

Unacceptable Imaginings: Artaud's Medieval Revolution

© Clare O'Farrell 1996

*Paper delivered at '100 Years of Cruelty'
Conference on Antonin Artaud
Powerhouse Museum, September 1996*

In her excellent book on Artaud, Jane Goodall suggests that a number of contemporary thinkers have merely used Artaud as an excuse to discuss their own obsessions. This paper is no exception to that rule. Rather than being a paper directly on Artaud it is inspired by controversies his work has provoked and the implications of those controversies. Thus I will start with Artaud, then immediately digress and as befits a text which takes its inspiration from a writer famed, justly or unjustly, for the fragmentary nature of his work, my own reflections will be somewhat discontinuous in nature.

'What is curious' Goodall says '... is the insistence with which Artaud and his works are conjured away as an enabling condition'.¹ Perhaps not so curious after all: it could easily be said that Artaud's work is in fact one long provocation to think beyond it, to imagine and dream about the silences and boundaries which it illuminates.

Indeed in many ways Artaud's work is perhaps less interesting in itself than for the possibilities and the visions which it opens up. I will address myself in particular to two controversies arising from his work. The first of these is the pamphlet war between Artaud and the surrealists following his expulsion from the movement in November 1926. The second concerns Foucault's controversial statements about the status of Artaud's writings as a 'work' and the relation between madness, literature and philosophy. At issue in both discussions is the status of a particular area of human experience which has received bad press particularly since the Enlightenment, but also long before that with the end of the Middle Ages. This general area includes those systems not directly governed by the rules of physical, social and historical existence: an area which has been variously and vaguely characterised as mystical, visionary, imaginary, fantastic or just plain mad.

The second issue at stake could be very generally defined as the problem of 'representation', the question of just how the rules governing language, the rules governing imagination and thought and the rules governing material existence interrelate. Artaud's production in writing, cinema and theatre has the effect of showing firstly, that it is very much a question of the existence of separate sets of rules and secondly, that the

¹ Jane Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 218.

relations between these sets of rules is by no means fixed or obvious. This disjunction between words and things became the subject of particular focus in French thought and literature during the 1960s, but it is not an easy intuition to retain. Indeed, one could argue that much work today that claims to be done in the wake of the thought of the 1960s has forgotten this appreciation of finitude and the limits of human thought and language and has simply sunk back into an easy materialism (all is determined by and contained within material and social 'practices') or an equally facile idealism (everything is a 'discourse' which can be 'read').

In 1926, the surrealist collective published a violent pamphlet titled 'Au grand jour' in which Artaud was pilloried and scorn was heaped on his refusal to link his work to a political ideology, namely communism. The collective accused him of not wanting 'to see in the Revolution anything but a metamorphosis of the interior conditions of the soul, which is typical of the weakminded, those who are impotent and cowards'.² Artaud replied in detail in a piece called 'A la grande nuit ou le bluff surréaliste' and also made a number of pertinent comments elsewhere in his writings. What is the good of any revolution he said, if he still remained in interior pain and misery?³ In short for Artaud, Communism was simply not revolutionary enough. The only true revolution as far as he was concerned was one that was capable of 'undermining the current foundation of things of changing the angle of reality'.⁴ As if 'from the absolute point of view', he continued, 'there could be the slightest interest ... in seeing power pass from the hands of the bourgeoisie to those of the proletariat'.⁵ Revolution, for Artaud was not about the transfer of power it was about changing reality.

Artaud had originally seen in surrealism a kind of magic that had the power to reshape reality. In his view, it was able to transform the appearance of the entire concrete world and transform the 'mental gestures' linking the concrete and non concrete.⁶ He rejected without hesitation the charge of the surrealists that he was only interested in leading an isolated interior existence without reference to the physical world. 'Any spiritual action if it is right', he declared 'becomes material at the right moment. The interior conditions of the soul! These carry with them their rayment of stone, of true action'⁷ There was no doubt in Artaud's mind that Revolution is necessary, but it was not the Revolution supported by the surrealists: 'there are bombs that need to be put

² André Breton et al, 'Au grand jour' in José Pierre (ed) *Tracts surréalistes et déclarations collectives 1933-1939: t1: 1922-1939*, Paris: Le terrain vague, 1980, p. 68

³ Antonin Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 1, Paris: Gallimard, 1956, p. 284

