



## 2010 Issue No. 18 — The Face and Technology

### Appearing to Act Younger: The Face of Avon

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In Avon's Australian "Summer Beauty" catalogue for 2004, the following sentence is used to describe Anew Pure 02 Oxygenating Cream: "Rejuvi-cell Complex makes surface skin cells appear to act younger" (Avon 42). What can this possibly *mean*? What is this "appearance of acting" on the part of skin cells, given the magical presence of Rejuvi-cell Complex? What kind of derma-techno-logy is this that can so easily, and with such directorial powers of ordering, put on the appearance of acting younger?

Perhaps it means nothing; it is a throwaway phrase, mere words. It is, after all, advertising copy in an Avon catalogue, destined for a quick read in the bathrooms of suburban Australia before being tossed out with the recycling. Such a simple phrase, so clear, so innocent, so nicely packed with the power-words of the genre. No doubt it is another white cream in an endless run of white creams that either do or do not have some kind of effect on one's face, or on the appearance of one's face, or on one's perceptions of one's face, or on the perceptions of others of one's face, and either way its actual effect is functionally irrelevant, the main issue being the "race to the bottom" of selling the smallest amount of white cream at the highest price.

I can't help wanting to take it literally though. What if someone buys the product, someone in need of rejuvenating, a wealthy baby-boomer, or an aging actor perhaps? What happens when their surface skin cells start appearing to act younger? What does that *feel* like? For precisely this reason I can't help having some questions; what if it were *true*? What if it actually worked, what if it lived up to its letter, the letter of its law, what if it *performed* precisely as it said it would?

In this paper I will both return to and build on analyses of the cosmeceutical industry and its relation to time and memory I have conducted elsewhere (see Cooke), focusing, here, more specifically on the relation between the face and technology, and the way in which the language and practices of technoscience inflects this relation. I intend to focus this paper around the advertising copy describing the aforementioned product, and another product from the same catalogue. While it often seems as if the rhetoric of the cosmetics industry comes pre-analysed, pre-digested, pre-determined to explain its intentions fully upon the slightest hint of critical analysis (or to be simply revealed as marketing gibberish, which is always a distinct possibility), I would nevertheless like to use these advertisements as something of a sounding board, as think-pieces for a broader questioning of the state and status of the contemporary face and its relation to technology. Avon's rhetoric has an economy, simplicity and bold absurdity that is as charming as it is absurd, and these ads are no exception. If we can take the language of cosmetics advertising as both reflective and constitutive of contemporary approaches to and understandings of the face and its appearance, and most especially of the faces of women, what

light does Avon's language shed on the face and its appearance today?

It is my argument that the advertisement's doubling of figures of artifice – Rejuvi-cell complex makes surface skin cells *appear* to *act* younger – problematizes the separation of the face and its appearance, and thus surface and depth, artifice and reality. At the same time, the emphasis on skin *cells*, and on these skin cells' openness to a technological "cure," shifts the focus from the face and its appearance to the comparably deeper and "biological" level of the constitution of the skin, which is rendered, however, as essentially technological. Thus, Avon's language could be seen as reflective of broadly post-structuralist discourses to do with the relation between humanity and technology – the "cyborg" and the "posthuman" – as well as more recent examinations of the obsolescence of notions of bodily "wholeness." At the same time, the emphasis on changes on a cellular level suggest the promotion of the product as a "cosmeceutical," which in turn relies on recent developments in technoscience. The economic significance of such a move – the significance of co-opting either a post-structuralist or a technoscientific and cosmeceutical discourse, in the name of selling cosmetics – is the question the final section of this paper will address.

### The Appearance of Appearance

Today, "appearance" is the domain of the cosmetics industry, and it is predominantly around the face that questions of appearance coalesce. "Reduces the appearance of fine-lines and wrinkles"; witness any TV advertisement or read any newspaper or magazine ad for any of the various cosmetic anti-aging products on the market, and this now generic phrase, or a variant thereof, will no doubt play a part. The appearances of fine lines and wrinkles the world over are daily ploughed and plumped by loving cosmetic micro-machines, cleansers and toners, re-programmers and fillers, communicators, informationalizers and erasers. Once the relatively innocent evidence of time and age, fine lines and wrinkles are now daily demonized as some of the "signs of aging" – the somewhat apocalyptic "7 signs of aging" if we take Olay as our guide (Olay) – and are defined no longer in terms of such evidence, but in the terms of the cosmetics industry and its many technologies for reducing not fine lines and wrinkles themselves, but their "appearance."

But what does "appearance" *mean*? If a certain product can reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, it is generally understood that it reduces the *visibility* of fine lines and wrinkles, the degree to which they are noticeable by another or by oneself. Appearance is a question of looking and being looked at. Fine lines and wrinkles, in being observed, can be said to "have" an appearance, to the degree that the visible appearance of the fine lines and wrinkles can change while the fine lines and wrinkles themselves need not; fine lines and wrinkles "have" an appearance that stems from but is not necessarily "attached" to them. Facial features, and the face itself as the unifying logic that overcodes and gathers facial features together into a sensible whole, are simultaneously structural and visible things, and the visible aspect of the face and its features can, it seems, be changed while their structural aspect remains the same. There is a surface/depth dichotomy at work here, which maps onto a distinction between what is mutable and what is unchanging.

