Appendix
Constructing Ageing and Gender: A Selective Literature Review

This material has been included as background supporting some of my arguments in this book in relation to ageing and gender, although it does not specifically address dance. It also contextualizes the book’s arguments within wider discourses on ageing and the body.

Whereas research informed by post-structuralist theory has focused on deconstructing or destabilizing our normative conceptions of categories such as gender (Butler 1990, 1993; Foucault 1980; Gatens 1996; Grosz 1994), less attention has been given to deconstructing the category of age. Moreover, as noted earlier, traditional approaches within ageing theory have been concerned with ageing in relation to illness and disability (treating frailty, dementia and other conditions as forms of disability), have focused on a specific category (old age), and have been largely policy-driven (Arber and Ginn 1995). Furthermore, gerontological and sociological research has not until recently focused on the experience of ageing, and on how this impacts on, and structures, our everyday practices over our life course. At the same time, attention to the social implications of ageing has increased from the middle of the twentieth century, with global population ageing apparently continuing at a steady rate in both developed and developing countries (Borowski and Hugo 1997; McCallum and Geiselhart 1996).

One of the most compelling features of ageing policy has been a growth of interest in gerontological research into how older people and the ageing process are socially perceived and understood, and one of the recurrent themes of this research is that, while ageing is a biological phenomenon, it is always meaningfully interpreted within a social context (Bytheway 1997; Featherstone and Hepworth 1991a, 1995; Minichiello et al. 1992; Russell 1989). Further, research from social gerontology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology suggests
that the meanings, representations and practices surrounding old age are socially constructed (Bytheway 1997; Featherstone and Hepworth 1991a, 1991b, 1995; Minichiello et al. 1992; Russell 1989).

Ageing is not simply biological and uniform in its effects; rather, it has been argued that humans age at different rates and experience ageing differently (Butler 1975; Sax 1993). These differences in ageing are not individual idiosyncrasies that are independent of the culture in which we live. Rather, as social constructionists contend, the experience of ageing in humans is historically and culturally specific, as are the meanings others attribute to it. A social constructionist account of ageing is therefore useful in understanding how we are ‘aged’ by culture as much as by biology, and how we are categorized as aged, gendered, classed and so on. This account of ageing also allows us to appreciate that the onset of ageing is not only biologically set, but also culturally set. However, in earlier research little attention has been given to the cultural aspects, and little research has been directed to the embodied experience of gendered ageing.

In dispelling the Western cultural myth of universal ‘decline’, social constructionist research also highlights cross-cultural differences in how concepts such as ageing or gender are understood, and how attitudes to ageing vary across cultures (Shweder 1998). For example, in Japan, ageing is seen as a social process rather than an individual biological change, and life course development is conceived as an advancement in social status, maturity and responsibility, rather than merely as biological and physical decline (Lock 1993, 1998). In Samoan traditional culture there is no cultural sense of lost youth and declining vitality, obsessive concern with death and mortality, or a strong tendency to dissociate life stage from chronological age per se (Shore 1998), and for the Gusii people of Western Kenya the increased seniority that a man or woman develops over time is associated not with decline or ‘obsolescence’ but with respect, obedience, prestige and social esteem (LeVine and LeVine 1998). These differences suggest that cultures attach variable meanings to the concept of ageing as understood within culture.

A social constructionist view maintains that it is the experience and meanings of ageing that are generated within a social context; thus ageing itself is not simply a socially constructed category, but rather a biological phenomenon meaningfully interpreted in a psychosocial context, which is culturally and historically variable. As Featherstone and Hepworth (1995, pp. 30–1) note:

Whilst the biological processes of aging, old age, and death cannot in the last resort be avoided, the meanings which we give to these
processes and the evaluations we make of people as they grow physically older are social constructions which reflect the beliefs and values found in a specific culture at a particular period in history.

Similarly, the social *consequences* of ageing can be argued to be socially constructed; in the sense of being “the product of historic policies and public attitudes which are changeable or at least modifiable” (McCallum and Geiselhart 1996, p. 15). Gerontologist Cherry Russell is among those who argue that, while ageing is a biological phenomenon, its outcomes are determined more by social than by biological processes. These social processes are in turn subject to socioeconomic conditions that can result in structural inequality in older people, an inequality that is interpreted as a form of incompetence (Russell 1989), particularly in advanced neoliberal democracies, which is concerned with statistics based on populations, rather than with individuals.

Moreover, while ageing indisputably has a *biological* basis, inasmuch as what we understand as ‘ageing’ involves physiological bodily changes over time, it has been argued that age-based ‘decline’ is variable because biological ageing interacts with social, political and psychological forces within a society (Minichiello et al. 1992; Sax 1993). As Sax (1993, p. 5) notes:

> Not only do older persons vary in physical and mental characteristics, in economic and family resources and in social skills, but also in the life experiences which shape the condition of each new phalanx of people who enter old age... Until very old age is reached, age by itself does not severely impair the performance of everyday tasks by those who are growing old... Pressing needs are apparent only among a minority of older people, yet it is about elderly people in general that a stereotype has been constructed in the popular mind to produce images of frailty, dependency and incompetence.

Robert Butler concurs with the notion that older people are in fact *more* variable than young people (Butler 1975, p. 12):

> There are great differences in the rates of physiological, chronological, psychological and social aging within the person and from person to person. In fact physiological indicators show a greater range from the mean in old age than in any other age group... Older people actually become more diverse rather than more similar with advancing years.
Others have also criticized traditional perspectives on ageing in that they emphasize losses rather than gains, and foster a concentration on similarities rather than differences across older people (Rowe and Kahn 1997). Rowe and Kahn argue that, by ignoring this diversity in older adults and instead focusing on differences between broad age groups, such as youth, middle age, young-old, and old-old, we are already primed to look for similarities across older people and are blind to the differences. This leads to a homogenization of older people, involving an erasure of individual differences.

However, acknowledging that older adults are fairly diverse in the rate at which they ‘age’ would make it extremely difficult to say anything meaningful in empirical studies, which require relatively well-defined units of analysis. Defining the boundaries of older age groups is therefore problematic in demographic analyses, in which arbitrary choices often need to be made. For instance, Borowski and Hugo (1997, p. 20) suggest that fixing chronological limits to age groups is far from straightforward:

The concept of an aged person based on chronological age has meaning only in those societies in which social relations are differentiated by the number of years lived since birth... Because social relations within a society are dynamic, the social construction of the aged person in terms of years lived can be fluid.

Borowski and Hugo (1997) explain that their conscious decision to set the lower limit of 65 in their age group under study was reached because it originated from early collective retirement income specifications from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Thus an arbitrary marker of the onset of old age has been adopted in empirical and actuarial studies because Western social relations are not differentiated by biological age, but rather by chronological age. Yet retirement at age 65 for men and 60 for women was an economically determined policy set at a time when the average life expectancy of men was 58 years and women 62 years. Since then life expectancy has increased significantly (what Robert Butler has termed the ‘longevity revolution’) and this age-marker is no longer meaningful. This brings us to the conclusion that, if people do not age at biologically uniform rates, then the hegemonic construction of ageing in Western cultures must be seen as a cultural–historical exercise in homogenizing this diversity, for the purpose of creating a distinct social category – the category of the aged – maintained and perpetuated through shared social perceptions and expectations.
Specific historical conditions also contribute to shaping normative social perceptions of older people. Harper and Thane (1998), for example, argue that the postwar period in Britain from 1946 to the early 1960s witnessed the construction of a specific set of widely held images of elderly people. This resulted in the emergence of a historically new and specific set of definitions and experiences of old age (Harper and Thane 1998, pp. 43–4):

Whilst ‘the elderly’ have long been recognized as a distinct social category, ever-stricter stratification by age has emerged since industrialization [which] entailed the increasing separation of biological from socially defined old age...political, social, and economic changes combined to create a particular, historically new set of experiences and definitions of old age.

These conditions thus gave rise to “the processes whereby...elderly people...come to be defined and categorized, and have characteristics attributed to them, which then become normative” (Harper and Thane 1998, p. 44). They also led to a closer focus on the ‘elderly population’ in public debate and social research. This suggests that attitudes towards older people in highly industrialized societies are very different from those held prior to industrialization, and are linked to the social and economic changes that have accompanied industrialization.

Examining the historical development of the concept of old age in the United States, Hareven (1995) argues that, in late nineteenth-century American society, old age was no longer accepted as a natural process (with admiration for those who lived to a great old age) but became increasingly understood as a period of weakness, decline and obsolescence, and also became increasingly medicalized. As Hareven (1995, p. 120) contends:

Advanced old age, which had earlier been regarded as a manifestation of the survival of the fittest, was now denigrated as a condition of dependence and deterioration...Beginning in the 1860s, the popular magazines shifted their emphasis from attaining longevity to discussing the medical symptoms of senescence. By the beginning of the twentieth century geriatrics emerged as a branch of medicine.

Hareven suggests that cultural and socioeconomic changes over the last century have fostered age-based segregation, an increased differentiation
of social roles and an emphasis on individualism (1995, p. 132):

The gradual ousting of older people from the labour force at the beginning of the twentieth century and the decline in their parental functions in the later years of life tended to disengage them from their offspring. One of the most important changes affecting the elderly, therefore, was the increasing association of functions with age and formation of segregated, age-based peer groups. This segregation by age occurred first among the middle class, and was only later extended into the rest of society.