⁴ Ibid, pp. 284-5

⁵ Ibid, p.285

⁶ Cf ibid, p.287

⁷ Ibid, p.288

somewhere, but at the base of most of the present habits of thought, European or otherwise'.⁸

The clash between Artaud and the surrealists is a striking example of the clash between two very different conceptions of the imagination. One could easily claim that for all their radical pretensions, the surrealists in fact subscribed heavily to a post Enlightenment view that imagination is only acceptable if it is tied to a particular scientific, political or sociological rationality. Surrealism was also ultimately only interested in 'expressing' or 'representing' the unconscious, in finding a transparent match between the unconscious and language - something that Artaud himself was interested in at least initially.⁹ In other words, for the surrealists, imagination must be subordinated to the currently accepted rules and logics of material, social and political existence and must ultimately express and refer back to those rules. Only 'applied' imagination is of interest: socially and politically 'useful' works - these are the serious works of art. One of the best descriptions of this incarnation of the modern imagination is offered by C. Wright Mills in his famous 1959 book *The Sociological Imagination*. His views are worth citing in full:

... one meaning of the idea of an intellectual common denominator: [is that] men can state their strongest convictions in its terms; other terms and other styles of reflection seem mere vehicles of escape and obscurity....

This sociological imagination is becoming, I believe, the major common denominator of our cultural life and its signal feature... Popular categories of criticism -high, middle and low-brow, for example - are now at least as much sociological as aesthetic... the sociological imagination is not merely a fashion. It is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities. It is not merely one quality of mind among the contemporary range of cultural sensibilities - it is *the* quality whose wider and more adroit use offers the promise that all such sensibilities - and in fact, human reason itself - will come to play a greater role in human affairs. What fiction, what journalism, what artistic endeavour can compete with the historical reality and political facts of our time? What dramatic vision of hell can compete with the events of twentieth century war? ... the serious artist is himself in much trouble, and could well do with

⁸ Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes, supplément au t. 1*, p. 25

⁹ See for example Foucault's comments on the link between surrealism and the expression of the unconscious. He writes 'for the surrealists, language was only in the final analysis an instrument of access or a surface of reflection for their experiences. 'Le débat sur le roman' (1964), *Dits et écrits, 1954-1988*, t. I, Paris: Gallimard, 1994, p. 339.

some intellectual and cultural aid from a social science made sprightly by the sociological imagination.¹⁰

If the surrealists were happy to subscribe to this subordinate view of the imagination, Artaud was not: 'Art is not the imitation of life', he declared, 'but life is the imitation of a transcendent principle with which art can put us back in communication'.¹¹ The modern version of a 'useful' and 'truthful' imagination requires that it must somehow mirror and reflect back on an existing physical and social reality not radically recreate and reform those rules and certainly not refer to a dimension which appears different from those realities. Artaud proposes a return to the 'mentality of the Middle Ages': a reactivation of an older poetic and spiritual imagination, free of the dreary necessities of restricting itself to 'improving our social lot', free of the idea of art as completely bound by the dictates of 'social work' and political reform, in other words an imagination of the fantastic, of other worlds, of non material existences. It is also an imagination, which as the historian Jacques Le Goff suggests in his fascinating book *The Medieval Imagination*, is not simply limited to the world of books and literature.¹² It weaves itself into the very fabric of the everyday. Medieval scientists were quite happy to include strange and imagined or semi-imagined plants, animals and places in their scientific classifications. Such things were regarded as marginal and exceptional phenomena but were not untrue for all that.

It is possibility of the reinstatement of this kind of imagination, of this kind of experience which draws Michel Foucault to Artaud. In his book *The History of Madness* he argues that if in certain works of eighteenth century literature such as those produced by Rousseau, Tasse or Swift, one is never sure whether what one is reading are the symptoms of madness or the genius of inspiration, whether the words are a deliberate act of artistic creation or the uncontrolled and unwilled free association of mental illness, this kind of uncertain oscillation between reason and unreason is not present in the work of Artaud.¹³ If language is inherently rational and Reason is the only means of access to Truth, then madness can only be error and non-being. It is impossible therefore for Artaud to translate or represent his madness in literature. All he can do is refer to the impossibility of that representation. In silencing madness, Foucault argues, a whole area of human experience is repressed. There is no way of 'representing' this experience. Nonetheless there is something that resists and a body of writing such as Artaud's points to that silenced but still existent experience.

¹⁰ C. Wright Mills *The Sociological Imagination*. London: Oxford University Press, 1959, pp. 14-15, 17,18.

