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Our Perfect Age is Now?: The Persistent 'Othering' Older Models in Discourses of Skin Care Advertising.

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1. Introduction

Anti-ageing skin care advertising encourages the belief that 'the face is the principal determinant in the perception of individual beauty' (Synnott 1988: 607). Repeatedly, physical, visible youth is equated with the ideal in this industry, through the use of 'young, slim and beautiful' models (Chambers 2012: 161). L'Oréal Paris, in an attempt to combat the prejudice produced by these images, released a televised advert for its 'Age Perfect' range in 2015, using the face of actress Helen Mirren to front the campaign. By employing a noticeably older model, L'Oréal Paris endeavoured to subvert several of the expectations attached to anti-ageing advertising. This essay will seek to demonstrate how their methods serve only to strengthen the 'discursive "Othering"' of the elderly in cosmetic advertisements (Coupland and Coupland 2001). A range of linguistic and visual features will be explored, such as the use of colour, 'demand images' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005), stereotyping, rhetorical voices and scientised discourse, in order to examine how this positioning of the elderly as 'unwatchable' persists (Woodward 1991).

2. Background

Coupland and Coupland (2001) define "Othering" as 'the practice of representing an individual or a social group… [as] distant, alien or deviant' and explain that ageism 'can usefully be constructed in terms of "Othering"' (471). Advertisers have a responsibility for propelling this image of the elderly. According to Featherstone (1991), if an individual fails to manage their ageing face and body, it is an indication of 'moral laxitude' which places them in a position of blame (178). The 'imperative mood' of skin care adverts invokes this 'moral duty… for an ageing individual to take action' (Ylänne *et al.* 2009: 52); even the simple mantra of Nivea Visage to 'cleanse, tone and moisturise' is a collection of imperative verbs (Coupland 2003: 133). This treatment of the older generation is reminiscent of Parson's (1959) 'sick role', where the responsibility to seek professional help in order to overcome illness lies with the individual. Repeatedly, advertisements equate old age with degenerating health, framing older consumers as 'an "at-risk" aging population' if they fail to banish these visible signs (Smirnova 2012: 1238). Rozanova (2006) has taken this further, explaining the 'moral dimension' to her data 'whereby unhealthy lifestyles that led to unhealthy ageing were sinful' (127). The connection between ageing and ill health leads to the isolation of the elderly if they fail to conform to this outward image of healthy ageing.

The link between cosmetics and health has led to 'quasi-scientific discourse' in cosmetic advertisements (Coupland 2007: 44). Coupland and Coupland (2001) explain that through their lexical choices, ageing is presented as a condition which must be treated by experts – 'dermatologists' and 'pharmacists' (472) – falsely legitimising the "Othering" of a group which fails to seek professional support. Vincent (2007) and Coupland and Coupland (2001) establish that through the metaphor of war, physical ageing has been turned into a fight against time and frequently this is captured by words such as 'intervention', 'fight' and 'force' (Coupland and Coupland 2001: 472). These are commonly found in discourses of illness, critical conditions such as cancer being 'encumbered by the trappings of metaphor' (Sontag 1991: 5). This manipulative linguistic technique presents the visibly ageing consumer as being in danger of a 'terrible fate' (Vincent 2007: 957) which must be fought as though it is an illness.

Glinert (2005) claims that advertisements tend to 'use both an impersonal and a personal footing', often through the inclusion of an authoritative voiceover and the face of the campaign, which serves 'a two-pronged credibility strategy' (168). These 'multiple "voices"' may have a persuasive effect on consumers because they 'project a consensus of authority' (Glinert 2005: 167); however, the technique manipulatively allows advertisers 'to downplay or draw attention away from the company's voice and its goal' (168). Coupland (2003) supports this in her analysis of rhetorical voices in skin care adverts, asserting that 'the woman's inner voice' and 'the advertiser's authorial voice… become indistinguishable, a discursive strategy which seems calculated to incline the reader favourably towards acquisition of the featured products' (131). By presenting consumers with this unified voice, it is more

difficult to argue with the promise of the product. This is intensified by advertisers' use of synthetic personalisation (Fairclough 1989) as their ''you' constructions are framed as if voicing the reader's existing concerns' when instead, these are anxieties invented by the company (Coupland 2003: 131). They are constructing a problem which appears to originate in the consumer's 'own conscience' (Coupland 2003: 131), thus allowing society's ageism to become internalised.