Critical gerontology has only fairly recently begun to emerge as a theory of ‘difference’ that acknowledges that the category of age is itself heterogeneous and problematic (Higgs 1997, p. 122). Just as liberal feminism was superseded by feminism based on sexual difference, age as ‘difference’ rather than (in)equality has come into focus. For example, Emmanuelle Tulle-Winton explores whether ‘successful ageing’ might offer an opportunity for resistance by enabling people to forge new lifestyles and new modes of being which allow them to retain a place in mainstream society (Tulle-Winton 1999). Conversely, she asks whether ‘successful ageing’ is in fact a concealed technique of regulation which serves to deny old people the legitimate right to bodily difference (marked as ‘dysfunction’) and even perhaps their right to choose cultural disengagement. Molly Andrews also asserts that the prevailing tendency towards ‘agelessness’, in which old age is nothing more than a social construct, works against the old by depriving them of “one of their most hard-earned resources: their age” (Andrews 1999, p. 301). Perhaps the weakening grasp of ‘homogenizing’ theories of ageing will enable different (such as gendered) experiences of ageing to come to the fore and be noted. Developing more productive understandings of ageing involves a dismantling of existing assumptions governing how Western women and men embody and experience the process of ageing-within-culture.

Ageism and social presence

It is ironic that, although life expectancy and health in later years have increased this century (Markson and Taylor 2000; Minichiello et al. 1992), Western cultures have defined ageing predominantly in negative terms, as a period of gradual, irreversible decline. Woodward
(1999, p. xiv) highlights the irony inherent in culturally ageing people in negative terms, where “the promise of the longevity revolution is that our expectations for what is a full life – an abundant life – should be consonant with life expectancies. Here again we see the evidence that we are culturally illiterate about ageing and the meanings of the longevity revolution.”

Ageism, the social practice of negatively stereotyping and stigmatizing people on the basis of age, is a term believed to have been first used by Robert Butler in 1975. Ageism need not refer to old age, but can be directed at younger people, such as children. However, in Western cultures it is the younger, more socially powerful groups who are seen to ostracize and effectively ‘age’ the older groups, depriving the latter of what Esposito (1987) has called the “dignity of agedness”. Twelve years after Butler coined the term, Radford (1987) linked ageism to social power and control. Radford (1987, pp. 4–5) defined ageism as:

A tendency to categorize everybody else as being ‘like us’ or ‘unlike us’... gives a reference point from which one can be ‘comfortable’ with others different from ourselves... this trait of containment of others by categorization results in centrifugation and constraint of the conceptual framework by which we deal with them. It helps the groups in society with power to control those without it. For individuals in minority groups it may result in the loss of control of their time, space, energy and mobility... these features are often seen in institutions, especially for the elderly.

Age-grading, in combination with cultural markers such as class, gender and race, builds on structural inequalities, such as reduced income and reduced opportunities to participate in social life, and can lead to older people’s self-perception, and their perception by younger people, as lacking social presence and social power, as socially ‘obsolescent’ and ‘invisible’. Ironically, older people themselves often perpetuate and reinforce a negative cultural perception of them. Radford, too, argued that “[l]ike all prejudices, ageism influences the self view and behaviour of its victims. The elderly tend to adopt negative definitions of themselves and to perpetuate the very stereotypes directed against them, thereby reinforcing society’s beliefs” (Radford 1987, p. 5). Labeled as ‘frail’, older people come to perceive themselves as such, and collaborate in their social marginalization and the surrendering of their social power.

To continue to live an ‘abundant life’ into deep old age involves overcoming the entrenched ageism of Western cultures, and remedying
what Woodward (1999) refers to as the current ‘cultural illiteracy’ around ageing. For Esposito (1987, p. 5), overcoming ageism begins with understanding that:

True dignity for the aged cannot be based only on stoic isolation but must also rest on the view that all the phases of human life have value and integrity. To achieve such a pervasive dignity of life we must change not only aging persons’ attitudes about themselves and the prevailing cultural values but also the very mechanics of social life – the rhythms of work and play; of love, sex, and friendship; and of wealth and poverty in all the stages of the life cycle.

Ageism is distinct from prejudices such as sexism and racism, in that it involves a gradual transition from one ‘type’ (youth) to another (old age). Thus, argues Esposito (1987, p. 147):

The natural boundary between victim and victimizer differs from that in [racism and sexism].... If ageism is exploitation of the old by the young, the victimizer is destined to become a victim. If ageism is exploitation of the young by the old, then the victim who lives long enough becomes the victimizer.

Furthermore, as Woodward (1999, p. x) has noted, “Our disregard of age is all the more curious because age – in the sense of older age – is the one difference we are all likely to live into.” From a social justice perspective, ageism is unarguably exploitative, in that it leads to restriction in the optimal participation in social life of which those labeled as ‘old’ are capable, and thus limits their freedom as human, self-realizing subjects. They become entrenched in a stigmatized age category that limits opportunities for social participation, increases economic dependency and social isolation, and for many becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. They consequently become ‘less’ than citizens, because citizens have “the right of access to the social, economic and political life of the country and adequate means with which to exercise those rights” (McCallum and Geiselhart 1996, p. 22). However, it is impossible for those who are old to exercise their rights in a culture in which older citizens are not valued, but instead constituted through stereotypes and discourse as uniformly dependent and in decline.

The stigmatization of old age emerges from a cultural denial of the fact that our own bodies must age, must become old. As Simone de
Beauvoir notes: “When we look at the image of our own future provided by the old we do not believe it: an absurd inner voice whispers that that will never happen to us – when that happens it will no longer be ourselves that it happens to” and urges that we “recognize ourselves in this old man or in that old woman” (Beauvoir 1972, pp. 11–12), a perception that Woodward (1999) calls recognizing the other in one’s self that is old. Beauvoir’s approach implicitly represents ageing as a disruption of subjectivity rather than its continuity. It threatens to split the self by perceiving older people as ‘other’, as ‘not me’ – and as a threat to the continuous, stable subjectivity that is culturally and historically variable. To reject the ‘ageing other’ is to deny the possibilities of one’s own becoming, by rejecting one’s future aged self – a projected self-refusal, and thus limiting the possibilities for developing identities that are dynamic and evolving.

So far I have argued that, far from being a biological phenomenon uninfluenced by culture, ageing is constructed and interpreted within historically specific cultural norms that we internalize and perpetuate through discourses and practices. Theories of ageing, too, are subject to cultural norms, not independent of them. The historical recentness, in Western cultures, of taking chronological ageing as a marker of decline suggests that economic, social and ideological changes in cultures affect the way the ageing body-subject is constructed and perceived. It may, therefore, be useful to consider ageing as a ‘process’, a becoming, in Woodward’s terms, “the one difference we are all likely to live into”. Constituting subjects as ‘aged’ involves negotiating the inherent ambiguity of the ageing body. We are obviously not ‘young’ one year and ‘old’ the next, but fluid selves constantly in a process of becoming, yet we are subjected to static social categorization. Below I examine the usefulness of a range of perspectives in resolving this ambiguity of bodily ageing in Western cultures.

Postmodern perspectives on ageing in midlife: recyclable identities, discursive ageing

Earlier I have suggested that the concept of ageing is ambiguous and therefore problematic to theorize. The focal point of this ambiguity is the life-stage termed ‘midlife’, a stage previously known as ‘middle age’, which is characterized as the life period between 30 and 60 years (Featherstone and Hepworth 1991b, p. 201). In midlife the individual is culturally constituted as ‘no longer young, and not yet old’ (Gullette 1998). Midlife possesses an ambiguous status in relation to age, as it
represents an important transitional period, when the attitudes, comportment and practices that mark social identity in our youth and early adulthood are challenged, and when we become marked by our destiny of ‘old age’. The early stages of midlife also mark the point at which most ballet dancers retire from performing, with a number of notable exceptions (such as Mikhail Baryshnikov). Studies of ageing that focus on the midlife period are, therefore, useful in defining the processes through which we are aged.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several researchers, including Featherstone and Hepworth, began to consider the relationship between ageing and consumerism in Western societies. Featherstone and Hepworth suggested that during midlife the ‘spectre’ of ‘conspicuous consumption’ motivates individuals to maintain their bodies in a perpetually youthful state, as Western culture is predicated on youth. As part of this research, Featherstone (1991) identified a new type of subject, a ‘performing self’ that emerged at the beginning of consumer culture and roughly coincided with what Christopher Lasch describes as a culture of narcissism in the 1920s (Lasch 1979). This performing self is characterized as driven by consumption and preoccupied with the body’s appearance and presentation. Performing selves seek to enhance their health and marketability by engaging in constant self-scrutiny for signs of ‘failure’ to ensure their youthful state (Featherstone 1991, pp. 178, 189–90):

Within consumer culture individuals are asked to become role players and self-consciously monitor their own performance. Appearance, gesture and bodily demeanour become taken as expressions of self, with bodily imperfections and lack of attention carrying penalties in everyday interactions... The wrinkles, sagging flesh, tendency towards middle-age spread, hair loss, etc., which accompany aging should be combated by energetic body maintenance on the part of the individual – with help from the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries.

