence of theatricality lies in the extravagant production of fissures and gaps that create a space beyond the logic of the "quotidian", and this process entails a desire to initiate a dialogic relationship between the act of representation and the audience; theatricality, as he suggests, is a "process of looking at or being looked at" (Féral 2002, 98). The aforementioned sequence's aggressive endeavour to occupy the gaze of the viewer produces an uncanny effect making the viewers feel that they do not simply gaze at something but they are being gazed back at. This is a fundamental aspect of Artaud's work, which argued for the exploration of attitudes and gestures that cannot be expressed via words, with the view to downplaying psychology in favour of powerful actions. His conception of the plague as an allegory for the theatre aspires forcefully to re-stablish the communicative aspect of the medium, by pulling its conventions to pieces and producing shocks and sensations. The abovementioned sequence in *Napoléon* is evocative of some key Artaudian principles, such as the production of meaning by means of "visual sensations" and a representational excess, a method of visual assault that urges the audience to formulate ideas (AOT, 57).

The formal properties identified in Gance's practice have a kinship with the cinema of Eisenstein. A fine example of aggressive theatricality can be observed in one of the most celebrated sequences from *October*. Before moving to describe the sequence, I would like to state that the meeting points between Artaud and Eisenstein have already been discussed by numerous scholars. One of the most influential accounts has been offered by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Deleuze recognises the common elements between Artaud and Eisenstein particularly with regard to their desire to produce shocks that can generate thinking. Yet, for Deleuze the difference lies in the fact that whereas Eisenstein wants to produce shocking visuals that can culminate in logical conclusions, Artaud aims at tearing images apart to create a variety of voices that do not overlap. Deleuze concludes that the difference between the two is to be situated in their antithetical views on the power of thought; at one end of the spectrum Eisenstein is a firm believer in cinema's capacity to produce

dialectically deduced meaning, and at the other end Artaud's arguments do not put forward "the power of thought, but its "'impower'" (Deleuze 1997, 166). Deleuze mentions though in passing a key element of the Artaudian aesthetic when discussing the cinema of Carmelo Bene; he deems Bene to be Artaudian on account of his belief that cinema can bring a "profound theatricalization" (Deleuze 1997, 191), and indeed this aspiration is not very far from Eisenstein's, as I discuss below.

Following Deleuze, Martine Beugnet suggests that Artaud's thinking could not comply with the didactic elements of the Soviet avant-garde, but along with them he understood cinema as "a signifying process", which could integrate corporeal and intellectual experiences (Beugnet 2007, 23). While Beugnet accepts Deleuze's rationale she seems more inclined to acknowledge a stronger meeting point between Artaud and Eisenstein. Pasi Väliaho identifies this connection succinctly and argues that the key similarity between them rests on their belief that cinema can go beyond social conformism and open up new ways of thinking (Väliaho 201, 21). But what needs to be acknowledged is that Eisenstein's cinema cannot be simply reduced to a cinema of synthesis, that is, one that simply produces predetermined logical conclusions. Roland Barthes' renowned suggestion that there is also a "third meaning" an "obtuse meaning in Eisenstein" provides a different model of thinking about the Soviet filmmaker's work. Commenting on *Ivan the Terrible* (1944-45), Barthes suggests that there is a surplus of "artifice" in the film that has on the one hand story-telling function, and on the other hand it resists and disturbs the smooth narrative flow. It is noteworthy that Barthes identifies such a representational excess in the actor's "disguise" and the "artificiality" of the mise en scène; these elements generate a multiplicity of meanings ,a series of dialectical contradictions that do not confirm the preceding ones nor do they lay the groundwork for producing a synthesis with the ones that follow (Barthes 1977, 57-58). Barthes' emphasis on "disguise" and "artificiality" – their capacity both to represent as well as to befuddle the representational process –, bespeaks something specific as regards theatricality and its dual function as a medium that promotes the story and something that exceeds it by disrupting meaning in a seductive way.

I identify a similar effect in the first part of the famous God and Country sequence, in *October*. The sequence starts with an intertitle that reads "In the Name of God" followed by images of Christian Orthodox temples, Orthodox figurines, oblique shots of religious architecture, and more figurines from the Asian, Hindu and Pacific tradition. At times, images of the same figurines follow, shot from a different angle and this adds a gestural quality to the sequence. An intertitle appears that reads "and country", and now the camera captures props with military connotations; another intertitle reading "Hooray" appears and then the scene culminates in the reconstruction of a statue of the Tsar. Images from the statue shot from skewed angles, some in hard and others in soft light, succeed one another frantically; the scene culminates in an image of a priest whose posture and position is redolent of the statue of the Tsar.