The visual aspects of skin care adverts also contribute to this "Othering". Kandinsky (1977) explains that colour has both a 'direct value' and an 'associative value'; the latter is most relevant to this essay as it suggests that colour is charged with symbolic meaning (cited in Kress and van Leeuwen 2002: 354-5). Of most interest in anti-ageing research, however, is 'the semiotic politics of the ageing face' (Coupland 2007: 38). Although Coupland (2003) explains that ''anti-ageing' skin care marketing has focused almost entirely on the face and (to a lesser extent) the hands' (134), Chambers (2012) argues that the visible markers of old age, such as wrinkles and a sagging jawline, have for a long time been absent in advertisements because they are 'too grotesque to be exposed' (170). Older models are suitable for the advertisement of specific products, such as financial services and medicine (Carrigan and Szmigin 2000; Ylänne *et al.* 2009; Roy and Harwood 1997). However, a crucial contradiction exists whereby only 'young-old' models (Ylänne *et al.* 2009: 46) appear in cosmetic advertisements, who don't seem to need the products they are promoting.

Celebrity endorsers appeal because of their powerful status (Kamins 1990; Dye 2009; Amos *et al.* 2008) and are successfully used by advertisers because they 'become the brands they endorse' (Dye 2009: 124). Celebrities are often chosen based on their physical attractiveness (Kamins 1990: 4) and the tendency remains that 'Youthful celebrities like 35 year-old Penelope Cruz' are preferred (Chambers 2012: 170). Even when an older female celebrity is occasionally shown fronting a skin care campaign, this still contributes to the "Othering" of older consumers because these women 'have established a new norm'. As Bordo (1990) argues, 'Cher [then 44], Jane Fonda [53], and others have not made the aging female body sexually more acceptable' because they have sought a means of cheating ageing through 'continual cosmetic surgery' (cited in Smirnova 2012: 1237). Therefore, even successful older female celebrities are largely invisible in cosmetic advertisements because they must conform to this 'young-old' image (Ylänne *et al.* 2009).

Stereotypical depictions of the elderly frequently appear in televised and magazine advertisements (Carrigan and Szmigin 2000; Ylänne *et al.* 2007 and 2009) and Roy and Harwood (1997) explain that there is this tendency towards hyperbole due to the limited time to convey a message in commercials (51). However, studies have also recognised that many of these portrayals are positive (Ylänne *et al.* 2009; Simcock and Sudbury 2006), casting older consumers as 'strong', 'active', 'happy' and 'lucid' (Roy and Harwood 1997: 48). Although Zhang *et al.* (2006) and Ylänne *et al.* (2007) suggest challenges to the taboo of elder sexuality, there is broad agreement that older female consumers rarely conform to a 'sexy' stereotype (Simcock and Sudbury 2006; Carrigan and Szmigin 2000; Smirnova 2012). This has strong implications for cosmetic advertisements because frequently young female models are positioned as sexual and desirable. Indeed, Smirnova's (2012) content analysis found that females were 'presented in a sexualised or passive way 67% of the time' in anti-ageing advertisements (1241). If older women are denied this image of sexuality, they are similarly denied presentation in images of skin care advertising.

There have been efforts to change this limited image of beauty in advertising. This is due to the demands of readers in their desire to see 'real' older women, representative of 'the wider population' (Chambers 2012: 170). However, the real issue with anti-ageing advertising is that the products contradict any appreciation for natural beauty. As Dye (2009) explains, 'Rather than challenging contemporary beauty standards, Dove's Campaign… reinforces them… by encouraging girls and women to continue to view beauty… as a life-long pursuit that requires constant construction' (123-4). The research suggests that even if older models are introduced, the very nature of skin advertising undermines steps towards a more progressive image of positive ageing.

3. Methodology: Multimodal Discourse Analysis

I will be examining the L'Oréal Paris 'Age Perfect' television advertisement using Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). Although Critical Discourse Analysis is more established and would be suitable for discussing the power asymmetry between participant and viewer, it fails to create the detailed analysis developed through a multimodal approach. Scollon and LeVine (2004) explain 'language in use… is always and inevitably constructed across multiple modes of communication' because 'all discourse is multimodal' (1-2). Thus, this essay will explore linguistic features, from synthetic personalisation to scientised discourse, alongside visual aspects of the advert, such as 'demand' images, stereotypical presentations of old age and the use of colour. This diverse approach to analysis will allow for a more

developed reading of the advertisement. With this focus on both the linguistic and the visual, it may appear that there is a slight imbalance in analysis of the data as the visual impact of the L'Oréal advert is arguably more striking. Ylänne *et al.*'s (2007) research supports this as they found that 'trends in advertising [tend] to give more prominence to visual imagery' (8). As an ever-expanding field of discourse analysis, MDA remains limited in certain ways. O'Halloran (2011) asserts that 'Most semiotic resources are fundamentally different to language' (125) so it becomes difficult to find frameworks for analysis which are suitable for different kinds of discourse, from language to images. However, Baldry (2006) has recognised that developments such as multimodal transcription (which breaks an advert into 'visual frame', 'visual image', 'kinesic action', 'soundtrack' and 'phases and metafunctions') are challenging this issue (85).