Such monitoring and disciplining of bodies is widely exhorted in numerous women’s, and, more recently, men’s, magazines, leading to a flourishing industry of numerous products targeted at achieving youthfulness. Concomitantly, the individual’s ‘failure’ to remain youthful is interpreted as moral laxity, in a culturally endemic paranoia and denial of the signs of ageing. Featherstone and Hepworth (1991b, p. 201) suggest that in Western consumer cultures the term ‘midlifestyle’ is a
discourse of *resistance*, as it is focused on defying the threat of obsolescence in midlife:

This new orientation towards the middle years represents the endorsement of a new style of life...which suggests the middle years (30–60) are replete with opportunities to achieve new goals, fulfilment and personal growth...Self-renewal therefore is accorded a central place within this lifestyle.

Various theorists have linked the constitution and production of the midlife body as a historically specific site of conflict between a youthful inner self and an ageist society to the development of a postindustrialist, consumer society (Featherstone 1991; Turner 1984). Featherstone and Hepworth represent this dualistic tension between the ‘inner body-self’ and the ‘outer body’ as the ‘mask of ageing’, whereby the ageing body is conceived as an increasingly inflexible ‘mask’, which progressively impairs the successful social *performance* of youthfulness. Turner (1994) also argued that the midlife phenomenon in postmodern consumer societies that followed postindustrialism has triggered a ‘proliferation’ of possible lifestyles and identities, and that identities have become ‘recyclable’ and selves ‘revisable’, whereas previously roles were clearly defined by the life course. This, for Turner, indicates that “Postmodernity suggests rather that we live in a situation of contingent life trajectories. This idea of contingency in life projects better expresses the uncertainties, ambiguities and diversity of post-modern life styles” (1994, p. 110). The body accordingly becomes the site of numerous projects to continually revise and reinvent the self and establish a social identity in a postmodern culture (ibid., p. 111):

The central issue in...the postmodernisation of aging is the question of identity. In a society where social roles are highly structured and where rites of passage are clearly known, identity follows status without any ambiguity. In postmodern societies these status transitions within the life-cycle have been fractured and rendered ambiguous. The maintenance of identity is further complicated by an emphasis on the body beautiful. With the inevitable aging of the body, the continuity of self and identity is exposed...If postmodernisation means the reversible body, it also implies a revisable self. From this complex of relationships there emerges the idea of a multiplicity of projects for the body and the self.
Both Turner (1994) and Biggs (1997, 1999) thus argue that postmodern social identities have become more fluid in response to the lack of structure; the life course is no longer as ‘linear’, and social roles and relations are no longer clearly defined. Gullette (1998) also situates midlife as a time of conflict between a youthful subjectivity, a lifestyle of consumption and the apparently limitless revisibility of the self, focusing on the discourses that produce what she argues is a culturally endemic fear and dread of ageing, a fear of ‘failure’ in appropriately presenting the self in a social context which manifests itself in self-vigilance and paranoia of the body’s visible signs of ageing. Further, the onset of this paranoia is precocious, preceding the manifestation of the visible signs of ageing. Gullette (1998, p. 17) argues that consumer society generates metaphors of ageing as an irreversible terminal disease, and this produces paranoia of ageing, which she perceives to be a cultural fiction:

In the United States in the twentieth century [aged] no longer means a geriatric physical process, and it can begin long before marked events like retirement or the last of the children leaving home. Although widely shared, its core is a private emotion: fear of being not-young. In other words, it is a culturally cultivated chronic disease with an adolescent exposure and a no-later-than-midlife onset.

Gullette locates the social construction of ageing discursively, in the midlife ‘decline narrative’, which she argues is culturally taught through feelings and lore from puberty onwards. This, and her claim that the ‘natural’ midlife transition is portrayed to be as inevitable as, and indistinguishable from, biological ageing, is based on the argument that everything underlying the construct ‘midlife decline’ is learned; indeed, that “our very feelings depend on culture” (Gullette 1998, p. 9). According to Gullette’s view, emotions are socially constructed, and the social construction of feelings of agedness in contemporary US culture is predominantly discursively mediated and is subject to historical-cultural influences. Further, she argues that what she terms a “decline ideology” is seamless and ‘insidious’ in its subliminally reinforced practices, remaining invisible and naturalized. However, it is worth noting that in her argument she universalizes a subsample to assume characteristics shared across a population.

The preceding discussion of ageism suggests that midlife in Western late capitalist consumer societies is not supported as an opportunity for developing a socially valued self-identity. Instead, midlife has
traditionally been negatively perceived as marking the onset of physical deterioration and often also economic and social decline, the reasons for which are not clearly understood. While practices of conspicuous consumption and ongoing reinventing of the self as strategies of defying the ‘mask of ageing’ may seem useful in midlife, this defiance is ultimately not sustainable into deep old age. I therefore turn to psychoanalytic perspectives on ageing, which focus more on how ageing is experienced rather than how it is physically marked.

**Psychoanalytic perspectives on ageing in midlife: persona and masquerade**

Neo-Jungian analytic psychologists take a radically different approach to midlife from that of theorists such as Featherstone and Hepworth, Turner and Gullette. They perceive the period of the second half of life as significantly different from the first half. This period, they argue, is not characterized by a frustrated desire to continue to define the self through prolific consumption; rather, it involves a reevaluation of one’s life.

Simon Biggs, in his book *The Mature Imagination*, examines how the coherence, continuity and authenticity of a mature identity might be maintained (Biggs 1999). He is critical of postmodern approaches to ageing that stress the notion of a ‘reversible’ or ‘revisible’ self, and of a multiplicity of identities that, in an environment of prolific consumption, can be changed virtually ‘at will’; rather, this ‘freedom to choose’ is in actuality anything but a free choice. Instead, it involves a tension between the ‘reversible’ self’s compunction to select from a multiplicity of identities, independent of chronological age, and the increasing inflexibility of the ageing physical body. Individuals who succumb to the demand to maintain a youthful body and a socially desirable identity rely on the social ‘mask’ or ‘persona’ to conceal ageing and protect the self from social stigmatization and humiliation within an ageist society. This indicates that ageing in Western consumer-driven cultures is not an opportunity to ‘reinvent’ one’s self at liberty; rather, it represents a conflict between the desire for social recognition and value and the negotiation of culturally normative imperatives that devalue ageing.

For many individuals, developing a mature subjectivity thus becomes increasingly difficult since, over time, the mask becomes increasingly inflexible, as Biggs (1999, p. 62) notes:

>[E]ven though the postmodern ‘self’ is characterized as being capable of infinite expression, the aging body needs to be progressively
managed if this possibility is not to be lost. Old age increases this contradiction to a point at which participation in consumer lifestyles is significantly compromised. As aging gathers pace, it is increasingly difficult to ‘recycle’ the body and it becomes a cage, which both entraps and denies access to that world of choice.

Biggs espouses a concept he terms ‘masque’, incorporating masquerade and the Jungian-derived concept of the persona, which he defines as “an essentially social phenomenon which encompasses the roles we play and the compromises we make for the sake of ‘fitting in’...a device through which an active self looks out at and negotiates with the world, to protect the self and to deceive others” (Biggs 1999, p. 76). ‘Masquerade’ as a concept was first used by psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in “Womanliness as a Masquerade” within a feminist context, in which masquerade operated as a display, or performance, of normative femininity to defend against perceived retribution by (father-figure) men (Riviere 1929). The ability to disguise was particularly important in instances when women occupied ‘masculine’ (e.g. intellectual) positions. In relation to ageing, persona or masque is a means of social accommodation, of protecting the self and others from unacceptable parts of one’s personality, while also providing a means of social conformity to attain acceptance in an ageist culture.

Biggs further contends that the second half of life involves the shedding of self-preconceptions that are considered to be ‘false’ wrappings of the self. Drawing on Jungian theory, he argues that “it is a necessity for older persons in this second half of life ‘to devote serious attention’ to themselves as psychologically distinct, developed and spiritual beings, which itself requires that the Self is divested of the ‘false wrappings’ of the persona” (Biggs 1993, p. 30). He argues that the postmodern self’s potentially unlimited freedom in ‘inventing’ an identity is a fiction, since any increased opportunities for psychological development of the mature self are countered by the ‘increasingly marginal and restrictive social roles’ available to the ageing self. Biggs (1999, p. 80) concludes that “The advent of postmodern conditions has made a plethora of identities available. However, these appear to be drained of significance and easily become a means of avoiding an encounter with existential questions of ageing.”

The concept of ‘persona’ reflects a strategic attempt to overcome an ageist social climate that threatens to marginalize the ageing person’s social presence and value. Importantly, the individual in Biggs’s framework can exercise agency in crafting a coherent, mature embodied self
in ongoing personal development, and he argues that ageing offers an ‘experiential sophistication’ in an individual’s later years, which allows a flexible and contingent identity to adapt itself to the nature of contemporary society, contending that “According to this viewpoint...maturity gives rise to an expanded capacity for self-experience” (Biggs 1999, p. 81). The ability to negotiate a multiplicity of social situations while simultaneously retaining a sense of personal cohesion and continuity are argued to be the strengths of ageing, and one of the forms that this ability to negotiate might take is that individuals become more self-aware as they age, while also becoming more flexible in connecting with others in their social environment. This increase in self-experience and connection with others also has implications for the performance of dance as the dancer ages, in terms of relating to both self and audience, and is a core argument in this book.