¹¹ Cited in Goodall, *Artaud*, p. 18.

¹² Jacques Le Goff, *L'imaginaire médiéval*, Paris: Gallimard, 1985

¹³ Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris: Gallimard, 1972, p. 555

Artaud's work is perhaps not so much about the abolition of boundaries or limits as some critics have suggested, rather it has more the effect of a constant emphasis on their existence: the boundaries of a 'body without organs', of a suffering and ill body, of the limited capacity of language to adequately 'express' anything or 'represent' particular experiences. Likewise, Artaud's work also draws attention to the linear and temporal nature of writing. In a sense Artaud's work could be described as one long meditation - a subject creating rather than 'expressing' itself through the linear and temporal work of writing. The subject which emerges in Artaud's writings is not a direct translation or reflection of a pure originary and timeless subject which existed before the activity of writing took place. The Artaud of the '*oeuvre*' does not necessarily directly reflect the individual psyche 'Artaud' which incidentally is also modified through the process of writing.¹⁴ Of course, all of these issues have been discussed before at great length, but Artaud's work provides the reader with far more than a merely intellectual appreciation of these notions. He makes the reader actually feel and experience these disjunctions at the level of existence. In other words, he gives these ideas a body - a tortured and suffering body, a body that is not easy to live with.

On many occasions Artaud talks about the difficulty he found in exteriorising his thought or a level even more subterranean than thought: a kind of preconscious. He frequently draws attention to the difficulty of translating this level into language. He describes this impossibility of translation in his own case as 'illness'. In a letter to Jacques Rivière he says:

I suffer from a terrible illness of the mind. My thought abandons me at every level. From the simple fact of thought, to the exterior fact of its materialisation in words. Words, forms of sentences, interior

¹⁴ For an interesting discussion on the difference between a text as 'demonstration' and a text as 'meditation' see Foucault, 'Mon corps, ce papier, ce feu', (1972), *Dits et écrits*, t.II p.257. Foucault notes: 'Every discourse, no matter which one, is made up of a collection of statements which are each produced in their space and time, as so many discursive events. If it is purely a matter of demonstration, these statements can be read as a series of events linked to each other according to a certain number of formal rules. As for the subject of the discourse, it is not implied in the demonstration: it remains fixed, invariable and as if neutralised in relation to it. A 'meditation', on the contrary produces new statements as so many discursive events which carry with them a series of modifications of the speaking subject. Through what is said in the meditation, the subject passes from darkness to light... In the meditation, the subject is continually changed by its own movement; its discourse provokes effects in which it is caught up... In short, meditation implies a subject which is mobile and modifiable by the very effect of the discursive events which are produced.' I would argue that Artaud's writings belong to this category of 'meditation' rather than 'demonstration'.

Unacceptable imaginings: Artaud

directions of thought, simple reactions of the mind, I am in constant pursuit of my intellectual being.¹⁵

In another letter he writes:

it seems to me illness becomes apparent as soon as an image becomes conscious, is clothed in sensibility, affectivity, will ... as soon as one tries to pronounce in a lucid and clear fashion any of these interior worlds which the mind ceaselessly associates, illness manifests its presence.... That is, given that every idea or image awakening in the unconscious and constituting an interior word with the intervention of the will, it is a question of knowing at what moment of its formation the fissure will be produced, and if for certain whether the intervention of the will is a cause of disturbance, an occasion of fissure and whether the fissure will intervene in this thought or the next.¹⁶

In short, Artaud's madness allowed him to experience forcefully what most people can only conceptualise intellectually or at best imagine, namely the radical disjunction of discursive and non-discursive systems. It is in this discontinuity between words and things that imagination plays with and constantly refashions. Imagination constantly redefines and reworks the links between words and the non-verbal. It is a constant redefinition of the process of representation.

