Anthony Mannix: 'The atomic book'

Gareth Sion Jenkins

University of Wollongong

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses

Recommended Citation
NOTE
This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING
You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Anthony Mannix: ‘The Atomic Book’

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Gareth Sion Jenkins, Bachelor of Arts (Psychology), Master of Science (Psychology), Bachelor of Creative Arts (Honors, 1st Class)

Faculty of Creative Arts, School of Journalism and Creative Writing

2008
CERTIFICATION

I, Gareth Sion Jenkins, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

Gareth Sion Jenkins
27 March 2008
Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Introduction: A Playboy of the Garbage Tin.................................1-19


Chapter Two: Mannix Narrating Madness: “the art of schizophrenia”.................40-77

Chapter Three: Psychiatry Narrating Mannix Narrating Psychiatry...............78-111

Chapter Four: Opening the Venus Box: An Erotic Chasm............................112-144

Chapter Five: Reading Closely: “The present is all package” – or is it?............145-208

Chapter Six: The Light Bulb Eaters: Taking the Blinkers Off......................209-260

Conclusion: “I wish to harvest the crop”..............................................261-266

Works Cited..........................................................................................267-292

Works Consulted.....................................................................................293-300

Appendix 1.............................................................................................301-302

Appendix 2.............................................................................................303
Abstract

This thesis is the first and only investigation, academic or otherwise, of the oeuvre of the internationally recognised Australian Outsider Artist Anthony Mannix (1953- ). Virtually unknown as a writer, it is this aspect of his practice that will be the focus of this thesis.

The central argument of this thesis is that, whilst Mannix’s writing displays the extreme level of idiosyncratic thinking commonly associated with the work of Outsider Artists, it retains many traces of the literary, artistic and social environment in which he lives. Such traces are defamiliarised by his experience of schizophrenia and the episodes of psychosis that provide much of the subject matter for his texts. Rational language is refigured by madness in what Mannix calls his “outsider writing”. It is argued that such writing presents a dialogue between madness and reason, resisting the propensity (as elucidated by Michel Foucault) of rationality to silence the voice of the insane. Mannix cites the work of Antonin Artaud as influential on his own ideas. This thesis contextualises Mannix’s point of view in relation to theorists (predominantly post-structuralist and “anti-psychiatric”) for whom Artaud was also influential in defining notions of madness.

Chapter One discusses the construction of ‘The Mannix Atomic Book Digital Archive’ (‘The Atomic Book’), to which this thesis is designed as companion. The archive has been created to facilitate the detailed study of Mannix’s writing; almost entirely unpublished, such work is predominantly held in singular volumes unavailable to the public. Thus, it is to the archive itself that many of the Mannix quotations discussed by this thesis are referenced. The archive contains digital versions of seventy-two artists’ books (numbering in excess of four thousand pages), sound recordings, a video work and biographical material.

Chapters Two and Three discuss Mannix’s engagement with the central theme of his work, madness. Chapter Two examines the influence of schizophrenia, and particularly psychosis, on Mannix’s artistic world-view. Here he consciously situates himself within the lineage of Art Brut and Outsider Art as a shamanic figure documenting his own personal unconscious “cosmology”.


Chapter Three discusses Mannix’s dialogue with psychiatry. Mannix’s oeuvre, what he terms his “book of life”, can be read as a “speculative narrative” which counters the rational narratives with which psychiatry has attempted (in over twenty years of contact) to re/write him in a manoeuvre that sees the medical profession characterise the patient as an unreliable narrator of their own experience.

Chapter Four is focused on the second dominant theme within Mannix’s work: the erotic. Mannix’s psychotic episodes are often highly erotic in nature and the unconscious landscapes Mannix explores are dominated by erotic happenings and images. It is often through the erotic that Mannix experiences the subject / object confluence characteristic of schizophrenia, and the manner in which art-making facilitates such erotic unions is outlined.

The final two chapters of the thesis, Five and Six, rather than drawing from many works simultaneously, are dedicated to a close engagement with a selection of individual books and creative series produced by Mannix. Here it is the manner in which texts operate as narratives in their own right that is the focus of analysis. Chapter Five discusses the following texts: The Machines, or a Concise History of the Machine (as far as I know them...); Erogeny: a book of fables about Rozelle Lunatic Asylum, The Skull, The Chambers and The Demise.

Chapter Six focuses on what Mannix calls his novel, The Light Bulb Eaters. It is within this, his longest written work, that Mannix suggests he most comprehensively sets out his unconscious cosmology. Mannix details his “schizophrenic trek”, a journey into the underworld of the unconscious in pursuit of the “power” required to take control of the very landscapes through which he moves. Ultimately, Mannix seeks release from this death-like realm; in order to achieve such a resurrection he must, literally, bring his artwork to life and this becomes the definitive aim of his entire oeuvre.
Acknowledgments

I acknowledge the guidance and support of my academic supervisor Dr John Hawke (Monash University, School of English, Communications and Performance Studies, Faculty of Arts).

Sections of this thesis have appeared in the following publications:


Sections of this thesis have been presented as papers at the following conference events:


“I am a playboy of the garbage tin but in it are the sun and the moon.”

Anthony Mannix.