Biggs also discusses masquerade in relation to hegemonic (e.g. patriarchal) social codes, according to which ageing is the ‘difference’ to be erased, and youthfulness is the desired, valued outcome (Biggs 1999, p. 75):

In the deployment of the masque, youth becomes a normative state to which the body has to be restored. Age becomes a process of dispossessing and the cover-up, an exercise teetering on the brink of the grotesque. Through this intrinsic ambiguity, masquerade again becomes a process of submission to dominant social codes and resistance to them...It is a thing that is played with, which while obscuring signs of aging is also drawing attention to the fact that a deceit is taking place.

In her book Aging and its Discontents: Freud and other fictions, Kathleen Woodward applies Riviere’s (1929) concept of masquerade to old age. Masquerade for her is “a cover up through which old age nonetheless speaks” (Woodward 1991, p. 148):

In a culture which so devalues age, masquerade with respect to the aging body is first and foremost a denial of age, an effort to erase or efface age and to put on youth. Masquerade entails several strategies, among them: the addition of desired body parts (teeth, hair); the removal or covering up of unwanted parts of the body (growths, gray hair, “age spots”); the “lifting” of the face and other body parts in an effort to deny the weight of gravity; the molding of the body’s shape (exercise, clothing).
Woodward argues that recognizing ourselves as ‘aged’ can be described in psychoanalytic terms as a form of “return of the repressed”. She posits a ‘mirror stage’ of old age, as a kind of reverse scenario of the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’ of infancy. In the mirror stage of infancy, the sight of the body as a cohesive unity experienced by the infant is in contradiction with his or her experienced lack of bodily control as a condition of ontological immaturity, and the child feels joy at perceiving her or his image as a harmonious whole. Woodward suggests that, on the other hand, in old age the mirror reflects an image which the viewer rejects, and which, if encountered unexpectedly, evokes an experience of ‘the uncanny’ (das Unheimliche) in the face of what Woodward argues is the familiarity of the repressed – old age. Indeed, one of her major arguments is that Freud himself could not come to terms with his own age-ing, and that this influenced his lack of concern with older people in therapy.

Woodward (1991, 1999) therefore argues that, while the social realities of fear, denial and attempted defiance of ageing still exist, they should be seen from the perspective of the psychic significance of the ageing body in a social context. Woodward is particularly concerned with the nexus between gender and ageing, applying the notion of ‘masquerade’ to gendered ageing, which she conceptualizes as an outcome of the development of the psyche in response to the social world, a mode of self-presentation by concealment. She refers to two polarized functions of masquerade: “as submission to dominant social codes and as resistance to them... [where] femininity is worn as if it were a set of strategies which conceals a desire for masculinity” (Woodward 1991, pp. 153–4). Thus, following Riviere, she theorizes masquerade as a strategy used by women who are motivated by a desire to, in a sense, complement patriarchy. Masquerade thus becomes a means of negotiating ‘patriarchal oppression’, while at the same time never being able to extricate itself from within the very framework it seeks to usurp. By contrast, she believes that in old age masquerade no longer becomes a strategy for negotiating patriarchal oppression, but instead functions as a sort of ‘bridge to the past’, to a momentary (and private) reconnection with past selves, in an attempt to secure coherence and unity of identity (Woodward 1991, p. 157):

In advanced old age masquerade serves primarily a narcissistic function in a theater which is predominantly private, not public... masquerade in old age... is concerned not so much with parody...as with forging links to one’s past selves. Masquerade itself in fact can be
regarded as an intermediate object in the psychoanalytic sense, serving as a bridge to lost objects, as a bridge which re-creates, momentarily, the past in the present.

Hence it is the body which has become fragmented (into parts which manifest progressive biological decline) and which the (youthful, unified) self experiences as a threat to its integrity. The body, Woodward argues, has thus become the ‘other’, alienated from the phenomenologically experienced self, and perhaps also alienated from a mythical ‘other’ body, the idealized, whole body image of the self, which is cherished even in the face of its impossibility. However, one could also argue that the mirror image has perhaps always been a form of ‘othering’ our perceived image from our internalized notion of the self. In Eva Figes’s book *Waking* (1981), one of the literary texts Woodward (1991) examines, the protagonist encounters her image while looking in the mirror as a young woman, reflecting on her image in a curiously detached way: “I step back and the dark hair falls to the shoulders, delicate curves, thin arms, how the small face gleams in the dark, ivory pale, those two dark eyes stare back. Who are you? I whisper, and the solemn eyes stare back without a word” (Figes 1981, p. 26). As in the sociologically informed ‘mask of ageing’ theory, the lived self strives to retain temporal continuity (through agelessness), and in later life there is a tension, if not a split, between the self and the increasingly inflexible ageing body.

**Gendered ageing**

Woodward’s theory of masquerade discussed above presents ageing as gendered, and in this section I further examine how ageing is gendered (and gender is aged) in Western consumer cultures. That experiences of ageing and experiences of gender are inextricably interrelated is uncontestable, yet ageing (particularly the biological bases of ageing) has traditionally been represented in a gender-neutral way. However, while men and women share the experiences of ageing in Western consumer cultures, there are significant differences in the opportunities and constraints they negotiate. Ageing is not merely a biological phenomenon, but is gendered, classed, and subject to specific historical–cultural conditions that arguably privilege one gender over another. Moreover, ageing in Western consumer cultures has traditionally been linked to notions such as ‘attractiveness’ for women and ‘virility’ for men, both concepts that suggest clearly different experiences of ageing for men and women. A comment from one of the interviewees in Bowen’s book
The Fabulous Fifties (Bowen 1995, p. 64) illustrates one way in which older women are marginalized in Australia:

I don’t see that it is much better to be seen as forty-plus than fifty-plus. If you are a woman and you are over that nubile twenty-plus or maybe early thirties there is a perception that you are old anyway and you become marginalised. Individual women can work against that marginalisation with more or less success – by the time you are fifty, alright, you can work on it so that people only think you are forty – but I don’t think that helps much at all.

Among the most significant differences in older people reported in research into ageing is the relatively higher ratio of women to men, a phenomenon that has been called by some the “feminization of old age”, which has until recently gone unnoticed (cf. Bury 1995; Arber and Ginn 1995; McMullin 1995). Demographic studies in Australia and other countries show that, where old age is reached, older women typically outnumber older men, particularly at 80+ years, and data from other countries show similar trends (Borowski and Hugo 1997, p. 32). Structural inequality is compounded by the tendency, in the present generation at least, for older women to be economically more disadvantaged, since they are less likely than men to have worked full-time for their ‘working’ lives, and generally have lower superannuation savings (McCallum and Geiselhart 1996). Older women have even been described by some as “the poorest of the poor” (Butler 1975, p. 2; MacDonald and Rich 1984, p. 84). For example, MacDonald and Rich (ibid.) describe how gender, race and class intersected in terms of economic survival in the US in the 1980s:

Three-fifths of the ‘elderly’ are women... An old woman has half the income of an old man. One out of three widows... lives below the official poverty line, and most women live one third of their lives as widows... Seven percent of old white men live in poverty, forty-seven percent of old black women.

In terms of economic circumstances, it is fair to say that, among the less well-off in Western cultures, aged women have historically fared more poorly than aged men. Gender relations also appear to work to disadvantage women in later life in terms of their reduced capacity to represent culturally normative attributes of their gender. From a philosophical perspective, Esposito has linked women more than men with
the social perception of ‘obsolescence’ in old age, due to their lack of social status relative to men (Esposito 1987, p. 129):

In societies that continually measure status...the struggle to maintain or acquire status continues as individuals age. And insofar as women have been marked traditionally for attractiveness and men for authority, the aging process has had a greater impact on women. Older women become obsolete as women, whereas men acquire greater stature with age.

Bury concurs with this view, noting that the late twentieth-century Western youth culture of consumption tends to mask the gendered inequity of remaining youthful (Bury 1995, p. 27):

As a dominant form of ‘youthful’ middle-aged...culture holds sway, the message seems to be that we are all capable of being young now. This process may be particularly disadvantageous to older women, as youthful glamorous looks and sexuality are emphasized as positive attributes of this youthful culture. The implication remains that women’s value is still strongly influenced by sexual attractiveness, and youthful appearance, in contrast to older men.

Theorists of gendered ageing, such as Woodward, have also suggested that the experience of ageing for women is more difficult than for men, and its onset occurs earlier: “By experiencing aging, I am referring primarily to the internalization of our culture’s denial of and distaste for aging, which is understood in terms of decline, not in terms of growth and change” (Woodward 1999, p. xiii). She also argues that the combination of being a female and being older exacerbates the experience of ageing for women. Drawing on Susan Sontag’s observation of women and ageing, she suggests that: “Women are also subject to what I call ‘double aging’ or ‘multiple aging.’ Unlike men, women in mainstream culture in the United States today are struck by aging as it is defined by our culture far earlier than men” (ibid.).

