

The Bald Man and the Digital Perm

– a response to the works of Julia Drouhin in the exhibition

“Miss Despoinas: Pataphysical Salon_What is a digital perm”

Text-O-Matic

It's been a while, but before I was bald, my hair was curly. I had lots of hair in the 80s. We sometimes remember the past with a degree of nostalgia, but sometimes elements of the past are transitional phases, passing fancies. When I first saw Julia's 'Text-O-Matic', it reminded me that I've recently started seeing these knitting machines in op shops a lot more than I used to. Has a phase ended? Are more people starting to get rid of them or is it that I've just noticed them, having moved far enough away from that time so as they no-longer seem overly familiar, but archaic enough to be strangely foreign? This machine now has become a means of communication, not a constructor of warmth. Interestingly, even though it now has a new use, that use has the feel of some long forgotten futuristic imagining. The old spy-craft or espionage punch card, the code, the revealing occult, recording the discussions in the room and presenting key words like some piece of Burroughsian cutup poetry. Drouhin mentioned to me, that she wanted to re-interpret the word 'digital' to indicate, handmade, more specifically, the fingers, the digits. Again, a kind of retrospection, a perm by curling the hair around the fingers, rather than with some mechanical device.

Julia tells me of the appeal of recontextualising this readymade object:

The "Text-o-matic", metal insect looking knitting machine from the 70's (memo-matic), is based on type writer machine and computer reading punch cards...

The sound (it will eventually produce) can be heard through the "Signal To Noise" device using the pirate radio logo and customised headphones that Miss Despoinas provided. The woolen "book" or parchment will be a printed idea of what is a digital perm, in a pataphysical salon,

What will finally be revealed with this text, will it make sense? And at the end of the day, like some kind of music-box or pianola roll, the resulting pattern will activate a repetitive movement that will create a mechanical, an industrial soundscape transmitted to the pirate radio station.

What will it sound like?

Eugene, eardresser

I sat down beneath the hair dryer dome with the headphones and listened to an industrial thrum at the opening of the exhibition. It was the first element I heard of 'Eugène, eardresser'. The rest of the world continued to exist around me, but there was now this new, enveloping and seductive layer with me. That eventually gave way, then there were little hints of something, clicks, glitches that I couldn't quite make out. Perhaps a little cheekily I asked Julia to reveal her aural sources, she did tell, but I won't reveal them, partly because I can't remember everything, partly because the intuiting of what is being heard and allowing that imagining to wash over you is one of the great joys of this work. And even though the real world receded somewhat at the opening, I really wanted to return during the day to experience this work proper.

I asked Julia if there was a specific mood she wanted to create in the listener with this work or are all 'interpretations' valid? It was indeed a specific soundscape created, but how that may impress itself of the listener is uncertain. She states;

The "Eardresser" binaural soundscape is abstract enough but still suggestive to create mental spaces in every different brain(s), connected with personal experiences, memory, and practice of

listening. My intention is to refresh the ear function by creating a psychoacoustic illusion.

Sitting down for the second time on a quiet Monday afternoon, I seemed to enter the abstract narrative at the right spot, whatever that means. Little glitches, clicks, tiny pops, the minutiae of everyday life were all there and they grew and built over time. There were snippets of music, voices, birds. Even though there will little disturbances, they were well timed and executed within the soundscape and as a consequence, the work is strangely comforting. Perhaps it's the abstracted, yet familiar sounds that dress your ears, perhaps it's the sense of safety in the chair, the relaxing place you sit as you wait to be made beautiful. Or perhaps it's because as Drouhin states: *The specific soundscape I composed vibrates the water in our body by holophonic massage. It can conduce the listener to a perceptual hairstyle, a dry brain (then he can read the magazines, as you get bored in an hair salon, you still look at those crap people magazines), or a hidden message.* For me, I didn't want to read the magazines of collage, as many images were produced even with my eyes open.

There seems to be a clear commonality between the two works, in not only the retrospective materials and objects, but in the intent. As I spoke earlier there is an 'occult' nature to this work, with a very simple definition of 'occult' being the revealing or knowledge of the hidden, quite separate from the paranormal, though of course that interpretation is often made. I surmised that in their own ways, both works act as some kind of conduit for revealing something hidden. When suggesting to the artist that both of these works seem to me be tools of the occult. Drouhin concluded;

The personal alchemy between the visitor and the art works might stimulate reactions that I can't control. Those 2 art works can be quite mystic and magic, as they are printed of nostalgia, but are close to a science fiction device to send a message, or yourself, in another dimension. Those abandoned manufactured " found objects", as Duchamp would say "ready made", take place in a Pataphysical Salon to enhance the experiential spirit of "after physics" prototypes.

Which comes to the point, what do we finally understand when something is revealed that was once hidden. Do we have some enlightenment that allows us to move onward and upward in our lives. Or is the information so abstract as to wash over us as a mood or an emotion that is unquantifiable. Perhaps that in the end is enough, as what is revealed is there another layer that we didn't realise was there.

When the answer comes, will this digital perm make my hair straight?