The notion of a mutable surface appearance and comparably unchanging underlying structure, is a common understanding of the face, found in a number of European traditions and across multiple languages. Davide Stimilli discusses the distinction in Latin between *facies* and *vultus*, where "'facies' is natural and immobile, 'vultus' is arbitrary and mobile" (Stimilli 72). He also notes a later distinction in English between "face" and "countenance" in Thomas Hill's *Contemplation of Mankind* of 1571:

The face is often taken, and that simply, for the naturall looke of any; but the countenance [sic] signifieth the qualities of the mind.... In a man the face remaineth, but the countenance doth alter: so that the countenance [sic] is named of the Latin word *volando*, which properly in English signifieth a flying or vanishing away. (Hill, in Stimilli 75)

Here, as with *facies* and *vultus*, “face” refers to the structural aspect of a face, while “countenance,” which for Hill comes from the Latin *volando* and is related to *vultus*, is the mutable manifestation of the qualities of the mind, which appear and then vanish. The historical notion of the “passions,” which these days are understood as facial expressions, is tied up with this idea. When Johann Caspar Lavater wrote his *Essays on Physiognomy* in 1772, the notion of the passions as the *fleeting* expressions of the mind was the lynchpin for his distinction between physiognomy and pathognomy.

Physiognomy, opposed to pathognomy, is the knowledge of the signs of the powers and inclinations of man. Pathognomy is the knowledge of the signs of the passions.... Physiognomy, therefore, teaches the knowledge of character at rest, and pathognomy of character in motion. (Lavater 12)

More recently, Gilles Deleuze calls on this relation of movement and stillness in *Cinema 1*, in his description of the face as “intensive micro-movements” on a “reflecting surface,” arguing that whenever we discover these two poles in something, we can say that it has been treated as a face, faceified, *visagéifié* (Deleuze 88). The contemporary notion of appearance inherits these relations between stillness and movement, depth and surface, allowing that cosmetics can affect the appearance of the face while leaving the face itself relatively untouched, allowing also, then, that appearances can change.

There is another set of connotations, however, which add to how appearance is understood, and this is the relation of appearance and cosmetics to technics. The word “appear” comes from the Latin *apparere*, meaning to come forth, to become visible. There is a kind of revelation to appearance, a temporal process of “unconcealment,” as Heidegger might say. The word “apparatus” comes from a similar but slightly different root, the Latin *apparare*, to prepare, to make ready. *Ap-parare* and *ap-parere* are linked by a structure of bringing forth and coming into visibility. In later usage, apparatus, of course, comes to mean not just the act of equipping or preparing, but the equipment itself, that which is prepared. Likewise, appearance comes to mean both coming forth into visibility, and the look or visual aspect of something. Appearance is thus both visual aspect, and the art or act of achieving this visibility – appearances are things that are prepared – and it is here that appearance is related to *tekhnē*, for *tekhnē* in its Aristotelian sense is art, craft and skill, but also contingency, what Pierre Aubenque refers to as “that which could be otherwise” (Aubenque, in Stiegler 29) – which can be contrasted with *science* understood as the exploration of that which *cannot* be otherwise, that which *is* (Stiegler 34). Appearances are changeable and appearance is changeability, contingency. While the face, as underlying sub-structure, is to be considered “natural and immobile,” and in its physiognomic understanding is said to give access to the “interior” of underlying character, the appearance is surface and technical *artifice*, giving access only to fleeting and easily simulated passions, and it is the *art* of appearance that allows appearances to change.

If contemporary cosmetics advertisements unproblematically associate cosmetics with the art of changing the face’s appearance, and thus make the tacit assumption that it is not the face “itself” that is changed but its appearance, and that this is perfectly acceptable and indeed expected, historically, it has been precisely this potential for divergence between appearance and underlying “reality” that has contributed to the reputation of cosmetics for deception, and again it is a distinction between the natural and the artificial or technical that is at stake. Modernity has been marked by the association of the painted face with deception, and suspicion regarding

variances between appearance and being, which were hotly debated throughout the Renaissance and the Restoration, and continued until the late 19th century. John Donne, in a sermon "Preached at a Marriage," argues that to use cosmetics is to "take the pencil out of God's hands (Donne 26). Alongside usurping the creative power of God, cosmetics are associated with Promethean over-reaching, which is also, as with appearance, a question of technics. Frances Dolan cites the translation of Giovanni Lomazzo's *Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Painting, Carvinge and Buildinge* (1598), wherein "those who paint 'may seeme rather to be of the race of Prometheus, or some of Dedalus or Pigmaliions creatures'" (Dolan 232). All of these figures are over-reachers, but they over-reach via technical simulation or mimesis.

At the same time, distrust of cosmetics has also functioned as a suitable mechanism by which men could express their fears of and frustrations with feminine sexuality and power, popularizing an image of women as "naturally" duplicitous both as a means of exerting social power and to divert attention from men's own practices of dissimulation and self-creation (Dolan 231). As Will Pritchard notes, many Renaissance and Restoration writers saw women as inherently false. Pritchard quotes from Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), which detects "an inbred falsehood in women which inclines 'em still to them whom they may most easily deceive" (Pritchard 35). Demonizing the use of cosmetics was a perfect way to both underscore the apparent falsity of women and shift the blame for the use of cosmetics back onto women, decrying any male influence in the promulgation of expectations of beauty that may lead to cosmetic use in the first place.