The way in which ageing is discursively marked in Western consumer cultures is through the practice of ‘age-tagging’, a practice perpetuated in the mass media. Film theorist Patricia Mellencamp describes television in US culture as both gendering and age-tagging its subjects in order to naturalize what is a culturally constructed phenomenon (Mellencamp 1992, pp. 280–1):
TV visually charts the passage of embryonic Darwinian time as aging. Chronological age, assessed at a glance like sex, is television’s and the nation’s gendered obsession. Dates are minutely specified – in the detailing, in virtually every newspaper story, of the age of the subject, a number which halts the story’s progress as we stop to calculate ‘self-other’ (‘Jane Fonda, 50, fell off her bicycle in Toronto’)…Like sex, age is mistaken for only biology, illness (or lack of effort and poverty). Like sexual difference, age is related to economics and power. As women age, they move to the margins of power. For men, the inverse is true.

Age-tagging is a discursive practice that, together with sex-identification, ‘grades’ someone – such as a stranger about whom we read in a newspaper or magazine – into a precise chronological age bracket, defined by other, naturalized (and therefore invisible) characteristics. In Western cultures, through our everyday practices, we unselconsiously ‘age-tag’ others, the strangers we meet or whose images we encounter in the media, effectively interpellating the other (as middle-aged, middle-class, female, elderly, young, working-class, male, etc.). Age-tagging is therefore widely used as a means of unambiguously allocating people to particular age groups.

In her discussion of age-tagging, Mellencamp contrasts the classical body, which she defines as “monumental, static, closed, sleek and quiet” against another type of body: the grotesque, carnivalesque body (Mellencamp (1992, p. 279). “The classical body is young, the grotesque body is old,” she writes. She contends that older bodies are characterized by lack, but here this lack or loss is not primarily the loss of physical capital, if by that one refers to ‘what the body can do’. Rather, Mellencamp suggests that older bodies disturb us because they lack the ‘monumentality’ and unity of form inherent in young (classical) bodies. That is, they are characterized by ambiguity in that they are not easily ‘read’ or classifiable. The ways an older person performs her or his social self, through comportment, body shape, dress and other practices, are also required to be internally consistent, to have a unity, in order to allow others to identify him or her unambiguously as ‘aged’. In other words, ambiguity in performance of self is not normative, and therefore not within the bounds of what is considered ‘normal’ within Western cultures.

Age-tagging also defines age status, the roles men and women play. For example, research by Markson and Taylor (2000) suggests that
cinematic representations of older female and male actors differ significantly, in that women are portrayed more negatively than men. The authors found that male actors rarely portrayed roles of ‘retired’ men, whereas “unlike the men, the most frequent film ‘occupation’ for women was being rich...most often as society matron” (Markson and Taylor 2000, p. 150), or in relation to other family members. This is interesting in that there appears to be no male equivalent in the English language for the term “matron”, which refers to women in their middle years with children, and also ironic in that Markson and Taylor (2000, p. 151) note that “federal government statistics show that old women [in the US] are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group.” By contrast, the authors suggest that feature films portray fantasies of power of older men, in which “old age among men was highlighted as an extension of midlife. Male roles emphasized productive, task-oriented activity...These are portrayals of men who, by refusing to grow old, also refuse to be devalued for their reduced capacity for production in the formal economy” (Markson and Taylor 2000, pp. 150–1).

These perceptions in popular culture reflect a traditional masculine ideal, which Markson and Taylor (2000, p. 153) refer to as “the male ability to maintain instrumentality”, and an ideal from which older women are portrayed as deviating. In popular films, they argue, the ‘mask of ageing’ differs between men and women (Markson and Taylor 2000, pp. 155–6):

Male movie masks primarily deny physical aging or diminished dominance; the ever-young interior subjective becomes (or strives to become) the exterior. Female masks focus more on exterior physical changes associated with aging and sometimes exaggerate them...No longer objects of sexual or romantic desire, female power in old age appears to depend on their ability to either manipulate or retain goods and resources or their family status as wives, mothers, and other relatives. Very few glimpses of a constant inner youthful self are caught.

Thus, representations of ageing in forms of mass media in Western cultures markedly differ for men and women, to the social disadvantage of women. However, this tells us little about whether there are gender-based differences in the experience of ageing in men and women.

Sociologist Jeff Hearn has argued that the category of ‘old men’ involves the loss of two forms of empowerment: the organizational power of the middle-aged and the physical strength and virility of the
young. He locates the ageing of men in what he calls a ‘disruption of intergenerational relations’: “In this construction older men are gradually diverted from the centre of youth and the heterosexual family; they become the other of this centre, as they approach death” (Hearn 1995, p. 112). The category of ‘older men’ is linked with gender, and “connects oldness to gender, to men, and to men’s social power”. Moreover, Hearn suggests that the category of ‘older men’ may contradict dominant constructions of men and masculinities, such constructions being linked with youth, physical strength, and another marker of sexuality, that of virility. In the field of dance research, scholar Ramsay Burt has also linked the representations of the male dancer with contradictory constructions of masculinity (Burt 1995). An intriguing question following from this is: if older men become ‘other’, does ageing ‘feminize’ men in Western cultures?

More recently, Cynthia Weber’s analysis of the dance film Billy Elliot offers some useful insights into the representation of boys and men in dance films (Weber 2003). Billy Elliot addresses the experiences of a young boy from a working-class coal-mining town in the United Kingdom who frustrates his father’s desire for him to take up boxing and instead chooses to learn dancing. Weber contends that dance films are coded according to values of youth, gender and sexuality, and argues that films such as Billy Elliot can question and rewrite heteronormative masculinity. They achieve this by coding dance as a ‘queer space’, where queer does not mean opposed to heteronormativity, but rather represents a strategy of disrupting the very foundation of normativity itself, of confounding the norm (Weber 2003, s. 11).

Weber maintains that the understandings of and relationships among masculinity, sexuality and dance hinge on the concept of youth, arguing that in Billy Elliot youth is employed to deter questions of sexuality, “questions which – when left undeferred – queer characters, relationships and spectatorship” (Weber 2003, s. 13). By ‘youth’ Weber refers specifically to the sexual innocence of youth, and perceives this coding of Billy in the eponymous film as a means of recuperating masculine heteronormativity, since “by privileging a-sexual youth over queer alternatives, the film insures that Billy can still be read as heterosexual, as normal, as not queer” (Weber 2003, s. 31). Thus, her argument is that the practice of dance, as represented in film, does not so much feminize men as ‘queer’ the very notion of heteronormativity itself and therefore the abject, ‘excluded’ status of the feminized man, using the innocence of youth as a means of deflecting cultural perceptions of dancing males as feminine.
Another way in which gender has been marked is in the control of the body. Bodily self-control, the ability to control the body’s comportment, movements and emissions, has been an important concept in defining social status in Western cultures. For example, anthropologist Mary Douglas in her book *Natural Symbols* linked the notion of two bodies – the social body and the physical body – to bodily control. Douglas argues that bodily control is an expression of social control, and that “the physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society” (Douglas 1973, p. 93). Although Douglas’s argument may be essentialist, it is nonetheless useful for understanding gendered ageing, for it highlights the possibility that control over one’s body, like all forms of knowledge and experience in Western cultures, has traditionally been defined through male experience, as feminists of difference such as Grosz (1994) have contended. Bodily control is thus associated with men and masculinity, whereas ‘lack of control’ (and therefore lack of agency) has been traditionally associated with women and femininity. Psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva also draws upon Douglas in her analysis of male representations of female bodies as ‘leaking’ and ‘draining’ (Kristeva 1982), and has defined such representations as a key cultural concept underpinning patriarchal control.

The issue of bodily control, and the concept of the body’s (real or imagined) boundaries, have been used to theorize women’s bodies as ‘different’ from, and posing a threat to, a masculine culture. Bodily control and the permeability of the body’s boundaries have been linked for some time in the literature (Douglas 1973; Kristeva 1982). That is, unlike men’s bodies, women’s bodies’ boundaries are not configurable as ‘closed’ and definitive of ‘inside’ versus ‘outside’, and the permeability of the female body’s boundaries is feared by men. For example, Klaus Theweleit’s study on the soldiers in the German Freikorps suggests that men have a ‘fear and hatred’ of women, as women by their ‘engulfing’ excessive, boundaryless state threaten the enclosed safety of masculinity, clearly contained within boundaries, and thus incite abjection (Theweleit 1987).

According to Kristeva, the abject is that which threatens the *corps propre* or the ‘clean and proper body’ (where *propre* translates as both ‘clean’ and ‘proper’ in English), the body that is knowable and predictable, the body as a subject of institutional control and as subject to self-control. Abjection is perceived to be dangerous because it is always ambiguous and is seen as referring to a transitional stage of development, and the term ‘abject masculinity’ subverts the notion that masculinity is an
unproblematic, unquestioned norm. For Theweleit and others, Western heterosexual masculinity is structured by oppressive (oedipal) boundaries. Women are seen as a threat to these boundaries, threatening to dissolve them and render males in a boundaryless pre-Oedipal state of polymorphous perversity. Thus, notes dance scholar Ramsay Burt, the concept of masculinity is vulnerable and problematic: “Men's fear of women...is derived from the conflictual and problematic nature of male embodiment within patriarchal culture” (Burt 1995, p. 68).

