

Ageing, gender and dancers' bodies

An interdisciplinary perspective

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on research and frameworks from sociology, poststructuralist feminist theory, phenomenology, and social constructionism, this thesis offers—perhaps ambitiously—a much needed counter-discourse to the hegemonic cultural narratives of ageing as decline of body/self. It focuses on the experiences of ageing, and on the meaning of dancing, of practicing and retired theatrical dancers, a group who by virtue of their body-based profession face the impact of ageing earlier than most people in western cultures. This thesis critically examines the representation and experience of ageing of dancers in a western context, in which we are aged, gendered, and classed according to hegemonic—albeit historically variable—norms. I argue that dominant cultural discourses of ageing as decline-based and purportedly gender-neutral mask western consumer cultures' understanding of ageing as gendered: that is, as allied with a loss of not only physical but also sexual capital. However, the ambiguity of the 'ageing body' in its efforts to reiterate these norms in performance disrupts and challenges this discourse's cultural construction of gendered body-subjects. The thesis therefore explores how cultural body norms are experienced, enacted and perpetuated, and what possibilities exist for bodily agency in subverting or transforming them.

The findings in this study are based on transcribed life history interviews conducted with 30 dancers and former dancers between the ages of 27 and 76, with a background in a range of dance practices. Participants' narratives were grouped into recurrent themes using a grounded approach. It was found that, in contrast to cultural and institutional discourses that maintain that age-related factors such as waning stamina and endurance inevitably result in cessation from dancing, physical ageing per se had less effect on the desire to retire from performing than numerous other factors to do with economic and interest factors in midlife, including 'outgrowing' the authoritarian structure and politics of mainstream dance companies, time poverty due to family demands, or the absence of challenges or peer colleagues. The lack of broad-based support and cultural valorization of independent

dance in Australia was also a factor influencing dancers' decision to discontinue their practice.

Participants' chosen dance practices were also related to two styles of the dancer's body-self relation, one as a dualistic distinction between body and mind, the other as a more integrated form of embodiment. Embodiment is a third term that serves to deconstruct traditional western dualistic conceptions of body-subjects. I argue that a fundamental dualism underpinning theories such as the 'mask of ageing' in a postmodern consumer context is too limiting in understanding bodily ageing, and therefore, I draw on non-dualistic theoretical orientations through which to reframe the gendered body-self of the mature dancer.

DECLARATION

I, Elisabeth Schwaiger, declare that the PhD thesis entitled *Ageing, Gender and Dancers' Bodies: an Interdisciplinary Perspective* is no more than 100,000 words in length exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

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Introduction

In this thesis I investigate the experience and social implications of bodily ageing for dancers. My work draws on and is informed by several scholarly literatures, notably those on the social construction of ageing, the sociology of the body, and feminist work on dance. Specifically, it poses the questions: how is the dancer's body constructed or marked as aged? How is it experienced and embodied as aged? How is this reflected in dance institutional attitudes, policies and practices? What are the implications of this for our perceptions and expectations of 'older' dancers' physical and aesthetic capacities?

Ageing has become a pressing issue for governments over the last decade. The global 'greying' of populations in developed countries and the economic impact of this in relation to employment and health demands has received much attention from social policy and planning (Active Ageing Taskforce, 2003; Productivity Commission, 2004; see also Rogers, 2004, p. 52). This 'problem' necessitates careful evaluation of current industry infrastructures, for example public health services, to meet the projected demands of increasing ageing populations. However, it also requires pervasive, deep-seated change in our attitudes to older people, such as that of employers who have traditionally been reluctant to employ older people due to prejudices about their age (Sheen, 2001, p. 14). That is, it involves overcoming the negative stereotypes about older people that are entrenched and naturalized within western consumer cultures.

While the economic impact of ageing is undeniably important, less attention has been given to this deep-seated stereotyping of older people, and how we understand ageing. In this thesis I argue that our very perceptions of aged bodies are structured by our culturally predisposed perceptions, or what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls our 'habitus'. These perceptions have become so naturalized and ingrained that we are unaware of their biased underpinnings. In order to change them, we need to critically expose and question them, and this is one main aim of my thesis.

I have chosen dancers as a collective for my study, because they face the dilemma of ageing in a youth-oriented consumer culture much earlier than most other people. Furthermore, theirs is a body-based profession and their performing bodies are exposed to public scrutiny. Dancers' bodies are visible in performance, but dancers are also *embodied*; they experience and live their bodies. Therefore, this thesis addresses not only how western cultures understand and evaluate older bodies in performance, but also how dancers experience and live their ageing.

There are many studies that look at the physical capacity of the body, a capacity that we understand declines in older age. In dance, too, the expectation exists that people give up performing because their bodies are no longer able to cope with the strenuous demands of dancing and touring. However, I contend that this is not the primary reason for dancers to retire. Instead, I will show that the particular demands of midlife in dancers (at which stage they cease dancing) play an important part in their decision to either keep dancing or to discontinue it.

There is another impediment to older dancers continuing to perform on stage. That is, because their bodies represent age rather than youthfulness, older dancers are unacceptable to the scrutiny of western audiences, audiences who unthinkingly connect youth with sexuality and a sexually-based beauty, and who equate ageing with loss of beauty. I will adopt Bourdieu's framework on forms of capital to argue that our very perception of beauty and age is enculturated and naturalized. Finally, I will argue that, while ageing can lead to a disruption of subjectivity, it can only be a disruption to a subjectivity that is fixed, unitary and based on a dualistic mind-body split. Instead, ageing presents an opportunity to abandon outmoded modes of dancing (and being) and to develop a more flexible subjectivity that can resist the cultural stereotypes that constrain the practices and performances of self of older people.

In Chapter 1, I examine a range of perspectives on the ageing, gendered self, from social constructionism to postmodern, psychoanalytic and discursive perspectives, poststructural and phenomenological frameworks. In the following chapter, I draw on these perspectives and other research on gender and ageing within the context of dance practice. In Chapter 3, I present an outline of my methodology, and describe the recurrent themes that emerged from my interviews with mature dancers and former dancers. The following two chapters relate the theoretical frameworks examined in Chapters 1 and 2 to the most salient of these themes. In Chapter 4, I draw on the work of Bourdieu and others on sexual capital, in order to examine ways in which dancers' bodies are both markers of, and marked by, culturally normative ageing, and ways in which they conform to or resist cultural norms in performing their gendered age. Finally, in Chapter 5 I question how a dancing body-subject might achieve a coherent yet flexible subjectivity in maturity, and how participants' chosen dance practices relate to subjectivities that either conform to, or resist, traditional western notions of subjectivity. I also discuss examples of corporeal consciousness and other extradiscursive phenomena reported by the dancers interviewed, and argue that such non-discursive aspects of dance practice can inform a flexible, yet coherent *intersubjectivity* in mature dancers.

Chapter 1

Constructing ageing, gender and self

This chapter constitutes an introduction to the theoretical framework for my thesis, and the ideas in this chapter inform the work on the ageing dancer in the following chapters. In order to foreground the experience of ageing in dancers, about which until very recently little has been written¹, it is important to focus on how ageing is understood in western cultures in general. In this chapter, I will therefore begin with a general introduction to ageing, drawn from sociological, gerontological, cultural studies, and feminist literature. I will draw on both social constructionist and phenomenological frameworks to ask how ageing has been bodily inscribed and how it is experienced. Some recent issues of corporeality that have emerged in feminist philosophy will also be considered. Then, in Chapter 2, I will relate ageing, gender and self to dance practice.

The choice of ageing dancers as a collectivity deserving study is noteworthy here. Dancers are engaged in a body-based art form that is both an aesthetic and an athletic practice, at least in ballet-derived dance forms in Australia. The advent of bodily ageing confronts dancers at an earlier age than those in most other professions, barring athletes and models. There is an intensification and acceleration of ageing for these dancers which we 'lesser mortals' perhaps do not confront until much later. The intensification of ageing experienced by dancers highlights the hidden social constraints impinging on the ageing self's search for authenticity and coherence, a 'self' that is predicated on social recognition and valuing.

¹ Some notable exceptions are recent research by Bryan Turner and Steven Wainwright: Turner & Wainwright (2002); Wainwright (2002); Wainwright & Turner (2002, 2003), which I will discuss in more depth later in this thesis.

As I will argue, ageing is widely understood as a process of both physical decline and social marginalization for older people in western cultures. Further, age theory has traditionally focused on later life stages when issues of bodily control, dependence and frailty have become prominent. Thus a study of the ways in which dancers reaching retirement age (from late 20s to mid 30s) negotiate social and institutional constraints and opportunities of what has been described as an age-hostile society (Biggs, 1999), and at a time when their non-dancing peers are in mid-career, may have something to offer age theory in general.

In this chapter I consider several distinct theoretical orientations underpinning critical age studies, through the lens of the problem that ageing presents as a disruption of a continuous, coherent subjectivity. I draw on the work of Mike Featherstone and Mike Hepworth (1989, 1991a), Bryan Turner (1984), Simon Biggs (1993, 1997), and Kathleen Woodward (1991), whose theories are based on the argument that midlife in a western culture brings with it an experience of conflict between self-identity and social identity, but who approach this in different ways. Featherstone and Hepworth, and Turner, can be described as examples of sociological (and perhaps cultural materialist) approaches to ageing in a consumer-driven culture. Biggs and Woodward, however, locate the midlife conflict in psychic structures responding to developmental changes, in which previous modes of living become 'outmoded'. Such perspectives fall within the purview of psychological approaches to ageing, which have a radically different orientation from inscriptive approaches such as social constructionism.

In this chapter I also examine frameworks that argue that ageing is discursively based (Gullette, 1998; Mellencamp, 1992), together with the sociological frameworks of Bourdieu (1984, 1986) and Hearn (1995). In addressing body identity and how age and gender norms are embodied I draw on feminist theory (Butler, 1990, 1993; Diprose, 1994a, 1994b; Grosz, 1994; Harper, 1997), poststructuralist theory (Foucault, 1972, 1988, 1990; Rose, 1996), and phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968). However, I begin by examining how ageing is understood and treated in western cultures through a

social constructionist framework, because it is an important first step towards the critical exposure of myths and stereotypes of ageing that have become naturalized and unquestioned within these cultures.

1.1 The social construction of biological ageing

Whereas research informed by poststructuralist theory has focused on deconstructing or destabilizing our normative conceptions of categories such as gender (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993; Foucault, 1980; Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1994), less attention has been given to deconstructing the category of age. Moreover, 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), and have focused on a specific category: old age. They have also been largely policy driven (Arber & Ginn, 1995, p. 2). Furthermore, gerontological and sociological research has not generally 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 (e.g., McCallum & Geiselhart, 1996; Borowski & Hugo, 1997). The March 2003 report of the Western Australian Government's Active Ageing Taskforce is one Australian response to the recognition of the social and cultural sea change necessary to successfully negotiate the significant economic impact of a graying population with a falling fertility rate. As the report states, "Ageing policy is not just about older people: in its best form, it is about the kind of society we live in, and how we, as a community, deal with the risks and opportunities each of us faces, across our entire lifecourse" (ibid., p. ii).

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. 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 (Russell, 1989; Minichiello, Browning & Aroni, 1992; Bytheway, 1997; Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991, 1995). Further, research from social gerontology, sociology, philosophy and anthropology suggests that the meanings, representations and practices surrounding old age are socially constructed (Russell, 1989; Minichiello et al, 1992; Bytheway, 1997; Featherstone & Hepworth 1991a, 1991b, 1995).

Ageing is not simply biological and uniform in its effects; rather, humans age at different rates and experience ageing differently. These differences in ageing are not individual idiosyncracies 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 also culturally rather than biologically set. However, in traditional research little attention has been given to the cultural aspects. Moreover, virtually no research has been directed to the embodied experience of gendered ageing.

Social constructionism points to cross-cultural differences in how concepts such as ageing or gender are understood, and how attitudes to ageing vary across cultures (see 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 "advancement through the social hierarchy, accompanied by personal maturation and increasing responsibility", rather than as biological and physical decline (Lock, 1993, 1998). In Samoan traditional culture there appears to be no cultural sense of lost youth and declining vitality, no obsessive concern with death and mortality, and a strong tendency to dissociate life stage from chronological age per se (Shore, 1998). Likewise, the Gusii of Western Kenya appear not to age-grade the life course, and the

increased sense of 'seniority' that a Gusii man or woman develops over time is associated not with decline or 'obsolescence' but rather with respect, obedience, prestige and social esteem (LeVine & LeVine, 1998). These differences suggest that cultures do differ in the meanings they construct around ageing.

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; rather, it is a biological phenomenon meaningfully interpreted in a psychosocial context. For example, Featherstone and Hepworth (1995, pp. 30–31) maintain that:

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 are socially constructed; in the sense of being "the product of historic policies and public attitudes which are changeable or at least modifiable" (McCallum & 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 socio-economic conditions that can result in structural inequality in older people, an inequality that is interpreted as a form of incompetence (Russell, 1989). Thus, people in their later years cannot be expected to equally participate unassisted in a social world which has disadvantaged them in their earlier years.

While ageing indisputably has a *biological* basis, inasmuch as what we understand as 'ageing' involves physiological bodily changes over time, it is an interesting and little noted phenomenon that individuals 'age' at significantly different rates. 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) puts it:

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.

Researchers such as Robert Butler claim that older people are in fact *more* variable than young people (Butler, 1975, p. 12). He notes that:

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 & 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, and an erasure of their differences from each other.

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. For example defining the boundaries of older age groups is therefore problematic in demographic analyses, where arbitrary choices often need to be made. For instance, Borowski & Hugo (1997, p. 20) acknowledge 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.

As Borowski and Hugo explain (*ibid.*), their conscious decision to set the lower limit of 65 in their age group under study was reached because

the most commonly chosen lower age limit [in western societies] is 65 years, a choice which has its origins in the retirement age specified under the provisions of some of the first modern collective retirement income arrangements introduced late in the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century.

Thus an arbitrary marker of the onset of old age has to be used in studies such as Borowski and Hugo's 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 and women 62—thus retirement pensions at that time were hardly a drain on public funds. Since then life expectancy has increased significantly (what Robert Butler has termed the 'longevity revolution') and, since compulsory retirement on age-based grounds was abolished in Australia in the early 1990s, this age-marker has lost its original meaning and usefulness.

If, contrary to the assumptions of research and social policy, humans do not age at biologically uniform rates, then the social construction of ageing must be seen as a *cultural-historical* exercise in 'homogenizing' this diversity. Its purpose is to create a distinct social category—the category of the aged—maintained and perpetuated through shared social perceptions and expectations. However, the variation across cultures in attitudes to ageing referred to above suggests that different cultures have vastly different views on the subject.

Specific *historical* conditions also contribute to shaping normative social perceptions of older people. Harper and Thane (1998), for example, argue that the post-war 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 & Thane (1998, pp. 43–44) argue that:

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” (ibid., p. 44). They also led to a closer focus on the ‘elderly population’ in public debate and social research. In Australia, attitudes towards older people also changed at a specific historical juncture, “late in the era of industrialisation with the development of pensions and aged care services” (McCallum & Geiselhart, 1996, p. 17). Thus, there is evidence that, within western cultures, attitudes towards older people in highly industrialized societies are very different to those held prior to industrialization. They are linked to the social and economic changes that have accompanied industrialization.

Research examining the historical development of the concept of old age in the USA offers similar conclusions. For example, 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 a time of “decline, weakness, and obsolescence.” It also became increasingly medicalized. As Hareven (1995, p. 120) comments:

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 maintains 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 (ibid., 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.

A fledgling form of age theory—what one might term critical gerontology or critical age studies—is just beginning to emerge as a theory of ‘difference’ that acknowledges that the category of age is itself heterogeneous and problematic (e.g., 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, is ‘successful ageing’ in fact a concealed technique of regulation which serves to deny old people the legitimate right to bodily difference (read ‘dysfunction’) and even perhaps their right to choose cultural disengagement?

Molly Andrews also asserts that the prevailing tendency towards ‘agelessness’, where 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. I therefore argue that developing a more productive understanding of ageing involves a dismantling of existing assumptions about how western women and men embody and experience this process of ageing.

1.2 Ageism and social presence

It is ironic that although life expectancy and health in later years have increased this century (e.g., Minichiello *et al*, 1992; Markson & Taylor 2000), our culture has defined ageing in largely negative terms: as a period of gradual, irreversible decline. Woodward (1999, p. xiv) points out the irony inherent in culturally ageing people in negative terms. She suggests that:

[T]he 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 aging and the meanings of the longevity revolution.

Ageism, the social practice of negatively stereotyping and stigmatizing people on the basis of age, was a term 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 ostracize and effectively ‘age’ the older groups. In this way they deprive the latter of what Esposito (1987, p. 5) has called the “dignity of agedness”.

Twelve years later, Radford (1987, p. 4–5) stated that ageism is linked to social power and control. He argues that:

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.

Russell (1989) also describes ageism as a “culturally constant ... symbolic loading of old age in this society with undesirable consequences”. Age grading, in combination with 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'. In this way, older people themselves perpetuate and reinforce a negative cultural perception of them. Radford, too, argues 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 surrendering of their social power.

To maintain 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 (*ibid.*, p. 147):

The natural boundary between victim and victimizer differs from that in [racism and sexism]. White people do not become black people, nor do men become women. 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.

As Woodward (1999, p. x) has pointed out, "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 which limits opportunities for social participation, increases economic dependency and social isolation, and for many becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. In McCallum and Geiselhart's terms, they 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 & Geiselhart, 1996, p. 22). However, it is impossible for those who are old to exercise their rights in a culture which does not positively value its aged, but rather stereotypes and discursively constitutes 'them' as both uniformly dependent and in decline.

The propensity for ageism in discourses surrounding the aged prevails in the caring and policy making arenas where decisions impact on older people's health, housing and welfare service provision. Those working with special needs groups which are not representative of older people as a whole may form a biased picture of 'the aged' as universally characterized by sickness and frailty (Ford, 1979). Certainly, discursive constitutions of older people are predominantly as frail and dependent. Biased attitudes are encouraged by collective terms such as 'the aged' (i.e. all old people are sick and handicapped).

Theorists discussing ageing need to be reflexive, that is, conscious of their own inherent biases, so they can disrupt negative discursive constructions, which have real effects on old people. Minichiello et al (1992, p. 1) explain that the last 40 years has seen some changes occur. They see this as the work of "*social gerontology*, which investigates the impact of ageing on society and the impact of society on older people" (ibid., p. 1), and argue that "Age and ageing have a wide range of meanings in our society, from precise, carefully defined concepts to imprecise and undefined *myths*". Further, they point out that "This broad range of meanings is shared by all members of society, including the health professions". If this is the case, and theorists want to ensure that older people are

active citizens with healthy lifestyles, we need to ensure that discourses on ageing reflect this.

The emergent discipline of 'critical gerontology' adopts such a reflexive, self-questioning approach. Critical gerontology recognizes that the discipline of social gerontology, the study of the social aspects of the human ageing process, is not independent of, but entrenched in, popular negative cultural conceptions of ageing. Thus gerontology has unwittingly reinforced and perpetuated the very myths it sets out to test. Russell, for example, claims that "by continuing to focus on precisely those issues which feed the myths, gerontology in Australia has become an active participant in their reproduction" (Russell, 1989, p. 22). Arguing that all forms of "knowledge" about ageing and old people are socially constructed, Russell advocates that gerontology be recognized as reflecting the existence "of those perceptions and social practices which create a process called 'ageing' and a category called 'old people', and which define that process and category as problematic".

Researchers, including Bytheway, call for critical social gerontology to engage in a *deconstruction* of existing myths (Bytheway, 1997), or a 'critical realist' deconstruction of the political and social issues of ageing (McCallum & Geiselhart 1996, p. 16). As part of this deconstruction process, critical gerontologists need to appreciate that their discipline is also a historical and cultural phenomenon, as is the object of their critique, and they must therefore constantly evaluate their own assumptions, discourse and methodology.

Another concern is that the ageing *body*, not to mention the classed, sexed body, has until recently been largely absent in gerontological research. Perhaps this neglect of the ageing body as a social phenomenon is partly due to a cultural denial of the fact that our own bodies must age, must *become* old. As Simone de Beauvoir expressed it in her book *Old Age*: "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 she 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 itself can be argued to be a cultural fiction, a theme that I will explore more fully later. 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 recency, 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 just when and how the culturally constructed process of ‘becoming-old’ begins is difficult to determine.

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

The concept of ageing is ambiguous and therefore problematic to theorize. The focal point of this ambiguity is the life-stage termed ‘midlife’, previously known as ‘middle age’, characterized as the life period between 30 and 60 years

(Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991b, p. 201). In midlife the individual is culturally constituted as 'no longer young, and not yet old' (Gullette, 1998). Midlife presents an ambiguous status in relation to age. It represents an important transitional period, when the attitudes, comportment and practices that mark social identity in our youth and early adulthood are challenged, where we become marked by our destiny of 'old age'. 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 suggest that during midlife the 'spectre' of 'conspicuous consumption' haunts the lives of ageing people, taunting them with the need to maintain the body in a perpetually youthful state, because western culture is predicated on youth. As part of this research, Featherstone (1991) identifies 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 driven by consumption and preoccupied with the body's appearance and presentation.

The performing self seeks to enhance her or his health and marketability by engaging in constant self-scrutiny for signs of 'failure' to ensure their youthful state. Featherstone (1991, pp. 189-190; p. 178) argues that:

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 ageing should be combated by energetic body maintenance on the part of the individual—with help from the cosmetic, beauty, fitness and leisure industries.

We witness this monitoring and disciplining (after Foucault) of bodies in the numerous women's, and more recently, men's magazines. Increasingly, the individual's 'failure' to remain youthful is taken as a sign of moral laxitude, leading to a culturally endemic paranoia of the signs of ageing.

Featherstone and Hepworth suggest that, western consumer culture, using the term 'midlifestyle' is a discourse of *resistance*, focused on defying ageing in midlife (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991b, p. 201):

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.

Some theorists, including Featherstone and Turner, argue that the constitution and production of the midlife body as a historically specific site of conflict between a youthful inner self and an ageist society, which does not value older adults, is linked to the development of a post-industrialist, 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'. They suggest that the ageing body is conceived as an increasingly inflexible 'mask' which progressively prevents prolific consumption. That is, the physical changes that accompany and mark bodies as they become old, such as wrinkles, sagging skin, osteoarthritis, and so on, prevent people from engaging in the lifestyle of consumption that characterized their youth and middle age.

Like Featherstone and Hepworth, sociologist Bryan Turner (1994) also argues that the midlife phenomenon in postmodern consumer societies that followed post-industrialism has triggered a 'proliferation' of possible lifestyles and identities. Turner contends that identities have become 'recyclable' and selves 'revisable', rather than roles being well defined by the life course. However, as Turner (1994, p. 110) notes:

Even the concept of the life-course is a somewhat rigid notion of a coherent progress through life. 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.

Turner situates the potential conflict in self versus social identities clearly (ibid., p. 111). He notes that:

The central issue in ... the postmodernisation of ageing 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 ageing of the body, the continuity of self and identity is exposed ... If postmodernisation means the reversible body, it also implies a revisible self. From this complex of relationships there emerges the idea of a multiplicity of projects for the body and the self.

Turner and others (e.g., 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. This poses a problem for ageing in that, as there are no set guidelines for an age-appropriate identity or lifestyle, the coherence and continuity of the self becomes compromised.

Feminist literary scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette also focuses on the midlife period as a site of conflict between a youthful subjectivity, a lifestyle of *consumption* and the apparently limitless revisibility of the self (Gullette, 1998). She focuses on the discourses that produce what she argues is a culturally endemic fear and dread of ageing. For her, fear of 'failure' in appropriately presenting the self in a social context comes in the form of a self-vigilant paranoia and fear of the body's visible signs of ageing. According to Gullette, paranoia about ageing is precocious, preceding the onset of what we understand as the visible signs of ageing. She argues that consumer society generates metaphors of ageing as an irreversible terminal disease, and that this produces paranoia about ageing, which is no more than a cultural fiction (ibid., p. 17). In making this argument she notes that:

In the United States in the twentieth century [ageing] 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 as indistinguishable from, biological ageing, is based on the argument that everything underlying the construct 'midlife decline' is learned, and that "our very feelings depend on culture" (ibid., p. 9). Gullette's view is clearly that emotions are socially constructed, that the social construction of feelings of agedness in contemporary US culture is predominantly discursively mediated, and that this construction is subject to historical-cultural influences.²

Gullette's argument is a Foucauldian one according to which what she terms a "decline ideology", is seamless as it is 'insidious' in its subliminally reinforced practices. For Gullette, this ideology "remains invisible to both its authors and its readers", as it has become naturalized (ibid., p. 7). She therefore advocates the analysis of discourse as a key to deconstructing the narratives through which these ageing practices are perpetuated, and urges researchers to apply and extend Foucault's insights on the 'disciplines' of power to the concepts, practices and structures that produce age discourse (ibid., p. 35).

We have seen from the preceding discussion of ageism that midlife in western late capitalist consumer societies is not supported as an opportunity for developing a socially valued self-identity. Instead midlife is perceived as marking the onset of physical deterioration and often of economic and social decline, and the reasons for this are not clearly understood. In the following

² It is worth while noting, though, that in her argument she universalizes a fairly distinct group, rather than a population: American middle-class women, like herself.

section I turn to psychoanalytic perspectives on ageing, which offer some alternative perspectives on the experience of midlife.

1.4 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 re-evaluation of one's life.

Biggs, in his book *The Mature Imagination*, examines how some form of 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 'revisable' self, and of a multiplicity of identities that, in an environment of prolific consumption, can be changed virtually 'at will'. Following Biggs and others, I argue that this 'freedom to choose' is in actuality anything but a free choice. Rather, it involves a tension between the 'reversible' self's compunction to select from a multiplicity of identities that are not dependent on chronological age, and the increasing inflexibility of the ageing physical body, one that makes it more difficult to continue participation in this process of identity selection.

People who succumb to the demand to maintain a youthful body and a socially acceptable identity rely on the social 'mask' or 'persona' to conceal ageing and protect the self from social stigmatization and humiliation within an ageist society. In doing this they reflect the fact 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 negotiating cultural normative imperatives that devalue ageing.

For many people, developing a mature subjectivity thus becomes increasingly

difficult. While the 'ageing' body-self seeks youthful identities for as long as possible through various body projects, with time the mask becomes more inflexible. I agree with Biggs (1999, p. 62) when he argues that:

[E]ven though the postmodern 'self' is characterized as being capable of infinite expression, the ageing 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 ageing 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.

The work of Biggs is important to considerations of ageing because he asks crucial questions about possibilities for a coherent, 'authentic' subjectivity in maturity (Biggs, 1997, 1999). Biggs espouses a concept he terms 'masque', which incorporates masquerade³ and the Jungian derived concept of the persona. He defines the persona 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). In terms of ageing, persona or masque is a means of social accommodation, of protecting the self and others from unacceptable parts of one's personality. It also provides a means of social conformity as a means of social acceptability in an age-hostile social environment.

However, Biggs contends that the second half of life involves shedding self-preconceptions that are now 'false' wrappings of the self. Biggs draws on Jung to argue 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).

³ '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 where women occupied 'masculine' (e.g., intellectual) positions.

Biggs argues that the postmodern self's potentially unlimited freedom in 'inventing' an identity is therefore a fiction, since the increased opportunities for psychological development of the mature self are countered by the 'increasingly marginal and restrictive social roles' available to the ageing self. He suggests 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" (Biggs, 1999, p. 80).

'Persona' reflects a strategic attempt to overcome an ageist social climate that threatens to marginalize the ageing person's social presence and value. However, it is important to note that the individual in Biggs' framework can exercise *agency* in crafting a coherent mature body-self. The issue, as Biggs sees it, is to "allow engagement with social expectation, whether multiple or restrictive, and ... protect personal coherence and continuing personal development". Unlike the 'postmodern ageing' theorists, 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: "According to this viewpoint ... maturity gives rise to an expanded capacity for self-experience" (ibid., p. 81). The ability to negotiate a multiplicity of social situations and simultaneously retain a sense of personal cohesion and continuity are argued to be the strengths of ageing. One of the forms this ability to negotiate might take is that people become more self-aware and also more flexible in connecting with others and 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. This argument will be taken up more fully in Chapters 3 and 5.