The Couplands (2001, 2003, 2007, 2009) are the leading researchers in this area of study. However, through an examination of the relevant literature, it is clear that there has been little other linguistic and visual analysis of anti-ageing skin care advertisements in relation to how they portray older consumers. Content analysis has been the preferred means of examination and although it provides a comprehensive overview of a range of advertisements, it is limited in developing multiple meanings in texts (Roy and Harwood 1997). This essay will endeavour to contribute to this under-researched area.

The L'Oréal anti-ageing advertisement was sourced on YouTube and is part of a campaign which involves other videos, including the more recent 'Age Perfect Golden Age' 2016 advert. Although there is a wealth of anti-ageing adverts readily available on the internet, the 'Age Perfect' campaign is particularly rich for analysis. Roy and Harwood (1997) acknowledge that because of the long-established belief that multimodal texts are problematic to analyse, much of the research has been conducted on print advertisements as opposed to commercials. This essay will be developing an area of research which has previously splintered into general TV advertisements and anti-ageing print advertisements. The campaign is also of interest because L'Oréal has attempted to break the convention of only using young female models. At 69 in the advert, Mirren is significantly older than the thirty-five year-old Penelope Cruz used in another of their ranges. Superficially, such a decision would suggest that they are tackling this "Othering" of the elderly who often find themselves marginalised or absent in cosmetic advertisements. However, this essay will demonstrate that the messages inherent in adverts which feature younger models are still very much present in this complex and contradictory campaign.

Zhang *et al.* (2006) recognise the importance of analysing this kind of data, and its implications for perceptions of the elderly more broadly. They explain that 'the more time individuals spend consuming media… the closer their views are to the "world" created by the media' (Zhang *et al.* 2006: 265). With a great deal of the research arguing that depictions of the elderly tend to be negative (Carrigan and Szmigin 2000; Smirnova 2012; Coupland and Coupland 2001; Coupland 2003, 2007, 2009), positioning them as "Other", it is likely that the perspective of the media will seep into public consciousness.

4. Analysis

4.1. Linguistic features

Coupland's (2003) research into the significance of 'you' constructions in skin care advertising is shown at the beginning of the advert. When Mirren's voiceover, disembodied and alienated, asks the rhetorical question 'Ever feel like you go unnoticed?' (1), the second person pronoun directly and personally addresses the consumer as though they should be concerned about ageing, even if this was not an issue prior to viewing the advertisement. She assumes that their answer is 'yes' – 'And when you aren't' (1) – as though all ageing consumers are expected to experience marginalisation. However, this framing of the older consumer is altered as the advert progresses. Mirren, in an attempt to rally this older group, invokes use of the first person plural pronoun 'Our' (5). The advertisers are trying to linguistically convince the viewer this is a shared journey: with the help of this skin cream, they no longer need to feel alone.

The 'quasi-scientific discourse' (Coupland 2007: 44) common to skin care adverts is evident in the combined power of the male voiceover - 'impersonal' footing - and Mirren, the 'personal footing' (Glinert 2005: 168). The male voiceover increases the validity of the product by informing the viewer it includes 'soya peptides' (2). It is unlikely the viewer has any idea what soya peptides are, or how they contribute to staving off the ageing process, yet the scientific discourse suggests that a team of experts have developed a solution, possessing knowledge outside of the consumer's reach. The advert undermines itself, however, as linguistic attenuators such as 'age spots *appear* reduced' flash up on the screen, 'offset[ting] the empirically based claims' (Coupland 2003: 139). The force of the advert's

rhetoric leads to an exertion of power on the part of the advertiser as they try to convince the viewer that the product has proven-scientific benefits. Mirren increases the credibility of these claims by asserting that it is 'the science I trust to help me look like me' (3). Her use of language is indicative of what has been named 'the mask of ageing' in the field of gerontology (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991). She suggests that only the skin cream will cure the division between who she is inside and her external, ageing appearance.

