

Book review

The Occulture (David Cecchetto, Marc Couroux, Ted Hiebert, Eldritch Priest), *Ludic Dreaming*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2017. ISBN: 978-1-5013-2079-8 (HB); 978-1-5013-2080-4 (PB); 978-1-5013-2082-8 (ePub). doi:10.1017/S1355771817000565

Ludic Dreaming concerns the interchange between sound and contemporary technoculture. The sound organisation it examines is one that takes place in the brain, and specifically the sleeping brain. It is a very welcome book: a timely corrective to the ever-increasing materialism of sound studies, media studies, digital cultural studies and even musical composition itself. This is not to say that it is simply anti-materialistic. As the book states: ‘dreams register fluxes of the real independent of any operation of consciousness and any bodily capture or incorporation; *to have dreamed*, though, is to recognize the mediatic role that a body plays in shifting this event from a registration to a symbolic inscription’ (p. 19). The dreaming of the title is therefore an embodied dreaming, and not a surrealistic cataloguing of the subconscious. This is crucial, because sound, which is after all made of vibrations, requires a body as well as a mind.

By writing both in and on a dream, *Ludic Dreaming* leads the reader towards a creative response which is moreover embedded in the text itself through its interweaving of fiction and ‘post-critical’ analysis. Actively resisting lucidity in favour of ludicity, it aims to reposition criticism in the ways set out in its own Introduction: by undermining ‘the myth that knowledge necessarily entails transparency’; by going beyond mere deconstruction; and by moving sound studies ‘beyond its infancy as a species of media archaeology and towards the domains of aesthetics and speculative thought’ (p. 14).

Of course, there are consequences of such an ambitious approach. If it is lucidity you seek, then this book is not really for you. One emerges from a reading in much the same state as one does from a dream: convinced of its importance and excited by the flow and variety of its ideas, but not entirely sure what it is one has just experienced. There are many passages of real insight. To mention just a few: the discussions of tinnitus (a topic which will acquire increasing importance as a generation that grew up with amplified in-ear headphones experiences the consequences), Nietzsche’s musical madness, sonic texturing and

virtual perspectives in ambisonics all jump out as full of revelations. The same is true of more philosophical discussions of topics such as irony (‘irony is lost when it’s forgotten that it’s not the opposite of what it’s playing at’ p. 55) or the imagination (‘the imagination is permeable to both dreams and the real ... It is not just dreams that incorporate stimuli drawn from the real world, but reality, too, that sometimes incorporates moments that began while asleep’, p. 103).

The elaborate language constantly shifts between such insightful passages and the more ludic aspects of fictional writing. The major mode is a continuous relativising of illogic which offers a challenge to ratiocination. As the waking mind emerges from the book, there is a natural tendency to dismiss its contents as too puzzling to be useful. This must be resisted, because, just as with dreams themselves, logic is a poor framework through which to make such judgements. So, the reviewer’s job is partly to ‘go with the flow’ and not to raise small objections that diminish the power and impact of the read experience.

This does not, however, imply an absence of critical response. Let us consider an example where the strain placed upon the suspension of disbelief takes the reader down into a vortex of rethinking and out the other side into the presumably desired dream-like state of uncertainty. The first chapter begins: ‘last night, I dreamed I was a sound’ (p. 17). (This ‘last night I dreamed...’ formula is an incipit which begins each chapter.) Now, we may reasonably ask, how does the dreamer *know* s/he was a sound? The question becomes acute when, later in the chapter, the writer says: ‘I dreamed I was a sound; if you can make sense of that, then I’d wager you haven’t understood my dream. I certainly can’t, and thus haven’t’ (p. 19). The epistemological crisis this induces can lead in only one direction: this is a fiction and the incipit is hypothetical. So what does it mean to know *anything* in this context? Of course, one has the strong sense that this is precisely where the authors (writing under the significant name ‘The Occulture’) want you to end up. The danger is that it reduces the impact of the rather rich content of this chapter to be able to dismiss it so easily.

This is a book that is so thoroughly imbued with pataphysics that it does not need to signal its presence explicitly beyond a few mentions of the word in chapter headings. Instead, the pataphysical operators (syzygy, clinamen, antinomy and the rest) are present throughout. Some of the most successful passages

occur when the prose reaches a Raymond Roussel-like precision of description, for example:

Scroll was bewitched by the manifold methods of restructuring acoustic fields, ultimately devoting himself to syzygetic combines for their defiantly arcane attributes. In these double earworms, each component remained accessible yet fatally intertwined with the other. Such imbrication was accomplished through psychoacoustic principles like masking, in which the spectral components of one song temporarily overwhelm the other, redirecting listening: and metamorphosis, an insidious operator concealing the emergences and disappearances of either song, clinching indivisibility. (p. 73)

One is also reminded of Alfred Jarry's unjustly neglected novel *Les Jours et les nuits* (*Days and Nights*) (1897), with its subtitle 'novel of a deserter', which refers to desertion of both the army and the real (physical) world. Jarry begins by alternating chapters

describing events of the day as if they were happening at night and vice versa, until this alternation itself breaks down, leaving 'only hallucinations, or perceptions, and ... neither nights nor days' (Jarry 2006: 74). The playfulness of *Ludic Dreaming* is, therefore, full of humour, but of a kind which leads to the seriousness of pataphysical science.

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REFERENCES

- Jarry, A. 2006. *Three Early Novels: Days and Nights; Exploits and Opinions of Doctor Faustroll, Pataphysician; Absolute Love*, trans. Alexis Lykiard. London: Atlas Press.