Biggs also discusses masquerade in relation to hegemonic (here 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 dispossession 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 ageing 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 concept of masquerade to old age. Masquerade for her is "a coverup through which old age nonetheless speaks ... As pretense, masquerade is a form of self-representation ... A mask may *express* rather than hide a truth. The mask *itself* may be one of the multiple truths" (Woodward, 1991, p. 148). She explains masquerade as follows:

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' is a form of "return of the repressed", in psychoanalytic terms. 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.⁴

⁴ One of Woodward's (1991) major arguments is precisely that Freud could not come to terms with his own ageing and this influenced his lack of concern with older people in therapy.

Woodward (1991, 1999) contends 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 (1991) is particularly concerned with the nexus between gender and ageing. She applies 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 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. 153–154). Thus, following Riviere's argument, 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, in advanced old age masquerade is no longer 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). On this point Woodward suggests that:

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.

Thus 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

ourselves which we cherish even in the face of its impossibility.⁵ As in the sociologically informed 'mask of ageing' theory, the lived self strives to retain temporal continuity (i.e. agelessness), and there is a tension between the self and the increasingly inflexible ageing body.

1.5 Gendered ageing

In this section I examine how ageing is gendered in western consumer cultures. That experiences of ageing and experiences of gender are inextricably interrelated is uncontested, yet much research into ageing has traditionally assumed gender neutrality. 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, it is gendered, classed, and subject to specific historical-cultural conditions that arguably privilege one gender over another. Moreover, ageing in western consumer cultures is linked to notions such as 'attractiveness' for women and 'virility' for men, both concepts that distinguish 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 age research is the relatively higher ratio of women to men, a phenomenon which has

⁵ Of course one could also argue that our mirror image has perhaps always been a form of "othering" our perceived image from our internalized notion of the self. In Eva Figs' *Waking* (1981), one of the literary texts Woodward (1991) examines, the protagonist encounters her image while looking in the mirror as a young girl-woman, reflecting on her own 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" (p. 26).

been called by some the “feminization of old age”, which has until recently gone unnoticed (cf. Bury, 1995; McMullin, 1995; and Ginn & Arber, in Arber & Ginn, 1995). Demographic studies in Australia and other countries show that, where old age is reached, older women typically outnumber older men, particularly in the 80+ years, and data from other countries show similar trends (Borowski & 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 (e.g., McCallum & Geiselhart, 1996). Older women have by some even been described as “the poorest of the poor” (MacDonald & Rich, 1984, p. 84; Butler, 1985, p. 2). MacDonald and Rich (ibid.) describe how gender, race and class intersect 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 society, 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 links women more than men with the social perception of ‘obsolescence’, due to their lack of social status relative to men (Esposito, 1987, p. 129). He suggests that:

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). Bury contends that:

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. Woodward writes: "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 woman and being older exacerbates the experience of ageing for women. She draws on Susan Sontag's observation of women and ageing to suggest 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.). This poses the question that, if both female and male professional dancers also experience ageing at an earlier chronological age than those in most other professions might this phenomenon reflect the 'feminine' status of dance? It is an important question that will be revisited later in this thesis.

The way in which 'double ageing' or 'multiple ageing' is discursively marked for women 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 cultural phenomenon (Mellencamp, 1992, pp. 280–281). Mellencamp notes that:

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—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 unselfconsciously 'age-tag' others, the strangers we meet or whose images we encounter in the media, effectively 'interpellating' the other (as the middle-aged, middle-class, female, or as the elderly, working-class male). Age-tagging is therefore a means of unambiguously identifying bodies as belonging into 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 for another reason: because they lack the 'monumentality' and unity of form inherent in young (classical) bodies. That is, they are characterized by *ambiguity* and are not easily 'read' or classifiable. The ways an older person performs her or his social self, whether through comportment, body shape, dress, and other practices, must also be internally consistent, must 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) has shown that cinematic representations of older women and men differ markedly, inasmuch as women are portrayed more negatively than men. Markson and Taylor's study of older actors in American feature films between 1929 and 1995 posed the question: "To what extent have roles played by older actors and actresses shifted over the decades to reflect changes in the mask and stereotypes, fantasies, and realities of later life?" (ibid., p. 139). 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"⁶ (ibid., p. 150), or in relation to other family members. This is despite the fact that "federal government statistics show that old women [in the US] are more likely to live in poverty than any other age group" (ibid., p. 151). 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" (ibid., p. 150-1).

These perceptions in popular culture reflect a traditional masculine ideal, "the male ability to maintain instrumentality" (ibid., p. 153), and an ideal from which older women are portrayed as deviating. In popular films, Markson and Taylor argue, the 'mask of ageing' differs between men and women (ibid., p. 155-156):

Male movie masks primarily deny physical ageing 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 ageing 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.

⁶ Interestingly, there appears to be no male equivalent in the English language for the term "matron," a term which has derogatory connotations and refers only to women, particularly in their middle years with children.

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 argues that the experience of ageing is different for men than for women (Hearn, 1995). He contends 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, and 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" (ibid., p. 112). The category of 'older men' is linked with gender: "It connects oldness to gender, to men, and to men's social power". Hearn goes on to suggest 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.⁷ An intriguing question following from this is that, if older men become 'other', does ageing 'feminize' men in western cultures?

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 Elliott* addresses the experiences of a young boy from a working-class coal-mining town in the United Kingdom who contravenes 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 dance 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

⁷ 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).

represents a strategy of disrupting the very foundation of normativity itself, of confounding the norm (ibid., s. 11).

Importantly for theories of gendered ageing, Weber maintains that the understandings of and relationships among masculinity, sexuality and dance hinge on another concept built into the meaning system in the film, that of youth. She argues that *Billy Elliot* employs youth to defer questions of sexuality, “questions which – when left undeferred – queer characters, relationships and spectatorship” (ibid., s. 13). By ‘youth’ Weber refers more specifically to the sexual innocence of youth. She 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” (ibid., s. 31). Thus, Weber’s argument appears to be that dance, as represented in film, does not so much feminize men as ‘queer’ the very notion of heteronormativity and therefore the abject, ‘excluded’ status of the feminized man, and that the innocence of youth can be a means of deflecting cultural perceptions of dancing males as feminine.

Another way in which a framework for gendered ageing might be developed is via the notion of control, specifically 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. She argued 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 proposed that bodily control is an expression of social control (Douglas, 1973, p. 93).

Although Douglas’ theory is arguably 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 argued by Grosz (1994) and others. This finds expression in statements such as women cannot control menstruation, whereas men can control ejaculation (Douglas, 1966), and from the popular concept of women's biological enslavement to their bodies ('biology is destiny'). Bodily control is 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 draws upon Douglas in her analysis of male representations of female bodies as 'leaking' and 'draining' (Kristeva, 1982). She has defined such representations as a key cultural concept behind 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 (e.g., 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 it has been argued that 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* (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 dangerous because it is always ambiguous, seen as referring to a transitional stage of development. 'Abject masculinity', for example, 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 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, outlined by Douglas (1973) and others, between social power, bodily control and masculinity, breaks down when essential control over bodily emissions starts 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 gender us in everyday life. This has two implications. First, the ageing of men is aligned with femininity through 'lack' of bodily control. Secondly, if absolute control of the body, as defined through male experience, were not the overarching marker of gendered adulthood, then the concept of lack of bodily control associated with advanced old age (in both women *and* men) would not be so stigmatized. As they age, men can no longer escape the construction and experience of their bodies. Furthermore, 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). This comment suggests that, when bodily control becomes more problematic in older age, men are forced to confront their ageing bodies as no longer 'other' but as part of themselves.

Harper is one of the few theorists who has applied feminist arguments of the body to age theory (Harper, 1997). Harper applies 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. Grosz advocates a "broad, nonphysicalist materialism" (Grosz, 1994, p. viii) according to which models and conceptions of corporeality are nondualist, nonreductivist, and acknowledge sexual difference. Like Shilling (1993) and others, she sees the body as essentially open to cultural completion, although limited in the biological sense, and actively produced by "historical, social and

cultural exigencies" (Grosz, 1994, p. x), while being determined by neither.

Harper takes up Grosz's argument that the body is involved in the production and evaluation of knowledge. She notes that, within the western philosophical tradition, reason is dissociated from the body and the bodily and sexed nature of rational thought is disavowed. Harper goes on to argue that this disembodied and rationally determined form of knowledge is androcentric and perpetuates a patriarchal culture through reiteration of masculine norms and values. Thus it is only "through acknowledging the embodiment of male sexed knowledge as the dominant paradigm within which the ageing body is interpreted, [that] the relationship between knowledge, control of the body and lived experience can be further understood" (Harper, 1997, p. 161).

Harper also critiques Featherstone and Hepworth's 'mask of ageing' account, "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., p. 161). Harper contends that:

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.

Harper advocates a framework that accommodates *both* construction and experience, both 'inner' and 'outer' aspects of ageing.

So far, I have sketched out some important issues in age theory research on bodily ageing in contemporary western cultures, with as yet only minimal reference to their implications for the practice and performance of dance, and it is this that I address more fully in the next 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 address of gender in ageing. Nevertheless an important and as yet unaddressed concern underlies all

this theorizing of the 'ageing body': what is this body that ages? In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider some recent concerns in theories of corporeality, drawing on the work of poststructuralist and feminist philosophers. The purpose of this exercise is to gain a fuller understanding of how the (gendered, ageing) body might be constructed and represented in western consumer cultures, and within what constraints it is possible to constitute a coherent corporeal subjectivity in maturity.

1.6 Theories of the embodied subject

This section represents a shift in focus from a predominantly sociological account of gendered ageing to a focus on how different theoretical frameworks approach subjectivity, in order to understand how aged and gendered body-subjects are constituted in western cultures. Earlier I discussed the dualistic underpinnings of much research on ageing, according to which ageing can never be understood as anything but decline, as well as being beset by a progressive failure to integrate the 'inner' and 'outer' components of the body-self. To formulate alternative conceptions, then, involves at least some loosening of binaries, in order to develop alternative and perhaps more productive ways of theorizing gendered ageing in both dance and everyday life.

Poststructuralist theories of the body in the second half of the twentieth century in western cultures moved away from conceiving the body as an object (of analysis), towards conceiving it as constitutive of its own subjecthood. The mind-as-subject and body-as-object duality was replaced by the notion of the 'corporeal subject'. As corporeality and subjectivity have become increasingly interlinked, and the body-mind duality loosened, the problematic question of how 'the body' and 'the mind' might interconnect in achieving this corporeal subject has inevitably arisen. This question impacts on how we might conceptualize 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 bodily ageing.

Grosz broadly distinguishes 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, as, in her overview of theoretical positions on the corporeal subject, Grosz differentiates between theories which stress interiority and those focusing on exteriority (or surface).

Grosz (1992) provides a useful summary of how psychoanalytical theories such as those espoused by Freud and Lacan 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 6 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, have a sense of body boundaries and an ability to distinguish 'self' from 'other'. As Grosz (*ibid.*, 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, in the sense of a stable, continuous subjectivity bounded from, yet influenced by, the outside world, comes into being. The mechanism through which this ability to differentiate between self (subject) and others (objects), or 'inside' and 'outside', is through the emergence of the child's sexual drives, of its "relations to its own body, the other and the socio-symbolic order" (*ibid.*, 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”.

The corporeal ego is a kind of map of the body’s boundaries, but a map that involves an *interpretation* of them through psychic activities such as fantasy (ibid., pp. 38-39):

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 psychic and social (ibid., p. 36). As Grosz notes:

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 terms of 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. According to Lacan the symbolic order of language is a sort of *promise* of a unified, ideal subjectivity, a

telos that is never attained. It has been argued that the notion of an ideal unity of subjectivity is a masculine one, referring to the 'unity' of the phallus.

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 supposedly induces in men. As Grosz (1994, pp. 57-58) comments:

[Freud's] position can be understood in terms of how meanings, values, and desires construct male and female bodies (and particularly how their differences are represented). His postulation of the Oedipus complex and the castration threat can be read as an analysis and explanation of the social construction of women's bodies as a lack and the correlative (and dependent) constitution of the male body as phallic.

However, feminists of sexual difference, including Grosz, 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 quite different from the implicitly masculinist accounts of Freud and Lacan, one that acknowledges the sexual specificity, plurality and singularity of bodies. As Grosz and others contend, there is no such thing as 'the' body, rather, there are specific bodies of sex, bodies of colour (ibid.). Grosz (1992, p. 40) 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 phallogocentric 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.

Freud and Lacan did not address the sexual specificity of bodies, as Grosz and

others have argued, neither did they address the ego of the aged body. As discussed in Section 1.4 of this chapter, Woodward (1991) filled this gap by contending 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 its psychic integrity, an integrity constituted through the psychic fantasy of an 'ideal body-self' 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, just as the female body 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, visibility of the phallus) define the feminine (genitals) in terms of perceived lack and disorganization (invisibility, plurality) (Irigaray, 1985). I would suggest that the ageing female body is thus doubly marginalized; first by virtue of feminine lack, and secondly 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 the 'masculine' economy privileges unity, stability, consistency and completion, and fixed and final meanings, the ageing woman's body will be considered to be a potential threat to masculine power, and therefore conceptualized as abject. According to a psychoanalytic perspective, it becomes the 'monstrous feminine' that threatens to dissemble the phallic order, as it is anathematical to this order. 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 phallic culture that can tolerate only the homogeneous, the defined, knowable and consistent.

I will therefore contend that ageing, like femininity, disrupts the masculine order through this very ambiguity and fluxus of subjectivity. This flexibility of subjectivity has not been constructively theorized in western cultures.

I now turn to 'surface' theories of the body, which are my primary focus in this thesis. 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 poststructuralist theorists such as Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Judith Butler, contend that the corporeal subject is formed (or subjectified) through processes of cultural inscription, and that there can be no 'pre-cultural' subject as such. Moreover, these processes of inscription operate discursively. Thus 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).

Foucault insisted 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 'meta-language' to accommodate the non-discursive. In other words, while the materiality of bodies is non-discursive, the body's form and articulations is dependent on discourse (see Kendall and Wickham, 1999).

When theorists such as Foucault (1980) maintain that the body is almost exclusively discursively produced, this suggests that there exists in our understanding of the body no prediscursive, 'natural' state. Thus 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 (insofar as 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.

For Foucault, there is 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, what Foucault called Power/Knowledge. Foucault argued that the individual is already "one of the prime effects" of power, it is both constituted by and the vehicle of power (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Mansfield succinctly explains the relationship between power and the individual for Foucault (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.

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) 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 institutional level (e.g., the written and unwritten rules of a school, prison or hospital). 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' is already made for her by the imperative to conform to normative expectations (of age, weight, etc.). Alternatively, if she continues to dance in older age, she violates specific historical-cultural norms, and is made aware of this both discursively (through ageist feedback from others) or in other ways (through companies refusing to employ her).

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 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, and notions such as choice or self-determination are merely illusions. 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.

Like Freud and Lacan, Foucault has been critiqued by feminists such as Butler and Grosz, on the basis that his account of the corporeal subject lacks sexed specificity. 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 that 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” (ibid., p. 159).

One feminist theorist’s reworking of Foucault’s model is Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) framework of performativity of gendered subjectivity. Butler delineates what we understand by gender as a performance of the modes of dress, behaviours, speech, and all the other ways gender-specific norms are discursively and behaviourally enacted in order to successfully fabricate a gendered (i.e., masculine or feminine) subjectivity. These *normative* enactments of gender become *normal* within a culture. That is, they have become so naturalized as to be unquestioned. However, there are possibilities for bodily resistance to the norms that prescribe one’s gender, as I will discuss in more depth in Chapter 4.

Critical psychologist Nikolas Rose is also critical of 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 (ibid., p. 172):

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 rather culturally and historically specific. The body, Rose maintains, is less unified and ‘material’ than commonly taken, and is perhaps more usefully conceptualized in terms of *relations* (i.e. linkages) rather than as a static entity (ibid., pp. 172–184):

Perhaps, then, there is no such thing as ‘*the body*’: a bounded envelope that can be revealed to contain within 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 is here developing a theoretical framework through which to discuss the body and performance, 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 create 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 should act *as if* we were embodied, even though what we really are is a dynamic melee of assemblages! Rose 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” (ibid., 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 (see, e.g., Carey, 2000) and, as I will discuss more fully later, to Jose Gil's analysis of the Cunningham dancer's body (Gil, 2003).

1.7 The flesh, the fold and the intersubjective self

What is evident so far is that ways of conceptualizing the corporeal self that acknowledge the imbrication of the discursive and the material, of transcendence and immanence, might offer a resolution of the dilemma encountered in theorizing the embodied subject as either created through discourse or subject to an extradiscursive ontology, since each of these radically contrasting epistemological approaches to understanding corporeality and subjecthood deals with a fundamental conceptual difficulty. One wrestles on the one hand with the 'problem' of accounting for the body's materiality when attempting to theorize it purely within a discursive field, and on the other with that of universalizing and essentializing it, once a pre-discursive (i.e. pre-cultural) body is assumed. This is the tension between subjecthood and objecthood, which phenomenologically informed accounts of the subject seek to overcome.

This concept of the 'fold' has been a fruitful one for attempts to theorize the relationship of 'outside' and 'inside' in constituting corporeal subjectivity. It has emerged from the efforts of theorists, such as Foucault, Butler, Irigaray, Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Guattari, and Grosz, to question the dualist underpinnings of western thought, where the marginalization and 'feminization' of the body in contemporary western cultures has been an undesirable outcome of the polarization of masculine/feminine, mind/body, culture/nature. Reconceptualizing (and reconciling) the 'inside' and 'outside', or material and cultural, aspects of embodied subjectivity therefore necessitates developing concepts that are not entrenched in binarist thinking. One such concept is that of the 'fold'.

Feminist theorist Elspeth Probyn (1993) draws on Foucault's and Deleuze's (1993) notion of the fold (*le pli*) as a means of enabling alternative conceptions of the gendered self to be brought into being, in an attempt to rethink the self as subject in the context of feminist cultural studies. Folds (or pleats) for Foucault are modes of articulating the 'outside' and the 'inside' of the self, as Probyn (1993, p. 129) notes:

Here we can see the distinction ... of the line of power that remains outside (pressed against the body) against a conceptualization of the ways in which the line meets up with the inside. Simply put, one is to be found in the techniques of objectification and the other in the processes of subjectification. The act of 'pleating' or 'folding' ('la pliure') is thus the doubling-up, the refolding, the bending-onto-itself of the line of the outside in order to constitute the inside/outside—the modes of the self ... [It is] a way of conceptualizing modes of creating and using selves which cannot condense into a unified Individual or Subject ... Thus the line of the outside is folded, and refolded against the inside along a series of 'optional' practices involved in the relation of self to self and to selves ... The production of subjectification then allows us to envisage ways of living with ourselves and with others.

The embodied subject is thus not a unity, substance or thing that can be represented (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). It is a form, a mode of analysis which can develop strategic knowledge of, and problematize the power relations in which it is enmeshed. Most importantly, it is an *intersubjectivity*, a self imbricated in, and constituted by, other selves.

Merleau-Ponty, in his final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, invokes the notion of 'folding-back-upon-onself' in the constitution of subjectivity, through his central concept of 'flesh.' The 'flesh,' a sort of primordial, pre-rational glue, or a condition for the possibility of all being, is by a reversibility that enables both seeing and being seen, touching and being touched, an integration of subject and object; what Grosz calls "a single 'thing' folded back on itself" (Grosz, 1994, p. 95). This does not constitute a return to the notion of an unproblematic prediscursive experience in an attempt to break out of a binary ontology, as Grosz takes care to point out (*ibid.*, pp. 96, 102-103):

[Merleau-Ponty] is not seeking a pure datum uninfluenced by the social; instead his goal is to find the preconditions within sensibility itself, within the subject that makes the subject open up and be completed by the world ... Flesh is that elementary, precommunicative domain out of which both subject and object, in their mutual interactions, develop ... Subject and object, mind and body, the visible and the invisible, are intercalated ... The flesh is composed of the 'leaves' of the body interspersed with the 'leaves' of the world: it is the chiasm linking and separating the one from the other.

The concept of reversibility renders it possible for the embodied subject to be constituted *both* materially and culturally, both discursively and through practice, and both subjectively and intersubjectively. As Probyn points out, "the concept of folding the self scrambles any dichotomy of interior self and exterior social" (Probyn 1993, p. 130). 'Flesh,' as a condition of reversibility, is an implication of self and other selves that enables reflection or, in Foucault's terms, 'strategic knowledge' of the situatedness of one's lived subjecthood within everyday practices that is combined with an ability to "cut into that real" (ibid.).

Another phenomenologically oriented account of the constitution of subjecthood that takes the body as its central concern, and one that importantly also addresses dance and performance, is offered by Rosalyn Diprose (Diprose, 1994b). Here the tension between subject-object is dispelled by the introduction of a third term, that of intersubjectivity. Diprose argues that intersubjectivity is a fundamental assumption in phenomenology, and she casts it in terms of embodiment and body performance, focusing on the ways in which bodily practices might constitute subjecthood, or 'body-identity', as well as the limitations placed on these. Her interest is in the performance of identity, which she defines as "the ability to transform the self through action", and in the constraints under which this performance operates, as well as the role of the other in performing the self. Performing the self, then, involves performing body-identity through action, as: "the self does not have an identity except through action. The deed, act or performance is the self actualized. Since action implicates the body, the self's identity is performed through the body. Self-identity is equivalent to body performance" (ibid., p. 8).

This notion of self-identity as constituted through bodily action is radically different from the more conventional Western notion of self-identity as located in consciousness (the mind) and as untransformable by action. An acceptance of responsibility for one's actions is consistent with moral and political thinking in which the model of self-identity presupposes a rational, reflective subject whose actions are planned by (mental) consciousness. The 'law', says Diprose, assumes that the self (defined through mental self-consciousness) causes actions, and that the body (divorced from this self) is a 'passive, material object'. It relies on this presupposition of a hierarchical mind-body distinction that bestows agency on human action, as 'natural' rather than ideological. This stance she argues to be objectionable from a social justice perspective, since it maintains institutional structures of racism, homophobia, ageism, etc., structures that condemn *different* selves. The law requires possession of the 'proper body', and assumes that humans can conform by changing their minds—when the covert injunction is to change their (deviant) bodies.

In positing self-identity as body performance, then, Diprose argues that identity is an *effect*, not a *cause*, of the body's performance. It can be attributed on the basis of another's actions, and can be an outcome of a 'proper' (predictable and knowable?) body that acts not out of agency but out of conformity to the 'disciplinary production by the law'. Theorists such as Nietzsche, Foucault and Butler have maintained that body identity is constituted through reiteration: through a repetition of acts, through habit formation. Bodies are thus 'trained' to repeat what are 'good acts', to perform cultural norms through reiteration, a performance which is naturalized and seamless rather than transparent, for "[t]he law is an artist in naturalizing its categories of identity, in performing them through bodies" (ibid., p. 9).

However, Diprose contends that the law requires *consistency* of body-identity (as performance), as well as the '*artifice of difference*': "We are trained to perform different body-identities according to that required by the place we occupy within the social structure". For example, "the disciplinary production of gender

difference takes centre stage in the law's performance of body-identity ... Around a fold of the skin is built a mask of habits, desires and gestures considered proper to that body" (ibid., p. 10). The material body here is linked to the social body, and Diprose concurs with Butler's view that femininity is a performance naturalized in appearance, but actually a 'cultural production' attributed to a fictitious underlying (pre-existing) self or psyche. I would also argue that age is performed and understood in an analogous way to the performance of gender, as a performance of body-identity in which the material body and the social body are imbricated.

This requisite for 'consistency' of body-identity of what Diprose refers to as the 'law' makes it intolerant of forms of ambiguity and transgression in its performance. Body-identity is, however, not enforced by institutional structures alone; it is policed by everyone: "We keep body-identity in its place ... because ... any ambiguity in the other's difference threatens the security of our own identity" (ibid., p. 10). Self-identity (that is, body-identity) thus rests on the subjugation of the other to normative boundaries, in order to maintain as 'natural' the 'artifice' of identity. For, Diprose maintains, "if you cannot be sure of the other's performance, if identity is not natural, then you cannot be sure of your own" (ibid., p. 11). The naturalization of self-identity, then, is performed bodily, and difference and ambiguity (as for example in gender or age atypicality) is marginalized.

How then can the normative performance of body-identity be subverted? Diprose advocates a form of parody in using performance, a "flexible, self-affirming, lighthearted performance". She refers to Foucault's urging us to "create ourselves as works of art", to "practice an aesthetics of existence on ourselves". Yet our ability to "re-perform identity against the law" is, of course, limited. Diprose maintains that Foucault's aesthetics of existence relies on a 'multiplicity of bodily pleasures' that have somehow escaped the attention of the normalizing social code. Butler's view that resistance comes from the 'disjunctions' in body performance is, according to Diprose, no more satisfactory;

if read reductively, it leads to a plurality of identities—anyone could become ‘anything at all’: “the performing body in its singularity disrupts its own identity through repetition” (ibid., p. 13). This plurality might suggest that we have the freedom to choose any identity we desire, but she cautions that the fact that “performance could be so free is itself suspect” (ibid.).

Indeed, there are limitations on body-identity: “What you can become is limited by the social history of your body” (ibid., p. 15). Drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘tolerance’, Diprose makes the important point that who we are is limited by the style of our embodied existence, a style subject to ‘sedimentation’ within its institutional setting. Thus, the postmodern self’s dreams of reinventing itself are stymied, for “while no body engaged in a project simply repeats identity, no body is free to create itself and its world anew” (ibid.).

This leads Diprose to the syncretic nature of body-identity. According to phenomenological accounts of subject formation, identity is *intersubjective* and constrained by social and familial milieux. Agency thus only becomes possible through the body’s relation to others and to the world. This agency is suppressed by fabricating a rigid identity, by “building a partition between their body and the body of the other”, and by exclusion of the other through rigid boundaries. However, the notion of *syncretic sociability* can account for the intersubjective nature of embodied self-identity, which Diprose defines as “the transfer of movements and gestures between dispersed bodies”. Using Merleau-Ponty’s example of identity-formation of the young child, she explains the complex intersubjective structuring involved: “Insofar as the child identifies with its image of the other’s image of itself, it cannot easily distinguish between what it lives, what the other lives, and what it perceives the other is doing. This tripartite system is one of ‘syncretic sociability’.” (ibid., p. 13).

Therefore, the body-subject is, by virtue of its constitutive intersubjectivity, always open to ambiguity (ibid., p. 14):

As the self, as a lived body, remains caught between subject and object, syncretic sociability structures an adult's embodied existence even with a lived distance between self and other ... As my body is always already opened onto the world and the other, then the relation between my body, the other and the world is ambiguous and open to possibilities.

Thus, through syncretic sociability one's body-identity is theorized as interdependent with the perceived other's behavior and with the image the other reflects back to one, as one perceives that reflected image, as in the example of the young child. Applying this model to ageing, one could imagine that older people in an age-hostile culture are likely to introject and identify with stereotypical and negative images reflected back to them by others, or to confine their sociability to the company of their peers to avoid such negative images.

So far, I have discussed non-dualistic ways of rethinking the body, self and subject, including theoretical concepts such as the 'fold', the 'flesh', and 'syncretic sociability'. What then can we say about the fundamental question of what this embodied self might be, and how it might be constituted? The answer appears to lie somewhere between a discursive body-subject and an extradiscursive body-subject, for neither can adequately account for the self as an intentionality both produced and constrained by others. The body-subject is constituted through discourse, but also through non-discursive practices, such as movement and dance, for the possibilities for an ontology of being and doing—the flesh—elude the purely discursive.⁸ This perspective is important for my study on how older dancers negotiate the disruption of subjectivity that they face on being marked as 'aged'. It also suggests that dancers might find possibilities for resisting the 'decline' model of ageing in western cultures, because their dance practice eludes the hegemonic decline discourse.

In this chapter I have identified some important concerns arising from research in ageing, drawing on research from different disciplines. These include,

⁸ I am not saying here that movement and dance styles are non-discursive inasmuch as they are unaffected by discourse, for they undeniably are subject to discursive construction. Rather, I define them as 'non-discursive' because they will always contain elements that resist discursive delineation; that is, they offer a *potential* for resistance rather than being non-discursive in

for example, western cultures' preoccupation with youth and beauty, the discursive and therefore conceptual alliance of beauty with youth, and the structural inequality of older people in economic and social terms, an inequality that is gendered to the disadvantage of women. I also addressed the notion of the gendered, corporeal subject, through an analysis of how poststructuralist feminist theorists have dealt with a number of issues involved in theorizing the gendered body as subject. These issues include the relationship of the discursive and extra-discursive in bodily practices, conceptions of subjectivity as stable and unified or as dispersed and transformative, how norms are reiterated through body performance and how selves might be constituted through bodily practices within social constraints. I have thereby established some theoretical frameworks through which we might ask what opportunities there might be for resistance to performing cultural age- and gender-based norms and stereotypes. These are vital for our consideration of how dancers might negotiate the constraints of the particular dance genre they practice in crafting a mature subjectivity.