The relationship between social power, bodily control and masculinity breaks down when essential control over the body and its functions begins to fail in men. As with illness, the ageing body, whether male or female, finds itself progressively unable to express itself in the conventional, normative codes that constitute us as gendered subjects. The implications of this are that the ageing of men is aligned with femininity through ‘lack’ of bodily control, and it is the loss of this prized control which forces men to confront their ageing bodies as no longer ‘other’ but as part of themselves as they age. As gerontologist Sarah Harper argues, “it is only in later life that men, like women, through the experience of the experiential and constructed body, are forced to recognize the ‘other’ as a defining force in their own construction and experience” (Harper 1997, p. 169).

One of the few theorists who have applied feminist arguments of the body to age theory, Harper draws on corporeal feminist Elizabeth Grosz’s (1993, 1994) theorization of the sexed body as a framework for understanding the role of the ageing body in the social construction of later life (Harper 1997). Grosz advocates a “broad, nonphysicalist materialism” (Grosz 1994, p. viii), according to which models and conceptions of corporeality are nondualist and nonreductivist, and acknowledge sexual difference. Harper engages with Grosz’s argument that the body is involved in the production and evaluation of knowledge, and notes that, within the Western philosophical tradition, reason is dissociated from the body and the bodily and sexed nature of rational thought is disavowed. She argues that this disembodied and rationally determined form of knowledge is androcentric and perpetuates a patriarchal culture through the reiteration of masculine norms and values, and contends that it is only “through acknowledging the embodiment of male sexed knowledge as the dominant paradigm within which the aging body is interpreted, [that] the relationship between knowledge, control of the body and lived experience can be further understood” (Harper 1997, p. 161). She has also critiqued Featherstone and Hepworth’s concept of the ‘mask of ageing’, “that tension which exists between the external
appearance of face and body and functional capacities, and the experience of personal identity”, arguing that the image of a mask lacks sufficient explanatory power (ibid.):

Changing physical appearance is more than a physical mask, it is the whole construction that we have placed on the chronological age of the body. It is construction/symbol/experience, the ongoing tension of the body as constructed and the body as experienced, the body as an inscribed exterior and the body as a lived interior.

Instead, she advocates a framework that accommodates both construction and experience, both ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ aspects of ageing.

So far, I have discussed some key issues implicated in bodily ageing in contemporary Western cultures, with only minimal reference to how they relate to dancers. My purpose has been to sketch the broad structures and cultural narratives according to which ageing, gender and the body are defined and understood, before narrowing my focus to dance practitioners in the following chapter. I have also given a general critique of the shortcomings of this research, in particular its underlying emphasis on Western dualist thought and its inadequate focus on gender in ageing. However, an important and as yet unaddressed concern underlying the ways the ‘ageing body’ has been theorized is: what is this body that ages? In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I will consider some recent concerns in theories of corporeality, drawing on the work of post-structuralist and feminist philosophers. The purpose of this exercise is to explore how the gendered, aged body might be constructed and represented in contemporary Western cultures, and within what constraints one might achieve a coherent corporeal subjectivity in maturity.

**Theorizing the embodied subject**

In the second half of the twentieth century in Western cultures, post-structuralist theories of the body moved away from conceiving the body as an object (of analysis), towards conceiving it as constitutive of its own subjecthood. At this time, the mind-as-subject and body-as-object, a legacy of Cartesian dualism, began to give way to the ‘corporeal subject’. As corporeality and subjectivity have become increasingly interlinked, and the body–mind duality loosened, the problematic question of how constructs such as ‘the body’ and ‘the mind’ might interconnect in constituting the corporeal subject has inevitably arisen.
This question impacts on how we might conceptualize and understand embodied subjectivities, not only in relation to gender (which has been a key focus of feminist research in sociology and philosophy) but also in the cultural context of gendered ageing. Elizabeth Grosz has broadly distinguished theories of subjectivity during this time period into two groups (Grosz 1994). The first, associated with Freud and Lacan, seeks to define the nature or structure of the subject (its ‘truth’), whereas the second, exemplified by Nietzsche and Foucault, locates subjectivity as the product of culture and power (see also Mansfield 2000). We see here a parallel with the two broad approaches to ageing discussed earlier, social constructionist theories and psychoanalytic theories, which Grosz (1994) distinguishes respectively as theories that stress surface or exteriority and those focusing on interiority.

Grosz (1992) provides an account of how psychoanalytical theories theorize the role of the body in psychical life. The body’s role in subject formation is linked to the child’s development, specifically the mirror stage at approximately six months of age, prior to which it experienced its body-ego as fragmented and chaotic, and following which it is able to distinguish ‘outside’ from ‘inside’; that is, having a sense of body boundaries and an ability to distinguish ‘self’ from ‘other’. As Grosz (1992, p. 36) states:

In Lacan’s terms, the child experiences its body as disunified and disorganized, a body in bits and pieces. It is a fragmented body, not yet organized by the distinctions between inside and outside, self and other, or active and passive. Lacan describes the infant at this stage as an ‘hommelette’, a subject-to-be, a psychical scrambled egg whose processes remain anarchical and chaotically unintegrated.

The ‘mirror stage’ is the point at which ego formation comes into being, in the sense of a stable, continuous subjectivity bounded from, yet influenced by, the outside world. The mechanism through which this ability to differentiate between self (subject) and others (objects), or ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, becomes possible is through the emergence of the child’s sexual drives, of its “relations to its own body, the other and the socio-symbolic order” (Grosz 1992, p. 37). Importantly, Grosz notes that ‘drives’ in Freud’s sense are not reducible to biological ‘instincts’; rather, they are “the results of processes of libidinal intensification which correlate with the acquisition of labile meanings for various body components during ego formation” (ibid.). The corporeal ego therefore represents a kind of map of the body’s boundaries, but one involving
an interpretation of these boundaries through psychic activities such as fantasy (Grosz 1992, pp. 38–9):

The ego is like an internal screen on to which the illuminated images of the body’s outer surface are projected. It is not a veridical map, a photograph, but a representation of its degrees of erotogenicity, of the varying intensities of libidinal investment in different body parts. The ego is an image of the body’s significance or meaning for the subject; it is as much a function of fantasy and desire as of sensation and perception.

The child’s nascent subjectivity is thus tied to developmentally normative bodily experiences linked with its experiences of the outside world (primarily its bodily interaction and experience of the mother). The body’s importance in this process lies in its function as a bridge between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’, or the psychic and the social (Grosz 1992, p. 36):

Both Freud and Lacan link the genesis of the ego in primary narcissism... to two distinct but complementary processes. First, the ego is the product of a series of identifications with and introjections of the image of others, most especially the mother. These images are introjected into the incipient ego as part of its ego-ideal (the ego-ideal always being a residue of the subject’s identificatory idealizations of the other). Second, the ego is an effect of a re-channelling of libidinal impulses in the subject’s own body. The body is thus the point of junction of the social and the individual, the hinge which divides the one from the other.

Subjectivity conceived predominantly in relation to psychic interiority has traditionally been conceptualized in terms of unity and stability rather than plurality and flux. For example, Lacan’s position is that the subject is created through her or his developmental entry into the symbolic order through language, which reflects the patriarchal order and which involves sacrificing ties with the semiotic, undifferentiated and maternal other. Yet the symbolic order of language is a sort of promise of a unified, ideal subjectivity, a telos that is never attained. Feminist researchers drawing on psychoanalytically based frameworks thus argue that women, specifically women’s bodies, have been traditionally defined in terms of ‘loss’ and ‘lack’ (of the phallus), which leads them to be fetishized as phallic by men to compensate for the lack of the
phallus and the concomitant castration anxiety this is believed to give rise to in men.

However, feminists of sexual difference have argued that women’s bodies cannot be construed in terms of the loss or absence of the masculine, but must be understood from a perspective that acknowledges the sexual specificity, plurality and singularity of bodies. As Grosz contends, there is no such thing as ‘the’ body; rather, there are specific bodies of sex, bodies of color, and so on. Grosz (1992, p. 40) aptly sums up the position of psychoanalytic theory in the formation of the female subject:

Where psychoanalysis has always seen the two sexes on a single model, in which the presence or absence of the phallus signified one’s psycho-social and sexual position, feminists have insisted on the necessity of conceiving of (at least two) distinct types of imaginary anatomy, two sexually specific types of corporeal experiences, two modes of sexuality, two points of view and sets of interests, only one of which has been explored in its own terms in our history of thought. Both negatively and positively, psychoanalysis has provided a crucial moment in the recognition of women’s corporeal submersion in phallocentric models – negatively in so far as it participated in and legitimized models of female corporeality as castrated; positively in so far as its insights provide a challenge to the domination of biology in discourses of the body.