Post Cartesian or more accurately post Enlightenment language is about the Representation or the mirroring of Reason, it is the expression of a Rational subject and is linked to the physical, material and social worlds in a particular way. Certain experiences are disqualified as a means of expressing truth, they are by definition 'in error'. Under these circumstances all that Artaud can do is describe the impossibility of transcribing or representing a particular experience, the impossibility of speaking. It is in this sense, according to Foucault, that he cannot produce a work - the smooth transition between rational thought and literary output does not occur in the accepted sense. For Foucault, Artaud's writings operate at the extreme limit of literature, they mark 'a profile against the emptiness'¹⁷ and although Foucault is careful to say that madness is not the only language common to the literary work, in his view madness reveals better than anything else what the limits of literature are. Madness shows, particularly in Artaud's case, the finitude of human reason, the limits of the human capacity to ever perfectly match words

¹⁵ Artaud, *Oeuvres complètes*, t. 1 p.20

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 316

¹⁷ Foucault, *Histoire de la folie*, p. 556

and things, to ever find the perfect language to transcribe particular experiences.¹⁸

Jane Goodall raises a number of objections to the characterisation of Artaud as the mad artist without an *oeuvre*. If one accepts the notion that Artaud's production is not a work, then it would contain only two elements: firstly a series of statements which could be classified medically as symptoms and secondly a series of comments about the impossibility of speaking about a particular experience. Both sets of statements do indeed exist in Artaud's work and it is the second series of statements that interests Foucault. Artaud's writings in this context point to nothing except the silence of the excluded other of madness and, given the absence of any real acceptable language of madness, can display no order beyond the order of symptoms pointing to mental illness. But, as Goodall shows, there is in fact a third series of statements in Artaud's work, a series of statements which can be read through the rigorous if baroque logic of a heresy - namely gnosticism. In other words, there is an existing discourse other than madness within which Artaud's work can be read and analysed and that is the discourse of heresy. Again like the fantastic imagination this is another example of 'unreasonable' discourse that has often been equated in the modern view with madness.

For Foucault, the only place where the experience of what he describes as 'unreason' or of the fantastic can emerge today is in literature. In his article on Flaubert's *La tentation de Saint Antoine* he remarks that if Flaubert described his experience in writing this novel as an experience of madness and delirium, the book is actually a 'monument to meticulous erudition'.¹⁹ All the dreams, heresies, visions and temptations he describes can be found in old manuscripts and engravings. Foucault notes that it is strange that Flaubert seems to experience delirium in relation to what is so manifestly a detailed piece of research. He suggests that perhaps this is because Flaubert's experience of the fantastic is a modern one:

The new space of fantasms is no longer the night, the sleep of reason, the uncertain emptiness open to desire, it is on the contrary wakefulness, unfailing attention, erudite zeal ... The imaginary is lodged between the book and the lamp. One no longer carries the fantastic in one's heart, one does not expect it in the incongruities of nature ... To dream one does not need to close one's eyes, one needs to

¹⁸ Foucault not content simply with the mad Artaud invents the imaginary Artaud attributing to him, as Edward Scheer points out, non-existent editions of his work. Edward Scheer, 'Foucault/Artaud: The madness of the oeuvre', in Clare O'Farrell (ed), *Foucault: The Legacy*, Brisbane: QUT, forthcoming

¹⁹ Foucault, 'Un "fantastique" de bibliothèque' (1967), *Dits et écrits*, t.1 p. 295.

read ... The imaginary is no longer constituted against the real to deny or compensate for it ... it belongs to the library.²⁰

The fantastic imagination only exists in books - it is frozen and neutralised in the historical event of the book. To take imagination out of the safe zone of literature and the history of literature and to weave it into everyday life as did the medievals is nothing short of lunacy. Artaud's own peregrinations in Mexico and Ireland and his fixation with the cane of Saint Patrick exist in that borderland of imagination - a borderland that became real madness for Artaud.

The contemporary reactivation of a medieval imaginary of the everyday can be seen in those science fiction fans who dress up as Vulcans and Borgs and assorted other fictional characters at Star Trek conventions or who firmly believe that they have every chance of being abducted by aliens any day - that is if they have not already been abducted in the past. If some of those who engage in such imaginings do indeed demonstrate the classic profiles of mental illness, not all can be included within this category and these imaginings can in fact be analysed according to a strict logic which does not entirely coincide with clinical pathology.

One might ask at this point whether in fact the links between madness and the fantastic imagination are as inevitable as Foucault suggests. He, unintentionally perhaps, puts his finger on the problem when he asks why Flaubert characterises his experience of writing *La tentation de Saint Antoine* as approaching madness when it is clearly an exercise in rational erudition. It is indeed a modern experience, but perhaps more in the sense that the fantastic imagination and madness have come to form an indissoluble pair. In the modern world the fantastic imagination has become synonymous with madness at its extreme limits and constantly flirts with madness across its entire spectrum. As Foucault points out, for post Enlightenment culture, any experience that is not rational must necessarily be mad. Since a strong interest and curiosity about the fantastic and the 'non-rational' appears to persist in spite of the best efforts of the champions of various forms of modern and even postmodern rationality, attempts have been made to neutralise it in a number of ways.