Chapter 2

Gendered ageing and dance practices

The discussion so far has provided a general picture of the ways ageing is enculturated, and has suggested that factors such as gender can be related to different experiences and outcomes for people as they age. If age and gender studies are only beginning to intersect, as McMullin (1995) suggests, the literature becomes even more fragmented when we turn to the field of cultural and critical studies in dance. Here we find a rich yet unexplored terrain of possibilities for a deeper understanding of how ageing is embodied in subjectivity: the relation of the ageing body to what could be described as 'the self'.

In this chapter, I turn more specifically to gendered ageing in dance practice and performance. I begin with examining how gender itself is constructed and performed in western cultures, and then locate ageing within Bourdieu's framework, in particular his concept of habitus. This is followed by an analysis of how gender and ageing operate in western theatrical dance, and what institutional constraints and structural gender inequalities operate within dance institutions to mark dancers as 'aged'. I then engage in a comparative analysis of the concept of 'agedness' in western social dance, to determine whether similar norms and constraints apply to render the 'older dancer' invisible in social dance practices. Finally, I take up the issue of how different dance styles produce different body-subjects, and what the implications of this might be for ageing and gendered dancers.

2.1 The trouble with gender...

In order to ask how gendered ageing is experienced in the practice of dance, one needs to specify how gender itself is constructed and experienced in western cultures. In Chapter I, we explored what is meant by 'ageing', both as a category and as a process. But what do we mean by 'gender'? So far I have used the term

fairly unproblematically, but it is now time to unpack the concept of gender—and its often interchangeably used corollary, sex—as well as the assumption of the ‘gender neutral’, biologically sexed body.

Where sex has been taken to refer to biological characteristics of male or female, gender, on the other hand, has been a more fluid and problematic construct to theorize. Gender in contemporary western cultures has conventionally been understood as belonging to one of two mutually exclusive bipolar opposites: masculine and feminine. Moreover, gender is assumed to be stable over a person’s life course. However, historically the notion of a ‘natural’ bipolarity of gender is a fairly recent phenomenon (Foucault, 1980, 1990). It is also a view which has been challenged by poststructuralist feminists (e.g., Butler, 1990, 1993; Gatens, 1996; Grosz, 1994) and others (e.g., Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Gatens, in Chapter 1 of her book, *Imaginary Bodies*, attempts to clarify the distinction between the two terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, terms that have been more or less aligned with the biological (sex) and the social (gender), which in her view does not hold (Gatens, 1996). Gatens sees gender as an important category as it has been used as a “central explanatory and organizing category of ... accounts of the social, familial and discursive construction of subjectivity” (ibid., p. 4). However, the use of the sex/gender distinction in political analysis and practice has been towards the neutralization of sexual difference and sexual politics. This is based on the assumption that “both the body and the psyche are postnatally *tabulae rasae*”, therefore the connection between the female body and femininity, and the male body and masculinity, is arbitrary, which makes resocialization possible.

Gatens challenges this view in her critique of the ‘degendering proposal’, a proposal that began with psychoanalyst Robert Stoller’s claim in his book *Sex and Gender* (1960, cited in Gatens, 1996) that a person’s biological sex predisposed them, albeit not in a deterministic way, to adopt the appropriate gender identity for that sex. While this view exerted a strong influence on feminists of equality,

or 'degendering feminists', she contends that it is based on two unfounded assumptions. The first is that the body is neutral and passive with regard to the formation of consciousness, and the second is that one can definitively alter the important effects of the historical and cultural specificity of one's 'lived experience' by consciously changing the material practices of the culture in question (Gatens, 1996, p. 7).

The sex/gender distinction was in fact understood as a body/consciousness distinction by the 'resocialization' feminists, implying a body/consciousness dichotomy. Furthermore, behaviorist conceptions of subjectivity presume the body to be neutral and passive, and consciousness to be socially determined. However, Gatens points out that Freud showed that perception is *not* passive, hence such conceptions are erroneous. The neutral body doesn't exist, as "there are at least two kinds of bodies: the male body and the female body" (ibid., p. 8). It is not 'gender' that is valorized; it is sexual difference: "That the male body and the female body have quite different social value and significance cannot help but have a marked effect on male and female consciousness" (ibid., p. 9). Signification is therefore important in the constitution of subjectivity and, Gatens stresses, it is an active process, not a passive one.

When we turn to how gender norms might be embodied and lived, Gatens introduces the concept of the 'imaginary body', a body that is "developed, learnt, connected to the body image of others, and is not static" (ibid., p. 12). The notion of the imaginary body is developed from psychoanalytic studies of hysterics. It is a culturally constructed *ideal* self-image that conforms to predominant cultural norms, a psychical image of the body-self or what Lacan and Freud call a libidinous and narcissistic relation to one's body (ibid., p. 12):

[T]he imaginary body is socially and historically specific in that it is constructed by: a shared language; the shared psychical significance and privileging of various zones of the body (for example, the mouth, the anus, the genitals); and common institutional practices and discourses (for example, medical, juridical and educational) which act on and through the body.

The imaginary body is therefore socially constructed and reflective of culturally normative and intersubjectively shared phantasies and modes of thinking. It is in the imaginary body that the historical and cultural specificity of masculinity and femininity become apparent: "It is to the imaginary body that we must look to find the key or the code to the decipherment of the social and personal significance of male and female biologies as lived in culture, that is, masculinity and femininity" (ibid., p. 12). There is also a contingency between the male body and masculinity, and the female body and femininity, but this does not mean the connection between sex and gender is arbitrary: "Masculinity and femininity as forms of sex-appropriate behaviors are manifestations of a historically based, culturally shared phantasy about male and female biologies" (ibid., p. 13).

Gatens also contends that the imaginary body is lived within a patriarchal culture that privileges the masculine male. The imaginary body therefore reflects this gendered cultural privileging of the masculine (ibid., pp. 15, 16):

It is not masculinity per se that is valorised in our culture but the masculine male ... The problem is not the socialization of women to femininity and men to masculinity but the place of these behaviours in the network of social meaning and the valorizing of one (the male) over the other (the female) ... I would suggest that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' correspond at the level of the imaginary body to 'male' and 'female' at the level of biology.

Gatens' (1996) work on the imaginary body is an example of recent post-structural feminist research on the body which attempts to destabilize or 'refigure' constructions of gender, by the questioning and dissolution of the traditional binary structures such as nature/culture, female/male, body/mind inherited from Cartesian dualism. Cultural and feminist theorists are thus positioning theories of gender based on sexual difference away from essentialism and biologism, and problematizing the binary gender structures of conventionally understood heterosexuality (e.g., Butler, 1990; Gatens, 1996). Yet for the main part they have remained curiously silent on the topic of ageing. Instead, the tacit assumption of an 'ageless' gendered body has prevailed until now. Given that the social effects of ageing can never be experienced in a gender

neutral way, the relative lack of research activity by feminist scholars into gendered ageing is surprising.⁹

In relation to my study, I will argue that the function of the imaginary in ageing men and women is as a means of privileging culturally normative 'virtues' such as youth, strength, bodily control and the smooth, firm and unlined 'classical body' as 'masculine' attributes connected to social power. According to this constantly shaped and reiterated phantasy, biological signs of ageing, such as reduction in strength (or stamina), lines and sagging skin, signify a loss of these virtues, a deviation from the normative imaginary masculine and feminine body by the biologically male or female mature dancer, and a feminization of older men and women dancers.

2.1.1 Seriality in gender and ageing

Iris Young's understanding of gender takes a somewhat different approach from that of Gatens, by theorizing gender as a form of seriality rather than as an identity, one in which prereflective thought and habit take the place of conscious acts in bringing the gendered self into being (Young, 1997). She develops Sartre's original notion of seriality and applies it to women as a social collective, as a strategic avoidance of essentializing and marginalizing women's experience.

Young delineates important differences between groups and series. Unlike groups, which form around actively shared objectives, a series is a social collective whose members are unified passively by the objects their actions are oriented around—and (or) by the objectified results of the material effects of the actions of others. The unity of the series comes from individuals pursuing their own ends within a shared continuous material environment, responding to structures created by the unintended collective result of past actions (*ibid.*, p. 23-24). For example, people waiting for a bus are a series, brought together by their

⁹ One reason for this might be that they are only now starting to feel the impact of age, as a colleague anecdotally informed me.

relation to the bus (material object) and the social practices of public transport. Beyond this they do not necessarily share a group identity.

For Young, the advantage of describing gender as seriality is that in this way it “does not rely on identity or ... the social production and meaning of membership in collectives” (ibid., p. 22). Sartre calls the series a ‘practico-inert’ reality, structured by actions linked to practico-inert objects, where ‘practical’ means as a result of human action and ‘inert’ means as material, constituting constraints and resistances to action. Further, seriality designates social existence and relations with others at “the level of routine, habitual action, which is rule-bound and socially structured, but as a pre-reflective background to action ... where action is directed at particular ends that presuppose the series without taking them up self-consciously” (ibid., p. 27).

In her ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’, Donna Haraway identified the fluid nature of identities that defies classification, arguing that markers such as gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in ‘essential’ unity, and that there is nothing about being ‘female’ that ‘naturally’ binds women” (Haraway, 1985). Young likewise argues that women cannot be theorized as a ‘group’, because they span religious, ethnic, cultural and national groups, groups that involve some but not all common traditions; in other words, they do not share a habitus common to all women. Yet she claims that the conception of women as a collective social position is strategically necessary, since to do otherwise permits continued exclusions, oppositions and disadvantages that women often suffer: “If we cannot conceptualize women as a group, feminist politics appears to lose any meaning” (ibid., p. 8). She argues that strategies that have been used by feminists that rely on theorizing gender identity as multiple rather than binary, or on arguing that women constitute a group only in the politicized context of ‘feminist struggle’, have failed to resolve this.

The problematic category of ‘woman’ might thus usefully be reconfigured as a series, where “as a series *woman* is the name of a structural relation to material

objects as they have been produced and organized by a prior history, which carries the material necessities of past practices congealed in their matter” (Young, 1997, p. 28). Importantly, the (pre-reflective) practices of gender both ‘gender’ and are themselves gendered through corporeal enactment. Corporeal enactment through their *bodies* is one way in which women are positioned in the gender series, “through structures like enforced heterosexuality and the sexual division of labor” (ibid., p. 29). ‘Social objects’ such as the physical characteristics of female bodies, Young argues, are not only physical but also resulting from, and inscribed by, past practices. For example, in heterosexuality, she says, “the material practices of enforced heterosexuality serialize women as objects of exchange and appropriation by men” (ibid., p. 28).

Another form of enactment lies in the performance of what Young terms *gender codes*. Dress, make-up, comportment, gestures, as well as verbal idioms can “create and reproduce gender meanings that condition a person’s action and her interpretation of the actions of others” (ibid., p. 29). One example of this, as I will discuss later in this chapter, is in the ways boys and girls are trained in ballet. Naturalized sexual divisions of labor underline these gender codes. Such a division generates a multitude of practico-inert objects that constitute the gendered series (ibid.). Importantly, however, Young indicates a space for individual agency. That is, the “practico-inert structures that generate the milieu of gendered serialized existence both enable and constrain action, but they do not determine or define it. The individuals pursue their own ends” (ibid., p. 29). Practico-inert structures are not defining structures, but rather material social facts, “possibilities and orientations for concrete actions that give them content” (ibid., p. 30).

In my own study, I will adopt the metaphor of the series in relation to both gender and ageing. The heterogeneity of older people, discussed in Chapter 1, suggests that ‘older dancers’ cannot be seen as a homogeneous collectivity with a coherent identity that refers to their age. However, they *do* share the experience of a set of institutional and discursive representations of ageing in western

cultures. Similarly, gender can be understood as informed by both the institutional, discursive representations of people as males or females, *and* the way they respond to these representations through their perpetuation or subversion. The reason for this is that institutional practices and discursive constructions influence dancers' lives and performing opportunities and constraints even as they are being constructed by, and through, the practices of the dancers themselves, in an 'age-based' and 'gendered' milieu. Further, I would contend that defining what 'gender' or 'agedness' *is* is less useful than how the category of gender and the process of ageing are *understood* and used in western cultures, since it is the latter that informs the dancers' lived and embodied experience and construction of the gendered body-subject.

In fact, Young and others argue that the traditional western cultural assumption of a stable, unified identity or subjectivity, an underlying consciousness which structures experience and action, is an assumption of an implicitly 'male' subjectivity, in that it presumes a stable physicality and rationality, and that does not take into account significant bodily changes such as pregnancy, giving birth or experiencing menopause (Young, 1998). According to this assumption, the body is a medium through which we experience and act on the world, but remains unobtrusive, efficiently functioning in background mode, until something occurs, such as illness, pregnancy, disability, or a form of physical change due to age (MacDonald & Rich, 1984). In such situations the unity of subjectivity which Young (1998b) critiques herself for assuming too unquestioningly in *Throwing Like a Girl*, and which is a fundamental assumption in our sense of self, has been 'disrupted'. This has implications for age theory, since the ways in which subjectivity is disrupted (e.g. by pregnancy or menopause) are related to constructions based on gender and will thus 'gender' ageing. This means that our subjectivity is not stable over a life course. Rather, it is likely to be disrupted many times.

Ageing also leads to a disruption of subjectivity. The 'ideal self', the imaginary body, the libidinous or narcissistic relation of ourselves to our bodies (Gatens,

1996), is assaulted every day by the discursive mediation of age-normative cultural perceptions. We learn what it means to be old, and it is not a valued state in western cultures, particularly for women. Ageing 'well' therefore requires a flexible, resilient subjectivity in order to negotiate a self in ways other than as constituted negatively, through metaphors of decline, lack, or loss.

2.2 Ageing, class and the gendered habitus

Young's notion of seriality positions people – here women – within what is a passive social collective, rather than their self-consciously identifying with a group (e.g., 'woman'). Likewise, Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is such a collective, since it is also naturalized and invisible to its performers. It is therefore useful at this point to look at Bourdieu's theoretical framework more closely, in order to examine how bodily practices might perpetuate or subvert dominant age- and gender-based discourses, such as those describing feminine appearance and demeanor. Furthermore, his concept of 'social capital' can equally be applied to ageing dancers and everyday social life, and therefore deserves consideration in some detail.

Bourdieu's theory was radical at the time at which he published *Distinction*, as he maintained that individual differences in, for example, educational aptitude and success are not 'natural' gifts but are a function of such predisposing factors as that individual's family of origin, access to resources (such as good schooling), and other social conditions based on *class* inequality (Bourdieu, 1984). Everything the individual does and says constitutes a form of distinction that can be traced back to these factors, and in *Distinction* Bourdieu elaborates his argument through a study of the tastes of French working class, petit bourgeois and aristocracy (ibid.).

These forms of distinction are all centered on the body and its modes of discourse and practice. Social inequality (and therefore class differentiation) is manifested through them as they are embodied and lived in everyday life. To explain how class-based inequality is perpetuated, Bourdieu invokes a number of

key concepts, such as 'habitus', 'capital' and 'social field'. Habitus, according to Bourdieu, is a set of durable and transposable dispositions that reflect the individual's social position, and is both invisible to the individual and embodied in his or her comportment, discourse and action. These dispositions are 'predisposed' to function as structuring structures. Capital takes on a variety of forms, such as economic, physical or symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986), but is principally a resource or value that is sometimes embodied and therefore cannot be exchanged (as in the case of physical capital). Social fields can be described as dynamic, organizing principles that structure practices, and that are relatively independent of other fields. Thus 'dance' can be seen as a social field that is distinct from, say, 'medicine'.

Bourdieu associates ageing with a decline in embodied, physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Further, if women are valued more for their attractiveness than men then one would expect a physical capital related to 'attractiveness' to decline at an earlier age for women than for men. The importance here of Bourdieu's work is that both ageing in general and ageing for women are linked to a class-based hierarchy in which classes can be distinguished through specific body practices. Thus ageing, and that form of social class loosely referred to as the 'working class', involve a socially perceived devaluation of the body and its class-characteristic comportment, speech and behavior.

What it means to age, and social status, or class, are thus strongly connected, and an analysis of how the body is 'marked' by class, how this has historically emerged in western cultures, and how class (like age) can be understood as a discursive formation, can be useful in conceptualizing how ageing is perceived pejoratively in these cultures. Researchers such as Anne Cranny-Francis (1995) have addressed this issue in relation to class and gender. It is worthwhile considering her argument in the light of ageing as an 'involuntary' marker of class and gender.

Cranny-Francis, in her concern with the bodily inscription of social class in the United Kingdom, has argued that class as a marker is difficult because “it is almost invisible to the constituents of a particular classed society” (ibid., p. 66). Tracking the historical changes in perceptions of class, she notes that from the 19th century formulation of the contemporary class system, class was delineated in moral rather than economic terms, through middle-class “observations of the embodied subjectivities of working-class people”. This moral evaluation shifted in the 20th century to one based on sexuality. The nascent hegemonic middle-class gaze, she argues, thus generates a set of terms that discursively constitutes working class and aristocracy, stereotyping each class in a gendered way, which becomes in turn embodied by them.

This, she contends, has resulted in the constitution of a ‘discursive formation’ known as the ‘working class’. For example, she argues that working class women have been discursively constituted as ‘maternal’ and ‘nurturing’ (i.e. asexual) or as ‘servile’, but also as ‘seductive’ and threatening, since sexually transmitted diseases of the working class and aristocracy were feared by the ‘respectable’ middle class. The sexualisation of working-class women as both nurturing and sexually dangerous thus constitutes them discursively. Working class men were similarly perceived in terms of their bodies: as physically more competent and more at ease with their bodies, but also as potentially more violent and therefore dangerous to the middle class, who believed they could control their own violent impulses through ‘mental effort’, or greater self-control (ibid., p. 75).

Cranny-Francis explains this phenomenon as a regulatory technique of the hegemonic middle class that serves to maintain class boundaries, and is achieved through ‘displacement’, where oppression was displaced as fear (of contagion through sexually transmitted diseases), and exploitation as desire. Thus, “[p]olitically and socially ... the description of working-class men in terms of ‘body’ established the dominance and priority of middle-class men, who reserved for themselves the symbolic status of ‘mind’” (ibid., p. 74). However, there is also the possibility for resistance to the middle-class gaze (ibid., p. 76-77):

[W]orking-class women and men offer bodily resistances—which draw on the very terms which motivate the stereotype—to middle-class scrutiny and regulation. For working-class men, bodily prowess—as sportsmen, for example—is sometimes a tactically useful way of deflecting middle-class condescension. For working-class women the situation is more complex, since it involves a doubling of their positioning as ‘other’.

One of Cranny-Francis’ key arguments is that class is not ‘invisible’; rather, the naturalization of class differences is embodied, and she draws on Marcel Mauss’ (1934) work on body techniques to support her contention. Mauss’ argument, that there is no ‘natural’ way of performing any action, caused a paradigmatic shift in the perception of actions as predominantly culturally rather than biologically inscribed, a tenet that has been adopted by Bourdieu and others. Mauss cites as an example distinct cultural variations in the locomotory act of walking, which are not ‘natural’ in terms of being individual or psychic, but rather a ‘social idiosyncrasy’ (ibid.). Bodies are thus inscribed by everyday activities, and these include ‘class, ethnic, racial, gendered and sexed experiences’.

Importantly for my study, Mauss maintained that techniques of the body (and therefore the body-subject) can be distinguished by factors such as sex and age (ibid.); accordingly, by the performance of our bodily inscription of everyday activities, we are socially gendered and aged. Cranny-Francis extends this to the concept of class, positing that cultural stereotypes could be conceptualized as what she calls physio-psycho-sociological assemblages “which characterise an individual life by its social positioning in a particular class culture” (Cranny-Francis, 1995, p. 79). Consonant with Bourdieu’s position, class delineation and conflict are defined and maintained through a socially inscribed ‘taste’ that masquerades as a natural preference: “This judgement of taste is not consequent upon particular behaviours, but is motivated initially by the mere self-presentation of the embodied subject. Nothing need be said or done: class-based judgements can be made entirely on appearances” (ibid., p. 83). These judgements, which also delineate gender and age, are manifested through attitudes, values and practices learnt within a person’s home and institutional

cultures, and are made on the basis of corporeally inscribed characteristics of individuals, what Mauss termed 'techniques of the body' and Bourdieu a 'bodily hexis' (ibid., p. 86):

Unable to be named without deconstructing and thus destroying the operations of middle-class ideology, 'techniques of the body' constitute a powerful system of identity maintenance and control. What they maintain is not the specific nature of embodied working-class or middle-class or upper-class subjectivities—all of which are fluid and flexible—but the boundaries between these positionings, which particular individuals may traverse repeatedly in the course of their everyday lives.

If the concept of class were replaced by that of age in the above quote, then it is plausible to assume that techniques of the body that delineate age cohort differences operate in a way analogous to class; to naturalize age-class-gender distinctions through defending boundaries (with the middle-aged, middle-class and masculine as hegemonic collective). This enables us to shift our focus from the official decline discourse centering on physical skillfulness ('what the body can and can no longer do') to the perhaps less politically correct one of the body's appearance as a signifier and bearer of other cultural norms—and its changing capacity for normatively representing them.

The value of Mauss' (1936), Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) and Cranny-Francis' (1995) framework is that it links the body to ageing, gender and social class, showing how we classify ourselves and how others classify us on these variables through our bodies. Crucially, these classifications are founded on social and economic inequalities (c.f. Shilling, 1993). A social field, as a set of dynamic organizing principles for structuring social practices, is maintained by a hegemonic social collective. In this way a valued body type, such as a youthful and athletic one, can become a category of physical capital with an 'exchange value'. However, the value attached to particular bodies changes over time. Thus, as people age, their capacity to produce and convert physical capital (i.e., their working bodies) into other resources begins to decline, a decline that Bourdieu (1984) argues is a function of class-based differences. Physical capital, however, is not gender neutral but a product of culturally normative gender

relations and attributes, therefore it cannot be dislocated from gender. Rather, ageing is gendered and has different meanings and outcomes for men and women, as well as deferring to class-based differences.

2.2.1 Application to dance and body practices

Bourdieu's framework has recently been used to study the impact of ageing and injury in the social field of professional dance (Turner & Wainwright, 2002; Wainwright, 2002; Wainwright & Turner, 2002, 2003; see also Wainwright, 2002). For example, Bryan Turner and Steven Wainwright's (2002) study of the experience of ageing in dancers of the Royal Ballet Company has applied Bourdieu's model to delineate a relationship between the dancer's 'ballet habitus', identity, ageing and injury. This enabled them to argue towards a notion of the ballet habitus as "sustained by the sense of professional discipline and attachment to the ballet company" in dancers' experiences and management of injuries. This habitus is both structured and structuring, as it is "both a medium and outcome of social practice" (Turner & Wainwright, 2002). It is thus a potentially useful concept in determining how institutions might influence the bodily experience of dancers, particularly the disruption of the female or male dancer's identity through ageing.

The dance habitus as an 'acquired system of generative dispositions' is, moreover, apparent at the site of the dancer's body, whose accumulated history of movement constitutes her or his 'bodily hexis' (Turner & Wainwright, 2002, original emphasis):

The habitus is not, therefore, simply a state of mind, it also a bodily state of being. On this view the body is a repository of ingrained and durable dispositions. Bourdieu describes this as a bodily hexis. 'Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *em-bodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking' ... dance-training produces a 'dance habitus': both in the sense of a particular type of body, and also in the mastery of the dancing body.

Evidence of a durable way of walking is, for example, the ‘duck walk’ of the trained ballet dancer whose turnout of the hips has been permanently inscribed on the body. Turner and Wainwright (2002) maintain that dancers’ identities are sustained by a distinctive dance habitus: “The spirit of the Company is such that the ballet dancer is expected to manage pain. The discipline of their calling demands it. Professional ballet is not just something that you *do*—it is something that you *are*. Being a dancer becomes the embodiment of identity”. Thus dancers’ actions are always structured, “produced by and shaped through institutionalisation”. However, at the same time, the authors argue, dancers possess the agency to transform (or structure) these structures, although quite how they do this is not made explicit.

Turner and Wainwright did not include gender in framing the dance habitus as a set of both structured and structuring dispositions, and therefore little can be inferred about the gendered nature of ageing from their work. However, according to Bourdieu’s model, a ‘gender habitus’ is constituted by a set of durable dispositions, both structured by and structuring one’s culturally assigned gender, and made manifest in one’s tastes, habits, comportment, and so on. Habitus is enacted through a gendered bodily hexis and subject to discursive constitution by what Cranny-Francis (1995) would maintain is the hegemonic middle class. Given the importance of gender in the study of ageing, it is surprising that ageing appears to be treated as gender neutral in much sociological research, of which Turner and Wainwright’s research on ageing dancers is no exception (see, e.g., Turner & Wainwright 2002; Wainwright & Turner, 2002, 2003). However, I argue that, in the rhetoric of such research, dance is implicitly aligned with the feminine, and the gendered nature of ageing is thinly veiled by a presumed gender neutrality, while serving to perpetuate dance as a ‘feminine’ cultural form.

Among those who *have* argued for a gendered habitus is Tate (1999). In her research on female American weight-trainers, Tate contends that, through literally redefining the contours of their bodies as an outcome of training, the

women in her study are subverting normative feminine body types by constructing their bodies to their 'own' desired 'latent image', and could thus be seen to manifest female agency in redefining culturally normative body types. However, at the same time Tate claims that gender identity affects the individual in the most 'natural' parts of his or her identity, as it relates to the body. Hence her argument is based on a contradiction, between 'freely' choosing a subversive body type, and by one's choice being presumably already structured by a disposition to choose a type that remains within the normative range. For, as Bottomley (1992, p. 122) notes: "the durable, transposable dispositions acquired in childhood are overlaid and transformed by adjustment to later circumstances. But those adjustments are themselves biased by pre-existing perceptions, which mostly operate below the level of consciousness". Thus the tacit assumption of researchers such as Tate, that women are free to choose a body-identity not already determined by cultural constraints, is based on circular reasoning. Consider for example her claim below (Tate, 1999, p. 40):

The women's views about their existing bodies and ideas about the bodies they want to have, lead to a preferred 'latent' image. This inner schematic becomes evident through its inscription on their bodies by exercise and diet. Through this image, and its concomitant body project, women experience their bodies as being controllable. This image is a re-working of the dominant aesthetic into the desire to be bodied in a specific, personally aesthetically pleasing way, according to the women's own design.

Yet if the "inner dialogue between the discourses of the 'social' and the 'personal' which women enter into in order to construct the latent image and its manifest inscriptions on the body" (ibid., p. 41) is clearly tied to the socially constructed world, it is difficult to see how this image can exist outside of its cultural norms.

The concept of a 'gender habitus' can be linked to ageing in research such as Tate's and Frueh's. Although ageing is not explicitly addressed in Tate's study, she draws on Bordo (1995) in referring to "the necessity within our culture to not have soft, loose flesh"; 'feminine' muscles are neither 'excessively' bulky nor 'loose and flabby'. However, I would suggest that loose, untuned flesh is also a

construction of the 'aged body' in societies in which physical decline is associated with ageing, and where loss of bodily control (or self-control) is equated with a looseness of the body's boundaries. Frueh's (1999) paper on midlife women bodybuilders echoes Tate's discussion of the socially subversive practice of inscribing a 'latent image' of the desired body onto one's physical body, but here subversion is examined specifically within the context of ageing. Through these practices of weight training and body-building, the 'age-graded, age-grading habitus', as one might call it, is supposedly subverted. The anxiety of helplessly watching one's body 'fall apart' in old age (e.g. Beauvoir, 1972; Woodward, 1991) is replaced by a reaffirmation of bodily control (Tate, 1999).

However, we have seen that a major point of contention with arguments such as those of Frueh (1999) and Tate (1999) lies in whether the women bodybuilders' 'personal design' can be considered to be truly 'theirs', implying that it is independent of cultural norms. Tate, for example, asserts: "A woman who weight-trains ... seizes power by operating outside the system which would judge her on the femininity of her appearance. Her inscription, her body becomes the site of struggle over the power to divine beauty. This is a struggle which women win through becoming bodied as *they* have defined" (Tate, 1999, p. 47).