Notably, just as Freud and Lacan did not address the sexual specificity of bodies, neither were they concerned with the ego of the aged body. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Woodward (1991) redressed this omission by positing that old age can bring a ‘mirror stage’ as a form of reversal of the Lacanian ‘mirror stage’ of infancy. In the mirror stage of the infant, it glimpses its image as a harmonious whole. By contrast, in the mirror stage of old age, the body is perceived as ‘falling apart’: as fragmented, as a collection of parts that are different from the unified, idealized, imaginary body image of the self, parts that the ego (the youthful, unified inner self constructed through bodily experience and culturally mediated fantasy) experiences as a threat to its ego integrity. In other words, if the Lacanian infant’s mirror stage that involves a perception by the child of bodily integrity marks the beginning of subject formation, Woodward’s mirror stage in old age marks its nemesis: subject destruction. Masking and masquerade, therefore, may represent strategies by the body-subject aimed at preserving psychic integrity, an
integrity constituted through the psychic fantasy of an ‘ego ideal’ constituted by what is essentially a masculine, or phallic, unity.

Indeed, it is quite possible to use a psychoanalytic perspective to argue, as I do here, that the way in which the ageing body is characterized by lack or loss is analogous to the way the female body has traditionally been understood in psychoanalytic theory. For the ageing body ‘lacks’ or ‘loses’ the signifiers of youth: strength and beauty, virility and fertility, just as the female body in Freudian psychoanalytic theory lacks the phallus, that which constitutes male masculinity. Feminist psychoanalyst and philosopher Luce Irigaray has challenged Lacan’s framework, claiming that the connotative characteristics of the masculine economy of vision (the erection, unity, strength and visibility of the phallus) define the feminine (genitals) in terms of perceived lack and disorganization, of invisibility and plurality (Irigaray 1985). It would, therefore, seem that the ageing female body is doubly marginalized; first by virtue of feminine lack, and second by virtue of the loss of youth, a youth that has been defined in masculine terms of power (including sexual power) and bodily control.

Furthermore, if, according to Irigaray and others, the ‘masculine’ economy privileges unity, stability, consistency and completion, and fixed and final meanings, the ageing woman’s body could be considered to be a potential threat to masculine power, and therefore conceptualized as abject, as the ‘monstrous feminine’ that threatens to dissemble the phallic order, to which it is anathema. As Mansfield (2000, p. 71) argues:

The idea that anything may have a dynamically changing or inconsistent identity, or have contradiction as its very essence or animating principle, is defined as monstrous and abominable to a phallomorphic culture that can tolerate only the homogeneous, the defined, knowable and consistent.

According to this perspective, ageing, like femininity, disrupts the masculine order through this ambiguity and constant state of flux of a form of subjectivity.

I now turn to ‘surface’ theories of the body, theories concerned with cultural processes rather than individual interiority, which are my primary focus in this book. My reason for this choice is that I want to preserve the emphasis on how gendered ageing is ‘marked’ and understood by culture, and how mature body-subjects might be constituted within
cultural ideologies (or myths) that have become naturalized. ‘Surface’ theories, which include the perspectives of post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and Judith Butler, are based on the belief that the corporeal subject is formed (or subjectified) through processes of cultural inscription, that these processes of inscription operate discursively, and that there can be no ‘pre-cultural’ subject as such. Thus, Foucault has argued, culturally established discourses, or ‘discursive formations’, such as the accepted disciplines of medicine, law and economics, regulate the human subject, while being themselves structured by historically specific rules of formation, techniques of power, objects and strategies that enable them to carry out their unifying and totalizing functions (Foucault 1972).

Kendall and Wickham (1999) contend that Foucault maintained that the body, far from being a ‘natural’ or ‘prediscursive’ phenomenon, is historically and culturally produced through discourse. It is both subject and target of discourse, and cannot exist outside discourse, for, while the material body can be considered to exist outside discourse, it is acted on and constituted by discursive practices (or at least discursively produced and mediated practices). Therefore, it cannot be articulated or theorized outside the discursive realm, since there is no ‘metalanguage’ to accommodate the nondiscursive. In other words, while the materiality of bodies is nondiscursive, the body’s form and articulations are dependent on discourse.

To suggest that the body is almost exclusively discursively produced suggests that so-called ‘internal’, individual constituents of ‘the body’ do not exist outside their discursive ontology, and bodies (and subjectivities) are produced and constituted through, and as, texts. What this can be taken to mean is that, in theories that assume that nothing exists (in the sense of being articulable) outside discourse, the materiality of the body disappears, since only those aspects that could be discursively articulated could be brought into theory, and therefore be understood to constitute the body-subject. Indeed, one of the key issues concerning the theorization of the corporeal subject is the tension between the materiality of bodies and their discursive production (Grosz 1994). For Foucault, there appears to be no individual, in the sense of being a self-creating subject. Subjectivity is not constituted through lack, or erotogenic fantasy, but through regimes of power and knowledge, which Foucault called Power/Knowledge. Foucault argued that the individual is already “one of the prime effects” of power, in the sense of being both constituted by, and the vehicle of, power (Foucault
1980, p. 98). Individual agency in this case is an illusion (Mansfield 2000, p. 55):

Power comes first...and the ‘individual’ – and all the things we identify as making up our individuality (our separate body, its idiosyncratic gestures, its specific way of using language, its secret desires) – are really effects of power, designed for us rather than by us...We are the very material of power, the thing through which it finds its expression.

Further, individuals conform to normalizing power by exercising self-surveillance as well as being subjected to normative surveillance from outside. Foucault used the example of the panopticon, a model prison designed by Jeremy Bentham in the nineteenth century which enabled prisoners to be visible to guards at all times, as a form of omnipotent, omniscient surveillance, where the prisoner was unable to tell whether she or he was being watched or not, and therefore was more likely to behave normatively. Regimes of power are mediated at the institutional level (for example, the written and unwritten rules of a school, prison or hospital), and surveillance as a disciplinary form of power functions to individualize, normalize and hierarchize subjects, to produce what Foucault called *docile bodies*, and therefore subjectivity becomes a construct, a cultural fabrication.

The corporeal subject is therefore constituted through techniques of the body that reflect regimes of power imposed on, and perpetuated by, that subject through the ‘correct’ performance of norms. For example, if a woman buys a particular dress, according to Foucault her ‘choice’ would already have been made for her by the imperative to conform to normative expectations (of age, weight and so on). Alternatively, if dancers continue to perform in older age, they violate specific historical–cultural norms, and would be made aware of this both discursively (through ageist feedback from others) or in other ways (for example, through dance companies refusing to employ them).

Scholars such as Mansfield (2000) argue that the unity and continuity of a person’s subjectivity are therefore fictitious for post-structural theorists such as Foucault, as is the notion of an ‘individual’ that is to some extent autonomous of the discursive practices in which she or he is embedded and enmeshed, and is able to independently choose a particular path. Rather, it is the illusion of unity and logical continuity of selfhood that allows people to become regulated subjects within totalizing, hierarchizing systems of discursively based power/knowledge, in
which agency, choice and self-determination are mythical constructs. As Mansfield (2000, p. 60) notes:

Here, the ‘individual’ is not free and autonomous, but the focal point of larger forces, analysed by systems of knowledge in what they claim is an impartial quest for truth. Your interior life is not your own property, with its own logic and inner truth, that you bring into society as a free agent. It is a permanently open display case of psychological and sociological truths, to which you always remain subordinate.

Foucault has been critiqued by post-structural feminist theorists on the basis that his account of the corporeal subject lacks sexed specificity and is implicitly male. Grosz, for example, argues that Foucault “rarely... talks about the issue of sexual difference or specifies that the objects of his investigation are implicitly male bodies and subjectivities, men’s practices and modes of social organization” (Grosz 1994, p. 156). Therefore, she contends, Foucault’s framework needs to be reworked by feminists, as “his work has not left a space for the inclusion of women’s accounts and representations of the various histories of their bodies that could be written” (Grosz 1994, p. 159). One feminist theorist’s reworking of Foucault’s model is Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) framework of performativity in gendered subjectivity. Butler delineates what we understand by gender as a performance of the modes of dress, behaviors, speech, and all the other ways gender-specific norms are discursively and behaviorally enacted in order to successfully fabricate a gendered (i.e. masculine or feminine) subjectivity. Through consistent practice, these normative enactments of gender become normal within a culture. That is, they have become naturalized and therefore unquestioned; however, there are possibilities for bodily resistance to the norms that prescribe one’s gender, as I have discussed in this book.

Critical psychologist Nikolas Rose also critiques humanist theories of subjectivity underpinning his discipline. In a radical departure from the focus on interiority of the mainstay of traditional twentieth-century psychology, Rose (1996) draws on the framework of Deleuze and Guattari in his work on the psychological constitution of personhood. Rose argues against a humanist theory of subjectivity by indicating the circularity of reasoning that assumes the existence of that very phenomenon that it seeks to establish (Rose 1996, p. 172), in which “The very possibility of a theory of a discrete and enveloped body inhabited and animated by its own soul – the subject, the self, the individual, the person – is part of what is to be explained, the very horizon of thought
that one can hope to see beyond.” Rose claims that the notion of the unified ‘body’, clearly delineated from the ‘outside’ by its boundaries, is a cultural construct, and that this unified body is not ‘natural’ but culturally and historically specific. The body, Rose maintains, is less unified and ‘material’ than commonly assumed, and is perhaps more usefully conceptualized in terms of relations (i.e. linkages) rather than as a static entity (Rose 1996, pp. 172–84):

Perhaps, then, there is no such thing as ‘the body’: a bounded envelope that can be revealed to contain within in it a depth, and a set of lawlike operations. What we are concerned with ... are not bodies, but the linkages established between particular surfaces, forces, and energies. Rather than speak of ‘the body’, we need to analyze just how a particular body-regime has been produced.