One method, as Foucault suggests, is to relegate it to the purely literary and historical domains separate from lived experience. The next step is to banish it to the realm of childhood: children are allowed a few short years of experimentation with the imaginary as part of their 'development' but they must also learn to grow out of such things as quickly as possible if they are to become 'normal' rational functioning adults. To maintain an interest in the fantastic imagination into adulthood is far too risky - too much imagination

²⁰ Ibid, p. 297

leads to a fatal inability to distinguish the 'real' from fantasy and as such this inevitably leads to madness. This is all linked to an idea that the fantastic imagination is dangerous and cannot be controlled or trained in any orderly manner. An interest in the fantastic is only tolerated if one is an artist or if one wishes to be entertained and escape from the harsh realities of everyday existence. In short, the fantastic or speculative imagination is simply not a valid way of experiencing the 'truth' about or making sense of human existence. If one applies the analyses of C. Wright Mills such a category of imagination clearly falls outside that dreary 'intellectual common denominator which is the 'sociological imagination' and as such it becomes as Mills so aptly puts it a 'mere vehicle of escape and obscurity'.

The fantastic imagination since it does not follow the rules of the sociological and rational imagination must of necessity be bordering on, if not entirely contained within, madness. Madness and other non-rational experiences have come to be confused and both have been silenced and refused any dialogue with reason. One of the contemporary tasks of thinking would be to untie and to distinguish madness from 'unreason' and to overthrow the myth that Reason is the only means of access to the truth. The elevation of the works of Artaud and other 'mad geniuses' to the status of romantic heroes of transgression simply continues to reinforce the problem. The experience of 'unreason', now only visible in literature in its most elevated form can only be produced by 'mad geniuses' such as Artaud and Vincent van Gogh. The fantastic imagination can only be indulged in by madmen, artistic geniuses and mystics. 'Ordinary' people have no real access to this domain except at one remove - through literature.

In contemporary culture, imagination in its speculative and fantastic form emerges most clearly in the form of 'popular culture' notably as science fiction and fantasy; its appearances are far more rigidly controlled in academic and avant-garde cultures. As part of popular culture it is supposed that the fantastic imagination operates merely as a form of entertainment, a glorified tranquiliser or anti-depressant or, at best, as thinly disguised 'morality tales' for the masses. It is not generally supposed that this kind of imagination is able to reveal any kind of genuine, difficult or 'truthful' insight into existence. The mainstream view of the fantastic imagination is nowhere better encapsulated than in an address (in Latin no less!) by the Chancellor of Oxford on the occasion of the award of an honorary degree to Doris Lessing whose later work has drifted into the realms of science fiction. He says 'she even took on the immense task of inventing a whole world, a genre of writing in which we expect to find nothing serious, which hardly accedes to the truths of ordinary life'.²¹

²¹ Cited in Ellen Parry 'All the news that is news', *Murmurs*, 4, 4 (August 1996), p. 4.

At the other end of the intellectual establishment, the comments of that champion of the reactivation of unreason are equally instructive. When asked for his comments on science fiction, Michel Foucault responded: 'Conducting a discourse on science fiction does not appeal to me. I know nothing about it. Absolutely nothing. No discourse comes to my mind or ever will I think. Science fiction leaves me without discourse.'²² The mere thought of Foucault bereft of discourse on any subject is almost within the realms of science fiction itself! Thus, one of the most important and popular contemporary incarnations of the fantastic imagination is dismissed by both the establishment and also by its self appointed transgressors.²³

As an aside, Foucault's comments appear in a quite extraordinary book published in 1979 by the Bogdanoff twins media personalities who specialised in presenting science fiction to the French public in the 1970s and 1980s. They boldly go where no-one had dared go before and asked a number of celebrities and other prominent figures what they thought of science fiction. Respondee included such luminaries as Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, Yves Saint Laurent and Paul Bocuse amongst many others. Their best efforts, however, were unable to elicit more than polite replies from the secretariats of Pope Paul VI and Queen Elizabeth.