What is represented by Tate as a personal choice is in fact achieved by a practice that moulds a 'cross-dressed' body *type*, one which juxtaposes body codes of femininity and masculinity. This results in what Richardson (2004) sees as a form of 'queering' normative representations of gender. Richardson's study investigates the practice of extreme bodybuilding among men, a practice that he terms as 'queer'. He uses the term 'queer' in its broadest sense, not as a synonym for 'gay' or as subverting heterosexuality, but as a means of subverting normativity in gender performance, "as something that describes mismatches or incoherencies between sex, gender and sexuality" (Richardson, 2004, p. 50). Moreover, the extreme bodybuilder, through diet and exercise, creates a body type that queers the norms of how the male body should look, rather than what it should do. Richardson (*ibid.*, p. 51) contends that:

The most important difference between bodybuilders' bodies and other "built" bodies, such as the powerlifter or sumo body, is that other athletes are judged on what his body can *do* while the bodybuilder is judged on how his body *looks*. Bodybuilding is therefore a culturally specific activity that exalts, as its aspirant template, the professional, competitive bodybuilder's physique.

The work of researchers such as Richardson is very important for my study on gendered ageing in dancers, because it implies that the image of the transgressive body is firmly embedded in the 'gendered habitus', whether through conformity to norms or in defiance of them. While it cannot truly break out of the mould of oppression by age-grading and gendering cultures, it may also be possible to 'queer' the age and gender appropriate norms through practices such as bodybuilding and dancing. Moreover, Richardson's study is also important because he argues that extreme bodybuilders, who queer gender norms, are judged on physical *appearance* rather than the masculine attribute of physical *power*. In this sense they 'queer' gender norms *and* are feminized men. They remain within the gendered habitus but subvert it from within.

Like bodybuilders, dancers produce and maintain a highly visible physical body type, and, while performance is important, they are also judged on physical appearance. In contemporary dance there is more scope for 'built-up' bodies, bodies that attempt to resist stereotypical gender norms, such as the dancer Louise Lecavalier as discussed by Albright in her chapter "Techno Bodies" (Albright, 1997). Yet Albright notes that built-up bodies may not be radical transformations of normative female dancing bodies (Albright, 1997, p. 31):

In what ways can a woman physically break out of the traditional representation of the "feminine" body, and in what ways does the "feminine" become literally reincorporated to accommodate the changing fashions of physical being? For, as Judith Butler quite rightly warns us in her book *Gender Trouble*, "the female body that is freed from the shackles of the paternal law may well prove to be yet another incarnation of that law, posing as subversive but operating in the service of that law's self-amplification and proliferation.

Albright explores the possibility of how such an alternative body might be constituted; that is, an embodied subjectivity that is not tied, through antithesis, to the norm. This also has implications for gendered ageing, as it would be even

more tempting for older women to build up a muscularity that defies their construction as increasingly 'frail' and dependent as they age, a musculature that endows them with an embodied counter-narrative to the conventional one of physical decline. Indeed, as we have seen, midlife female bodybuilders were the subject of Frueh's (1999) research. In order to avoid reifying the (masculine) norm through becoming its antithesis, the task for feminists lies in theorizing alternative forms of embodiment for older women that do *not* refer to that norm.

It is the performance of dancer Jennifer Monson that for Albright offers an alternative physicality through a technique that "because it is grounded differently in a flow of energy ... reads more resistively, fitting neither the traditional picture of the feminine dancer, nor the current fixation on the fit, tightly defined, muscled, female dancer" (Albright, 1997). Albright is concerned with "how the ideologies of gender are layered throughout women's bodies and movement styles", and states the obvious by maintaining that "the development of muscles alone doesn't necessarily give us a female physicality that resists gendered norms" (ibid., p. 54). On the contrary, like Gullette (1998), she interprets such body work in terms of a cultural anxiety in relation to ageing (Albright, 1997, p. 54):

The obsessiveness with which American culture approaches fitness and other forms of body management makes me feel that we are desperately trying to refuse the fundamental experience of the body's inevitable loss. Building muscles creates an illusion of the body's strength, an illusion of stability (which of course requires vigilant maintenance). In this sense, I see Lecavalier's and Streb's relentlessly pumped-up movement style as embodying a deep cultural anxiety about the inevitable fragility of human bodies ... Fit and strong, young and daring, these dancers embody the possibility of success, the productive harnessing of physical energy.¹⁰

Monson's body, however, signifies a physicality that can defy the ageist imperative to cease performing in 'later' life, without the use of muscular

¹⁰ If, however, as this comment suggests, ageing bodies have been overcoded by 'loss' and 'decline', then why shouldn't we fear ageing? And would we cease to fear it if it were recoded as 'change', as ongoing transformation?

appearance as armature against the discursively perpetuated 'use-by date' (ibid., pp. 54–55, emphasis mine):

Monson's explosive physicality supports a more profound experience of her being-in-the-world. While certainly linked to the strength of her muscles, Monson's body is not entirely defined by them. When I watch her dancing, I see a continuity, a movement history that bespeaks a future as well ... Monson's dancing is *grounded in a way that can accommodate change*. Although she is strong and rambunctious now, *I can readily imagine her continuing to dance, even as her body begins to register the passage of time*.

Albright's comment suggests that experimental body art and experimental dance and movement practice may expand the potential for creating alternative female (and male) corporeal subjects, subjects that are 'grounded in a way that can accommodate change'. In my study, I will ask whether experimental dance practices might offer alternative ways of constituting gendered corporeal subjects, ways that *can* accommodate changes in physicality and expressiveness through age.

2.3 Gender and ageing in theatrical dance

Commentators have noted the neglect of dance by disciplines such as sociology, cultural and feminist studies (see Desmond, 1997a; Thomas, 1993, 1995, 1997). For example, Helen Thomas points out that despite the fact that dance can arguably be linked with processes of gender roles and identification, dance has "not been drawn on as a significant resource in opening up the categories of gender", even though women such as Isadora Duncan, Martha Graham and others played a strong part in developing twentieth-century modern dance in America (Thomas, 1997, p. 5). In a similar vein, I would argue that dance presents a unique site for examining the operations of age and gender norms. However, until recently the integral relationship between ageing and gender in theatrical dance has been largely unexplored.

Dance scholars such as Hanna (1988) have argued that western theatrical dance has been a site of both the subversion of gender stereotypes and their

perpetuation within a patriarchal system, as epitomized in modern and classical dance respectively. From the turn of the twentieth century, women like Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Denis, Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and more recently Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp and other female dancer-choreographers figured strongly as leaders in modern dance, a trend which Hanna sees as “in part a rebellion against male domination in both dance and society” (Hanna, 1988, p. 131). These dancer-choreographers subverted the official canon of classical ballet and its vocabulary of movement and established schools and companies in which they were also founders and managers. In choreographer Senta Driver’s ‘role reversal’ lifts, for example, it is women who lift and ‘flip’ men, an unthinkable phenomenon in classical ballet.

However, while such women predominated onstage during the first half of the twentieth century, Hanna argues that this in turn led male choreographers to react by foregrounding the male dancer in a conventionally accepted, ‘virile’ way, characteristic of what she calls the ‘second phase’ of modern dance as male dominated and driven by aspirations to establish a socially valued identity for the male dancer. This culminated in the male ‘superstar’ dancer who ostensibly restored dance as a ‘respectable’ profession for men (see also Burt, 1995; Daly, 1997).

Ironically, such a gender-based ideology is ultimately self-sabotaging, as Daly (1997: 115) notes:

the fervor with which apologists invoked the rhetoric of difference in order to assert male dominance in ballet ironically echoed the very rhetoric—that some activities are ‘masculine’ and others are ‘feminine’—which had long contributed to the ‘emasculatation’ of the art form as a whole. The profession will never be truly destigmatized for men (or women) as long as the masculine-feminine difference is maintained, because it is due to this polarity that dance was dubbed ‘effeminate’ in the first place.

Burt (1995) claims that modernist and formalist views of dancing that traditionally dominated discourses on dance held that the highest standards in dance are ahistorical, and also essentialist, being generally based on a belief in

the metaphysical transcendence of the “base, physical facts of anatomy and gender”. Thus gender was seen as unchangeable and therefore irrelevant to analysis of dance. Such views, he maintains, “efface and deny the agency of the body in producing dance, [which] is of course gendered” (ibid., p. 31). More recently, however, the way in which cultural concepts such as gender are represented in dance has begun to be explored (e.g., Albright, 1997; Burt, 1995).

Burt (1995, 2001) has highlighted the relational nature of representations of gender in western dance, arguing that these representations symbolize larger, historically situated cultural norms. Burt contends that representations of gender are constituted by “discursive and affective symbols which are ideologically produced and historically and socially situated ... representation in dance is contingent upon beliefs about the body, and ... the gendered body is therefore an area in which the embodiment of socially produced norms is defined and contested” (Burt, 1995, p. 32).

Similarly, Albright (1997, p. xv) cites the emergence of interdisciplinary research and cultural studies for dance scholars as important for seeing the social situatedness of dance and dancers rather than studying ‘movement for movement’s sake’, as earlier researchers had done. Thus, the emphasis has changed from earlier cross-cultural studies using an anthropological framework (e.g. Hanna, 1988) to intra-cultural (predominantly western) research focusing on how cultural norms and customs might be represented in dance forms. Rather than identifying the presence of cultural norms in the representation of male and female dancing bodies, more recent research has focused on how cultural norms and customs might be represented and actively reproduced in dance forms.

Burt for example argues that “gender representations in cultural forms, including theatre dance, do not merely reflect changing social definitions of femininity and masculinity, but are actively involved in the processes through which gender is constructed” (Burt, 1995, p. 12). In the case of the male dancer, he maintains that gender ideologies, the conventions that ‘police and protect’

representations of masculinity in dance, inhibit all male dancers in the way they develop a personal style that expresses their sense of identity through dance (ibid., p. 47).

Theorists such as Foucault and Rose contend that 'the body' is itself a historical phenomenon, an outcome of a particular cultural, scientific and technical history (Rose, 1996, p. 183). The implications of this position are that any form of movement, from the highly stylized vocabulary of classical ballet to the way individuals walk and gesture in everyday social life, reflects culturally constructed rather than 'natural' or 'innate' regularities.

Whether occurring in a performing context or in social life, body movement, comportment, and presentation in general have been argued to signal something of the social status of the body that produces them (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Hanna, 1988). Dance forms such as classical ballet are culturally constructed, gendered and gendering corporeal codes that become embodied through practice, in the sense of reflecting 'masculine' or 'feminine' ways of dancing and moving. For example, in the 1980s dance researchers such as Hanna (1988) and Wilson and Moore (1982) argued that feminine and masculine styles of ballet dancing are not 'natural' but are rather an outcome of training. Wilson and Moore (ibid., p. 115) clearly note this in commenting on gendered classroom instruction practices in ballet in Australia in the 1980s:

A boy and a girl are taught very specific ways to stand, and the differences between the two sexes are cultivated. A girl is trained to appear softer and more flexible, and is primed for light and airy movements, the boy is taught to appear stronger. Both conform to society's stero-typical [sic] roles, and the image of a girl on *pointe* is totally out of date with today's woman.

Training in ballet technique therefore can be argued to involve the bodily inscription of gender-appropriate comportment designed to reinforce the normativity of the heterosexual binary. The body's muscular shape, lengthened and poised through many years of such inscription, becomes a generic

representation of its assigned gender, a signifier of a body-identity through the appropriate representation and performance of cultural norms.

Significantly, dance and dancers in western cultures are also historically linked to a popular cultural perception of gender identity and sexuality that is, rather unsurprisingly, linked to youth (Hanna, 1988, p. 19):

The power of dance to convey sexual imagery is ... related to its popularity and accessibility ... [I]n the 1970s dance came into full blossom coincident with the adoption of government subsidies for cultural organizations and the dissolution of the puritanist denial of bodily pleasure. American culture's preening hedonism, terror of aging, adulation of youth, and fixation on slimness paved the way for increased dance performance and appreciation. Onstage performers are young, strong, slim, and sometimes defiant of everyday limitations.

Ballet technique has thus been polarized into gendered styles of executing movements. These styles are based on body types that exemplify conventional heteronormativity, through what Cynthia Novak (1993, p. 43) refers to as 'sexual dimorphism' (men are larger than women and jump and lift, women are smaller, stretch and use finer body movements, etc.). They are also linked to youthful virtuosity and bodily control. Professional ballet privileges certain body forms or types that act as 'ideal forms' for these gender-appropriate styles of movement; as Foster (1997) puts it, dances are usually created for 'ideal' bodies, and these are *young* 'superbodies' that defer to normative sexual representation.

That the bodies of dancers cannot escape their classification by culture is an argument that also underlies theoretical positions such as that of 'gaze theory', the notion of women as 'objects of the (male) gaze', a perspective that gained popularity in feminist research on dance (e.g., Daly, 1987, 1997; Wolff, 1997; see also Banes, 1998, for a review). Gaze theory in dance draws on Laura Mulvey's pioneering paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey, 1975), in which the cinematic representations of male and female screen actors are argued to reflect patriarchal, masculine viewing positions, just as Berger's *Ways of Seeing* had done for painting (Berger, 1973).

However, the adoption of gaze theory in dance has been argued to be problematic in a number of ways, such as its unfounded presumption of an analogy between cinema and dance, as well as its inability to adequately theorize situations where the spectator is female. For example, Banes (1998) questions the appropriateness of 'gaze theory' in universally representing female dancers as passive objects of (male) spectators' scopophilic gaze. Nevertheless, it is useful in the sense that it highlights the fact that ways of looking at bodies on stage are already predicated on pervasive cultural gender norms. For example, its argument is that female bodies cannot escape 'appropriation' by a visual economy that marks them as objects for a hegemonic form of masculine desire (Wolff, 1997, p. 88):

The issue of women's viewing positions and possible identifications has been one much discussed (and disputed) in recent years ... The devastating implication of this work in general appears to be that women's bodies ... *cannot* be portrayed other than through the regimes of representation which produce them as objects for the male gaze, and as the projection of male desires.

The 'ideal' dancer's body, however, is a youthful body. Wolff aligns ageing (for female dancers) with the antithesis of the 'ideal' body, since she cites the ageing body as one of a number of potential sites for transgression of this ideal (ibid., p. 88):

What happens when the female body is affirmed and displayed, in defiance of the dominant ideals of the 'perfect body', acknowledging the reality of actual women, the diversities of shape and size, the functions of corporeal existence (eating, excreting, menstruation, sex, pregnancy, aging, illness)? The 'grotesque body', at least, should be immune from incorporation into the objectifying gaze.

Here Wolff associates those bodies that are different from the ideal as 'grotesque'. The association of the ageing body with the Bakhtinian 'grotesque body' suggests it is a body that possesses the power to transgress and subvert reified culturally normative concepts, such as those constituting what is culturally understood as female beauty (Bakhtin, 1984; Russo, 1994). However, it is questionable whether, given the limited performing roles available to older

dancers, portraying older bodies as 'grotesque' would be a particularly effective feminist strategy for subversion. Furthermore, there is always the question of what forms this resistance might take in order to be effective, that is, for older women's bodies to become visible and not in the process become culturally denigrated. What is of key importance is that notions such as the 'grotesque' subvert an understanding of concepts such as beauty as 'natural'; that is, as uninfluenced by cultural and social factors.

In the case of professional dancers, ageing becomes particularly problematic, as bodily control (virtuosity) and the capacity for culturally normative youthful representation are critical characteristics of the 'ideal' dancer's body. As Foster (1997, p. 237) notes:

Typically, a dancer spends anywhere from two to six hours per day, six to seven days per week for eight to ten years creating a dancing body ... Dancers constantly apprehend the discrepancy between what they want to do and what they can do. Even after attaining official membership in the profession, one never has the confidence in the body's reliability. The struggle continues to develop and maintain the body in response to new choreographic projects and the devastating evidence of aging.

This is incidentally the only reference to ageing in Foster's essay: a quality which manifests itself through its 'devastating evidence'. Bodily 'decline' is thus taken for granted, as 'natural', when in fact Foster's dancer's body is *already* aged and gendered in our cultural perceptions. She participates in her own gendered ageing by culture in her search in the mirror for the 'devastating signs of ageing', an act of self-surveillance fuelled by a precocious dread of ageing, constantly evaluating whether her body is nearing the end of its capacity for representing youthful beauty and consummate physical skill.

2.3.1 Gender and ageing in sport

When viewed as a performative practice whose participants are aged precociously, and in which the body signifies gender norms, ballet can legitimately be compared with other body-based cultural forms, such as elite

athletics and professional football. Football in its various forms is widely followed as a spectator sport in Australia. It also offers a useful contrast to ballet, as it is a predominantly 'male' cultural form. As McKay *et al* (2001, pp. 233-234) have argued in their analysis of gender inequities in amateur sport in Australia:

Sport in Australia (as in most other countries) has a profoundly masculine inflection, operating as a major means through which ascendant forms of masculinity are asserted, promoted, tested and defended against 'rival' articulations of masculinity and femininity ... as is the case with other popular social and cultural institutions, structures of power (albeit uneven and contested) can be readily shown to exist, while also being subjected to denial by those with a deep affective investment in the institution and its *mythos*.

McKay *et al* draw on Connell's (1995) concept of 'hegemonic masculinity', one that "refers to the 'culturally idealized form of masculine character', which stresses 'the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness', the 'subordination of women', and 'the marginalisation of gay men'" (McKay *et al*, 2001, p. 234). The footballer is thus valorized as an embodiment of a hegemonic representation of western working-class, heterosexual masculinity, where "One reason sport is such a resonant symbol of hegemonic masculinity is that it literally *embodies* the seemingly natural superiority of men over women" (ibid., p. 237). Significantly, the player acts as an icon to maintain and reinforce larger institutional power structures through an appropriately gendered performance. Also significantly, footballers are considered 'past their prime' at approximately 30 years of age, and like dancers retire from the field comparatively early in their adult lives.

Interestingly, McKay *et al*'s argument of a qualitative difference in the depiction of men and women athletes in the media is influenced by 'gaze theory'. The media "tend to admire the former for what they *do* and the latter for how they *look*. The thoroughgoing sexual objectification of the female sporting body in a manner akin to that of soft pornography, with the predominantly passive female athlete functioning as the object of the male gaze" (ibid., p. 238). As we have seen, gaze theory is problematic but it is useful in unearthing hidden

gender inequalities, whether these be in sport, dance, visual art, cinema or everyday social life.

What qualities that mark youth and masculinity, then, does the body signify in sport, and how do they become embodied and lived by the individual? Connell (1983, 1987) addresses the masculine qualities of 'force' and 'skill' that are nurtured in adolescent boys through the social practice of sport, qualities that imbue the masculine self with *embodied* power, as distinct from merely social or economic power (Connell 1983, p. 18):

What is learned by constant informal practice, and taught by formal coaching, is for each sport a specific combination of force and skill. Force, meaning the irresistible occupation of space; skill, meaning the ability to operate on space or the objects in it (including other bodies). The combination of the two is a power ... the capacity to achieve ends even if opposed by others. And at the same time it is a sensuous experience.

The performing body in football also reflects class delineations, as well as those of gender; specifically the hegemonic bourgeois, middle-class (male) management of the working-class male body's representation of 'brute strength'. Bourdieu (1984, p. 214), for example, referred to the 'common' values and virtues of football and other 'masculine' sports such as rugby, boxing and wrestling, once the province of the aristocracy, as "strength, endurance, violence, 'sacrifice', docility and submission to collective discipline ... and the exaltation of competition". Gender and class differences thus intersect in discursively constituting players in these terms.

Bourdieu delineated a relationship between social class and ageing, according to which working classes 'accept' ageing-as-decline more 'stoically' than middle classes, who see it as a source of anxiety.¹¹ Importantly, he linked age and sports participation to the 'classedness' of different forms of sport (ibid., p. 212):

¹¹ Gullette's (1998) population is, of course, American middle-class, white and female, hence her concern with the paranoia of ageing.

The relationship between the different sports and age is more complex since it is only defined—through the intensity of the physical effort called for and the disposition towards this demand, which is a dimension of class ethos—in the relationship between a sport and a class. The most important property of the ‘popular’ sports is that they are tacitly associated with youth—which is spontaneously and implicitly credited with a sort of temporary licence, expressed, *inter alia*, in the expending of excess physical (and sexual) energy—and are abandoned very early (generally on entry into adult life, symbolized by marriage). By contrast, the common feature of the ‘bourgeois’ sports, mainly pursued for their health-maintaining functions and their social profits, is that their ‘retirement age’ is much later, perhaps the more so the more prestigious they are (e.g., golf).

Note the ‘entry into adult life’ that marriage symbolizes, which Bourdieu maintained signals the abandonment of youth-oriented sports in working class individuals.

It is interesting to compare the equation of the male body in sport with ‘force’, ‘skill’ and ‘control’, to Young’s account of feminine motility, a motility that is also learned socially (Young, 1998a). Young defined feminine motility as exhibiting “an *ambiguous transcendence*, an *inhibited intentionality*, and a *discontinuous unity* with its surroundings” (ibid., p. 264). When a woman typically throws a ball, for example, she does not execute that motion with bodily confidence, but inhibits the power of her throw by not putting her full body into it. Instead, parts of her body are working against other parts, thus weakening the power and directness of the throw. As Young explains (ibid., p. 265): “In those motions that when properly performed require the coordination and directedness of the whole body upon some definite end, women frequently move in a contradictory way. Their bodies project an aim to be enacted but at the same time stiffen against the performance of the task”. What Young refers to as ‘feminine hesitancy’, in which she claims women underutilize their bodies’ real capacities, is not a natural weakness but is an outcome of socialization into normative feminine behaviour. Masculine power, an embodied power, is likewise not something attributable to ‘naturally’ superior strength or skill in male bodies, but something that male bodies learn over a lengthy process of socialization, one that accumulates over generations. Connell connects the construction of masculinity with ‘the social

power structure of patriarchy', through qualities that do not merely represent the phallus, but rather the body as a whole: "What it means to be masculine is, quite literally, to embody force, to embody competence" (Connell, 1983, p. 27). It is this hegemonic masculinity that informs culturally valorized spectacles such as professional football, a practice that Connell would term one of the 'cults of male physicality', in which youth is combined with force and competence.

However, the male body in dance fares rather differently. Burt (1995), for example, drawing on the gaze theory of Mulvey (1975), interprets theatre dance as transmitting gender more problematically for men, as always treading the fine line between homosociality and desire for other men in the eyes of the (male) spectator, and in Chapter 1 I discussed Weber's (2003) analysis of dance films such as *Billy Elliott* as involving a queering of heteronormative masculinity. The 'problematic' presence of males dance on stage that Burt discusses could account for the proportionally fewer men dancing, compared with those administrating, choreographing or directing—that is, not visibly dancing, but controlling which 'regulatory ideals' are represented and which are excluded. There is a cultural belief that dancing for a living is not seen as a legitimate occupation, a 'real' job, particularly for men (Leach, 1997, p. 18). In a masculine culture, the fact that many more women than men dance (and salaries are low), and that more men than women take choreographic and directorial positions in dance companies upon retirement (which are more highly paid than those of dancers) might plausibly reflect a gender inequity in the opportunities of dancers to transform physical power into cultural power or, in Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) terms, physical capital into cultural capital. It is quite possible that the effects of such inequity of opportunity will intensify as dancers age and are perceived as increasingly unable to represent cultural norms of youthful physical power and bodily control.

Cross-cultural comparisons of the relationship between gender norms and theatrical dance are also useful in highlighting the cultural situatedness of these norms and how they become embodied and lived. A notable example is Cheryl

Stock's paper on her work as a female choreographer with the Dance Theatre of Vietnam, in which she examines gender roles in performance, as well as complex institutional and informal gender and power relations within the company (Stock, 1998). This dance company performs both traditional and western repertoire, and, in contrast to most western companies, male dancers outnumber females.

Stock found the male dancers to be more energetic and also more direct in their connection with the audience than the female dancers, who had more difficulty with picking up the new movements, and showed no competitiveness with each other. However, they learned more easily when rehearsing apart from the men. The *embodied* normativity of comportment was impressive to Stock (ibid., p. 11): "What I failed to grasp, at first, was how deeply aesthetics, taste, conditioned modes of physicality and emotional nuances worked through every fiber and muscle of the body, particularly the female body". She relates this to the culturally specific virtues of mandatory female behavior as prescribed by Confucius (qualities of modesty and self-effacement), which appear not at the level of the dancers' conscious attitude but at the level of *comportment* in dance. These self-limiting feminine 'virtues' resonate with Young's modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility, and spatiality in western women (Young 1990). Again, what is perceived as a 'natural' gendered mode of comportment or movement is enculturated so deeply and imperceptibly that it becomes naturalized.

2.4 Ageing in social dance

A key argument in this chapter has been that representations of gender and ageing in theatrical dance reflect wider cultural norms, based on extant research. Another means of supporting this argument is to draw comparisons between social and theatrical dance styles, to determine if there are age-based exclusionary practices in social dancing, or discourses that mark out dancers' bodies as 'belonging' to different age groups. This would strengthen the

argument that theatre dance forms such as classical ballet reflect wider cultural norms, rather than somehow a 'pure' aesthetic domain separate from everyday life and transcending it.

Cultural studies research on dance (e.g., Desmond, 1997a, 1997b; Thomas, 1997) has focused on social dance forms as diverse as rave (Pini, 1997), tea dances (Thomas & Miller, 1997) and set dancing (O'Connor, 1997). In more recent years, such research has also focused on older dancers. For example, Helen Thomas and Lesley Cooper engaged in a one-year project involving interviews, filming and observation of social dancers aged 60+ in various clubs in London and Essex, in order to study what social dancing means for older people (Thomas, 2004, 2003; Thomas & Cooper, 2002a, 2002b). Thomas and Cooper (2002a, p. 690) suggested from their findings that participation by older people in social dance such as the popular modern sequence dancing provided a range of benefits for these dancers, including:

[1] 'continuity within change': a generation that was brought up with a certain set of cultural experiences, codes and behaviours, can continue to define itself in these ways without being challenged or ridiculed ... [2] a way to enter ... a second 'teenagerhood' where after leaving behind the burdens of family and jobs they can now have 'fun' ... [3] a sense of community or 'communitas' ... [4] a way of becoming visible and aesthetically pleasing, not so much to the public at large but to each other, in ways that their particular generation appreciate ... [5] a sense of worth and achievement in the skills learnt through dancing ... a kind of cultural capital that dancers can draw on in later life.

They also suggest that a sense of belonging, of community, might become stronger as people age, and that dancing provides a safe haven within which to enjoy and re-experience some of the pleasures of their youth. The safety of modern sequence dancing for these dancers is not merely confined to the dancing itself, however, but is also inherent in the context of the dance hall. This milieu is circumscribed by familiar social codes such as formal dress and etiquette, codes that they were socialized into in their youth and with which they feel comfortable and protected from social ridicule. According to research such as

Thomas and Cooper's, dance codes and social codes are therefore strongly connected.

Social dance, unlike theatrical dance, does not require special skills or a particular body type, and is not intended as a form of public display in front of a paying audience. Yet the studies cited suggest that some forms of social dance, such as rave, can be seen to elicit ageist discourse, whereas in others, such as tea dancing and set dancing, age is not perceived as a barrier to participation. Pini's study, for example, highlights an ambivalence towards age that centres on the question of whether older bodies can legitimately 'rave'. Thus, while she notes that there have been "utopian claims made by women ravers regarding the apparent ability of rave to dissolve social divisions based upon sex, sexuality, age, race and class" (Pini, 1997, p. 118), these claims in fact point to age-grading as an exclusionary practice (ibid., p. 119):

All ... interviewees are between 25 and 30, which makes them relatively old for 'ravers'. However, this sample proved to be interesting in that these women—because of their age—seemed to have reflected more closely upon their experiences of raving. This is primarily because these older women feel they will soon have to 'give up' or 'let go' of 'raving', so that they don't become what one woman has described as 'saddies'.

Here, as in ballet and football, the body is marked as 'aged' after 30. This cannot be explained merely by the stereotypical binary of sexual display and youth, since in rave the emphasis is on the self experiencing ecstasy (often assisted by the eponymous drug) as part of a greater body, and not ostensibly on finding a partner (Pini, 1997; Gore, 1997).