For the most part, discussions of this sequence have dealt with Eisenstein's capacity to produce a tangible thesis via the juxtaposition of different images (Carroll 1998, 88; Smuts 2009, 415; Cox 2013). Eisenstein himself explains that the sequence is structured in a logical way that intends to gradually lead to a conclusion (Eisenstein 1977, 62). But there is another aspect that invites further attention and this is none other than the grotesque and uncanny effects produced by the succession of religious figurines. This rapid chain of figurines aspires to capture our attention in a forceful way, but at the same time the sequence produces an intensified gestural effect. Here Eisenstein's schooling next to Meyerhold is made once again plain. Meyerhold, as one of

his actors, Erast Garin explains, believed that representational approaches that highlight gesture, posture and movement can enliven even motionless figures. Setting as an example the use of toy figurines Garin explains that they "can be made to seem happy, sad, etc., even though the facial features never change. The secret of their expressivity is in the change of pose" (cited in McCaw 2016, 160). But there is another significant Meyerholdian aspect in the renowned *October* sequence and this has to do with its grotesque qualities. As the motionless figurines succeed one another, they appear strange and aggressive, something that is accentuated by the eccentric filming of the sequence in terms of camera angles and lighting. Stylisation here leads to defamiliarisation. Meyerhold understood the grotesque as an appropriate method for producing inflated contrasts; by mixing antithetical materials, high and low culture, the grotesque creates a collision of opposites that lead to a "'stylized improbability'" and denaturalise one's perception of the world (MOT, 168). Not unlike Artaud, he calls for exaggeration and stylization in order to represent what cannot be represented, or to phrase it more clearly, to revive theatricality so as to intervene at the juncture where language fails.

The basic idea underpinning this method is a view of theatricality as a transformative activity. By acknowledging the failure of verbal dramaturgy, theatricality advocates a piecemeal approach to representation and valorises the view of representation as a process. In a similar vein, Eisenstein argued for capturing images, or sequences not in rigid ways, but in the course of their development and unfolding "before the sense of the spectator" (Eisenstein 1957, 18). Taking these points into account, one is inclined to concede that in this renowned *October* sequence, the succession of these figurines is not simply in service of a preordained argument, but it also produces a visual surplus, a seductive artificiality that upsets representational harmony.[8] Thus, the sequence operates on the interstices of rational argumentation and intensified excess; the latter is further highlighted by the idiosyncratic style of the tilted shots that provokes a representational fissure in the allegedly argumentative synthesis. The aesthetic consequences are not far from Artaud's understanding of cruelty as the basis of a new figurative language "somewhere between gesture and thought" (AOT, 112). In these terms, cruelty is very much contingent on an aesthetics of compression, which does away with verbal expression and culminates in frames/tableaux that are offered to the audience to be scrutinised.

Elements of hyper-theatricality as cruelty can also be identified in late modernist cinema.[9] The work of Fassbinder is a standardised reference point, not only because his work on theatre was extremely influential on his cinema work, but also because of his ability to manipulate theatricality in cinematically specific ways. Fassbinder's experience in anti-naturalist theatre found its expression in his own films, which privilege plastic aspects such as hyperbolic gestures, seductive mise en scène, excessive framings, and at times a disjunction between language and corporeal movement. But this aspect of discontinuity is different from the objects described above in the sense that it is not necessarily reliant on montage and parallel editing, but on a different form of fragmentation that takes advantage of the tableau aesthetic. Peter Brook's adaptation of his theatre production of *Marat/Sade* into film is another relevant example, as well as Daniel Schmid's *Shadows of Angels*

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8 David Bordwell quotes Eisenstein's statement that whereas "*Potemkin* has something of the Greek temple, *October* is a little Baroque" (Bordwell 2005, 73).

9 András Bálint Kovács mentions the ways theatricality was employed in late modernist cinema as a means of revitalising film language. What needs to be noted, however, is that for Kovács this return to theatricality is simply a characteristic of late modernist cinema and not of the early modernist period of the sound period. I hope that my comments on Eisenstein and Gance have challenged this assumption. See (Kovács 2007, 201).

(1976)[10], and Philippe Vincent's film adaptation of his theatre performance of Heiner Müller's *Mauser* (1999). What distinguishes these films is their ability to fragment space through expressive camerawork, to capture physical and sensual movements, and to produce cuts within static shots, e.g. through the use of lights, or rhythmic gestures. The narrative economy of all these films does not privilege dialogical sequences and verbal dramaturgy but a performative excess, which is consistent with a cinematic language. By way of conclusion then, in re-evaluating the concept of cruelty as theatricality, we can pave the way for rethinking not only the Artaudian aesthetic outside its canonical reception as extreme violence, but also the ways theatricality can be profoundly interlinked with film language.

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10 This film is an adaptation of Fassbinder's controversial play *Garbage, the City, and Death* (1975).

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