But one might ask at this point, what is the value in reinstating this domain of human experience, an area which C. Wright Mills and his supporters would be inclined to analyse simply in terms of an aberrant social psychology, or a survival of old forms of 'superstition'? Some supporters of rationalist philosophies such as psychoanalysis like Julia Kristeva are willing to admit that in denying this area we are condemning ourselves to psychic death and meaninglessness and to crippling boredom and depression. 'These days who still has a soul?' she asks in her 1993 paean to psychoanalysis *New Maladies of the Soul* 'Today's men and women - who are stress ridden and eager to achieve, to spend money, have fun and die - dispense with the representation of their experience we call psychic life.'²⁴ To fill their psychic emptiness, Kristeva says, the modern individual resorts to psychotropic drugs on the one hand and on the other to television and the media. Drugs and television allow people to dream their lives away obviating the necessity to really face anything or create an active interior life for themselves. 'In such a

²² Igor & Grichka Bogdanoff, *L'Effet science fiction: à la recherche d'une définition*, Paris: Laffont, 1979, pp. 35, 117

²³ If various sociological studies of science fiction, the fantastic and its 'fans' have been attempted, rigorous philosophical and historical analyses of the domain might offer useful additional insights into the way truth and imagination are linked in contemporary society and open up new possibilities for reflection.

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul*, trans. Ross Guberman, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 7.

situation', she says, 'psychic life is blocked, inhibited and destroyed'.²⁵ But perhaps she has underestimated the capacity of the consumers of these alleged opiates of the masses to resist and turn these things to positive creative ends.

Psychotropic drugs such as tranquillisers and anti-depressants can certainly numb and normalise and their use needs to be carefully monitored, but as Artaud himself has argued on so many occasions, drugs can be the salvation of the truly ill body.²⁶ Without drugs, the ill body is condemned to the passivity of pain, suffering and mental disorder - it can think nothing, produce nothing. As for television, couch potatoes and credulous '60 minutes' addicts indeed abound, but increasing numbers of viewers are using it as a basis for the creation of wide and diverse social networks a process aided and abetted by the expansion of internet. Such viewers also use television as an opportunity to create new fictions and ideas and as a springboard to discuss social and political issues and the human condition in general. Neither is this consumption uncritical: 'fans' are some of the film and television industries most trenchant critics. In recent years, for example, there has been a growing criticism of the industry's apparent assumption that the viewers are a mindless and easily manipulated mass, only too happy to watch any formula aimed at the 'lowest common denominator'.

If the fantastic imagination does not have the respect of philosophers and other arbiters of 'truth' in our societies not everyone is content to accept these judgments. This may help to explain the enormous popularity of something like *The X Files* - a series not without its flaws by any means.²⁷ Paradoxically those very things which Kristeva claims can anaesthetise psychic life can be used to open it up again. However, she and others are right to emphasise the dangers of the fantastic imagination, haunted as it is at its extremes by the spectres of superstition, pure escapism and madness, but since no area of human activity is ever free of danger, is this sufficient reason to discard it entirely as a valid 'discourse of truth'? Again, the fantastic imagination, like any other human experience has its own systems of order and it is quite

²⁵ Ibid. Dennis Potter presents a similar view in his final work for television *Cold Lazarus* (1995). He depicts a world some 400 years into the future, governed by two giant corporations headed by two corrupt and evil magnates. One corporation provides the pills and the other television and other virtual entertainments. Resistance to this status quo emerges in the form of a terrorist group who call themselves 'Reality or Nothing'.

²⁶ It must be said, however, that the drug used by Artaud in the absence of the drugs available today - namely opium - resulted in problems almost as serious as the condition he was trying to alleviate by its use.

²⁷ *The X files* is often little more than an exercise in style - the 'unexplained' and pseudo-mysticism as another postmodern fashion accessory. Although I have no intention of denigrating style per se, it is highly debatable whether it is really capable on its own of filling the 'psychic void' described so well by Kristeva.

Unacceptable imaginings: Artaud

possible to train it, to analyse and criticise it and to relate it to other 'discourses of truth'.

To conclude this discussion, I wish to finish with a passage from Artaud:

For the moment I will limit myself to saying that the most urgent revolution that needs to take place is in a sort of regression in time. If we ere to return to the mentality ... of the Middle Ages, but in reality and by a kind of metamorphosis in essences, then I would judge that we have accomplished the only revolution worth talking about.²⁸

If a great many aspects of the Middle Ages are best left behind in the mists of history, a revolution in the way contemporary society links truth and imagination is long overdue.

²⁸ Artaud, 'Manifeste pour un théâtre avorté', *Oeuvres complètes*, t.1, p. 25.