In marked contrast are Thomas and Miller's observations on the participation of much older dancers in tea dancing, a form of ballroom dance. The set steps performed in unison are also reminiscent of the corps de ballet, but the bodies differ from both ballet and rave in that they are the bodies of 'old people' (Thomas & Miller, 1997, p. 107):

Despite the misrepresentation with which they are imbued, they serve to confirm the older generation as outsiders, as they dare to experience their bodies in alternative ways to those prescribed by late capitalism's consumer culture. Here were a smartly-dressed group of people, in the later stages of life, observing, almost without exception, the etiquette of the ballroom, sipping tea and enjoying particularly the sequence dancing, the pre-set dances which afford the safety of everyone moving in the same direction and doing the same steps at the same time. However, anything more than a cursory glance reveals an energised, skilled, heterogeneous activity practised not by 'old people' but by *dancers*.

Similarly, many participants in Irish set dancing in a study by O'Connor (1997) were no longer 'young' but in their forties, fifties and sixties. O'Connor's interviews of the dancers highlight the body's capacity to dance and move even in the face of increasing frailty, something which dance movement therapists working with older people have known for many years (e.g., Stockley, 1992), as the following comment from one of the participants shows (O'Connor, 1997, p. 166):

I often think it's something I could do for my life ... the granny when I'm still in my zimmer-frame (general laughter) ... again to go back to that famous night in Knocknagree, in Danny Connell's ... in the corner of the room ... in the same room with all these people dancing up in the air was a group of what looked like to me ... ninety-year-olds dancing the same dance ... they were doing it at a slower pace and everything but I thought that was wonderful.

O'Connor explains the distinction between younger and older social dancers by drawing on Frank's (1991) typology of the body, in order to link social dance forms, such as disco or set dancing, to how differently-aged body-subjects relate to others and to their world as predominantly self-related or other-related. The first of Frank's body types is the 'mirroring' body which narcissistically embraces a consumptive lifestyle, a body that Frank describes as "open to the exterior world but monadic in its appropriation of that world" (Frank, 1991, p. 61), and it is one that O'Connor aligns with dance styles such as disco and rave. A second type is the 'communicative' body, which is 'other-related'. According to Frank, the communicative body is in a "dyadic relation with others who join in the dance and it implies an associatedness which goes beyond one's own body and extends to the body of the other(s)" (ibid., p. 80). According to Frank, the

‘communicative’ body is not narcissistic but associative. O’Connor thus contends that particular body-selves are associated with particular dance styles, on the basis of age. In doing so, she implicitly invokes the notion of an ‘intersubjectivity’ in the construction of a body-self in social dance styles in which older people participate, styles that are age-inclusive.

It would be somewhat of a generalization to suggest that, in the second half of life, humans (holding the question of gender for the moment) move from a narcissistic to an associative, other-inclusive phase in their social dance practices and preferences. However, it is consonant with Jung’s (1967) belief that the first and second half of life are markedly distinct from each other, with the narcissism of youth ceding to the spiritual search of the more mature individual. This view is too homogenizing and implicitly prescriptive an account of how and why people choose to both dance and to stop dancing, and it does not explicitly take into account constraining factors on the experience of dancing, such as gender, economic circumstances, or class. However, its value lies in its linkage of ageing with increased associatedness and intersubjectivity at the site of the body.

We can ask, then, what other bodily experiences might social dancing offer, and how might these change as dancers age? Implicit (and sometimes explicit) in the dance research cited in Thomas (1997) and Desmond (1997a) are a number of themes which may be useful for such analysis. These include: *spectacle*—to display virtuosity or athleticism; *“losing self”*—a synchronicity with something larger, being incorporated into a larger social constellation, or connecting with a community of equals (‘communitas’); *euphoria*—drug- or endorphin-induced wellbeing, positivity, harmony with self and environment; *self/bodily control*—confidence, shaping the body as a fine-tuned instrument under one’s control; *self-expression*—emotional communication by use of the structure of dance (movement vocabulary, rhythm, music, etc.); *sexual expression/narcissism*—attracting attention and interest from others (can be for overtly sexual reasons, e.g., flirting or finding a partner, or more generally to be admired); *exercise*—a preferred way of working out and stress release; and *“recovering self”*—a way of

incorporating past into present (memory), of maintaining continuity of self. All of the above relate to the self, and could be useful in asking what might constitute a subjectivity through dance, particularly as dancers age. Some of these themes will be drawn on in my analysis of the comments made by interviewees in Chapters 4 and 5.

2.5 Body-subjects and dance practices

No study to my knowledge has as yet addressed how a mature subjectivity can be developed through the practice of dance. However, a number of dance researchers have in the last two decades focused on how different dance forms can produce different dancing subjects (Foster, 1986; Gardner, 1997). This research is important in understanding how mature dancers use their particular practice in developing a mature subjectivity. Susan Leigh Foster, in her seminal book *Reading dancing: Bodies and subjects in contemporary American dance*, delineates four transition points in the history of western theatrical dance: allegorical dance in the late renaissance; the neoclassical dance of the 18th century, the expressionist dance of the early 20th century, and experimental (or what she calls 'objectivist') dance from the 1950s to the 1980s. Each period is characterized by a distinct mode of representation of meaning (resemblance, imitation, replication and reflection), and also creates distinct dancing subjects (Foster, 1986).

In a related vein, Sally Gardner takes up the notion how different dance genres can produce distinct dancing subjects in her Masters' thesis *Lying down in the air: Feminism, (new) dance, and representation* (Gardner, 1997). Gardner outlines three main ways in which subjectivity has been inscribed in western concert dance, and contrasts three dance genres, classical ballet, early modern dance and early postmodern dance. The first, classical ballet, privileges stability, legibility, and coherence in the constitution of the body-subject, and a concern with expressing transcendental, universal concepts, for which the body becomes a medium. Early modern dance also produces a stable subjectivity, in terms of a

psychic interior 'truth', which Gardner argues is therefore a (culturally) 'universal' truth. Graham based work, Gardner points out, shows an illusion of a unity of the 'I' and its feelings, the psychic and physical. Physical appearances are here made to look as if they coincided with an interior truth (ibid., p. 40):

The dancer performs a kind of suture—binding together, in the illusion of a unity, the 'I' and its feelings, the psychic and the physical ... in Graham's work ... it is the dancer's job in training and in performance to bind her mobility to the demands of psychological meaning, to make physical 'appearances' seem as if they coincided with an interior truth. In order to participate in the construction of meaning in the dance the dancer must interpret what she does in terms of this interiority. Her dancing is thus the means of producing a stable subjectivity.

In the third approach, seen in the experimental concerns of American postmodern dancer-choreographers in the 1960s and 1970s, subjectivity is redefined as always already in process and in movement. That is, in the more experimental approach movement is taken as already encultured in the body (ibid., p. 41):

The idea of a powerful interiority which had driven earlier forms of Modern dance was thus rejected. Movement came not from individualised, subjective choices, needs, desires but was rather *already there* as the medium of sociality ... The question was not how to make the body mean what you wanted it to mean but rather how to shift and destabilise the meanings with which the body was already laden—but in addition how to allow the body a significance of its own. (original italics.)

Elsewhere, Gardner notes that these experimental dance practices in the 1960s subverted the conventionally beautiful and (economically) productive body, to reinscribe and represent bodies in alternative ways (Gardner, 1996, p. 51):

These practices involve a redefinition and reinscription of the body as animate and 'thinking' in its own right in a context where most processes of bodily inscription, such as in sport and in traditional forms of dance training based on classical ballet, are 'disciplinary' in the sense that Foucault uses the term. Alternative movement practices tend to subvert the disciplinary production of docile, productive bodies and of processes that reinforce dichotomous definitions of mind and body.

Subversion becomes possible by destabilizing culturally normative meanings overcoding the body, and also through allowing the body “a significance of its own” (Gardner, 1997). It is these experimental dance practices by choreographers as ‘pattern makers’ (Foster, 1986) that enabled a new dancing body-subject to emerge. As Gardner notes: “Dancers working in these kinds of practices understand and experience their bodies as animate ... not simply as instruments that the mind or the will directs towards certain purposes” (Gardner, 1996, p. 52). The traditional body-mind dichotomy is replaced by “a proliferation of kinds of bodily knowledge and bodily representations” (ibid., p. 51). There is thus a crucial difference between classical ballet as a ‘discipline’ and more experimental dance practices in constituting body-subjects, and in how dancers express and represent the meanings of movement in different approaches to dance (Foster, 1986; Gardner, 1996, 1997; Jowitt, 1988). In relation to the question of how different dance practices can accommodate the development of a mature subjectivity, might not then experimental practices offer greater flexibility for older dancers than classically-based dance practices?

Gardner’s analysis suggests that it is through more experimental dance practices that transformation of subjectivity becomes not a problematic phenomenon to be captured and explained, but rather an intrinsic element of development; not a ‘disruption’ of a ‘normally’ stable subjectivity but instead a productive component in the ongoing (re)constitution of a subjectivity always in process. The self is thus able to be established and constantly re-negotiated *through* difference, *through* change, rather than through norm-referenced continuity against which aberrations are defined. Maturity may here become a productive rather than a limiting condition in the constitution of the body-subject of the dancer, because it can enable the abandonment of outmoded structures that through repetition and reiteration have become emptied of meaning. Perhaps this is part of the reason why some dancers tire of classical ballet and turn to other genres or retire altogether. For example, consider the following comment from former Australian classical dancer Ulrike Lytton (Trotter, 1997, p. 41):

I couldn't enjoy doing *Swan Lake* for fun (and fun is very important to me). I was more exhilarated by the idea of being able to truly embody the soul of the swan and express the deepest meaning of the drama despite the requirement of skill and precision. Once I had achieved that there was no longer any need to repeat it over and over again.

For this performer, in 'embodying the soul of the swan' she gave form to a concept of timeless, transcendental beauty that became emptied of meaning through repetition over time. It no longer has any productive potential for this dancing subject.

Another perspective of dancing body-subjects, and one that has significance for the study of mature dancers, is Jose Gil's account of the Cunningham dancer's body. Gil, in theorizing Cunningham's dancer's body, speaks of a 'virtual body', a body composed of a heterogeneity of (organic) bodies, one that not so much lacks a core (body-self) or a central point of origin for movement, but possesses the potential for multiple cores, multiple points of balance – what he refers to as a 'metastable point of balance' (Gil, 2002). It is this *virtual* body, Gil argues, that emerges in the attempts of Cunningham to devise a new 'language' of movement through negation of the hegemonic corporeal code of ballet. Gil's contention is that the grotesque, virtual body, in contrast to the classical, organically unified body, is fertile with possibilities, able to develop new corporeal codes, and able to transform itself in a way that the classical body never can.

There is an intriguing affinity between Cunningham's 'virtual body' and the grotesque or 'carnavalesque' body. For, Gil maintains, unlike the 'organic' body, the 'virtual' body is not unitary. Rather, it is formed from a "multiplicity of organic virtual bodies ... an impossible body, a sort of monstrous body that prolongs gesture into virtuality ... composed of a multiplicity of virtual bodies, where heterogeneous movement can coexist" (ibid.). The classical unity of the singular body of the dancer is thus fragmented into a heterogeneity of bodies potentially existing within the one organic body. The grotesque or 'monstrous' body is monstrous because it is 'unreadable' by reference to normative cultural

conceptions; it defies the classical canons of unity that 'properly' constitute the organic body.

One major implication of Gil's position for ageing theory is that, because they no longer conform to the canons of what constitutes a classical body, older dancers have an opportunity to 'transform' themselves through their practice, to forge hybrid mature subjectivities. This negates the traditional perception that, as they age, dancers take up dance practices that make fewer demands on the body (and, I argue, that are also less culturally and economically valorized), such as character dancing or more experimental contemporary dance and body practices. Instead, the very cultural perceptions that create the expectation that older dancers will perform the corporeal codes of mainstream dance 'less well' or to dance 'differently' paradoxically serve a *productive* function, for they enable them to pursue dance forms that exponentially expand their capacities for developing new personal corporeal codes (what I refer to as 'individual movement projects'). From this perspective, necessity is the mother of invention, and physical ageing thus enables the *expansion* of the body-self through dance practice, where this practice is not static but instead open to new discoveries, discoveries that directly stem from the maturing of the body-subject.

Thus the virtual body differs from the 'classical' body in that it is constituted by heterogeneity, disruption of existing structures, lability, and a process of being in flux. Rather than merely disrupting or negating normative codes (whether in dance or in western social life), it throws into question the whole process of cultural normalization altogether. For it is not so much a matter of interrogating or negating norms (indeed, the very act of so doing would reify them) as of whether they are relevant to the choreographer's (or the performer's) concerns.

Does this heterogeneity indicate that the 'virtual' body reflects a 'dispersed' subject? Gil's model suggests otherwise, for he posits a foundational consistency underneath this heterogeneity of the 'virtual' body, one that is organized in such

a way that the most apparently uncoordinated movements are able to achieve a unity that approaches a new corporeal code, the birth of a new way of moving, one that has a foundational logic. This foundational logic has affinities with Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of the flesh, inasmuch as both suggest a form of primordial and pre-rational 'glue' that enables specific modes of being—and dancing, as a bodily expression of being. While this is debatable, the virtual body is explicable in terms of Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh'. For, while it represents a heterogeneity (dispersion) of movement structures, this apparent dispersion is subtended by a foundational consistency. It is not a substance or an organism, but the pre-rational, creative force that brings Being—and movement—into being. For Merleau-Ponty (1962), the body-subject is the primordial and pre-rational basis of meaning in the world, and therefore there is a foundational consistency underlying the dispersed, heterogeneous 'virtual' body that organizes movements accordingly. Analogously, I argue that there is a 'foundational consistency' in movement and the body in the ambiguous signification of older dancing bodies.

2.6 Institutional constraints and structural gender inequality

Earlier I argued that both the predominance of female dancers on stage and their gendered style of technique can be understood as an outcome of the construction of culturally taught gender norms, norms that become embodied over time, through a process of reinscription. How then might what Hanna (1988) has termed a gender 'prestige hierarchy' operate in Western dance companies, and how might it limit (younger *or* older) male and female dancers' opportunities in economic and symbolic terms? Furthermore, what might the implications of becoming increasingly 'age-marked' be for men and women dancers?

In this section I will focus on existing research in Australia on dancers' transition into other careers, in order to identify dance institutional attitudes towards dancers retraining while they are still dancing, in preparation for their next career. One of the questions I want to ask is whether opportunities for

transition from performing are structured to disadvantage older dancers, particularly older female dancers. I have already noted that ageing represents an ambiguity that becomes problematic to social classification. This ambiguity also surrounds the concept of 'older dancers', and the representational capacities of older performing bodies in dance, and it influences wider institutional attitudes towards, and opportunities for, female and male dancers in transition.

Hanna presents what she terms 'prestige hierarchy' in western theatrical dance as a case of gendered social inequality, according to which the opportunities for female dancers to enter prestigious non-dancing positions are reduced in comparison to those of male dancers due to stereotypical expectations of gender roles (Hanna, 1988, p. 121). Hanna contends that:

dance is to some degree occupationally differentiated and sex segregated, separating the performers, choreographers/composers, and directors/managers—the nondancing positions being more powerful and male-dominant. Women have less mobility across these career segments than men. They are rarely trained in other disciplines or in team sports that aid managerial skills. Whereas marriage or teaching are postperformance options for women, and most university dance departments are chaired by women (from modern dance), teaching, choreography, and management of larger-income enterprises have been career developments for men.

Further, Hanna argues that this situation has been historically consistent throughout the 300-year development of ballet in Europe and the United States, where, although women were the main focal point on-stage, "Offstage, men retained control as ballet masters, choreographers, directors, and producers, and theater directors. They determined the work rules and chain of command: who held which rank and danced which role, how often, and with whom" (ibid., p. 126). As evidence, she cites statistics from the 1980s that show a marked gender imbalance in managerial positions of most major ballet, modern and ethnic dance companies in the US, with the largest ballet companies all under male management (ibid., p. 127).

While retention in dance company at managerial level after retiring from performing would then be more favourable to male dancers, what she presents is

an oddly gender-neutral view of ageing dancers in terms of irreversible bodily decline. Consider the following comment (*ibid.*, p. 121):

A person's career as a performer is short-lived because the instrument, the human body, ages and can no longer meet the physically strenuous demands; consequently, dancers retire in their thirties and forties, usually without pensions and retirement plans. The dancer also risks the ever-present hazards of physical injury.

Here it should be noted that, in addressing the fate of the ageing dancer, Hanna follows the tradition of failing to distinguish dancers by gender and includes male and female dancers in one homogeneous collective. Where she does specifically deal with gender inequity in dancers' subsequent career choices, she has been accused of resorting to a type of essentialist, liberal feminist conception of gender (see Daly, 1989). Moreover, Hanna's universalizing rhetoric reflects a naturalized and widely shared cultural belief that the overarching cause of retirement for dancers is an irreversibly diminishing physical capacity for strength and endurance. It also ignores the importance of a host of other factors impacting on dancers' decision to retire, factors which may have little to do with high levels of physical endurance and virtuosity.

There is a modest body of research in Australia on the situation of dancers in transition, a term that refers to a change from a dancing career to a non-dancing career (see, e.g., Arnold, 1989; Beall, 1989; Page, 1989; Ryan, 2001; Throsby & Hollister, 2004; Trotter, 1997; White & Guest 1995). However, it soon becomes evident from what research there is available that the nature of transition in Australian dance companies has until recently been largely 'informal', and consequently there is potential for the economic exploitation of dancers.

For example, a project on career options for dancers (CODA) in Australian dance companies (White & Guest, 1995) found no official guidelines on dancers' transition in the eight Australian dance companies surveyed, with only one of the companies making a significant contribution to dancers' transition, and six

out of eight personnel interviewed (management and artistic directors) unaware of any dancers' transition programs in Australia.

Moreover, while in the CODA study key dance industry personnel supported the concept of transition assistance in general, they expressed concern over the possibility of dancers taking too much time off from their work, and of touring commitments prohibiting participation in retraining courses. The larger companies felt unable to assist dancers in transition on an individual basis and most key personnel believed that assistance should predominantly come from 'outside' (i.e. through government funding) as their company's funding was too limited to provide financial support for dancers.

It is worthwhile here to briefly summarize the problems of career transition for dancers and dance companies reported by White and Guest (1995, pp. 55-57), in the light of this institutional lack of concern with formal assistance. For dancers, these included denial as a defense against stopping dancing; a lifelong narrow focus on dance at the neglect of general education; and little free time and energy to pursue other interests and skills. For dance companies, problems identified included the perception that planning for another career might distract dancers from performing at their best; limited funds, time, or expertise of companies in assisting retraining of dancers; erratic work hours (including evening and weekend work) and touring commitments which make it difficult for dancers to attend retraining courses. For the wider community, they included the fact that the relatively low wages of dancers provided them with limited financial resources for full-time study or retraining; the inapplicability of government training schemes that are designed for full-time school leavers undergoing vocational training courses; and the difficulty of retraining for a second career because of financial commitments (such as mortgages and family support needs) that school-leavers did not as a rule encounter.

In the CODA study, key managerial and artistic positions in larger, 'mainstream' dance companies were found to be more likely to be occupied by

men than the smaller, more experimental companies. A pilot study, by Rogers, Baldock and Mulligan (1993) on career opportunities for women in the performing and visual arts in Western Australia, likewise highlights forms of structural gender inequality in opportunities for performers and artists. For example, women artists and musicians reported greater time poverty, relative to men, as a consequence of child rearing responsibilities, a phenomenon which the authors note has persisted in spite of concerted efforts by the Australian government to implement EEO policies implemented in arts organizations such as galleries, dance and theatre companies, and the music industry.

Rogers *et al* (1993) found that, in the case of orchestra performers, these policies currently offer little assistance to women, with possible reasons for failure being “pronounced patterns of homosociability in orchestras, and childrearing responsibilities which make it difficult for women to find the practice time and the creative energy that is essential for demanding principal positions in orchestras” (ibid., p. 5). Likewise, in the visual arts and crafts, there emerges a structural inequality in the hidden handicap of artists who are mothers of young children while trying to fully realize their artistic potential. The authors outline the detrimental impact of this inequity on the careers of the female artists in their study (ibid., p. 9):

In the world of art, the exhibition of an artist’s work indubitably enhances an artist’s standing as a professional. A woman artist with young children, however, cannot produce as many works as a male artist who does not have child rearing responsibilities, and the time between exhibitions will in all likelihood be considerably greater for the female artist than for her male counterpart. Further, there is also the commercial reality that the period of preparation for an exhibition—longer for a woman with young children—well may preclude the sale of works during that time.

While the impact of childrearing responsibilities on career was not addressed in dance in their study, a finding consonant with the CODA study was that women reported a preference for employment with smaller dance companies, which they saw as not only offering them greater opportunities in terms of access to positions, but were also more likely “to embody a vision of art which was

women-oriented and able to express the ‘women’s voice’’. At the same time, however, the funding budget of these smaller companies is correspondingly smaller and more precarious than for the larger dance companies. Rogers *et al* delineate a qualitative difference between large and small dance companies in gender representation in key positions (ibid., p. 3):

In dance as in theatre, there was a clear dichotomy in gendered representation between large and small companies, with women being substantially better represented in many key positions in the smaller companies, and ... preferring to work in this environment—one which (as women in theatre) they saw as less hierarchical, and which allowed them far greater scope for innovation and creativity.

Hanna’s (1988) gender prestige hierarchy in dance (in the tendency for men to predominate in key management positions) thus receives provisional support from these two Australian studies. Rogers *et al* noted a relationship between the size of the dance company, its predominant genre of dance, and opportunities for employment for female choreographers and artistic directors. These opportunities they found to be gender equitable in small dance companies, but not in the more mainstream ballet companies.

Significantly, the authors also posited a gender distinction between ballet and contemporary dance from their interviews with women working in dance, one that differentiated the genres of ballet and contemporary dance on a hierarchical versus cooperative dichotomy (ibid., p. 70–1), with ballet companies perceived as a male preserve characterized by a hierarchical structure and process, operating within a traditionally male-defined framework led by a male authority figure, while the smaller, more ‘fringe’ contemporary dance companies permitted women to play a major role as artistic directors, and were characterized by a co-operative, consensual and democratic structure and process that allowed women more flexibility and scope for decision-making.

Overall, then, we find some evidence that structural gender inequality might detrimentally affect the financial and social wellbeing of dancers in general, and of dancers in transition contemplating entry into managerial careers within a

dance company. This inequality is likely to be exacerbated by the informal nature of retirement policies and transition programs for dancers in Australian companies, where such policies and programs exist at all.

The most extensive study on dancers in transition to date was commenced in 2003 by Australian Professor of Economics David Throsby on behalf of the Research Center for Arts and Culture at Teachers College, Columbia University in the US, in which ten countries participated in a country profile, including Australia (Throsby and Hollister, 2004). The study includes surveys of a sample of 4000 current and former professional dancers in classical, modern, indigenous, commercial and show dance, from Australia, France, Switzerland and the US, which includes an Australian country profile.

Unfortunately Throsby and Hollister did not address gender beyond the observation that their sample was predominantly female: "Dancing is a career with high percentages of women artists. Three quarters of current dancer respondents, and 65 per cent of former dancer respondents, were female". A sole Indigenous participant also meant it was impossible to conclude anything about the situation for Indigenous dancers in Australia. Nevertheless, their work is useful in illuminating the economic plight of those in body-based professions such as dance in which youth is a prerequisite for employment, and in which ageing spells "exit, stage left", without a pension or formal assistance in retraining for a second career in early midlife.

So far, I have considered the ways in which dance institutions in western cultures might constrain opportunities for 'ageing' dancers, and that the informal nature of transition support in Australia exacerbates gendered structural inequality in dancers seeking to change careers, which includes young *and* older dancers. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, I will deal more explicitly with the dancer's body and possibilities for conforming to, or subverting, these constraints as they are negotiated in the practice of dance and in the constitution of a gendered, ageing 'self'. At this point, I will foreshadow an argument that

springs from the contention of Hanna (1988) and others, that dancers retire because their bodies can no longer *physically* cope with training and touring. This is an issue that I will develop more fully in Chapter 4. I will examine the proposition that older bodies are culturally inscribed and perceived as 'lacking' not merely the 'male' qualities of stamina and strength but also a culturally constructed and perpetuated embodied form of capital, one that is essential for the appropriate bodily signification of culturally normative age- and gender-based body codes. I will argue that gaining an insight into the role of culturally normative representations of youth and sexuality in dance in influencing our perceptions of older female and male dancers is crucial in our understanding of the ways in which we are gendered and aged by and within our culture, rather than by nature.

The work of Sally Banes (1998) suggests an alternative image to that of the physical decline of the 'older dancer', whose gender is notably often unspecified. In *Dancing women: Female bodies on stage*, Banes contends that variations of the 'marriage plot', a patriarchal trope that reflects hegemonic cultural values, predominate in forms of western theatrical dance. What this trope requires is for the female dancer's physique to reflect a specific point of her lifespan, namely, that she is in her youth and at the point of surrendering her agency to marriage, after which she becomes invisible (Banes, 1998, p. 6):

In dance, [the] conspicuous framing of the moment of marital choice is a favored theme ... the physical conditions of the vital people portraying the action in dance overdetermine the preeminence of the marriage plot. Although older dancers may still perform in ancillary roles, the central performers in both ballet and modern dance are young women at the peak of their powers as dancers. And on stage their job is to move—to be active. The medium of dance—lively young bodies, with a preponderance of female bodies, in motion—itself militates against depicting sedentary states (like domesticity) and leans instead toward issues of sexuality and the social governance of mating through the marriage institution.

Banes contends that, in both ballet and modern dance, the female characters are 'enmeshed' in the marriage plot, and that dances participate in cultural

discourses surrounding marriage. However, while the marriage institution has a patriarchal basis, patriarchal values are not uniformly reinforced (ibid., p. 5):

While individual dances may buck the trend and 'push' the marriage plot ... they are the exception rather than the rule. In fact, even in what is often seen as the conservative arena of the ballet stage, the general trend over the past century and a half has been toward questioning the values of marriage and monogamy.

The marriage plot addresses culturally normative social relations. Thus, to look at women's roles and the marriage plot is to examine kinship networks and to analyze how women fit in (or don't) according to the community's rules. These dances, Banes maintains, form narratives about whom one should or should not marry, especially in terms of class, but also in terms of incest taboos, endogamy versus exogamy, physical attributes, and disposition (ibid., p. 7). Further, in her research of dance plots Banes identifies a tendency to represent bourgeois rather than working-class values surrounding sexuality and marriage (contested or otherwise) in concert dance, in contrast to the popular stage.¹²

It is important to note here that gender and youth *in combination* are crucial in our understanding of the constraints experienced by older dancers. The contrast between Hanna's and Banes' statements suggests that, traditionally, retirement or retraining policies of dance institutions stem from an underlying, hidden ideology of an implicitly *nongendered* (and, as Grosz and other feminists would argue, therefore male) dancer's body that has become naturalized and unquestioned, and according to which age manifests itself solely as progressive loss of physical skill and stamina. It therefore becomes quite possible that normative cultural discourses and practices serve to mask the contingency of how we perceive and understand older bodies as something that is 'given' or 'natural'.

If this is so, we could theorize the gender neutralization of older dancers in discourse as itself masking the transgression, by that 'older' body, of a

¹² Such a thesis could account for why ballet has been traditionally considered a 'high art' in western cultures, and other forms, such as character and vaudeville dancing, have been comparatively undervalued.

fundamental but publicly unacknowledged cultural conflation of two conceptually independent attributes: the conflation of youth with beauty and sexuality, what, following Bourdieu, we might call 'sexual capital' (Martin and George, 1997; Caputi, 2003). The notion of sexual capital, which sets up significantly different cultural meanings of ageing for women and men, will be more fully developed in Chapter 4.

2.7 Summary and rationale

Several important theoretical positions in Chapter 1 have been further developed in this chapter. These centre on the constitution of a mature subjectivity in older age, a subjectivity that is gendered and in which the body and its capacity for signification plays a primary role.

In Chapter 1 I contrasted postmodern (discursive) perspectives on midlife as a period of resisting ageing by choosing from a multiplicity of potential identities, and psychoanalytic perspectives that view midlife as the onset of a reevaluation of the first half of life, of shedding the 'false wrappings of the self' and resorting to masquerade as a form of negotiating an ageist society. I also contrasted 'surface' theories of subjectivity, such as those of Foucault, Butler and Rose, with psychoanalytic theories, such as those of Jung, Biggs and Woodward, where the former position the subject as formed through culture and power, and the latter theorize it in relation to an inner 'truth'. My own position is an eclectic one, but leans towards 'surface' perspectives, as the self is always positioned within a larger social and cultural context which it negotiates and at the same time perpetuates or subverts through both discourse and bodily performance. In this Butler's and Diprose's positions are most useful to my study.