In a similar vein, Kathy Peiss notes that use of cosmetics was frequently associated with witchcraft, citing the English Parliament's introduction, in 1770, of an act that allowed men to annul their marriages to women who "ensnared" them through the use of perfumes, face paint, cosmetics, false teeth and hair. "That a woman with rouge pot and powder box might practice cosmetic sorcery suggests both an ancient fear of female power and a new secular concern: In a rapidly commercializing and fluid social world, any woman with a bewitching face might secure a husband and make her fortune" (Peiss 26). Here, cosmetics are associated with sorcery and entrapment because they give *any* woman the opportunity to "secure a husband"; cosmetics allow women to cross class boundaries, to "pass" in an economic or cultural sphere to which they may not have been born. In a society where status and class were expressed through the signs and codes of dress and comportment, and a society in which women were taking a gradually more public role, as occurred through the 1600s and 1700s, cosmetic use had to be rigorously monitored and its significations tightly circumscribed.

Most importantly, cosmetics were to form part of a relation between art (*tekhnē*) and the natural. What emerges time and time again in histories of cosmetics and of the technologies of women's appearances more generally, is that these technologies were deemed to be acceptable only when they highlighted what was (assumed to be) "natural" and did not seek to introduce disparity between what a woman "was" and what she "appeared to be." Didactic texts in the 1600s encouraged women to "bee indeed what you desire to be thought" (Braithwait 330), and that "the best way to seem chaste is to be so" (du Bosc 27). Despite the emphasis on playing to public expectation and "seeming," virtue is the preferred cosmetic. The same discourse functioned in the United States in the 19th century. Kathy Peiss describes the 1827 publication of a book containing riddles wherein images of cosmetics were flipped aside to reveal moral platitudes. "The pictures were pasted onto the page in such a way that when lifted, they revealed the answer to the puzzle. 'Apply this precious liquid to the face / And every feature beams with youth and grace.' A pot of 'universal beautifier'? No, the secret lay in 'good humour'" (Peiss 25). However, because virtue was not always quite enough to guarantee the look of youth and a rosy hue, it was considered acceptable to use cosmetics in certain situations, such as to cover blemishes or deformity, to cover the pallor of an illness (Peiss 49), or so that a wife (note: a *wife* and not a woman as such; beauty is proprietary) could "seeme more comely in the presence of others" (Braithwait, in Dolan 233). In

this understanding, cosmetics can only be used to bring the woman's face into line with male expectation and notions of the "natural" state of things, which is also to say that technologies of appearance are tolerated to the degree that they reinforce an *idea* of the "natural" (Negrin 87).

It is this logic which underpins the shift that occurred in the late 19th and early 20th century, when a view emerged in which cosmetics were seen not as falsity but as "self-expression." In the Introduction to *Hope in a Jar*, Kathy Peiss notes the 1938 release of two lipsticks named Lady and Hussy, marketed together as products to be alternated according to mood. Where in the previous centuries these categories of Lady and Hussy would have been seen not merely as polar opposites but as categories of being, now, they are seen as two options for the expression of a woman's mood (Peiss notes that Hussy outsold Lady five to one (Peiss 3-4)). The assumed artificiality and technicality of make-up practices does not in fact disappear with the emergence of this understanding of cosmetics. Rather, what emerges is the idea that to take on multiple appearances is in fact a "natural" thing to do, and that appearances are the changeable manifestations of an inner self which has multiple "facets" but remains essentially the same, just as appearance is an enhancement that occurs "on" the biological face which likewise remains the same.

Finally, it is worth noting the relation between actors, appearance and cosmetics as they have developed. The face of the actor has always been a contentious thing. In his book *The Player's Passion*, Joseph Roach gives a history of the "theatricalization of the human body," beginning in the seventeenth century and ending in the early twentieth. He also concentrates in large part on the actor's main stock-in-trade; the expression of emotion, the ability to move an audience by appearing moved him/herself, which perforce implicates the face as the seat of this emotion. Of great interest is the discussion of the paranoia that the actor garnered among 17th century audiences, who were suspicious of the actor's ability to mechanically (or magically) "control" the audience's passions, and to express emotions dictated by an external force and not necessarily an inner volition. This is also the era of guidebooks for the expression and interpretation of the passions; Charles le Brun's "Méthode pour apprendre À dessiner les passions" (1668), displayed annotated depictions of the primary and subsidiary passions, and this and similar books were used in the theatre as the bases for actors' performances. (Roach 70) What is "real" about the passions and their expression – that is, appearance – when the actor can study them in books and produce them on call? We can recall the words of the leader of the acting troupe in Tom Stoppard's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*: "We're actors; we're the opposite of people". Can a distinction between feigned emotion and genuine feeling any longer be made when there are actors who can simulate genuine feeling so well that they find themselves unable to return to "normal" after the performance? (Roach 49). The eternal conundrum of Hamlet: *He acts crazy so well, he must be mad.*

The actor, then, and most importantly the face of the actor, invokes suspicion over the process by which it appears, and by which it performs. The face of the actor has a technical dimension, invoking a range of uncanny doublings and repetitions. During the Restoration, actresses operated as scapegoats for suspicions regarding women's duplicity (much as contemporary celebrities operate as sacrificial figures by which the populace's fantasies of fame and beauty are simultaneously validated, manifested and reviled). As Will Pritchard notes, the increasingly public nature of women's lives in the 1600s was epitomized by the professional actress, who explicitly manifested both the notion of "playing" in public, and the potential for divergence between the public and private self (Pritchard 34). If actresses were to embody the divergence between public performance and private "presence," "other women were instructed to provide what actresses did not: an authentic, legible self-performance" (Pritchard 34). Of course, it is precisely this distinction that becomes normalized in 20th century understandings of cosmetics use and appearance, where public and private "selves" diverge according to the requirements of "self-expression", and "other women" are encouraged not to disparage but to *reflect* the practices of actresses, stars and celebrities.

