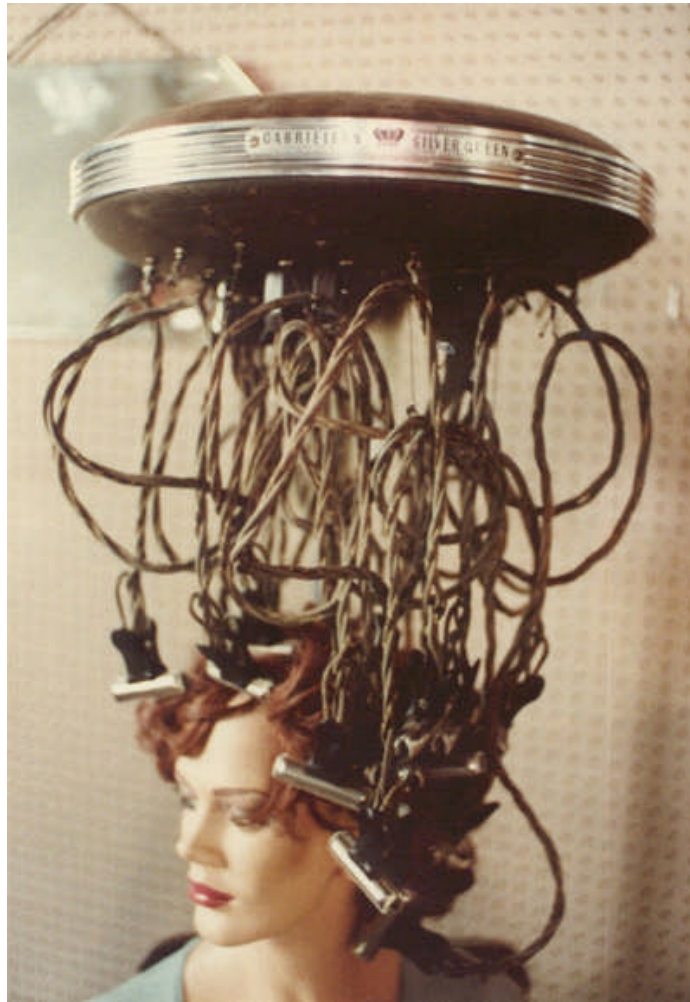


The Silver Queen



As mentioned previously, the Acme Brain Wave Transferatron was an effective person-to-person telepathic linking device. However, its nearly insatiable appetite for electricity made it unsuitable for all but the most well-heeled consumers. So a more cost-effective version was designed. But when the Acme Brain Wave Transferatron Mark II, a.k.a. the Silver Queen, was unveiled a year later and several crates of dollar bills over budget, anticipation turned to disappointment. First of all, it had none of the sexy visual appeal of the original Transferatron. In place of the sleek lines was a rat's nest of connecting cables, saddling the user with a Medusa-like appearance. Second, the Silver Queen could only accommodate one party at a time. The transferer connected first, downloaded her mentalizations into the unit's buffer, and disconnected. Then the transferee hooked up (but typically not before thoroughly sanitizing the cables), uploaded the pertinent data, and disengaged. Even a simple dialogue could take hours to complete. But this eventually led to the rediscovery of a nearly forgotten human activity known as "conversation." (*Conversation: noun, a spoken exchange of thoughts, opinions, and blancmange.*) Regrettably, interest in the activity was short-lived, and people soon reverted to their typical taciturn natures.