Linguistic markers of ageing and metaphors of war are more implicit in this advert than in the skin care campaigns discussed in the literature review. Rather than using terms like 'repair' and 'correction', imperative verbs such as 'nourish' and 'indulge' (3) are used to make the skin care experience seem more luxurious and less intimidating. Similarly, instead of highlighting 'wrinkles' and a 'sagging jawline', Mirren only makes vague reference to 'age spots' (4). The language is far less threatening in this advert than in several others on the market, such as 'Clinique repairwear day cream' (Coupland 2007: 43). Crucially, the same message – that signs of ageing must be eradicated - is still implied, which causes this method of advertising to become even more insidious. She uses a collection of six imperative verbs within two sentences (3-5) which makes the advert strangely demanding and reinforces the idea that she is in charge of the viewer's decisions. The metaphor of battle is only once suggested when Mirren asserts 'show those age spots who's boss' (4) as though a power struggle is being insinuated between the consumer and their ageing body. This is reinforced visually by Mirren's clenched fist as it is a sign of strength and agency.

Combined with the linguistic and visual force of the advert, sound effects also have a role in "Othering" the elderly. When Mirren is shown crossing a dark road, the echo of a car horn racing past indicates a variety of meanings. Not only does it create a sense of urgency through an association between ambulance sirens and death, but in a more abstract sense, it also suggests that life is passing by Mirren and she is unable to seize control of it. Instead she appears to be stationary and embodying the 'moral laxitude' which isolates the elderly (Featherstone 1991).

4.2.Visual features

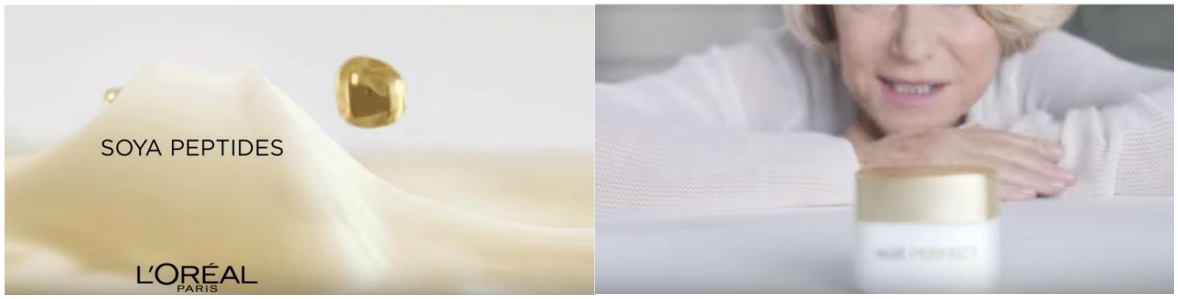
Before Mirren applies the skin cream, the colours are dark and dull, recreating the typical 'before' and 'after' filters used in cosmetic advertisements. This is prominent in figure 1, as the image depicts a black and rainy night on a busy city road and the only contrast is provided by the beam of the cars' headlights. This light source obscures Mirren's figure so that she blends into her background and becomes invisible, drawing attention to her role as insignificant elderly woman at the beginning of the advert.

Figure 1. L'Oréal advert

When a young woman offers her a seat at the bus shelter, this is playing to multiple stereotypes, namely the societal expectation for younger people to give up their seats to the elderly. The colours are coordinated so that Mirren's beige, nondescript mackintosh coat blends into the colour of her skin and hair; this colouring has an 'associative value' which suggests that she has lost any form of distinctive identity (Kandinsky 1977, cited in Kress and van Leeuwen 2002). When Mirren turns her head, she looks directly into the camera and 'acknowledges the viewers explicitly, with a visual 'you'' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 122). Although Kress and van Leeuwen (2005) argue that the repeated use of 'demand' images in magazine advertisements suggest the model's power over the viewer, Mirren's penetrating gaze is more complex than this (146). In figure 2, she is seen through the blurred Perspex glass of the bus stop shelter, which creates a mottled effect on her skin, obscuring her in the same way as the cars' headlights. Although she is directly addressing the consumer, she is not in a position of power; rather, she is victim to her ageing skin. The advertisers are turning Mirren into a warning against the effects of ageing.