## Appearing to Act Younger

With this vexed history of cosmetics, appearance and acting in mind, let us try to take Avon's advertising copy at face value, let us read it at first sight. "Rejuvi-cell Complex makes surface skin cells appear to act younger." This is extremely exciting. There is a new kind of skin cream that can make skin cells appear to act younger, which we can translate as suggesting that the use of this product will make your skin look younger. On the surface, such a claim seems to make perfect sense; any consumer of popular culture will be equipped with the tools to process such a statement. Or rather, such a claim makes perfect sense when articulated in terms of a public desire for youth and a repudiation of the appearance of aging that itself makes perfect sense *on the surface*, on and in relation to the surface and thus the appearance of the face.

Anew Pure 02 is an anti-aging product – it makes skin cells act *younger* – and it is legitimated by the public value given to products, processes or technologies that aim to reduce the effects of aging on the body. While some commentators see the anti-aging industry limited mainly to food and beverages, dietary supplements, cosmetics, cosmetic surgery and pharmaceuticals (Mehlman et al 305), in a broader sense, the anti-aging industry can be understood as a large-scale multidisciplinary movement encompassing medical, gerontological, sociological, biotechnological, pharmaceutical and cosmetic fields, spanning the medical gamut from "high end" technoscience such as stem-cell research, gene therapy and nanotechnology, to comparatively "low end" lifestyle products such as the erectile dysfunction treatments Viagra and Cialis (Neilson 181; Mytykyn 16). Likewise, the suspicion that some approaches to anti-aging medicine are underpinned by the age-old fantasy of immortality and the "fountain of youth" or "elixir of life" has led to some anti-aging proponents being labelled as "hucksters" by prominent gerontologists, while at the same time the ethical agenda of providing relief from the pain and cost of aging gives anti-aging medicine a much more respectable air (Mykytyn 8-11). What isn't up for debate, however, is the reality that developments in anti-aging are responses to the degree to which increasing global life expectancies and decreasing global birth rates have led to marked population aging, especially among the wealthy capitalist world (Neilson 163) – a "population bomb" for the new millennium (Mykytyn 9). Whatever the contested status of specific anti-aging products and technologies, the broader goal of responding to the physical, sociocultural and economic effects of aging works as a kind of conceptual wrapper to legitimize individual efforts. Anew Pure 02 may appear as a cosmetic product, but it takes its place within a plethora of products and services – many underpinned by the "aura" of technoscience – that the consumer concerned with aging can choose from, and with some estimates valuing the anti-aging industry at \$30 billion, we can assume there are a large number of such consumers and myriad concerns (Mehlman et al 305).

Additionally, the use of "appearance" in the description of Anew Pure 02 makes sense in terms of the legal apparatus that determines what effects it is permissible for advertisers to claim their product can deliver. Because the product is a cosmetic skin treatment in an Australian catalogue, the language used to advertise it reflects a careful avoidance of falling within the purview of the Australian Government's "Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code" (in the United States the FDA operates on similar principles stemming from the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act (Kawalek)). This Code regulates the advertising of any goods making claims to therapeutic effectivity, requiring that, for instance, an advertisement for a therapeutic good must not "be likely to arouse unwarranted and unrealistic expectations of product effectiveness" or "mislead, or be likely to mislead, directly or by implication or through emphasis, comparisons, contrasts or omissions" (Australian Government 6). Thus Avon's reference to appearance is easily understood as advertising code for a product that works only on the surface level, on the appearance and not on the face "itself," and is thus cosmetic not therapeutic. At the same time, however, because it is through technologies of appearance that we get at the "natural" anyway, this separation is

disavowed as it is acknowledged. As Jennifer Craik points out, cosmetics are one mechanism by which women are encouraged to *be* by being *surface*: “For as the face becomes the canvas for decoration, so femininity becomes the *product of actions* upon the body: in contrast, masculinity is a set of bodily parts and the *actions they can perform* (6).

The product’s claims also make sense in terms of a fantasy of the technological cure, the patented, trade-marked machine-panacea, legitimated through its assumption of a progressive, beneficent technoscience and a legal system of performative writing, *litterae patents*. This is a common marketing strategy. For example, throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s, two of Estée Lauder’s most successful product lines, Clinique and Prescriptives, were marketed as part of a highly technological and scientific skin-care regimen (Koehn 242-244). The recent emergence and massive growth of “cosmeceuticals” – doctor-branded products that provide cosmetic benefits through medically and scientifically derived “active” ingredients (Rowland) – marks something of an apotheosis of this trend, and Anew Pure 02, as an anti-aging product, is marketed explicitly as a cosmeceutical, reflecting biology’s analysis of the body’s “make-up” and the technoscientific promise of bodily modification at the cellular and molecular level. Thus, “Rejuvi-cell Complex” makes skin cells appear to act younger, and it does this because this is the kind of thing we desire and expect such technologies to do, and the face and its appearance are the domain, and thus *property*, of such technologies. Elsewhere in the same advertisement, Rejuvi-cell Complex is referred to as a technology: “The same Rejuvi-cell technology as Retroactive with sunscreen plus a fresh supply of oxygen” (Avon 42). It is likewise coupled with another technology that is also “bundled” within the delivery device of Anew Pure 02; the Energie-cell System: “Exclusive Energie-cell System increases the delivery of oxygen to the surface skin” (42). Both Rejuvi-cell *Complex* and the Energie-cell *System* are technological entities delivered to the skin cells via the conduit of Anew Pure 02; through their individual naming, branding, and the capitalization of these names, and through their differentiation from the cream which is merely a delivery device for the *real* because *patentable* inventions, they are defined as technological entities unto themselves.

