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Short Circuits

Krustapseudicals

Emily Candela



A visitor reaches for a krustapseudical at the exhibition 'Does Dark Matter?', Shoreditch Studios, October 2012, curated by cosmicmegabrain. Photo by Martina O'Shea.

KRUSTAPSEUDICALS ARE EDIBLE CRYSTALS that purport to halt their consumer's body in time. They are crystallisations of beauty advice from magazines and advertising, and are made of materials found in topical cosmetics (like zinc and vitamins), proteins (mostly obtained from my own hair), and small amounts of other metals and ointments. They also contain materials evoked by the marketing of cosmetics that advertise bodily freeze, such as seaweed and gold. They are tiny fictions.



The krustapseudical takes its prefix from the Greek *krystallos*, for ice (which also lends its name to the word 'crystal'). They are the shadows of two new kinds of products that blur the cosmetic and the medical in the name of suspended animation: cosmetic pharmaceuticals, or 'cosmeceuticals', topical beauty products such as skin creams that advertise drug-like effects, and their sister product, 'nutricosmetics', tablets offering to beautify the skin through *internal* use. Alongside the wrinkle creams and botox treatments on offer these perform a one-line chorus, *we will help you stop aging*. Their marketing often invokes hints of crystals and metals, substances untroubled by thoughts of ageing or death: my foundation is called 'bare minerals'; Charlize Theron's face gleams on a billboard, her skin seemingly replaced by some rare-earth metal. The endgame of this imagination of beauty is the human transformed into mineral, as in the plot of so many science fiction scenarios. As edible objects, krustapseudicals invoke the consumption of immortality by way of a material bodily ingestion of the inorganic environment.



But krustapseudicals are far from the immortal solidity of the mineral. They have the stickiness and consistency of jelly, so they wobble and, when bitten, your teeth cut right through. Historically, crystals have invited meditation on what is and is not 'nature', and what distinguishes the living from the non-living. They are always to be found blurring the two, from ancient beliefs that saw crystals gestating beneath the ground like living matter, to the humans in JG Ballard's *The Crystal World* who transmute into mineral, frozen in space and time. As such they are a class of objects ripe for edibility, part of the environment not firmly positioned outside the body – an 'elsewhere' like the landscape as it is so often perceived - but something that flows through us and becomes part of our matter.



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