In the present chapter I argue that Butler's performativity theory is important for gender but also for ageing, as it enables us to perform ageing differently, and again the body is central in this performance, one that empowers older bodies to subvert normative ageist and sexist stereotypes. Diprose's notion that self-identity is constituted through body performance likewise reinforces the

importance of the body and its capacities for strategic signification as a means of potentially transforming stereotypes. Following Butler and Diprose I suggest that ageing and gendered bodies transgress (and thereby queer) normative body performance as they present incoherencies of gender signification and cannot therefore be 'read' as masculine or feminine.

I have also examined research in cultural and critical studies in dance, addressing the relation of the ageing body to the self. I began with Gatens' (1996) distinction between sex and gender and her concept of the 'imaginary body', a culturally constructed ideal self-image that conforms to predominant cultural norms, and a psychical image of the body-self that is lived in a patriarchal culture that privileges the masculine male. I then addressed Young's (1997) notion of gender as a form of seriality rather than identity, an important distinction as it positions older people as a passive social collective rather than in terms of self-conscious membership of a group, and their actions as prereflective and habitual rather than consciously motivated. This leads logically into discussion of Bourdieu's (1984) concept of 'habitus' as a set of structured and structuring dispositions that become naturalized, embodied by, and invisible to individuals. Turner and Wainwright's (2002) work extends Bourdieu's framework to the institutionally situated dancer's body, in the form of the 'dance habitus' produced by dance training – the embodiment of an identity of 'being a dancer' that becomes more naturalized than consciously adopted by individuals. The concept of habitus is important to gendered ageing, for according to Bourdieu's framework ageing is gendered and linked to social status (class) distinguished through specific body practices, which constitutes an 'age habitus' that delineates age cohort differences through specific techniques.

One of my key arguments is that representations of gender and ageing in dance reflect wider cultural norms. The argument that dance codes and social codes are strongly connected also finds support in research by Burt (1995), Thomas and Cooper (2002a, 2002b), and others. O'Connor's (1997) study of older social dancers also links age cohorts with orientation, where self-related dance

forms are practiced by the young and other-related dance forms are preferred by older people, and she draws on Frank's (1991) body typology to suggest that ageing may be associated with an increased orientation towards others, an 'intersubjectivity' that takes in the other and prefers age-inclusive dance styles rather than the narcissistic consumption and physical/sexual display of young social dancers. There is a link here with Jung's theory of the second half of life as a period of re-evaluation, which I discussed in Chapter 1.

Albright (1997) is mindful of the unavoidable increase in fragility of the body in old age, and suggests a feminist alternative form of embodiment for older female dancers which does not refer to the masculine norm of strength and stability, but offers the ability to accommodate bodily change in the ageing process, unlike the research of Tate (1999) and Frueh (1999). Taking up Albright's contention, I ask whether experimental dance practices are more conducive to alternative constitutions of a mature gendered subjectivity for dancers, and turn to research addressing the relationship between types of dance practice and distinct body-subjects (Foster, 1986; Gardner, 1997).

I concluded this chapter with a review of the transition research in Australia, which suggests that, contrary to claims by Hanna (1988) and others that cessation of performing is predominantly due to age-based waning physical stamina, this research indicates that there are a host of factors that adversely impact on dancers' decision to continue performing, and a lack of broad-based support of both male and female dancers in midlife.

What is evident from this interdisciplinary analysis is that ageing is experienced by dancers (and people in everyday life) not only as a *physical* phenomenon. Rather, it can be seen as including at least two other registers: the *economic* and the *representational*. The physical register is the sole focus of decline discourses that emphasize inevitable, irreversible physical decline with increasing age. However, the transition research covered in Chapter 2 and research in sociology and critical gerontology discussed in Chapter 1 clearly

suggest that a decline in economic power is associated with old age, and that this is gendered to the disadvantage of women (the feminization of old age). Research such as that of Featherstone and Hepworth does not address the structural inequality of old people in economic terms; it presumes unlimited access to the resources required to engage in prolific consumption in midlife, presumably because there is a tacit assumption that midlifers are also middle-class and financially secure. However, economic disadvantage has been shown to increase in older age, particularly for women, as MacDonald and Rich and others have suggested. The economic register is one that is fundamental to choice of lifestyle for older people, and should not be ignored.

The third register – the representational – is less easily empirically verifiable than the physical and economic registers, but it is no less important in understanding how ageing is marked and experienced by men and women, particularly in the dance profession in which youth, athleticism and sexual appeal prevail. In theatrical dance, older dancers have traditionally been relegated to marginal roles, and Banes' notion of the marriage plot provides an alternative explanation from that of physical decline that has been painted gender-neutral but is in fact implicitly masculine according to the feminists of difference discussed. The problematic categories of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' require perfect reiteration in bodily practice and appearance, and bodies that are easily legible as falling within one or the other category. However, both categories are based on youth being a primary defining characteristic, and older bodies represent an incoherency, an ambiguity, and therefore a queering of normative gender codes.

In the following chapter, I turn to comments from the interviewees, narratives that delineate a number of salient themes, which I will try to interpret in the remaining chapters by drawing on and extending some of the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapters 1 and 2. These themes emerged from the interviews, and were coded according to whether they occurred in narratives repeatedly across a number of interviews. That is, they reflected more than one person's point of view. They are also informed by the theoretical positions

outlined so far. The question is whether they support any of these positions or contradict them, and I will address this in considering each theme in the next chapter. It should be noted that the themes are not hierarchical, nor are they mutually exclusive, and that this should be borne in mind to avoid treating them as discrete rather than interconnected.

Chapter 3

Emergent themes

3.1 Methodology

In this section I address methodological considerations and practices informing the interviewing of participants in this study. Some difficult issues are also addressed, such as preserving the confidentiality and anonymity of the interviewees without sacrificing the integrity and personal meaningfulness of their narratives.

In the previous chapter, it was noted that very little research has addressed the gendered experience of ageing in dancers. Given this is a relatively unmarked research terrain, it was crucial not to impose prior theoretical assumptions and attempt to 'fit' the data to these preconceptions.¹³ In so doing, I would be running the risk of interpreting participants' narratives in terms of prevailing models based on the primacy of physiological decline, and thereby failing to capture alternative narratives of resistance to culturally normative decline discourses and practices.

To avoid this outcome, I adopted a 'grounded' approach in which the experiences narrated by participants could be subject to minimal constraint, and distilled into a set of recurrent themes that addressed dancing, gender, the body and ageing. The term 'grounded' in this sense is based on the principles of grounded theory as first developed in sociology by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and continues to be a widely used methodology in qualitative research, although it has also been soundly critiqued on issues such as its claims to predict and explain data through inductivist means

¹³ Research in gerontology has been criticized for unwittingly reinforcing and perpetuating the very myths it sets out to test (Russell, 1989, p. 22): "By continuing to focus on precisely those issues which feed the myths, gerontology in Australia has become an active participant in their reproduction".

while remaining unbiased (see Thomas & James, in press). Thomas and James (ibid., p. 25) argue that:

To use grounded theory involves a rejection of simple understanding. It entails an explicit denial of what we know and our ways, as practitioners (and as human beings), of making sense. For grounded theory elevates a certain kind of thinking while it demotes and eschews other kinds of thinking and understanding. In its hankering after order – with its fracturing, its axial coding, its categories and sub-categories – it seeks to impose a certain kind of patterning, shape, and even rationality. Via such procedures it thereby relegates the original voice – the narrative – of both the respondent and the discussant in the research exercise. By the superimposition of method, and the ultimate production, supposedly, of theory, it implies a dismissal of the direct validity and import of people's accounts.

However, I have chosen a grounded *approach* (rather than grounded theory) because of the exploratory nature of my study, therefore adopting the stance that theory is driven by data and refined by it rather than being imposed on the data (in this instance, participants' narratives about their life in dance). Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest that a grounded approach enables the researcher to interpret data in accordance with her or his assumptions of what the data will reveal, but can also accommodate alternative viewpoints and revise these according to whether new data supports or contradicts these assumptions. This is an important consideration inasmuch as it to some extent controls for biased perception of data as confirming what the researcher already surmises, and avoids ignoring evidence that contradicts the theoretical frameworks identified.

I therefore use 'grounded' simply in the sense that (a) I am working with data first to see whether it supports or contradicts the main theoretical positions outlined at the end of Chapter 2, and (b) I approach and interpret data with what Baehr (2004) terms 'theoretical sensitivity' which includes adopting a reflexive approach to one's implicit theoretical biases. Baehr (ibid., p.68) evokes the concept (or construct) of theoretical sensitivity as a synthesis of Strauss and Corbin's (1998) principles: "the abilities to step back and critically analyze situations; to recognize the tendency toward bias; to think abstractly; to be flexible and open to helpful criticism; to be sensitive to the words and actions of

respondents; and to have a sense of absorption and devotion to the work process". I have also deliberately drawn on an interdisciplinary, multi-theoretical framework to inform my 'theoretical sensitivity' and reduce the risk of structuring and interpreting data with reference to a single theoretical position.

Interviews were minimally structured to focus on respondents' experiences without constraining narratives by posing 'closed' questions. This strategy allows participants to voice their bodily experience of dancing and ageing, in the context of their unique, embodied history of dance. Initially I developed a questionnaire for the interview, which was designed to provide some minimal structure for participants' responses. The areas to be covered included the participants' early training, aspirations and expectations; the prospect/memory of leaving dance; how they experienced dancing over the years (i.e. in the course of ageing); current involvement in dance; current aspirations and future directions. Twelve questions addressed these issues in detail. After the first 12 interviews, however, it became evident that the questionnaire was structuring what participants had to say in a highly constrained way. What was intended to be a conversation about their life in dance became a stilted collection of questions and answers. Thus, while some interesting and valuable material emerged, this method was soon found to be inadequate for the present purpose; that is, to provide a forum for each 'voice' to enunciate her or his subjectivity in relation to gender, ageing and dance.

It therefore seemed more appropriate to use a life-history approach in pursuing the objectives of this project. Robert Connell in his book *Masculinities* (1995) and Gary Dowsett in *Practicing Desire* (1996) have both adopted this methodology in interviewing men about their sexuality and sexual practices in order to demonstrate how bodily experiences and practices shape sexual selves. Dowsett, for example, interprets the responses of his sample of homosexual men in New South Wales to investigate, among other things, how sexual practices can reflexively shape sexual subjectivities.

Life-history methodology has also been used in qualitative ageing research, including M. Sean Campbell's (1999) case study investigating how older people suffering from Alzheimer's Disease discursively constitute their identity as they age. It is not intended to offer a biographically factual account of a person's life in dance, but a way in which the researcher can understand the person's interpretation and meaning-making of the life events she or he perceives as significant, his or her interpretation of ageing and dancing, and herein lies its appropriateness for the present study. For example, Atkinson (1998), cited in Sean (1999, p.12) notes that a life history is "not the life experience itself but only a representation of it ... telling a life story is a way of organizing experience and fashioning or verifying identity". It illuminates our understanding of what 'being a dancer' and 'ageing' *means* to participants, not what it *is*.

A life-history method also offers significant benefits over more reductive, *a priori* data collection methods. One of these benefits is that it allows participants to talk unconstrained by set questions and choose which aspects of their experience to reveal. Dowsett's use of unstructured interviewing, he argues, "allows maximum flexibility for both interviewer and interviewee to follow any path they choose and yet always maintain the focus on the research question the researcher has chosen" (ibid., p. 53). This would allow participants a high degree of control over the flow of the narrative, and to identify themes of personal significance, some inevitably unanticipated by the researcher.

This procedure also provided a means of accessing not only participants' personal experiences but also the institutional constraints and expectations they faced in their careers as dancers. Connell presents a cogent argument for using a life-history approach in research concomitantly investigating individual and social facets, because of "its capacity to reveal social structures, collectivities, and institutional change at the same time as personal life ...[and] the interplay between structural fact and personal experience" (cited in Dowsett, 1996, p. 50). Therefore, the life-history method became an obvious choice for this study, because it facilitated the tracing of dancers' experiences of their dancing and

ageing as they occur within social and institutional matrices. While recognizing the limitations of this method, such as that data gathered in this way cannot readily be generalized to other samples, and that participants' recollection of their experiences may not always be factual, generalizability and verisimilitude were less important considerations than how participants placed their experiences in a context that was meaningful for *them*.

A further issue concerned the sensitivity of the subject of ageing, a term that is loaded with implications of physical decline and loss of the youthfulness so prized in western cultures and in theatrical dance. Connell's and Dowsett's subject areas can lead to highly intimate, personal narratives, and a structured questionnaire would leave respondents feeling vulnerable and therefore reluctant to freely share their experiences. Experiences of ageing dancers in ageist cultures can have a similar effect, and this became apparent in the early, more structured interviews, particularly with regard to the interviewer's discomfort in not being able to articulate questions on ageing in any terms that lie outside a presupposition that is already ageist. The question, for example, "What is an older dancer" immediately by implication frames the interviewees in this category (this is what the culture classifies them as!) and subsequently constrains their narratives, particularly when their experiences might differ from conventional discourses surrounding ageing. Instead, the participants were asked to recount their dance experience, from their earliest memories to the present time. This approach avoided generating any uncomfortable feelings associated with age-directed questions on the part of the interviewer, questions that might invoke sensitivity to ageism and discourage participants from speaking freely about themselves.

The remainder of the sample of participants was therefore interviewed using a much less structured approach, in which prompts were used by the interviewer to elaborate in more detail any events and issues raised by the participant that addressed the sites of interest of this study (bodily experiences of ageing, gender, and dancing). In this way, a narrative could emerge through a process of

discovery leading to critical questioning and refinement of the researcher's pre-existing assumptions.

A total of 21 women and nine men were interviewed over a period of three years, from October 2000 to August 2002.¹⁴ Participants ranged in age from 27 to 72 years,¹⁵ although most were over 40, and had participated (or were participating) in dance forms and body practices ranging from classical ballet to classically based contemporary dance, modern expressive dance and hybrid experimental dance practices. The diversity of dance forms was important in identifying any differences in the bodily experiences of ageing. All interviewees had danced, or were still dancing, in what could be considered as a professional capacity, where for the purposes of this study the term 'professional' was taken to mean that dancing was a paid job at some stage of their lives.

Interviewing took place in Europe (Germany, Ireland) and Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth). Participants were sourced through websites, dance organizations such as Ausdance (the Australian Dance Council), press articles, and word-of-mouth, and invited to participate by phone, letter or email. Some participants suggested others whom they knew who might be interested in participating in an interview. Interestingly, word of mouth proved to be the most effective way of sourcing participants, who were more likely to agree to participate if someone they knew had also done so, rather than answer a call for interest in a dance newsletter or studio notice-board.

Most of those approached were very interested in the questions the study posed and believed them to be important ones for dancers. A few declined to participate and others did not reply to the invitation. Interviews were conducted at a mutually convenient location, such as the participant's home, a performance space, or a quiet café. The advantages of interviewing participants at home included seeing visual material they offered to share with me, such as pictures of

¹⁴ This study began as a part-time project in July 1999.

¹⁵ For comparative purposes, five participants were less than 40 years old.

performances, or newspaper clippings. The purpose of the interviews was explained to participants prior to its commencement, and a consent form jointly signed by them and the interviewer at that time. Transcripts of interviews were sent to participants for purposes of verification and/or correction of the text. In some cases, additional material was volunteered by participants by return mail, which was added with a note at the end of the interviews. Some interviewees chose not to correct their transcripts. All but four interviews took place face to face, the remainder were conducted via telephone due to geographical remoteness from the interviewer.

Participants' age, gender and dancing status (whether practicing or not) were also included, and they were asked whether they were currently practicing or considered themselves retired from active practice. It soon became evident that it was difficult to establish criteria for what constituted 'retirement' from dancing, since even those participants who had 'officially' retired from dancing in companies took on occasional guest appearances and still considered themselves to be dancers, even if their performing opportunities were limited to the occasional guest spot. Whether an individual had 'retired' from dancing therefore proved to be too general a category to be useful. 'Practicing' was therefore taken to include casual, intermittent work and appearances as guest artists in productions, and was assumed if the participants explicitly considered themselves as such. The comments given are prefaced with each interviewee's 'age' label, and while this does carry the disadvantage of tempting us to interpret their experiences in light of their chronological age, it would otherwise have been difficult to articulate age as a variable in this study.

Since interviews were confidential, pseudonyms are used to identify the transcripts on which the following extracts are based. Confidentiality, however, emerged to be a major issue, and proved more complex than the mere assignation of pseudonyms when it came to transcription of the interviews. In order to ensure that participants could not be identified from reading their transcripts, it soon became evident that one would have to omit or alter any

details that would identify them by association. These included names of other individuals in their professional life who were very well known at least in the dance circles, works they had performed and/or choreographed in a particular year, and so on. This was a problematic issue, since the dance communities in the Australian states are quite small. Some participants listed many names that would be well known in their relevant dance circles and to audiences of these, and were easily identifiable through such references by association with not only names, but venues and dance pieces, as well as published texts.

This difficulty in maintaining confidentiality could not be resolved simply by rigorous 'cleaning' of all transcripts. Firstly, such a procedure would significantly reduce the flow of participants' narrative and leach meaning from their life histories. Methodologically, it also presented the problem of where to draw the line in blanking out or altering names and other details. For example, the naming of early teachers presumably would not render a participant easily identifiable, but the only alternative to global blanking of names would be to consider each instance on an individual basis and make an ultimately subjective judgment on whether to anonymize it or not, which would result in an unevenness in standardization of transcripts. The alternative was to represent anonymous comments from participants in the body of the research thesis, and to retain the authenticity of the complete transcripts in the appendix, with access to the latter restricted to examiners. For the reasons outlined above, this alternative was adopted in this study.

Themes emerging from the earlier interviews were used to guide discussions in the subsequent interviews, in a 'grounded' process intrinsic to life-history research. Relevant here were themes that addressed the sites of ageing, dancing, gender and the body, and that recurred across the interviews. Participants' observations from the 30 interviews were thematically organized according to the themes identified (see below). Sometimes comments bridged more than one of the above areas, which reflects the permeability of the conceptual themes; that is, contrary to empiricist tradition they are not assumed to be mutually exclusive,

congealed categories but rather concepts in dynamic, intricate interrelation with other concepts. These comments were placed in the area in which they were more predominant, according to the interviewer's judgment.

3.2 Overview of themes

The 'grounded', inductive nature of the methodology employed in this study resulted in the identification of eleven recurrent themes. In this chapter, these themes are described and illustrated with relevant comments from the participants, with minimal reference to theory. In the remaining chapters, they will be taken up in relation to some of the theoretical issues discussed in Chapters 1 and 2.

In summary, eleven themes emerged from the life-history interviews. They are briefly summarized below. Each theme, including its positioning within (or in contradiction to) the theoretical frameworks considered, is then described in more detail in the following sections of this chapter.

1. *Relation to transition* – how retirement from/cessation of dancing is experienced by dancers.
2. *Lifestyle and family* – how negotiating the demands of everyday life impinges on the experience and practice of dancing throughout maturity.
3. *Cultural valorization of dance* – dancers' experience of whether their status as dancers and their professional contribution is valued in the cultures in which they live and perform.
4. *Emotional self-expression* – dance as an embodied expressive emotional outlet for the self; variations in content of this expression.
5. *Bodily passion and sublime moments* – dancing as a form of addiction, a bodily passion, a connection with moments of transcendence and sublimity.

6. *Connection with dance, self and others* – dance as a medium for greater connection with self and others.
7. *Bodily conformity to dance codes* – conformity of the body to the codes of different forms of dance involving the legitimation of certain dancing bodies over others.
8. *The dancer's body-mind relationship* – whether this was experienced predominantly as a body-self dichotomy or as an embodied self, how this relates to different approaches to dance.
9. *Performing presence* – the development of gendered focus and stage presence in maturity and its relationship with social presence.
10. *Age and body management* – self-management, mindfulness of the ageing body's capacities.
11. *Performing one's age* – awareness of appropriate social coding for self-presentation in dance, and concern with protecting the social vulnerability of ageing bodies in ageist cultures.

It should be noted that virtually all of the participants had trained in some form of ballet-based technique early in their career, with notably few exceptions. Some had rejected the canons of this technique in favor of more experimental dance practices, but significantly almost all had been influenced (or corporeally 'inscribed') by ballet at some formative life stage, even if later to consciously attempt to discard it. This was unsurprising, since most of the participants were practicing in Australia, where ballet is considered the 'reigning' dance form, and where modern dance practices had never gained significant foothold. As Gardner (2003, p. 541) notes:

Modern dance began in the USA and Germany as a radical alternative to ballet, and the two have been clearly separated, especially in the USA. Such a duality has never been clearly established in Australia, where ballet—as esthetics and a system of values and training—remains the standard for all

Western theatrical dance and what is known as 'contemporary dance' has usually owed more to the physicality and theatricality of ballet than it has to modern dance. The absence of distinct, developed modern-dance practice and esthetics has largely precluded the possibility of a postmodern dance culture. Postmodern dance was brought to Australia but its practitioners found less than ideal conditions in which to develop a domestic practice.

This balletic tradition has implications for ageing and the practice of western theatrical dance in Australia, where in this study the latter is defined either through or against the balletic tradition.

3.3 Themes

In the following sections, a fuller description of each of the themes is offered, illustrated with comments from participants. Where parts of comments are italicized, this reflects the emphasis interviewees gave to speech, rather than that of the interviewer.

3.3.1. Relation to transition

This theme and the following relate to the transition literature discussed in Chapter 2, in that the economic challenges of continuing some form of dance practice in midlife compromise the opportunities of making a living while dancing. Studies such as White and Guest (1995) and Rogers et al (1993) have outlined similar difficulties for this age cohort. It is compatible with Bourdieu's framework of physical and cultural capital, and poststructural feminist theory's concerns with structural gendered inequality in relation to older female and male dancers.

Two paths to transition were identified. Dancers either follow a traditional path of generativity (passing on knowledge to others) and reduced performance, or they pursued their individual or collective experimental movement projects. The first path can be related to a Jungian/Eriksonian framework, while the latter is more compatible with a Foucauldian bodily practice of self-development. The factors that influence retirement from dance are predominantly economic rather

than physical (although some felt they would retire once they felt ‘burnt out’ or no longer challenged), which discounts the theory espoused by Hanna (1988) and others that dancers retire primarily due to physical decline. Albright’s (1997) contention, that physical virtuosity is conflated with aesthetic ability in western cultures, is supported in the comments of dancers who often related dancing to various forms of sport (e.g., tennis, football) in which youth is important and the masculine male is culturally valorized (see *cultural valorization of dance* below), and peak performance refers to physical (i.e. youthful) rather than artistic maturity.

One of the key issues participants addressed was their understanding of the cessation of dancing, both in the sense of performing and in the form of an ongoing practice. By way of qualification, most of the dancers I interviewed, including some in their 70s, did not see themselves as ‘retired’ from dancing. They might no longer be attached to a company, or perform full-time, or dance in the style in which they originally trained, and their regular income might come from a non-performing activity such as teaching, directing, managing, or lecturing on dance or the performing arts—or an altogether different *métier*. However, it is clear that many of them still in some way perceived themselves as dancers, although they might subsequently qualify the definition of dance or call themselves performers or dance/movement artists. In other words, they had given up full-time performing in the conventionally defined sense, but had not relinquished their embodied identity as dancers.

This explicitly poses the question, ‘What is a dancer?’, as such responses strongly suggest that the reason that some participants preferred other terms, such as performer, dance artist or movement artist to describe themselves, might reflect their feeling that their ongoing movement practice did not fit in with the conventional margins of what constitutes a professional dancer, particularly in Australia.

Joanne (48, academic/performer): “There are people who will think that I *don’t* dance, perhaps, because it’s not of a particular style or within a certain framework. And I think I sometimes ... feel a bit strange about using the term ‘dance’ because it has such a strong connotation of particular practices in Australia that I think are still dominant. So I would call myself a performer more than a dancer now.”

Participants’ comments on the subject of transition can be described as falling into two broad categories.¹⁶ The first reflects a conservative, linear approach, where performing gives way in early midlife to teaching, passing on the knowledge and experience gained to the next generation of dancers. This approach can be described as an example of generativity, where the individual’s focus is on nurturing the emerging talents of others rather than the self (see Biggs’ discussion of Erikson, in Biggs, 1999). The once performing body of the dancer becomes the demonstrating body of the dance teacher, passing knowledge down to successive generations of students, a select few of which will be the next ‘star’ dancers. A system such as classical ballet has had a long tradition of this sort of transition, such that it has become an expectation.

Pia (60, dance lecturer): “It’s passing on my experience to the young dancers, the next generation, and I think that’s how it always works, people who taught me I remember what they taught and then how it works for me and so I’m trying to pass that on to the younger ones who are going to be the next, hopefully the next dancers ... in whichever field they go but it’s all a part of them, gaining information and knowledge.”

This is seen by some as a natural, unquestioned part of the transition from performer to teacher and nurturer of emerging talent:

¹⁶ Here I am leaving aside those who give up dancing completely and with it all involvement in dance related activities. While this group is important, it does not show how the relationship to dance changes over time, which is a question I am addressing.

George (37, director/teacher/choreographer): "I think really that's why it's an art-form; because...every now and then, in say the sports arena, and I know I keep going back to it, but it's so relevant in today's climate...is that every now and then a great cricketer comes along, and it's the same in dance; every now and then a great dance artist comes along, and everyone goes, 'Wow' ... And so it ... has to be done by the people who have had the experience and can pass on that knowledge. And I think it's important that those people, when they're retiring or about to step down from their performing career are recognized and *encouraged* to take on these elements of teaching or directing or choreographing, so that it's not lost."

The second approach is less well-defined, and less traditional. Dancers may choose to pursue individual or group movement projects and to continue performing, either as solo artists or in collaboration with other dancers. The form of dance they practice is less codified than ballet, and thus more amenable to movement experimentation, new ways of moving. Thus, while classical ballet is a fairly 'closed', highly coded system, the more experimental approaches to dance are more 'open', enabling artists to develop new movement structures. Concomitantly, there are no milestones that mark ageing, as age is no longer fixed by function (performer, teacher, examiner, etc.). In the words of one experimental dance performer:

Joanne (48, academic/performer): "A long time ago my age became irrelevant, and I think that's an attitudinal thing, that has some connection to what you're talking about. And I'm not sure when that occurred. But there is something in the work, and the inquiry that has contributed to that, I'm sure of it. It doesn't matter how old one is; it's totally irrelevant."

Here, dancing becomes a personal investigative concern, in which the body's kinesthetic intelligence is being continually deepened and extended. Reflecting on her exposure to exploratory approaches to dance, after early training in ballet, Alana notes:

Alana (43, choreographer/dancer): “The contact work and the release and the BMC [Body Mind Centering], it just opened up a whole new world for me and I felt like it took about three years after that year at the school ... to really integrate that stuff. And it’s still going on with deepening and deepening.”

Retirement thus becomes less defined, and even irrelevant:

Joanne (48, performer/lecturer): “I’ve never thought that I’d retired, and I’ve never thought that I’ve given up. It’s just evolved. (And are you retired?) No, not at all. I mean I don’t dance as frequently as I once did, and it’s very different to what I did at this early point of time. But to me *inside* the body it still feels like, yeah, I’m still dancing, still finding out something ... not different, it’s just a different level of information.”

3.3.1.1 Experiences of factors influencing retirement

As noted above, many participants expressed commitment towards continuing dancing for as long as they desired it. Retiring from full-time performing with a company was not seen as retiring from dancing altogether, and many continued to perform in some form, such as freelancing, making guest appearances, or becoming solo choreographer-dancers. While some mentioned significant external constraints, such as chronic physical problems, family commitments and prohibitive financial and funding considerations, many participants felt that, while it was difficult at times to continue, they were ultimately in control of their choice of when to stop ‘being a dancer’, and their ongoing corporeal engagement with dance evidenced a continuing passion for their art that does not decline with age.

Some of the respondents were performing as mature artists in an international dance company. Unsurprisingly, since their financial security was assured, economic constraints were less of a concern than internal cues as to when to stop. One participant describes this inner voice as a ‘message’ that directs her into the

paths she needs to take. Another's decision to continue dancing is an emotional one, a realistic self-awareness of her continuing need to give.