Across all of these levels and contexts, then, a statement such as “Rejuvi-cell Complex makes surface skin cells appear to act younger” can be understood to make a certain kind of sense, and to fit within an established tradition of associating cosmetics with appearance. But at the same time it is also completely confused and borders on gibberish, especially when we try to read it as a syntactical formation. There is a *mise en scene* to this scenario that is intriguing, and requiring of closer examination. Firstly; the skin cells appear to act younger. They don’t really act younger, they only appear to do so. But this is fine, this is all that can be expected, appearance being the accepted domain of cosmetics. But do they *appear* to act younger, or do they appear to *act* younger? Do they give the appearance of acting younger while in fact continuing to “act their age” – in which case they would appear to have been acting all along, regardless of the rejuvenating power of Avon’s product – or do they appear to act while in fact they are not acting at all? And, if they aren’t acting younger, what are they doing? Are they *being old*? Or might they genuinely be younger? But we can never know this because whatever they are doing, whatever they are being, they are only appearing to do it or be it anyway, and so the act is an act, as is the absence of acting. The doubling of figures of artifice – appearing and acting – allows Avon to “have it both ways,” keeping the face separate from its appearance at the same time as this distinction is undercut.

Remember, however, that it is *surface* skin cells that are acting and appearing; these skin cells are the outer-most ones, they sit on top of or in front of something, the skin cells are acting on the *sur-face*, on the face as on a stage. Are these surface skin cells part of the immobile biological face or the mutable and artificial appearance? Perhaps they were conceived of in order to act, perhaps that is their role, perhaps they are *actors*, perhaps they were only acting *like* skin cells, and the “active” cosmeceutical ingredients simply call upon them to “re-act”? This *mise en scene* is

concurrently a *mise en visage*, a putting on of the face as of a play. Appearing to act younger opens up an entire virtual world of and on the face, wherein surface skin cells are always-already acting *like* skin cells and are thus always-already part of appearance, and are somehow separate from the skin cells that they act *like*, the ideal, Platonic Forms of skin cells that are “natural” and “biological” and that *no longer exist*. This is the asymptotic curve of the natural and the artificial, the artificial employed to produce the natural but only ever producing something ever more *like* the natural.

Thus, Avon performs a complex about-face with this advertisement, a *volte-face* indeed, bringing together the two senses of the face we met earlier, the mutable *vultus/volando* and the unflinching *facies*. Firstly, the word “appear” is used to signal to the consumer (and to regulating bodies) that the product acts on the appearance of the face, and not the face itself. This much is perfectly acceptable and in line with common uses of the notion and wording of appearance. But, Avon takes things one step further; when appearing becomes appearing to act, what emerges is the notion that the face “itself” is made up entirely of appearances, because the skin cells are surface skin cells and are acting already, “on” a face and “like” skin cells that can never actually be found. Cosmeceuticals mark a break with the traditional understanding of cosmetics in that they usher in a cosmetic treatment and technological rendering of the face “itself.”

Alternatively: what if “appearing to act” were in fact a matter of acting poorly? Surely “good” acting is seamless; surely good acting transcends appearance, and can be taken at face value, like anything worthy of the suspension of your disbelief. It is always a jarring experience when watching television or film, and it suddenly occurs to you that you are watching a group of actors; their bodies continue outside the frame, their lives run parallel or perpendicular (or downright contrary) to the lives they are depicting. The crew is bored, the set is fake, the snow is melting under the lights. Perhaps it was nothing more than a poorly expressed statement, a smile that didn’t quite sit right, eyes that failed to reflect what the mouth was saying, an eyebrow that failed to raise; just another Botox moment. Either way, the spell has been broken and now you are witnessing the appearance of acting; the *faÅade* of the *faÅade*, the performance of the performance. In some decisive way the made-up is shown to be made-up, and the many technologies of appearing to act are suddenly exposed. The face and its surface skin cells are natural and artificial at the same time, and it is appearance that comes to stand in for this double articulation. “Appearing to act” is Avon deconstructing itself; Avon’s appearing to act allows that appearance can be taken to be either the face *or* what is put on it, and it is in this sense that the face is both a play and a stage – it is both figure and ground, biological substratum and artificial addition. Rejuvi-Cell Complex gives us a picture of the face and its appearance in contemporary cosmetic culture; the culture of technology and its infinite promise of leading us into the future while paradoxically making us appear ever younger; the culture of appearances, of surfaces, plays and stages; and the culture of the appearance of acting, the face that, on closer examination, given second sight, looks disturbingly like a farce.

