

A COURIER CAME INTO THE SHOP...

INTO THE BICYCLE SHOP WALKS A GREEN HAired COURIER. HE SWINGS HIS STRIPED SHOULDER BAG OVER AND RIPS OPEN THE VELCRO COVER. A BOX OF RUBBER TUBES – ‘SIGN HERE PLEASE’. THE JEWELLER BEHIND THE COUNTER SPIES A CURIOUS ORNAMENT AROUND HIS WRIST. IT’S A TINY ROLLER CHAIN. ‘WHERE’S IT FROM?’ ‘IT COMES OUT OF AN OLD PHOTOCOPY MACHINE.’ REALLY.

THUS BEGINS A CHAIN REACTION. IN CHAIN REACTION, BLANCHE TILDEN LEAVES HER BENCH IN SEARCH OF JEWELLERY IN THE WILD. UNTIL THIS POINT, TILDEN HAS BEEN CONTENT TO PAINSTAKINGLY TRANSLATE THE BICYCLE CHAIN INTO SLEEK BODY ORNAMENTS. TO SUPPLEMENT HER WONDERFULLY HANDMADE CHAINS, SHE BEGINS TO INVESTIGATE THE LIFE OF CHAINS IN BOTH THE HARD EDGED WORLDS OF MANUFACTURING AND ELUSIVE TURNS OF PHRASE IN EVERYDAY LANGUAGE. HER INTERESTS HAVE TRANSCENDED THE ROLLER CHAIN AS A PURELY FORMAL DEVICE AND EMBRACE ITS PLACE IN THE WORLD.

CAN THE PHOTOCOPIER CHAIN BECOME A JEWELLERY ITEM? NOT REALLY. AS STEEL IT IS MADE TO BE LUBRICATED AND WILL THUS EVENTUALLY RUST ON AN ACIDIC HUMAN BODY. PERHAPS THERE ARE SIMILAR CHAINS IN CIRCULATION THAT ARE MORE DURABLE. A PERSISTENT ROUND OF PHONE CALLS LOCATES A SUPPLY OF MEDICAL MACHINERY, WHERE CHAINS THAT WORK EQUIPMENT FOR PACKAGING MEDICINES ARE FABRICATED IN STAINLESS STEEL. THEY NEED TO BE STERILISED IN BOILING WATER. TRULY.

WHAT TILDEN DISPLAYS FOR US IN THE GALLERY ARE THE TREASURES OF HER RESEARCH. MINIATURE MODIFIES THE PACKAGING CHAIN BOUND WITH TITANIUM FOR TENDER WRISTS AND NECKS. ‘CUTE.’ VALUE ADDED TRANSFORMS BICYCLE CHAINS INTO BEAUTY ACCESSORIES. ‘SASSY.’ SPEED DRAMATISES THE CHAINS ROLE BY BREAKING THE LOOP WITH A TAIL. ‘DEADLY’. AND BUREAUCRACY TRANSFORMS THE CHAIN CONCEPTUALLY FROM A MECHANICAL DEVICE TO A METAPHORICAL APPARATUS. 324 PLATES, EACH DRILLED, HAND CUT, FILED POLISHED AND ANODISED, BRANCH OFF ONE ANOTHER TO GIVE SEMBLANCE TO THE DECISION MAKING RITUALS OF GOVERNMENT. WOULDN’T WE LIKE TO SEE THE LORD MAYOR WEAR ONE OF THESE AS THE OFFICIAL CHAIN OF OFFICE? ‘SUPER.’

SO WHAT IS GOING ON HERE? ARE WE BEING OFFERED A KIND OF FANCY DRESS, IN WHICH WE CAN SPORT THE CONCEIT OF TRANSFORMING ORDINARY OBJECTS INTO PRECIOUS JEWELS? IS CHAIN REACTION A POLITICAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE NEED TO CONSERVE OUR RESOURCES BY RECASTING REMNANTS OF INDUSTRY INTO NEW USES?

THESE MAY SEEM HEAVY-HANDED QUESTIONS. THEY HAVE LITTLE TO SAY ABOUT THE SENSORY PLEASURES OF TILDEN’S JEWELLERY. THESE ENQUIRIES DON’T TOUCH ON THE PERFECT FINISHES IN HER LINKS, OR THE WAY THEY HAVE BEEN BEAUTIFULLY PROPORTIONED FOR WEAR. THE QUESTIONS DON’T RELATE TO THE WONDERFUL PLAY OF POOLING A NECKLACE CHAIN INTO YOUR PALM, LISTENING TO THE PRETTY TINKLE OF PYREX.

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TILDEN

YET EVEN ON THE LEVEL OF PLEASURES, TILDEN'S PIECES TOUCH ON EXPERIENCES THAT GO BEYOND JEWELLERY. WE ARE NETWORKED BEINGS WHO ENJOY THE FLOW OF INFORMATION THROUGH OUR VEINS. WE ARE THE SPROCKETS AND INFORMATION IS OUR CHAIN. WE QUICKLY PASS ON THE EMAIL VIRUS WARNING. WE ENJOY RECEIVING AND SPREADING 'THE GOSS'. WE LOOK FOR A FAMILIAR FACE IN THE CROWD. WE FEED THE TICKET BARRIERS IN TRAIN STATIONS. WE LIKE THINGS THAT GO BEEP.

OF COURSE, IT IS EASY TO BE CRITICAL OF THESE PLEASURES – THEY CAN APPEAR AS FORCES OF BLIND CONFORMITY THAT TIE US TO THE LATEST BANDWAGON. YET THIS WOULD DENY OUR INTRINSIC NATURE AS MEMBERS OF A COLLECTIVE BEING. BETTER TO CELEBRATE THE TRIBE, THAN DRAW ACROSS THE CURTAINS OF ROMANTICISM. BETTER TO JOIN THE CHORUS, THAN MUMBLE DISSENT. BETTER TO MAKE APPLAUSE, THAN SIT ON BOTH HANDS.

YET NEAT AS THIS MAY BE, THERE IS ONE WORK OF TILDEN'S THAT DOESN'T SEEM TO CONFORM TO THE TREND. STIFF LINK DELIBERATELY UNDERMINES THE VIRTUE OF CHAINS AS FRICTIONLESS TRANSLATORS OF ENERGY. TILDEN INCORPORATES GRIT INTO ONE OF THE LINKS SO THAT IT MIGHT TAKE A STABLE FORM. IN A SUBTLER WAY, SHE REMINDS US THAT THE BODY IS NOT A BICYCLE FRAME – IT HAS FLASH AS WELL AS BONES. RESISTANCE CAN ACTUALLY BE PRODUCTIVE IN HOLDING A SHAPE ON THE BODY. SOMETIMES WE JUST DON'T FIT IN. 'BUGGER.'

THESE ARE SOME OF THE MYSTERIES IN TILDEN'S JEWELLERY. SHE GIVES METAL THE CAPACITY TO FLOW. SHE ELABORATES THE CHAIN AS A DEVICE FOR UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES. AND, CLASSICALLY, SHE ORNAMENTS FUNCTION.

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