Figure 2. L'Oréal advert

Mirren, as a beautiful and successful actress, embodies 'the 'promise of the product'' and is associated with the physical 'product itself' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 217) through a mixture of gold and white. In discussing the semiotics of colour, Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) explain that 'Advertisements often use colour repetition to lend symbolic value to a product' (349). This is clear in the cap of the bottle as it is gold like Mirren's shining hair, which is no longer dull as in the beginning of the advert. The bottle, too, is matched to her white cardigan and unblemished, glowing skin. The milky and gold colours of the soya peptides are similarly associated, visually reinforcing that the scientific promises of the product will translate into visible results, comparable to Mirren's look. The connotations of these rich and cleansing colours indicate that using an anti-ageing cream will revitalise your life, thus, only in undoing the effects of natural ageing is it possible to feel satisfied with your appearance.



Figures 3 & 4. L'Oréal advert

The advert's drive to position Mirren as a figure of youth is stereotyped to the extent that it patronises the older consumer. Where once adverts shied away from displaying the ageing face and hands, L'Oréal are lavishing attention upon Mirren's skin through shots at an intimate distance (Hall 1964, cited in Kress and van Leeuwen 2005: 131). Whilst this may seem like a progressive move, Mirren is forced to conform to a sexualised image of youth. By caressing her face and locking eyes with the camera she engages the viewer through a 'demand' image, as the camera tracks across her face. This sexualisation is uncomfortable because Mirren is not truly representative of the older female consumer: she is famous, extremely wealthy and presenting a 'young-old' image (Ylänne *et al.* 2009). This is most evident during her transformation as she pulls up the strap of a cherry red bra, applies the same colour lipstick, and puts on a leather biker jacket. Her clothes are attached to ideas of teenage rebellion and sexualised youth as the camera briefly focuses on her underwear and is suggestively drawn to her lips. Mirren's new image intimates that older women can only feel sexy and desirable if they return to their youth; instead, the advert should be promoting comfort in their own, naturally ageing skin.

5. Discussion

Although there is a lack of linguistic and visual research into the messages behind anti-ageing skin care advertising, conclusions can be drawn from the L'Oréal campaign based on research in this area. Some aspects of the advert support previous findings, such as the advertiser's attempts at persuading the consumer they have a problem (Coupland 2003) and the use of oppressive scientific discourse to raise the importance of ageing skin (Coupland 2007). However, there is clearly a desire on the part of the campaign to address several of the issues attached to these adverts. Metaphors of war which usually

abound in discourses of anti-ageing are only subtly alluded to on one occasion (4) and explicit references to physical signs of ageing are reduced to the vague term 'age spots' (4). This conscious recognition of the need for change in the advertising industry is signified through the introduction of Mirren as the older face of the campaign, undermining the tradition of using younger models (Chambers 2012: 170). Despite these efforts, the depiction of Mirren continues to frame the older generation as 'an "at-risk" aging population' (Smirnova 2012: 1238). Without L'Oréal's skin cream, Mirren is invisible, which is shown through the darker colour palette and use of elderly stereotypes at the beginning of the advert. Her sexualisation and adoption of youthful clothing supports the research claim that advertising promotes beauty as a 'life-long pursuit that requires constant construction' (Dye 2009: 123-4). This essay therefore gives evidence for the ways in which L'Oréal continues to marginalise the older consumer.

This advert is part of L'Oréal's wider 'The Perfect Age' campaign. On their website, there are multiple videos offering stories about ageing from everyday women. Analysing the 2015 Mirren advert in connection with one of these could provide an alternative perspective and create an interesting point of comparison. The fact that this advert has been analysed in isolation arguably produces a limited perspective of skin care marketing; however, it has also allowed for in-depth analysis within the word limit constraints. Future exploration could examine the relatively under-researched role of men in discourses of skin care advertising. Much research, this essay included, has instead focused on the alienation of the older female consumer. Coupland (2007) has made progress in developing this area of research and a comparative study of male and female marketed skin care products could make an interesting case for gender differences or similarities within this industry.

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Appendix

Link to the anti-ageing L'Oréal skin care advertisement:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ZPIqfpM3-s

Speakers:

HM – Helen Mirren

VO – Male voiceover

Line	Speaker	Utterance
1	HM	Ever feel like you go unnoticed? And when you aren't (.) well, enough.
2	VO	L'Oréal Paris Age Perfect with soya peptides.
3	HM	It's the science I trust to help me look like me. Nourish and indulge
4		your skin and show those age spots who's boss. Grow another year
5		bolder, look and feel more radiant. Our perfect age is now.
6	VO	Age Perfect from L'Oréal Paris.
7	HM	So are we worth it? More than ever.

Transcribing Conventions:

(.)	A short pause
Underline	Helen Mirren speaking directly to the viewer