Our second quote is more explicit in this association of the face and appearance with technology and, ultimately, technoscience. In the same edition of Avon’s catalogue, we find the following quote used to advertise Hydrofirming Bio6 Eye Cream: “‘Smart-sensing’ technology re-programmes the skin and trains it to moisturise itself” (Avon 45). This, too, is very exciting; the idea that something as innocuous as a skin-cream can re-programme the skin speaks volumes about the all-powerful, border-crossing potential of modern cosmetic technoscience. Who knew that the skin could be re-programmed? Again, the promise of technology is fundamental to the claim the product makes; being biological, being subject to time, aging, and all the other evils the cosmetics industry exists to rail against, the skin loses its ability to moisturise itself and must rely on a technological cure to regain that ability. Smart-sensing technology is the *completion* of the skin, the implementation of full and perfect *functionality*.

But more importantly; who knew that the skin was programmed in the first place? Smart-sensing



technology does not programme the skin as such, but *re-programmes* it, re-sets its programme, installs another programme, a technological programme, *on top of the old one*, which becomes technologically rendered by comparison. Within this schema, skin is trained and learns to train itself, as in some Foucauldian fantasy of docile-bodied skin-cells mustering at dawn and saluting the sargeant before trooping off to the showers to moisturise each other. In this schema the face can only ever approach itself through technological cures. Smart-sensing technology shows skin how to do its job *better*, how to be more efficient, how to act younger, how to get more out of life, how to be more *skin-like* than skin itself. As with the surface skin cells of Rejuvi-cell Complex, that are always-already acting like skin cells, here, the skin is re-programmed and trained to act *like* skin, but a skin that is better, a skin technologically gifted the autopoietic power of moisturising itself, as if autopoiesis was not something “natural” but was rather the function of cosmetic technoscience. Note also, now, how it is no longer even a question of appearance (which leads one to wonder whether this ad does in fact contravene the Therapeutic Goods Advertising Code). Apparently, Hydrofirming Bio6 acts upon the skin itself, re-programming and training it in its very essence – or at least, in the part of the skin which is open to technology because programmed and re-programmable, and is thus already technological.

Skin-creams, those perfunctory stalwarts of cosmetic culture and the appearance industry, are produced and marketed according to narratives of technological and technoscientific omnipotence and progress, and cosmeceuticals such as these two Avon products are paradigms of this trend. This much is reasonably obvious. The products we are discussing do more than that, however; they position the face, as both appearance *and* biological sub-structure, as something already technological. With Rejuvi-cell Complex, the skin cells are already acting. Already given to artificiality, already residing in the domain of the technologies of appearance, skin cells are given over to appearing to act younger. With Hydrofirming Bio6 Eye Cream, the skin that is re-programmed is assumed to already be programmed and programmable, that is, part of a technological ensemble open to an equally technological manipulation. Forestalling any problems about technological incursions into or onto the “natural,” which would be more at home in the 19th century, what Avon’s rhetoric does is plant a technology already at the core of the “natural” face, in order that the product can operate on the face in its technological “aspect.” When we think this process in terms of the use of the word “appearance,” we begin to see the complex and fundamental duplicity of the use of such a term. On one level, changes in the “appearance of fine lines and wrinkles” are easily understood and accepted because they are, after all, only changes in one’s appearance, and appearance is something artificial, something we all accept as artificial, a game we all play. At the same time, however, what emerges is the implication that the supposed “ground” of appearance, the natural “behind” the artificial, is in turn technological because open to technoscientific manipulation, programming and calculation.

### Appearing to Deconstruct

How can we understand all of this? What does it mean that Avon’s advertising rhetoric ultimately constructs a consumer whose biological elements such as skin and skin cells, are rendered technological and open to, indeed requiring, technological manipulation or completion? In some way this seems like a simple appropriation of broadly post-structuralist discourses to do with the cyborg and the posthuman, as in the work of Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, where the traditional notion of “the human” as a *sui generis* biological/organic entity is critiqued in the name of a more contextual understanding of the hybridizations and comminglings that occur between humans and machines on a daily basis (see Haraway; Hayles). In turn, such an understanding relates to post-structuralist body criticism, especially the feminist criticism of theorists such as Judith Butler, that critiques the “givenness” of a sexed and gendered body, arguing instead for sex and gender, and thus the body itself, as iteratively materialized via language and cultural forms (see Butler). In critical and cultural theory, such understandings have

become almost commonplace, acting also as a cipher for the ongoing project of de-centering assumed coalescences of power, and of breaking down the binary oppositions that underpin the exertion of power and the dualism of Western metaphysics. Cyborgs are border-crossers, and they inherit the liberatory value of such a role, clearing the way for those for whom categories of identity and being are unnecessary strictures, and for whom inside and outside, body and mind are codetermined articulations of “human” existence.

Whether Avon understands its rhetoric within the context of post-structuralist theories of posthumanity and the codetermination of the human and the technical, however, is unlikely. As much as the image of a group of deconstructionist advertising execs is a tantalizing one, what is more likely is that co-opting the aura of technoscience makes for good ad copy. The hybridizations figured by cyborg theory come increasingly to the fore under contemporary technoscience, where bio-informatics and genomic science produces the biological entity as informatic in its very “essence,” and uses this informaticization to conduct interventions into the genome. Under such practices – which Bernard Stiegler describes as the “technoscientific upheaval” of the incursion of the epigenetic into the genetic (Stiegler 32) – the “future” of the biological, and certainly the human, is explicitly technological. Given the degree to which an awareness of technoscientific practices has spread out into popular culture, as evidenced by the public debates over cloning, stem-cell research and genetically-modified foods, not to mention the popularity of the figure of the cyborg in science fiction and cyberpunk cinema and literature of the last 25 years or more, it is not surprising that a group of Avon copywriters might seek to piggyback such discourses as a mechanism of legitimation, a filter through which their product’s “benefit” can be readily understood.