Rose developed a theoretical framework, according to which what we understand the body to ‘be’ is not a material entity but the effect of the complex interplay of assemblages that gives rise to specific bodily regimes (ibid.):

Our regime of corporeality thus should itself be regarded as the unstable resultant of the assemblages within which humans are caught up, which induce a certain relation to ourselves as embodied, which render the body organically unified, traversed by vital processes, which differentiate – today by sex, for much of our history by ‘race’ – which accord it a depth and a limit, equip it with a sexuality, establish the things it can and cannot do, define its vulnerability in relation to certain dangers, make it practicable in order to bind it into practices and activities.

Here Rose almost seems to be saying that we act as if we were embodied, even though what we really are is a dynamic melee of assemblages! He also maintains that materialist approaches to the body as ‘the material inscribed by culture’ are inappropriate, as bodies “are capable of much, at least, in part, in virtue of their ‘being thought’ and we do not know the limits of what is possible for such thought-body-machines to do” (Rose 1996, p. 185). There is a movement here towards the ‘fusion’ of thought and bodily action, indeed towards embodied thought and mindful action, more akin to Eastern modes of embodiment than Western dualism (cf. Carey 2000; Gil 2003).
References


Featherstone, Mike, Mike Hepworth and B.S. Turner (eds), The body: Social process and cultural theory, 197–208. London: Sage.
References


references

nikolaisen, bente. 2004. Embedded motion: Sacred travel among mevlevi der-
page, J. 1989. Options for transition. Paper read at ‘transitions’, biennial confer-
ence of the Australian Association of Dance Education, Adelaide.
richardson, N. 2004. The queer activity of extreme bodybuilding: Gender dis-
russell, cherry. 1989. Ageism: Integrating research with education and profes-


Wainwright, Steven P. and Bryan S. Turner. 2002. ‘Just crumbling to bits?’ An exploration of the body, ageing and career in retired classical ballet dancers. Paper read at Conference of the British Sociological Association, at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK.


Wilson, D. and V.W. Moore. 1982. A comparison of the factors affecting ballet dancers and improvisational dancers. Paper read at 7th Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance,
References

at Department of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland, Australia.
Index

abjection, 108, 190
age-grading, xiii, 16, 22, 103, 104, 148, 174
ageing
and class, viii, ix, xiii, 9, 12, 14, 16–21, 27, 44, 46, 47, 86, 87, 88, 91, 98, 99, 100, 103–104, 110, 133, 162, 169, 173, 184, 185, 187, 189
gendered, viii–xii, 1, 2, 9–10, 12, 16, 24, 26, 27, 29, 31–33, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 45–47, 65, 79, 89–90, 97, 100, 115–116, 131, 133, 139, 165–167, 169, 183–184, 186, 190, 193, 196
successful, 173
ageism, v, 6, 49, 107, 140, 167, 173–175, 179, 204, 206, 207
agelessness, 109, 154, 173, 184, 201
age-ranking, 103, 106, 186–187
anorexia, 65–67, 93, 114, 136
as instrument, xi, 35, 38, 67–69, 72, 79, 96, 136, 150, 155
memory, 116, 117, 122–126, 128, 130–131
mirroring, 149
monstrous, 36
mute, 80
sexed, 191
total, 36–37, 123
bodybuilding, 22–23, 104
body-identity, 5–8, 22, 30, 104
Body Mind Centering, 68, 95, 129
body-mind relationship, 49, 67–69, 155
body-mind split, 81
body-reflexive practices, 74, 82
body techniques, 18, 19, 74, 198
capital
cultural, 52, 56, 86, 88–89, 96–98, 147, 152
physical, 17, 20, 56, 87–88, 103, 104, 110, 113, 133, 166, 187
social, 99
symbolic, 98, 102
Cartesian dualism, 12, 192
communitas, 147, 149, 156
consumer culture, ix, xi, xiii, 2, 56, 148, 165, 177, 184, 186
corporeal consciousness, xii, 116, 125, 126, 130, 165
corporeal enactment, 14
corporeality, 117, 164, 191, 192, 195, 200
corporeal subject, 3, 25–26, 69, 82, 109, 123, 192, 197–199
corps propre, 190
critical age studies, xiii, 2
critical gerontology, 47, 173
dance
ballet, 1, 14, 20–21, 27, 28–30, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50–52,
dance – continued
Bharatnatyam, 156
Butoh, xiii, 155, 159–160
contact improvisation, 65, 119, 121, 132, 161
cultural valorization of, 1, 48, 50, 54–57, 92
experimental, 25, 34–35, 46, 50, 52, 70, 86, 89, 90, 95, 126, 158, 164, 165
Ghanaian, 132, 161, 162, 163
Indian classical, xiii, 62, 112, 115, 156, 158
modern, 27, 28, 33, 34, 38, 43, 44, 58, 59, 71, 72, 96, 142, 143, 145, 152, 153, 154
postmodern, 33, 34, 58, 71, 72, 96
social, 46, 115, 147, 148, 149, 161
Vaudeville, 86, 140
decline
bodily, xi, 24, 38, 94, 103, 126
ideology of, 179
dementia, 126, 130–131, 168
and implicit memory, 124–126
distinction
beauty versus old age, 102, 114
body-mind, 117
Bourdiesian, 16, 86–87, 129
and class, 17, 19
sex-gender, 10–11, 45–46
ekstasis, 116, 117, 122–123, 125, 167
and body memory, 126
and whirling, 162–164
embodied subject, 3–5, 17, 19, 24, 82, 192–200
extradiscursive, xii, 3, 8, 26, 60–61, 79–82, 115, 117, 122–123, 126, 128, 164, 167
facialility of ageing, 109–116
flesh, the, 2–6, 8, 37, 67, 117–118, 121, 123, 129, 164, 165
and reversibility, 4–5, 118, 119, 164
focus
and gendered stage presence, 49, 70–74, 95, 112–113
and touch, 119, 122
fold, the, 2–5
Four Generations project, 152, 154
gaze, middle-class, 17, 18
gaze theory, 30–31, 70
gender codes, 14, 47, 65
gendered habitus, 16, 21, 23, 24
genealogy, 29, 134
gerontology, 47, 168, 173
gymnasia, 136
habit, plasticity of, 83, 90
habitus, 9, 14, 16, 17, 20–24, 29, 46, 64, 82, 85, 98–99, 101, 103, 114, 165–166
hybridity, 105, 116
inscription, cultural, 197
intercorporeity, 118–122, 164, 165
intersubjectivity, xii, 4–5, 8, 46, 62, 122, 149
longevity revolution, 171, 174
marginalization, age-based, 2, 3, 7, 13, 80, 85, 87, 88, 158, 174, 181, 185, 196
marriage plot, the, 43–44, 47, 97, 158
masculinity, heteronormative, 189
mask of ageing, 76, 81, 107, 131, 178, 180, 184, 188, 191
masquerade, 19, 45, 131, 133, 180–184, 195
matronization, of older
women, 104
mature identity, 180
menopause, 15, 16, 104, 108
Mevlevi Order, xiii, 155, 162
middle age, youthful, 186
midlife conflict, 2
mindful embodiment, 155
mindfulness, 74–75, 133
mirror stage, 123, 183, 193, 195
Möbius strip, 4
Index 213

normativity, 23, 30, 80, 189
obsolescence, and age, 143, 154, 169, 172, 178, 186
old age, feminization of, 47, 185
Panopticon, 198
performance of age, 101
performativity theory, 45
performing self, 112, 130, 177
phenomenology, 2, 5, 69, 118, 119, 123, 132
postmodernity, 126, 178
power
sexual, 104, 106, 196
social, 12, 99, 100, 103, 105, 113, 174, 189, 191
prestige hierarchy, 38, 41
psychoanalytic theory, 195–196
psychoneuroimmunology, 125
queer theory, 3, 4, 102
retirement from dance, 86
self, the
reversible, 180
revisable, 130, 178, 180
self-care, 74–75, 116, 133, 134–138
self-identity, 5–8, 69, 89, 179
self-surveillance, 32
seriality, 89
and gender, 13, 16, 46, 90
and practico-inert reality, 13
and practico-inert structures, 15
sexual difference, 11, 12, 101, 114, 173, 187, 191, 195, 199
sexual field, 97, 101, 105
social constructionism, 2, 80, 166
social field, 17, 20, 101
stigmatization, x, 175, 180
subjectification, 3–4
and ageing, xii, 33, 86
dancer’s, 9, 33, 79, 86
embodied, 3, 24, 82
gendered, 46, 80, 199
normative, 4, 105
subject position, 71, 73, 113, 122
sublimity, 49, 60–61, 116, 120, 122, 125
surveillance, 198

techniques of the body (see body techniques)
transition, career, 1, 39–40, 48, 84
uncanny, the, 77, 183
whirling, xiii, 155, 162–164
White Oak Project, 139, 141
witch, 105–106