Sylvia (43, dancer): "The day when it stops I'll know. Somehow you know when it's time to do something else, you get this little message in your head or you start to feel a certain way, and you know it's OK, I need to change, or I need to do something, or I need to move. You get those messages, well I'm listening for them, so I'm waiting for when that message comes, within myself."

Marie (49, dancer): "If I would feel I'm burnt out and empty I would immediately stop, because then I would lie to myself, and that's the problem, I cannot lie to myself, I cannot pretend, I cannot pretend onstage, or in life ... and so that would be a natural instinct for me ... I'm not there yet, so I'm still burning, to say it that way, and I still have desires to express myself."

For others, a physical and mental sense of fatigue is taken as a cue for contemplating retirement:

Nicholas (63, dancer): "I'm getting tired. My body's tired, and my mind is tired. I love dance, I love to see and do it still, but now it's time I think to leave the stage and to say 'OK, I do something else'. It's a decision that my body asks and my mind asks, it's not really my self but I think I should do that now, it's the time to do it."

Yet others gave reasons such as no longer feeling challenged or involved:

Martin (41, dancer): "I think I will probably retire once I stop getting nervous, once I lose interest in what I'm doing. Once I feel that I'm not being challenged any longer."

Anthony (55, dancer): "I'm 55 now, so that's getting on in years, and as long as ... I think one keeps one's enthusiasm for it it's still ... it's definitely possible ... to do dance on stage of relevance for a mature artist to be able to do that."

These comments reflect a degree of autonomy and agency in mature dancers, one that does not primarily defer to social constraints and expectations in relation to ageing and performance. However, for many other participants the decision to leave dance can also be strongly influenced by factors not directly under their control, whether these be economic (such as lack of ongoing financial support), or physical (such as injury). This was particularly the case for many of the Australian dancers interviewed, who as mature artists enjoy little financial security and rely on project-based work. For one former dancer, a combination of her physical condition and the lack of state funding led to leaving dance practice altogether:

Emily (56, dance academic): “We’d still do classical classes as well as contemporary ... and then my hips gave up on me, so I don’t do it any more.”

Emily felt her body was no longer able to cope with the technical demands of dancing, and any attempts to engage in it resulted in frustration for her, as they resulted in pain. At the same time, the ongoing struggle with financial hardship compounded her decision to stop performing with her company, and move into an academic career in a dance-related area.

Another interviewee had direct experience of the struggle to make a living from freelancing in Australia, and at the time of interview experienced strong reservations about continuing in the face of economic pressure as a single father in midlife and on a meager, uncertain income. It shows how men, like women, can become embroiled in the problems of caring for dependant family members while pursuing a career that offers little financial security or comfort. This participant’s socially normative gender role as male-breadwinner is complicated by his single parent status, the absence of a second (i.e. partner’s) income, and the uncertainty and anxiety of undertaking short-term contract work. All these factors negatively impact on his experience of dancing in Australia in his 40s:

Magnus (46, contemporary dancer): “I’ve been thinking about trying to join [a major company for older dancers], but I can’t leave, I have to stay here,

because I've got another two kids now, that's three, so...I'm a single parent, it's too complicated for me to go...And the other problem with staying in the industry as an older performer is that you are more expensive to the company to employ, particularly if it's not a project ... because ... you need more money; you're not twenty anymore. You know, see because companies can employ someone for eight weeks, on \$500 or even \$800 a week ... (Why is that, because you get more senior rates?) Yeah. (So your salary has to ...) Yeah. It doesn't always, too; sometimes you have to basically accept the pay that people accept as what they should have, so that you can do the work. This country's still financially absolutely appalling when it comes to supporting dance.

It is these significant financial barriers that will impact on the decision of dancers such as Magnus to retire from dancing, even though he reports his physical ability to dance as 'still' as good as in his younger years. This observation is counter-intuitive to the commonly held myth, perpetuated by Hanna (1988) and others, that the primary reason dancers retire is because they are no longer able to meet the strenuous demands of performing and touring. Rather, what is happening in cases such as Magnus', is a situation where 'the flesh is willing but the funds are weak'. It is economic hardship, not physical decline, which predominantly influences retirement from a career as dancer.

In contrast to most of the participants, the Irish interviewee's decision to retire from performing reflects a seemingly dispassionate cost-benefit analysis of her investment in years of dancing as a form of capital, one that she needs to preserve. Her investment in dancing is justified by following the well-defined teaching/adjudicating career path in Irish dancing:

Sinead (27, Irish dance teacher): "I still love dancing, don't get me wrong, it's only in the last two, three years that I've found I'm happy I've changed ... But I feel now ... I should have put dancing aside earlier ... I don't regret anything that I've done about dancing, when I look back now I feel I spent a lot of time

on dancing, and maybe I shouldn't have spent as much time, but then again it's time ... this is my hobby and it's the best thing for me."

Like Magnus, Sinead presents her reason to leave dance in economic terms. Any physical need or passion she might feel for dancing is not acknowledged within this framework; Sinead's age in her field of dance, and the social meaning of that form of dance, can only be that of a sideline to her 'real' work; i.e. a 'hobby'. In the form of Irish dancing she participates in the retirement age is even earlier than in classical ballet. Dancers cease performing after 21 years of age when there are no more peer-based challenges. These follow a well-marked career path, with age acting as milestone marker:

Sinead: "I suppose an older dancer is over 20. You're called an older dancer over 20. You're called a senior dancer. You can't go on any more than ... Over 21, it's called a senior dancer. That would be the oldest you dance. We don't do ... middle-aged dancing. Irish dancing stops over 21. You retire, you go up and you do your teacher's, and then, at 30, you can do your adjudicator's, but you must have 10 years experience underneath your belt before you can go on to do your adjudicator's ... (And do adjudicators dance recreationally?) They don't do any dancing. No, no, no; they're just there to ... be a judge."

In general, however, participants believe that dancers retire too early and that early retirement policies of dance companies cut off dancers' performing careers before they reach their artistic prime. Martin, for example, refers to the athletic aspect of dancing (what he calls gymnastics) as lacking in 'personality', a quality that many participants identified as emerging in maturity:

Martin (41, dancer): "My entire career up to now has been a rehearsal, and now I'm performing. Now I feel that I am a performer. And this is the very big problem that I find with big ballet companies, that they retire people at 30 and actually they're just *starting* ... as a performer. I mean all these classical ballets and stuff like that, the only two people who are actually performing are the two lead artists, but it's basically just gymnastics. It's like in

gymnastics, you don't need any personality, you don't need to feed the audience with a smile or look or anything like that. Those people who do have it, you know that they catch the audience, whether they win the medals or not, those are the ones that are remembered."

Sylvia (43, dancer): "I remember, way back (laughs), when I was in my twenties, I saw a lot of ... older dancers stop dancing; older, you know, fifteen years older than me at that time, and I thought 'wow, what a shame'. I remember thinking like that. I never thought of it as being very old."

What these comments seem to refer to is a fulfillment of a culturally based expectation of retirement based on physical criteria alone; that is, as upholding the notion of a physical 'peak' beyond which the dancer's body experiences progressive physical decline. This expectation reflects both the prioritization of youth and physicality, and the privileging of the image of the dancer as *athlete*. The athletic component of dancing that is valorized in the technique of classical and, to a lesser extent, other mainstream forms of western theatrical dancers, is perceived in western cultures as increasingly problematic as men's and women's bodies age.

Ironically, this may be a contributing factor in the tendency for dancers to retire earlier than their peers of a generation ago. Several participants made the connection between dance and elite sport, such as Adam:

Adam (72, actor, teacher, examiner, ballet master): "(Did people tend to retire by a certain time of their life?) No, they went *longer*; much longer than what they do today ... I mean, dancers today want to retire at 25 ... because of the training—and this applies to all of the arts too, I think, but particularly ballet, because it's so physical—the training today is so good and so thorough that dancers reach their peak physically and technically at a very early age, like tennis players. It's exactly the same as dancers. So ... and they start much younger these days than we used to ... by the time they reach 20 they have wonderful technique, they get bored with it and want to do something else."

3.3.1.2 Hitting your peak(s)

The concept of '*peak*' *performance* was important to a number of participants, who saw a clear demarcation in age at which peaks in performing ability might occur. One describes two 'peaks' in a dancer's career, a physical peak (in one's late 20s to early 30s) and a sort of emotional maturity that arrives at around 40, when one has 'lived a bit of life':

Pia (60, dance lecturer): "It depends on what you'd think of as your peak. It's interesting because *technically* I would say your peak would be, you know, somewhere in your late 20s to early 30s, but *maturity* I think is in that 30s to 40, where you offer something else ... that's your strongest after you've experienced more ups and downs and things in life."

Another's comment focuses on the physical dimension alone, and the association of physical peak with inevitable decline, again tellingly drawing on the analogy between dancing and sport:

Marie (49, dancer): "Of course, naturally, it's like sports people, exactly the same. (Yes, retire when they're 22 or something.) Yes, they have their limit at, I don't know 20, I would say with dance 27, 28, you are at the peak of your strength, you are at your physical peak, where everything is the strongest. After 27 already you ... (You think that's true?) Slowly, slowly, but ... (For everyone?) This is what I learned, and I know also that when dancers develop here, I know from choreographers or teachers they get to 27, 28 and that is where you are at your best. But as I say, you know, it goes so slowly, thank God, we don't see that."

Yet the artistic 'peak' to which Pia refers is not subject to the concept of preparation-peak-decline; it is cumulatively built on personal life experience, and it distinguishes dancers as not primarily athletes, but rather as artists with expressive components of performance gained through maturity. Dance

institutions, however, are less concerned with artistic expressiveness than with athletic ability in an aesthetic form, as another participant observes:

Lynette (68, yoga teacher): “Companies are hung up on young, young, you know, teenage, early twenties. They have a thing about young dancers, and I feel that as you mature, you have absorbed more of what the philosophy and the actual movement is, than someone of eighteen, because they haven’t lived long enough to experience it yet.”

Another interviewee describes mature dancers’ experience as ‘leg mileage’, which includes not only a dancing body informed by life experience but also by an accumulated mindfulness of the need to pace oneself:

Cilla (37, independent performer, teacher): “I went and saw this ... performance the other night, of the students ... And they did a good job. But ... someone described it as, they don’t have the leg mileage that we have. They haven’t learnt how to pace themselves, because they haven’t had the stage experience. They’re young; they’re only just starting ... And that thing of being able to convey something on the stage without ... losing it because you get physically tired, or...you know, we’ve been *doing* this for 15 years or whatever, so ... we have just as much to offer as the elderly in the community do because of their life experiences. And I think it’s really a shame to see it all go by the wayside because people ... are so oriented towards youth. You can’t get youth, who haven’t had life experiences in relationships and stuff, telling you or showing you love, or death, or whatever, if they haven’t experienced it.”

Albright (1997, p. 57) commented upon “the prevailing vision of professional dance that equates physical ability with aesthetic quality”. Physical virtuosity is primary, artistry is secondary to such conceptions of what constitutes a dancer. Dancers who retire in their 20s and 30s ironically do so while still being perceived as having much to offer:

Pia (60, dance lecturer): “it’s very hard, you spend so many years sort of developing your art, you know, your technique, and it’s such a short time that you have to ... Time goes so fast, and then suddenly, so many dancers, I just feel they give up too soon, too young. And then there’s a gap there, for some it’s just really hard for them.

In contrast, a comment from a participant practicing a non-western dance form suggests how culturally specific this privileging of youth is:

Nina (29, Indian dancer/choreographer): “I think as you grow older your dance only becomes more mature and more ... with more layers rather than just expressing certain kinds of straightforward things. As you grow older with your life experience and experience as a dancer I think it only gets better ... the body is limiting you in some sense, but at the same time the dancer really doesn’t age like *that*, I mean ageing is a good thing, even for a dancer ... the dancers I’ve seen in India, a lot of them have really aged very beautifully, now you see that maturity in the face and their presenting themselves as a woman, and how they present themselves as dancers has become very powerful ... (Like a maturing into a ...) yeah, into a nice, strong person.”

As we have seen from the above comments, there is no clear-cut notion of ‘retirement’ from dance, and most participants continue to retain their subjective identification as dancers over maturity. They also highlight two general ways in which people maintain a relationship with dance through their ageing, either through a traditional, linear path of ‘generativity’, or as a more open-ended project of discovery of the body’s movement structures and resistances through more experimental dance practices. How people age through dancing is negotiated in one of these ways. In the first, age is a marker of generative activity (e.g., dancer, teacher, examiner), but in the second, it does not appear to figure significantly in the dancer/choreographer’s continuing movement projects.

For many dancers, continuing to perform means finding their own financial support once they leave dance companies or being supported by their working

partners. Project-based work yields no steady income, and dancers must after all eat, pay their bills, and sometimes support children or dependant relatives; the need to dance (physical, emotional, spiritual) is negotiated alongside these life contingencies. Where these are taken care of, dancers may 'listen to their inner voice', but sometimes the body gives out through injury, or the wallet is empty. Many participants feel that dancers retire too early, curtailing their careers as performing artists (as distinct from merely being technically accomplished dancers). 'Personality' was a term associated with maturity and the second peak, as was stage presence. These will be further developed in the following sections of this chapter.

3.3.2 Lifestyle and family

This theme is intrinsically related to the first and, like it, differs from the other themes in that it is more 'empirical' and deals primarily with the economic challenges of dancing and negotiating the economic constraints particular to midlife in western cultures. In this case the challenge lies in negotiating a reasonable 'work-life' balance between maintaining an economically viable career, providing a desirable lifestyle for one's children and continuing a practice that brings self-fulfilment (see *emotional self-expression* below). Female dancers as primary child carers (and male single parents) feel this burden most keenly, as they attempt to successfully combine performing or teaching dance with caring for dependant children in a milieu in which formal childcare has been largely absent. Poststructuralist feminist theories that focus on structural gendered social inequity, and Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'habitus' are more amenable to these two themes than psychoanalytic or postmodern perspectives, as they address the relationship of structural inequality to access to economic opportunities.

Professional dancers are, like everyone else, people who negotiate the social world. That is, no matter how insulated their dancing life might be from the rest of their social milieu, they also exist as embodied social beings with desires or needs for stability, including financial security, place, belonging, and significant

others. As Pia's comment suggests, these two selves—the 'dancer' self and the 'social' self—are at times in conflict:

Pia (60, dance lecturer): "It's hard [to leave dance] because it's something you've been doing day in and day out. It's like living in a world of your own and suddenly, at times you have to make that decision, at times it's because you're married to somebody whom you're not seeing, because you're touring and he or she is in one place ... or you want to have children, or, you know, there's various reasons."

The desire for children, for example, can be negotiated by postponing raising a family until the dancer's career is well established, as some female participants reported. The need to pay one's bills must be met in the short-term, however, and the endless search of the contract-based dancer or dance teacher for steady income can have dispiriting effects, to which interviewees such as Magnus, Michael, Cilla and Ruby can attest. Cilla was forced to choose between 'saving a marriage' or having a career. Lack of childcare facilities or paid maternity leave in smaller dance companies can translate into leaving dance to have children, which was the case for Margaret and Lynette, or, as Joanne did, moving into new directions. As embodied social beings, dancers try to accommodate these contingencies in a more 'flexible' career path, such as opting for part-time or project-based work rather than the more elusive full-time and pensionable employment with a dance company.

3.3.2.1 Caring for children and dancing

From participants' comments, it was clear that women's experience of raising children can reprioritize career activities, as for example in Carla's case, who started a family in her early 40s, after a rewarding performing career. She comments on her change from the single-minded career orientation of her youth to her present commitment to creating a quality family lifestyle for her children:

Carla (54, dance teacher): “I still enjoy [performing] when I do it, but I don’t feel I have to. I’m very happy to do projects every now and then, which I am doing, but I don’t feel that innate need for it any more. I think maybe by being a woman, and you physically have children, rather than just having children ... something changes, and you see things a little differently. (How is that?) Well, I think even just the physical changes, that you have a child, you know, and then it opens your world up when you have a child as well, you can’t be just in your dance world, you’ve got to be in the real world when you have a child ... and I think that’s very healthy ... Although they did come to the studio when they were little so they know that world as well, but you can’t subject them to just one way of living, one way of doing things.”

Cilla also planned to have children after having established her career as a dancer. However, like others she is aiming at a balance between her performing career and her family commitments. In Cilla’s words, her child is “a whole new career, and a much more important one” than her dancing. This view, while her own, is also aligned with the traditional ideology of women as primary carers for children and family in western patriarchal societies, societies which exploit (but do not formally support) the unpaid but significant labor of women in performing this care. It strategically preserves the concept of the extended family unit as a self-supporting base with (unpaid) feminine labor as its crux, where grandmothers and female relatives informally provide child care to enable mothers to work casually or part-time, and thus continue as taxpayers. At the same time, it promotes and naturalizes gender inequality in that it is women (mothers, aunts, grandmothers) whose significant contribution in this area is so taken for granted that it becomes ideologized as a ‘natural’ part of femininity rather than as an *option* for women. This of course also impacts on those who do not have access to this type of informal care (i.e., who might live apart from immediate family).

With some dancers postponing parenthood until their careers are established, the tension between the time-consuming labor of love that is mothering and their

desire to continue performing becomes a concern for mature female dancers. Cilla justifies her need to continue to express herself in dance (emotionally, physically and spiritually), as making her a 'better person' and mother, effectively redefining her dancing self as secondary to her parent self, while informing it in an important way:

Cilla (37, choreographer/dancer): "You know, and I know that there are ways to do it, I know I could have put my son in child care, and I could have gone back to work a lot earlier, but it's my choice that I *haven't* done that and I don't intend to do that either until he's really at school age, where I will start then to maybe seek a little bit *more* independence in that respect. So I know that's my choice, that's my bed, I have to sleep in it sort of thing. And I'm happy to do that because I see that there's a happy, healthy child who knows he's loved, and that's really rewarding in itself, and he's a whole new career, and a much more important one. But, by the same token, I also know that if I don't have an emotional and physical and in a way spiritual outlet which is what I have in dance, then I'm not the best person I can be. So I need to find that balance, and I'm just starting to sort of look at that now."

Many participants spoke of the ways in which they managed, with help, to continue their practice or performing in combination with having children. Since dance companies have traditionally made few provisions for maternity leave or child care for dancers, participants who continued their performing careers with young children often resorted to informal support from family (usually grandmothers) during this time. Sometimes older children would accompany their mother to classes or rehearsals, sometimes they were minded in turns by other dancers:

Pia (60, dance lecturer): "It's not easy, particularly in Australia because the [company] is a touring company; it doesn't tour as much now as it used to, but we used to perform in each city throughout the year. I was very fortunate because my mother actually became the baby sitter ... my father died quite

young ... he was in his 50s ... and I have two sons, and so when I went back to dancing, I was just fortunate that my mother was fabulous with them ... the boys loved her and so I had that backup support throughout my career."

Emily (56, dance academic): "when I came back to Australia I went to Darwin, because my parents both lived there at the time ... and that was just prior to the cyclone, so as circumstances would have it, after the cyclone they were looking for people to work with children after school ... so I started teaching even though I had decided I was just going to be a mother and not anything else ... (Oh, you had young children on your own?) Just one ... at the time ... (Did you take the baby along to classes?) I think initially my parents looked after her ... three years later she was, or five, she used to come along to classes."

Vera is one of those participants who had no extended family support, but relied on a combination of formal and informal sources of child care. These included a playgroup and reciprocal babysitting with friends:

Vera (49, dance academic): "I have three children ... and when I had two young children and I had a dance company, where I was a performing dancer, I had a full-time position ... and I didn't really have any help at all; I mean I had a partner, a husband, but you know [laugh] ... but you mean, no, I didn't, I mean you just do it. (The company would look after the children when they were younger?) No, I used to go ... there used to be a school, there would be a play school or something ... or they go out with friends, and then ... we would take *their* friends when we were free, so there would be a lot of children-sharing."

Others, like Carla and Joanne, combined their care for their young children with training or teaching, which offered them the necessary flexibility to continue their involvement in dance. Here, an embodied identity of 'mother' exists alongside that of 'dancer' (or dance teacher); neither is submerged by the other,

and this requires some ingenuity and resourcefulness in order to be accomplished:

Carla (54, dance teacher): “I didn’t think I was going to start so soon, but somebody rang and asked me to come and teach when my son was only a few months old, and I said, ‘well, OK, I’ll come, but I will bring the baby’. So he came and I sat him in one of those little bouncinettes, which is easy when they’re tiny and I would just feed him in the middle of class. I said, “Look, this is how it is. If I need to feed him I’ll feed him, you just keep working”, basically. [laugh] And that worked very well until he started crawling, and then he started hanging onto your legs [laugh] ... so then we had to start to try to do other arrangements ... (Did you practice, have a practice regime?) What, at home? (Yes.) Well, I tried to, but that’s not so easy. As soon as I would sit down on the floor to do some stretching there’s a little thing that jumps on top of you, really.”

Joanne (48, dance academic, performer): “I can remember going into class and having the back of the stroller as a barre and trying to continue. Well, it makes you not grip the barre too tight, because it moves ... And then going to meetings and having a baby with you.”

Others still, like Lynette and Margaret, took a more traditional route and left their company in their 20s after discovering they were pregnant. Lynette’s fairly brief career as a ballet dancer with a major North American company ended when she became pregnant; she left partly through choice since she was finding the discipline too restrictive:

Lynette (68, yoga teacher): “I had a baby reasonably soon thereafter, and a baby is very time-consuming, you know, you don’t have time to dance ... that sort of thing ... (Did you have help with, did someone look after the baby while you were taking class?) Yeah, but you see that wasn’t easy either, you know, and it just made it much more difficult to have the freedom of doing

what I needed to do when I needed to do it ... People don't always like babies dumped on their doorstep, you know."

Margaret enjoyed a career with a major state dance company, and retired from dance in her early 20s due to injury. However, she had been aware of the expected path towards retirement for female dancers. Evident in her comment below is an awareness of the transparency of social expectations ('I went for that image' of marriage and family):

Margaret (49, high school teacher): "(So what happened to you when you had your back injury?) Well, that really closed the door. I mean I already saw the door a hundred times as a dancer anyway. Unfortunately...(At 22?) At 22. [laugh] Well, you got married, didn't you; you had a family. So, yeah, I went for that image, and I went for that. But something told me that that would not be enough."

It should be pointed out that the dilemma posed by attempting to combine parenting and performing is, although predominantly, not exclusively a feminine experience, and can also be a challenge for men. Anthony, for example, would like to see the establishment of a dance company for mature dancers in Australia, along the lines of NDT 3 in The Netherlands, but he is prevented from realizing this aim by his consciousness of the need to preserve his young family's quality of lifestyle. His case illustrates the dilemma many mature artists keen to establish new opportunities for their peers encounter; being time-poor and geographically restricted:

Anthony (55, dancer): "There's certainly a number of people around who I know are interested in working with more mature artists ... somebody ought to ... do something. People say, 'why don't *you* do something'. I think, oh yeah, I'd love to do something, but ... I don't know, it's ... it's a big struggle to do something like that, and it would require sacrificing a lot of the lifestyle one has at the moment. I'm referring to our time with children, things like that."

The complex combination of maturity, lifestyle constraints and financial viability also makes it difficult for mature dancers like Anthony to continue to earn a living from working in dance in Australia, where younger dancers are competing with mature dancers for limited opportunities:

“[My wife and I are] very fortunate to still be able to work within the dance ... I hesitate to say industry because it’s hardly an industry ... in the dance profession, but you have to juggle teaching and a little bit of choreography here and there and ... We still want to perform as much as possible, and obviously those opportunities are ... well, there aren’t as many opportunities for older dancers to do things ... (In Australia?) Probably all over the world.”

The irony of the relative inequality of opportunities between Australia and some European countries, in the conditions available to dancers committed to family responsibilities, is not lost on him:

“It was obvious that we should come back [from overseas]. And so, maybe had one stayed there we would have had positions as lecturers at the University or ... heads of departments which I had been offered and things like that ... I would have had a nice superannuation package and [laugh] things, that I suppose one has to consider but ... we certainly don’t have that here, because we’ve just been freelancing, and it’s been the freelancing that has enabled us to ... probably do more things with the kids ... than a full-time position may have allowed us.”

Sometimes goals took forms other than immediate family, such as caring for one’s future wellbeing. Peter, who ‘settled down’ and purchased a house before he turned 40, feels this would have been financially impossible for him if he had continued his career as full-time dancer:

Peter (68, retired, dance teacher): “I came back to Adelaide and bought a house. I was almost 40, still dancing well, looked years younger, but I thought, gee, I really need to be thinking about my future now. I’d never been

out of work, I was always working, but dancers were never highly paid ... And I kept thinking, I saw a lot of sad cases of people who were older, who just lived in rented places, not that there's anything wrong with that, but ... they had a bedroom, they shared a lounge room with other people, and I thought I'd want something better than that for all the years I've worked."

For Peter, the spectre of spending his old age in shared rental accommodation motivated him to stop performing and take on more 'bread and butter' work in television in order to ensure he received the lifestyle he felt he earned, to have 'something better'. Chronological age was not specifically an issue for him; he feels he could have continued in his current career, but he had rather reached a life stage where owning his own home meant security for life, something which would become more important for him as an 'older person'. Thus, it is not physical ageing that is primarily important for participants such as Peter. Rather, what matters for him are the meanings and consequences of being an older performer in a poorly remunerated profession. For him this took the form of producing something enduring for his years as a dancer, something that would benefit him for life.

In summary, comments from participants suggest that dancers, like other embodied social beings, negotiate goals such as parenting and/or having a 'home base', but these goals are difficult to achieve even for the full-time dancer performing and touring with a company. Sometimes achieving these life goals meant choosing a more flexible career, such as freelancing, or taking part-time work to earn a regular wage in order to sustain their dancing activities, or in securing more regular work, such as teaching. In very few cases, however, was dancing regarded merely as a 'hobby' or sideline, despite the enduring social perception of non-professional dance as such.

Considerable conflict must therefore be experienced by dancers, particularly women (but also men, as Magnus' comments show), in attempting to combine what they felt was 'good' parenting with their decision to continue dancing, and

as participants' comments indicate, they negotiated these conflicts in various ways. In the face of social pressures for them to give up dancing, and even though they are mindful of their bodies' changing physicality that is so commonly read as 'decline', and continue. This reflects an agency and resilience in dancers as they mature. It also sheds some light on why many dancers retire from, but never totally abandon, dancing. Economic security, enjoying quality time with their children, and a sense of 'one's own place' are some examples of different but important goals for dancers in midlife. Combining such goals with continuing dancing practice is analogous to the 'working mother', a feminine dilemma; dancers could arguably be seen as having a similar social status.

The economic foundation of a dancer's career therefore profoundly influences his or her career path, particularly when combined with increasing family responsibilities, such as caring for children and paying the mortgage and bills. For example, many participants who left companies for various reasons, such as being fed up with company politics, having children, or no longer feeling challenged, try to continue performing on a project-by-project basis. However, some participants frankly state that the insecurity of their income makes performing on a project basis an unaffordable option for them as parents of dependent children.

3.3.3 The cultural valorization of dance

This theme addresses dancers' experience of being valued as artists within their culture. According to interviewees, in western cultures such as Australia, dance is culturally less valorized than other cultural forms such as football, and that mature dancers are even more disadvantaged than young dancers in this respect. Participants' comments align this theme with Bourdieu and other class-based frameworks such as those of Cranny-Francis (1995), Connell (1995) and McKay et al (2001), that cultural capital – in dance, the physical capital to represent cultural values – has economic underpinnings. Certainly, participants generally believed that the cultural value of themselves as artists was largely unrewarded in

economic terms; however, this awareness did not preclude them from following their chosen practice. Such self-awareness is not generally credited to classed subjects in sociological research such as Bourdieu's and Cranny-Francis's.

Participants frequently referred to the notion of being valued as an artist, of a sense of economic and social recognition and valuing for their contribution. This sense of recognition and public valuing of their work, which includes economic support, I call 'cultural valorization'. Participants sometimes mentioned the discrepancy between cultural valorization of, and economic support of, sport such as football and the comparatively under-valued field of dance. Interviewees also commented on the relative financial security of dancers in some European countries, where dancers retiring after 40 receive a lifelong pension.