In *Getting Under the Skin*, Bernadette Wegenstein argues that in the post-millennium era – the era also of the technoscientific understanding of the body – the face is obsolete, having given up its overcoding of the body and role as the primary sign of character and identity, with any organ or body part now being able to take on this role of “window to the soul.” Wegenstein sees this reversal as a function of the increasing attention paid to the constitution and inner workings of the body itself, in medical imaging programs such as the Visible Human Project and genomic database projects such as the Human Genome Project. “Once the denizens of a dark continent of highly specialized medical knowledge, organs, tissue, cells, and blood have recently come into circulation as markers of individual and group identity” (Wegenstein 79). Thus the body, and especially the face as traditional locus of person-ality, cease to function as unifying and over-coding forces and are replaced by an interest in the minutiae of biological elements; DNA, RNA, cells, blood-lines. Wegenstein analyses a number of public programs and cultural texts in support of her argument. In particular, she looks at advertisements for cosmetic treatments. An Oil of Olay body wash ad depicts a healthy, tanned woman’s body alongside the phrase: “Words usually reserved for your face are now possible all over your body” (Wegenstein 89). Other phrases such as “even tone,” “smooth texture,” “radiant,” and “resilient” float beside the body, indicating the degree to which the skin itself is the “subject” of another’s gaze, and will be judged according to the moral value implicit in the notions of radiance or resilience. In an ad for Biotherm Draine’Up Liftteur, a woman’s face is accompanied by a background image depicting the action of the product on a cellular level (Wegenstein 91). The face, here, is simply the site for a more in-depth intervention, and it is within or under the skin that the product stakes its claim. Both of these ads foreground an interest in skin and its constitution as an “organ instead of a body,” while the notion of skin as an “ego envelope,” as the wrapper for an “inner person” with identity, character and the capacity for self-expression, is left out of the picture (Wegenstein 118).

Sociologist Nikolas Rose makes similar arguments in his article and book of the same name, “The Politics of Life Itself.” Rose charts the shift from a “molar” 19th Century view of the body as “a ‘natural’ volume of functionally interconnected organs, tissues, functions, controls, feedbacks, reflexes, rhythms, circulations and so forth” to a molecular, genomic and informatic body, a body

comprised of messages, codes and instructions (Rose, "Politics"13). Crucially, Rose also makes the point that this shift is not merely a shift in understanding or knowledge, but that it is also a shift in the power or orientation of this knowledge. "[T]he politics of the life sciences – the politics of life itself – has been shaped by those who controlled the human, technical and financial resources necessary to fund such endeavours"(Rose, "Politics"20). That is, that the knowledge of the body ushered in by technoscience is always political and economic.

The Avon ads discussed earlier fit clearly within both these schemas. The face of Avon is a collection of skin cells, or the location for skin that can be trained to moisturise itself. Avon's interest is not in molar elements such as facial structure, nor is there any recourse to anything to do with character, personhood or subjectivity, nor to the face as the sign of these things – rather, Avon's interest is in biological elements whose functionality is in question, and the question is one of the skin's ability to moisturise and oxygenate itself, its ability to "act younger." There is no overall corporal whole and there is certainly no subject, there is merely the body's capacity to act. Functionality is very important here; the skin and skin cells are deemed to have functionality which can be substituted for by technological processes, especially when aging renders this functionality defective. There is a logic of prostheticization at work, but the prosthetic is not external but internal, it occurs at the cellular level and not on the level of surface appearance. Following Rose, then, we can see that this prosthesis of the inside goes beyond the cyborgism of bodily augmentation in invoking the technoscientific body, in that "the new molecular enhancement technologies do not attempt to hybridise the body with mechanical equipment but to transform it at the organic level, to reshape vitality from the inside (Rose, *Politics* 20). Avon's consumer is encouraged to identify with the product to the degree that it operates on hitherto unimagined parts of themselves – there is a "taking care" of oneself invoked here which operates neither on the level of one's appearance nor on the level of one's "inner" self, but on the cellular level.

Wegenstein's interest, in analysing the "flattening" out of the body that occurs when any organ or body element both stands for and exceeds the notion of wholeness, is to demonstrate the degree to which the body has ceased to be the medium of expression for something else (a subject, a soul, a character), but has become mediation itself. That is to say, body and image are explicitly combined under the confluence of new media, medical imaging and a technoscientific employment of biology, and it is this new body-image complex, Wegenstein argues, that requires us to understand the body as that which mediates. The informaticization of the body is also its rendering as image, which gives to the body its mediating power. What Wegenstein doesn't discuss, however, is the significance of this foregrounding of body parts as wholes being taken up by commercial interests, as borne out by the plethora of cosmetic advertisements and products reflective of this shift. If, as Rose suggests, the technoscientific, molecular body must be understood always within the context of the entrepreneurs and corporations that fund its constitution, what does it mean that cosmetics ads reproduce a technoscientific body, and that therefore the cosmetics companies and products they advertise produce this body as well? What is their investment in such a vision, what is the payoff, where the value?

