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Gareth Sion Jenkins
University of Wollongong

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Title Sheet

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

Thesis Certification

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

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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.

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Vitalpoetics: A Journal of Critical Literary Theory, v.1, No.1. 2008.
www.vitalpoetics.com

‘Anthony Mannix: Translator of Strange Occurrences’. 2008 Adelaide Biennial Catalogue, Published by the Museum of South Australia.

‘Reality: A “Relatively” Private Anagram’ (Chapter Publication), Creativity, Madness and Civilization. Ed.: Richard Pine. Newcastle UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007.

‘Narratives of Self: ‘the missing piece / in the jigsaw of sanity’: Antonin Artaud, Anthony Mannix, Sandy Jeffs, Geoff Prince, Graeme Doyle and Francis Webb’, Catalogue essay in the publication, ‘For Matthew & Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia’. Sydney: University of NSW in association with Campbelltown Arts Centre and Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith, 2006.

‘Anthony Mannix: A Being of Art’, artist’s profile in the publication, ‘For Matthew & Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia’. Sydney: University of NSW in association with Campbelltown Arts Centre and Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre, Penrith, 2006.

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

2006 – University of NSW, College of Fine Arts (COFA). Conference: ‘For Matthew & Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia’: Paper entitled: “Anthony Mannix: ‘I am a playboy of the garbage tin but in it are the sun and moon.’”

2006 – University of Newcastle, ‘Critical Animals: Creative Research Symposium’. Paper entitled: ‘Anthony Mannix and The Atomic Book’.

2006 – University of Princeton (American Comparative Literature Association conference: ‘Human and Its Other’). Paper entitled: ‘Anthony Mannix: Riding the Beast Side-saddle – Resisting the Normal’.

2005 – The Durrell School of Corfu (Conference: ‘Madness and Creativity’): Paper entitled: ‘Reality: A ‘Relatively’ Private Anagram’.

2004 – University of Technology, Sydney (The Sydney Poetry Seminar). Paper entitled: ‘The Poetic Worlds of Antonin Artaud, Unica Zurn and Francis Webb’.

2004 – University of Wollongong (‘Vital Poetics Seminar Series’): Paper entitled: “The ‘above and the beyond of signs’: Towards a Schizophrenic Poetics”.

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

Anthony Mannix.