On a practical level, we can understand this as a process of market diversification and segmentation. For example, while Wegenstein reads the Oil of Olay advertisement's statement that "Words usually reserved for your face are now possible all over your body" as evidence that the face is obsolete, it is just as feasible to consider this as a quite candid admission that marketing strategies directed at the face are now to be targeted all over the body, and that Olay's products fill the gap left when the body is opened up as the site of potential "radiance" and "resilience" or, more importantly, *the lack thereof*. Fragmenting the body as a concept is, in the world of cosmetics marketing, segmenting the body as a market, and the *blason* form of romantic poetry, which produces the woman as object of the poet's adoration via iterative description of parts of her body, finds its contemporary manifestation in the aisles of any modern pharmacy. Thus, when

Avon targets surface skin *cells* rather than skin as such, or the skin *under the eyes* rather than facial skin in general, in some way it does this under the inevitable and indomitable logic of diversification and segmentation, which leads to ever more targeted products for ever more distinct “ailments.”

Most importantly, these ailments are a function of a technoscientific knowledge of the body, which cosmeceutical advertising employs not merely because it lends a certain contemporary cool, nor because the cosmetics industry thinks that the face is obsolete (I don’t think you would *ever* be likely to find a cosmetics executive who would agree to such a proposition), but because it produces a body whose functionality is essentially out of the subject’s control, destined to fail, and can only be brought back into control via the implementation of cosmeceutical technology; Rejuvi-cell Complex, Energie-cell System, Smart-sensing technology. To see the body as no longer over-coded by the face and identity, but replaced by a potentially limitless collection of “organs instead of bodies” – assuming that technoscience will continue to “discover” new elements *ad infinitum*, or alternatively that it holds the promise to “make” such elements, or alternatively again, and this is the crucial point, that *there is no difference between discovery and making under technoscience* – is also to admit that under technoscience, paradoxically, the body is out of control. The increasingly known, particulated, molecularised and imaged body is at the same time the increasingly unknown and out of control body, the body whose elements, particles and cells “act” by themselves and are completely outside “my” conscious control. Avon renders this process as skin cells “acting older,” or failing to fully moisturise and oxygenate. The more cosmeceutical technoscience leads me to know about the functioning of my body parts the more I am aware of the degree to which they are autonomous things to which any notion of the “I” is irrelevant. Thus “organs instead of bodies” because it does me no good to have a notion of a body as a unified thing anyway. Thus also, it is cosmeceutical technology that must complete me because it holds the potential to bring this unimaginable source of contingency under control via technoscience. Where the technics of appearance and cosmetics were appropriate under a pre-technoscientific regime of knowledge, because they operated as a technical level of contingency on top of a biologically immobile substructure, under technoscience, it is now the biological which is contingent because “I” am not in control of it, and the task for the consumer is to harness the power of technoscience to rein in this contingency, to take back the power.

But does technoscience *rein in* contingency, or produce more of it? At stake is the degree to which technoscience is funded by the logic of what Bernard Stiegler calls “permanent innovation,” by which he characterizes the modern industrial era (32). Where science and technics were traditionally understood as separate processes, one describing what exists (“discovery”) and the other bringing into existence (“making”), technoscience represents the bringing together of these processes, and under the logic of permanent innovation, represents a scientific enterprise of systematic exploration of possibility wedded to a capitalistic enterprise of increasingly finer product diversification and market segmentation. “Science is then no longer that *in which* industry invests, but what is *financed by* industry to open new possibilities of investments and profits.... The conjugation of technology, of science and of the mobility of capital, orders the opening of a future explored systematically by experimentation” (Stiegler 32). Thus technoscience reduces contingency at the same time as it opens it further, and infinitely, fixing biological “ailments” while producing ever greater possibilities for more discretely identified and particularized ailments and curative procedures.

An increasingly segmented cosmeceutical market inherits this logic, producing “smart-sensing” technologies and “Energie-cell” systems to combat ever-more specific biological failings. The cosmeceutical market, then, focuses all the power of the cultural drive to “permanent innovation” down upon the consumer, encouraging an ongoing process of “optimization” (Rose, *Politics* 20). The same process has been explored within the context of cosmetic surgery and makeover culture, where, for Meredith Jones, “good citizens of makeover culture improve and

transform themselves ceaselessly”(Jones 12). Under the aegis of an anti-aging industry, cosmetic surgery practices, makeover culture and the cosmeceuticals sector all revolve around questions of *agency*; questions of the capacities of consumers to make choices about their bodies, faces and appearances, and the pressures to improve, optimize and transform oneself that condition any notion of “choice”(Fraser 99). Within the cosmeceutical sector, demands for constant improvement are bolstered, re-animated and made ever more pressing by the ongoing identification of biological malfunction.

Simultaneously mutable surface appearance and immobile sub-structure, biological and technological at the same time, cellular, molecular and informatic, the face of Avon, then, is a face beset by two contradictory movements, a face that sits at the confluence of two important trends that cannot be thought separately; the face of Avon is beset both by an increasingly identified series of biological failings, mostly a function of aging, and a permanently innovating series of specifically targeted products and technological cures. Appearing to *act* is now the *appearance of agency*, the appearance of the ability to “take control” of autonomous bodily processes via the application of technologies containing active ingredients which act on the technological parts of the body, its acting skin cells, its programmable skin. And, if the face is technologized in this process, and the body molecularized, both are also commodified, just as the effects of time on the face, and thus the aging process overall, are likewise some kind of invisible commodity in this process as well, suggesting that what the anti-aging market really sells, what its products are really packed with, the ultimate technology to be bundled within whatever white cream in whatever tiny packaging, is the simple fact of aging itself. As if any of us needed to be *sold* this.

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