In a consumer culture in which cultural forms that are economically lucrative receive more mass exposure and support than others, the extent of economic support given to practitioners of a cultural performance form (be it ballet, modern dance or football) is directly related to its cultural valorization. Theatrical dance, in contrast to football, is under-valued in Australia; and one reason for this might be that, in contrast to the hypermasculinity of football (see the comments by McKay et al, 2001, in Chapter 1), it has traditionally been perceived as a female and feminized cultural form. As one interviewee commented:

Cilla (37, independent performer, teacher): "Australia is two things; it's not a cultural country in terms of what you see in Europe or Canada or places like that, where the arts are *revered* and respected. Here it's a hobby, and if there's anything that's revered and respected it's sport. And *they* get all that regalia and ... My God, the financial rewards of being a footballer, it's ridiculous, it's so out of the water."

The imbalance between footballers' salaries and those of dancers were an issue for several participants, all of them women, who interpreted this as an indication of the lack of 'respect' for dancers in Australia relative to other

countries in Europe. In Australia, footballers are valued as heroes while dancers struggle to find work that is paid a pittance by comparison. McKay et al's (2001) argument here would be that this is because footballers are the embodiment of heteronormative hypermasculinity, performing gender through the qualities of force and skill which, Connell (1983, 1987) argues, boys are socialized into learning through the practice of sport.

This lack of cultural recognition or respect for dancers is endemic to how mature dancers are treated by dance institutions, and the relatively marginal economic status of theatrical dance in contrast to other mainstream cultural forms. Margaret expresses her profound disillusionment at the lack of cultural recognition for a former ballet star as the motivation behind a personal decision not to return to teaching dance:

Margaret (49, high school teacher): "At that time [dancer], whom I have such immense respect for, I mean he was one of my idols ... was working with that company as well, and helping out and doing this, that and the other ... he's a star of Australian dance ... such a wealth of history ... To me such treasures ... shouldn't be relegated to teaching bits and stuff here and there. It's like, oh my God, you're still in my mind; you're up there, and what are you doing now? You're doing this because there is no other work."

Monique's comparison of the lack of respect and financial security mature dancers are accorded in Australia relative to Europe is interesting, in that she sees older *male* dancers as particularly disadvantaged in Australia. Her own career is only financially viable for her young family because her partner earns sufficient income to support them. It is still more socially acceptable in Australia for a woman to be a dependent spouse than a man, particularly if she cares for children:

Monique (42, choreographer, teacher): "I'm not in that situation because I'm in a relationship and my partner does have a steady income, but some friends who are older, and particularly male friends, once they stop performing if

they don't get a regular teaching job it's really hard for them to make enough money to survive. It's interesting, I mean, just here, the difference between how you're treated in Australia to if they were living in Europe, they'd be on a pension. You know, there's this lack of respect for artists here which is something ... I think when I was in Holland I happened by chance to see the first performance of Netherlands 3, which is the mature dance company. It was so amazing, not so much—I mean, they were all fantastic, and the works, some I liked and some I didn't, but what [laugh] was amazing was the audience, they were on their feet within seconds, and I just sat there and went 'Wow'. This would happen at a football game in Australia, but not at a dance performance."

Cilla and a fellow dancer collaboratively attempted to start a dance company for mature dancers in Australia, an attempt that failed due to both the lack of funding support from grant-giving organizations, combined with a pervasive cultural myopia in relegating dance to the status of 'hobby' rather than a 'real job'. Cilla summarizes the impact of this scenario on dancers bluntly:

Cilla (37, independent performer, teacher): "If for some reason your grant doesn't get accepted that round, you've got to go out and find some menial job, which means ... hours are crappy so you probably can't go to class, you probably aren't available for any rehearsals, because you've got to go and do paid work because you've got kids to feed and rent or a mortgage to pay. So it's really inhibitive in that respect ... And so then you make a choice. You say, 'OK, I've had the kids, now I'm going to have to get a *real* job. And that's wrong."

Meredith relates this lack of cultural valuing and respect for artists to her body, both now and as a future 'aged dancer'. Struggling to find meaningful work in Australia, the dancer-choreographer found her 'dream job' in Europe with a small dance company, which she was about to begin at the time of interview:

Meredith (31, dancer): "I have a certain value system for my body, I value it incredibly but it is also my livelihood ... when I was having difficulties with ... wondering where I was going to put my talents, who was interested in working with it ... is there a place in society for me to do what I want to do. For me that had a lot to do with my value, if I'm not valued in the environment I'm in, then I don't feel as good ... and when I'm teaching, when I'm doing community work, or when people just respect me as an artist, then I feel valued as a person, and when I'm not doing those things my value system drops ... and I've experienced that throughout the years when you come to a time when you're not working or you're not being artistically inspired, that's what happens. I would imagine that would also be a process with the physical body and ageing."

There was also a strong feeling from others of not depriving other struggling dancers of their livelihood by competing with them if one was financially secure:

Margaret (49, high school teacher): "I am missing out on the dreadful guilt that I'm going to feel that I'm taking away someone's very minuscule livelihood; and ... I just won't do that. There are so many ex-dancers with no money, you know, to do anything, and no real prospects. It's sort of all downhill from 23, or the peak of your dance career whenever that is. When you start hitting 30, it's starting to come down very quickly. But...you still have to bring up money for the next 35 years. What are you going to do? I won't be involved in taking away someone else's...absolutely not."

Evident in another participant's comments is a sense of ethics in refraining from applying for government funding to choreograph outside her academic institution (which is already funded), thus leaving more for other choreographers less fortunate than herself. This altruism is related to her maturity:

Vera (49, dance academic): "Because I'm lucky, I'm one of those few people who have got a career in dance, and that enables me to draw from it, I find

that if I ask for money from the Government, I feel that I'm double dipping ...
I don't think I used to think that way before but now I do."

In summary, Australian dancers felt that their culture undervalued them, and that this was directly reflected in economic disadvantage, i.e. in terms of very limited financial security. This lack of cultural valorization of dancers, both young and mature, is felt keenly by them as they either struggle to eke out a living through occasional project-based work or opt for 'real' jobs with a steady income. Dancers are already disadvantaged in that the preparation for their career as professional dancers, and their subsequent years of performing and touring, leave little time and resources for them to prepare for an alternative career in later life. Another factor is their denial of ageing and the ultimate demise of their performing career (e.g., White & Guest, 1995). This leads to a structural inequality in midlife relative to other professions, an inequality that can adversely affect the quality of life of the dancer contemplating transition.

3.3.4 Emotional self-expression

This theme addresses the expressive body in midlife. It supports the notion that in western cultures the expression of self becomes more intersubjective in maturity, in line with Frank's (1991) and O'Connor's (1997) frameworks. It also supports Diprose's (1994b) contention that subjects constitute themselves intersubjectively through action (here dance practice), and resonates with Gardner's (1997) model of different dancing subjects aligned with different dance styles that are in turn related to differing content of expression (see also Foster's (1986) perspective), in that the content of expression conforms to the style practiced. Comments from participants also suggest that choosing to continue a particular dance practice in midlife provided them with different benefits, but was discarded for another form if it became outmoded for them, i.e. that a dancing subject's continuity is achieved through an ongoing process of transformation and new learning. This suggests a model of subjectivity that sees

the subject as continually transforming throughout life, which conforms to perspectives such as those of Shilling (1993) and Mansfield (2000).

For many participants, dancing fulfils an expressive function; that is, it enables them to express some aspects of themselves. The comments below illustrate that this expression can focus on different content, but it has both an emotional and a communicative aspect. Emotional expression is regarded as independent of physical skillfulness, and is a critical ingredient in dancing and in continuing to dance over the course of ageing. The particular aspect that it takes—transcendent and universal, relating to individual psychic states, or contextual and in flux—might arguably relate to the style of dancing practiced (ballet, modern dance, postmodern dance), but for the dancers surveyed, dancing, even in the vein of Cunningham, is an undeniably visceral, emotional experience. This emotional dimension of dance is independent of chronological age. However, communication (with self and other/audience) becomes more salient in the course of maturity.

One of the ways in which we might look at the ways the self is expressed in dance is to consider the extent to which this expression has a communicative function. Earlier I discussed Frank's (1991, p. 52) argument that bodies can be 'monadic' in their orientation, that is, relating to, and closed in on, the self, or 'dyadic', that is, existing in relation of mutual constitution with others. In the interviews, some participants commented on their single-mindedness in their youth as they pursued their careers as young ballet dancers. They focused on technique and virtuosity, rather than stage presence or emotional expressiveness. As they mature, they report that their focus is more on intersubjective, people-oriented aspects of dancing, such as becoming more aware of the audience, than in their earlier years. In other words, participants' comments suggest that there is a shift from monadic to dyadic orientation that develops over maturity.

Interestingly, some of the younger participants in this study, such as the Indian dancer-choreographer Nina, also show a strong awareness of the

intersubjective aspects of their emotional expression in dance. For Nina, dancing fulfils two functions; it is liberating for the self; an expression of emotions and beliefs, but it can also be a powerful means of *sharing*, in her case a political message for women. Moreover, she did not see her age as irrelevant in terms of creating works that communicate her emotions and beliefs to a larger group.

Nina (29, Indian dancer/choreographer): “For me dancing is not a profession in the sense where I go to earn money, it’s more like a way of life, because I express my emotions, my feeling, my politics through dance, so it doesn’t make sense to think that I will stop when I am 50, I’ll stop dancing ... it won’t work for me. I might stop physically being on stage, I don’t know, but I’ll be creating dance ... It’s a way of expression for me, and I feel very liberated because it’s not constraining in any way, you can dance your heart out ... and at the same time, why I perform is because ... when I create a piece, I think it is important to share.”

While comments from many participants articulate their perception of dancing as an avenue for emotional self expression, the content of this expression differs from participant to participant. Dancing is seen variously as an expression of life, of freedom, and relief from stress, of a means of escape from the everyday, of being taken out of one’s self, of an experience offering the opportunity to express emotions not called for in everyday life, of a ‘satisfaction of living’, or a search for one’s ‘inner essence’:

Nicholas (63, dancer): “I see dancing as moving, and moving is living ... how can I explain it, dancing is the satisfaction of living. I think, when you are happy you dance, you move.”

For Meredith, whose dance practice includes ballet, tap, and physical theatre, it can be an expression of freedom:

Meredith (31, dancer): “When I dance, it’s an expression of freedom, an expression of life and celebration and it tends to ... relieve stress and you seem

lighter and you approach life differently. So, I think it's healthy. (Your persona, is that like your...?) My wellbeing, I guess, yeah, my personality."

For others, dancing is concerned with the expression of universal, transhuman emotions, where the daily grind of practice is motivated by the dancer ultimately transcending her/his body:

Pia (60, dance lecturer): "It's the artistic side, it's the emotion and the fact that you can actually express yourself through movement, and even through stories—like *Romeo and Juliet*, which was wonderful to dance and, yeah, you can just take yourself out of yourself and into another character and person, and ... technically, if your technique's strong enough and that's what your classes are for every day, when you're performing, that's the sort of area where you, hopefully, just trust, and then you can become an actress ... through expression."

It also enables others like Anthony, a classically-based contemporary dancer, to express a broader range of emotions than those available in everyday life:

Anthony (55, dancer): "To be on stage was just a magnificent opportunity to express all sorts of emotions that I wasn't able to go through in normal life, just to play roles and to do parts that didn't actually have anything to do with the way I was as a person but, you know, to actually be able to express those emotions is a great outlet for one's being, I think."

Here the concern with emotional expression reflects fundamentally different approaches to the meaning of what is expressed in movement. For Marie, influenced by early American modern dance, dancing is bound up with the individual's psychic conflicts, whereas for Pia, emotional expression in a role such as *Juliet*, refers to idealized, universal themes such as Love and Destiny, according to which the dancer 'transcends' her own body and transposes herself into another, idealized character. For both Pia and Anthony, life informs dance

but dance remains in a sense separate from and 'above' life; dance enables the expression through art of emotional aspects that quotidian life denies.

Whether it involves the expression of universal ideals, inner psychic conflicts, a social or political statement, or serves as a 'laboratory' for ongoing movement invention, dancing can thus have different meanings for participants. Furthermore, whether that meaning and expressive function lies in deepening emotional expression of the psychic self, or in a self-body connection through movement, it is very important for those who continue practicing dance through maturity.

Many participants commented on changes in the quality of their dancing as they matured. For some there was also a change in the movement 'vocabulary' as fixed corporeal codes, 'old ways of moving', are experienced as emptied of the meaning they once had. For example, exploring one's individuality was one outcome of maturing as a dancer for some participants, and this necessarily involves breaking the old code and re-educating the body to alternatives:

Ruby (50, independent experimental dance performer): "You get to that point where you can't do it any more. You get to a point where I thought, why am I doing it? You know, what is the point? You can only just get so beautiful. What do you do *after* that? *Then* what happens? And so when you get to that point you've got a point of reference to say, 'Well, lots of things can happen, and that's not the only thing'. And ... then every person has their own world inside them, and it's a matter of individuating that ... *you have to have got away from that original way of working, in order to see how else you can be.* And to understand the reasons ... and to be able to have a history of change."

In order to retain the authenticity of connection to her self, Ruby's project at one stage of life was to discard the familiar, inscribed techniques and discover alternative ways of movement that worked for her changed body and self.¹⁷

¹⁷ For this participant, such a change was precipitated by what she described as an emotional breakdown, resulting in the loss of her muscle tone.

Such decisions suggest that the meanings of dancing to the dancer, and its value as an avenue of emotional self-expression, can change over the life course of a singular body. The nature of these meanings is connected to the body's particular history in movement.

Moreover, several participants reported an increase in the enjoyment of dancing as they age, as distinct from displaying technical virtuosity. That is, they felt that they no longer need to perform what are, for them at this age, meaningless feats of virtuosity, or what some called 'throwing oneself around like a chicken', or 'bouncing around like a rubber ball'.

3.3.5 Bodily passion and sublime moments

This theme relates to self-transcendence and forming part of a greater whole, as in Pini's (1997) study on rave dancers. It also connects most strongly with a phenomenological framework as it is fundamentally concerned with a bodily connection with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), a bodily connection with the outside/inside of the subject inherent in the different aspects of physicality of performance, music, audience, etc. It represents a highpoint of emotional, physical and spiritual integration of the self within the context of others and the world, an extra-discursive moment of body-mind fusion (Carey, 2000).

These moments emerged from the repetition of an established practice, of what Foucault and Butler have called a reiteration of 'correct' acts that serve to define the body-subject on an ongoing basis, but they have not been attended to by these theorists as a possible means for ensuring continuity of normative performance. On the other hand, resistance to established movement patterns emerged as a possible antithesis to dancing being experienced as addictive in those participants who practiced it. I suggest that such resistance resonates with Diprose's (1994b) notion of the ability of the self to transform itself through action; that is, via resistance to an established practice, of subverting (normative) consistency of body-identity through strategic forms of practice.

Comments from the participants described the practice of dance in a variety of ways: as a passion, a drug, a compulsion, a feeling of completeness, a routine essential for wellbeing, a 'rhythm that I need', a 'love for life', as tied to the participant's embodied experience of self to the extent that a 'break' from dance practice is felt as a form of physical 'unease' or 'anxiety'.

Martin (41, dancer): "Dancing is definitely a passion ... it's a passion that could also be extended into an obsession as well. Because a dancer, if you're hooked you're hooked, it's like a drug, you need to, you know if you're on holiday for a couple of weeks you get this frustration you feel. You may not know why, but as soon as you get into a class, it all just disappears."

Meredith (31, dancer): "It's like a drug. I'm a really shitty person when I don't dance. I really am. It's just something I have to do, it's really a very compulsive thing ... and I love it, yeah, I really love it, and the few times in my life when I haven't been dancing regularly, I'm different."

For others, the physical responses to doing class are a form of bodily habit (a 'routine', a 'need') that becomes meaningful as a form of catharsis:

Sylvia (43, dancer): "I go in, I'm not feeling fantastic sometimes, and you go in, you do class, you sweat, and your body collects itself, and your mind starts to work really well, and everything starts to move, and then you go on stage and it's complete, it all comes together. I love what I do and so I need it, I need to do it. I need to do that for now. It keeps me going. It's a routine that I'm used to, and that routine gets me going, keeps me going through the days and performing makes it complete ... it's a little bit like breathing."

Dancing is also experienced as 'like a drug', a substance to which the body has become addicted through years of engagement:

Marie (49, dancer): “I just fell in love with it, and I never stopped loving it [...] I think by having danced so long in my life, so many years, my body ... it’s like a drug for me.”

Nicholas (63, dancer): “I love to dance, and I think that’s my food, that is my drugs, my passion.”

The connection between dance training and the dancer’s sense of embodiment is evident in reports of the physical experience of ‘feeling different’ when dancers take time off from practice, analogous to suffering withdrawal symptoms. There is a sense of catharsis in the regularity of training in, and performance of, ballet-based dance, connected to a ‘mastery of the body’:

Susan (53, dance academic): “Any time I stopped I became extremely distressed at some level, and that has continued throughout my life.”

Vera (49, dance academic): “I find that if I’ve missed doing ballet I’m very unttogether.”

3.3.5.1 Bodily reiteration and resistance to change

The addictive, cathartic nature of routine practice was not shared by dancers engaging in more experimental dance practices, such as Ruby, Joanne or Alana, who consciously adopted a method of ‘resistance’ to established movement codes in order to discover new connections. These participants, who moved from ballet-based training to more experimental dance practices, felt that continuous and ongoing training can also become a form of bodily ‘resistance’ to alternative movement possibilities, effectively ‘closing off’ the body from new experiences.

For example, Joanne’s experience of ‘training deprivation’ became a productive time for taking new directions in movement, rather than being perceived (as in

ballet) as a regrettable lapse in peak body condition.¹⁸ Others were trained in, or practiced, bodily resistance to habitual movement:

Joanne (48, dance academic/performer): “Even before I had children, I found that, when I had a period of time away from working on technique classes—this is more in the dancerly tradition—if I had a break away, new information was actually able to come into the body, because it didn’t have this resistance of an ongoing practice. So I’ve always been quite open to those periods where you go into something else ... It allows it to be open for change to occur ... I think I had that work ethic through classical ballet, for such a long time, that my body actually enjoyed being given the space.”

Gabrielle (55, independent dance performer): “My teacher always said you have to learn to work *against* you, don’t follow your spontaneous intuition, build *resistance*. Resistance was a very important word for her. We are always in resistance to something, to the air, to our own intuition sometimes, to go wilder, to discover, she said you must be very courageous to discover, don’t always follow the movements you like, that you can *do* already, *discover*.”

Alana, whose initial training was in classical ballet, describes the initial difficulty she experienced in ‘letting go’ of her habitual forms of moving, which she encountered while attending an international institution for experimental dance:

Alana (choreographer, experimental movement practitioner): “It was a big shift. It was hard at first, because ... a lot of the release stuff you were just lying on the floor for days [laugh], and I was just busting to move, I’d been doing acrobatics for years, so I was kind of like pumped up, you know muscle-bound, probably tense as hell, but anyway ... eventually, after a few months I realized I just had to let go of everything I knew and submit or I wouldn’t learn anything. And that was a real turning point.”

¹⁸ There is a time-honored saying in ballet: One day without class, you notice it; two days without

The maintenance of established corporeal codes forms a closed, repetitive practice that does not allow new structures to form. Instead, the dancer compulsively reinscribes herself or himself, through a reiterative process whereby the original meaning of the structures dissipates over time. Changes in the physicality of the dancer's body in the process of ageing also make such reinscription increasingly problematic for older dancers.

Ruby (50, dance artist): "There's a lot of *talk* that goes on about older dancers, keeping on working, but it's actually very difficult. (Economically?) Yeah. Well, economically; that's one big thing. But also physically, because if you don't have a way of moving, of getting true making material that's not based on what you used to know, then you haven't got a hope in hell, really. You've got to sort of reinvent your own way of doing things in a way."

3.3.5.2 The embodied experience of sublimity

There are instances in the participants' narratives that suggest a link between the bodily passion for dancing and the experience of a heightened state of self-awareness and connection to the world, a momentary and ineffable experience of sublimity. This experience is a visceral, embodied and kinesthetic one.¹⁹ Experiences of sublimity constitute an important mode through which bodily experience can bypass language (the sublime is literally untranslatable). Importantly, its occurrence is not confined to dancers in their physical prime, but also extends to the experience of older dancers. Perhaps one of the reasons why dancing becomes a bodily addiction is that it can lead to such moments. These experiences, I will argue, are also independent of chronological age and do not appear to diminish with corporeal ageing.

class, the company notices it; three days without class, the audience notices it.

¹⁹ Both Kant and Lyotard have addressed the sublime in their writings, Kant with reference to beauty and missing content, and Lyotard as that which is (discursively) 'unpresentable'. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, in *Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime*, discusses both perspectives in relation to modernism in art (Gilbert-Rolfe, 2000).

Gabrielle makes the following comment in relation to her experience of the sublime moment as one informed by a process of reduction to basic simplicity:

Gabrielle (55, independent dance performer): “Everything is in harmony, but harmony in a strenuous way, not harmony in a pleasant way; everything fits together. Everything, every little detail, fits together ... And you feel it. And in this moment you don’t have any materialistic wish. You are ascetic. You are pure, simple ... you really feel, for moments, as a whole ... complete.”

Dance is one site that offers such opportunities for heightened bodily experience, although there are other art forms through which it can be obtained. Margaret’s comment below draws a similarity between listening to certain forms of music and dancing in evoking a timeless moment (“everything stops”). She situates the sublime moment in dance within an extradiscursive domain (“you can’t say what it is”):

Margaret (49, high school teacher): “You’re talking about touching the soul, something like the second movement of the Ninth Symphony is just ... you know, the goosebumps come out, the tears come out; and certain parts of Mozart, also ... You live the music, and it’s my way of being free. Because ... I want my freedom ... because everything stops. You know, at that point, you can have no idea how amazing you feel; you’re connected with something else.”

This timelessness is echoed in Cilla’s response to the question whether she ever ‘got high’ on dancing. It is suggestive of a heightened awareness of the embodied self that in that moment temporally transcends its immanence:

Cilla (37, independent performer, teacher): “That thing of everything’s in the right place at the right time, everything just meets in this one moment, and that moment lasts forever, and if it’s in the middle of a *jeté*, or if it’s in the middle of something, it’s just like, everything stops, and it’s just, you’re *there*. And then you move out of it, but ... just for a minute, everything, *everything*

comes together, all those different aspects of the physicality and the performance, and ... everything comes together, it *works*."

The embodied experience of such epiphanous moments through dance is not only timeless in the sense of being disjunctive from (linear) temporality, but also ageless, in the sense that it is not confined to young bodies alone. That is, despite the biologically based changes in bodies over time, that are interpreted as markers of 'decline', bodies remain capable of such experiences for a lifetime, and one of the means of accessing them (but by no means the only one) is through dancing.

3.3.6 Connection with dance, self and others

This theme is related to Theme 4 (*emotional expression*) in that there is evidence from participants' comments that dancers become more connected to others (including audiences) as they mature (referring to Frank's (1991) 'associative body'). It also supports Diprose's (1994b) argument that body-subjects in dance are intersubjectively constituted. Here, however, the evidence suggests that increased intersubjectivity comes with maturity, which supports O'Connor's (1997) perspective that older dancers become more associated with others than younger dancers. However, as noted in Chapter 2, some dance styles enable a more intersubjective orientation than others, although none preclude it altogether. It is therefore not clear whether increased intersubjectivity is a function of maturity and 'life experience', the style of dance practiced, or a combination of the two and possibly other factors not addressed in this study.

Comments from the interviews suggest that, as dancers mature, their connection with dance changes. In ballet-based dance, for example, it appears to transform from being an athletic expression of physicality and virtuosity in youth into a more reflective approach, where the athletic is overtaken by aesthetic, spiritual and emotional forms of expression. Participants sometimes contrast the experiences of their youth with those of midlife, with the former characterized more in terms of physical virtuosity and uncritical adherence to

instructions, and the latter more in terms of an emphasis on emotional/spiritual connections and more collaborative processes. For example, Anthony describes how working with choreographers becomes more of a collaborative exercise:

Anthony (55, dancer): “You learn how much you can give to certain people. A choreographer might come in and you’ll know instantly if he doesn’t want any help, or he doesn’t want you to make any suggestions because it’s his baby and he knows exactly where it’s going to go, and exactly how to achieve it, and that’s fine, but there are those who will be just sensitive to another way of expressing the ideas that they might be trying to get across, and I think it’s then that a more mature dancer who’s somebody who’s worked and had experience with many different choreographers will be able to bring out of a choreographer certain things that he may not have necessarily been able to achieve otherwise.”

Some participants also commented on their increasing awareness of, and connection with audiences and with the context of performances. This theme is closely connected to that of emotional expression and the way in which dancing changes from ‘mindless’ virtuosity to an increased awareness and enjoyment of performing, as is evident from Gabrielle’s comment:

Gabrielle (55, independent dance performer): “It goes from the feeling deep inside ... It’s getting *abstract* also ... you are part, your ego is not interesting any more. You are part of the whole ... a very important part, but we are *part* of the whole. Part of the music, part of the light, part of the structures of the architecture, part of the energy of the spectators, but you are the centre because you work with it. I remember when I was young and I started to dance ... technically I was so ... I could do everything, but I didn’t get this feeling [laugh] technically ... and I went through so much and it was half, we did it and we did it very ambitiously, and it did it more and more and more, but this is not what struck my *inner* essence.”

Martin's comment below suggests not only an increased awareness of the audience but also a moral obligation of performers to communicate to a paying audience, which also develops with maturity:

Martin (41, dancer): "I feel that ... as a dancer of *this* age it's my duty to make sure that the audience get their money's worth. A lot of kids when they're younger ... say 'I didn't even realize there was an audience out there'. If you work that way ... I think that's a very selfish thing. There is an audience out there, and they pay money to see you, and we should be aware that they're out there, and that's where the communication actually comes into it, and that's why the mature dancer is able to communicate a lot more to the audience because you actually are aware that they're out there."

Other participants showed a sense of social connectedness in terms of their perceived social responsibility as artists. Nina's work reflects a commitment to the belief that the 'personal is political':

Nina (29, Indian dancer/choreographer): "I strongly believe that art is not neutral. Art makes a statement even when you don't want it to. So that's why I have chosen to make certain statements through my art, political statements, even when we say it is a neutral art ... there is nothing called a neutral art, it is making a political statement in whatever way ... it's like the very famous feminist saying 'personal is political', in that sense, or even as we create a world, there are a lot of things which go into it, which we might not recognize as political, but it is."

She also draws a significant distinction between dancing and performing which polarizes the terms into dancing as a narcissistic activity and performing as a communicative one, again evoking Frank's (1991) typology of the body as either monadic or dyadic in orientation:

"Dancing is one thing and then performing is another. Why I dance is because, as I just said, it's a way of expression for me, and I feel very liberated

because it's not constraining in any way, you can dance your heart out ... why I perform is, because I, when I create a piece, I think it is important to share. I don't necessarily believe that art is for art's sake and then you keep it for yourself, no I don't want to keep it for myself, I want to share it with everybody because being a human being I need that sharing and rapport between people and my work, so that's why I perform and I dance."

However, the 'seriousness' of her work is not culturally normative for a young person. Interestingly, Nina's focus on her dancing as communicating a political message (the oppression of women) from as early as her late teens elicited a form of 'reverse ageism' from some audiences:

"When I did my professional debut, I was ... 19 or 20, and I thought I was pretty mature, my age, and I was dancing a lot of things that were considered very ... adult kind of things in the sense that only mature dancers can do that. But, when I presented a lot of people thought I was 12 years old or something like that, and I was very unhappy with that and I was very angry that my presentation didn't come across as if a woman is dancing, rather than it being as if a kid was dancing ... I don't want people to think I'm some kid who's doing some work, I want to be the mature dancer who can make a political statement. In that sense I think age is good."

For another participant, ageing transformed a dancing self constituted through consumption and reiteration of existing structures to one of creation and synthesis of new structures:

Susan (53, dance academic): "I joined [company] and that was primarily dancing ... and making work. So I really had a chance then to start choreographing more than I had been in the past. Before then I just felt like I was eating it all up, and now I started to kind of make meals instead of just eating meals ... I think there's a way in which those experiences start to reorganize themselves in your head and you begin to see that there are things

that actually you can say and want to say about this or try out ... and experiment with in a variety of ways.”

3.3.6.1 From physical virtuosity to emotional-physical integration

Participants practicing dance forms based on classical ballet showed a keen awareness of the implications of their ageing for technical proficiency, and often referred to concepts such as ‘control’ and ‘discipline’ in their ongoing practice. Comments from many indicated that they were aware of the ‘decline’ of the technical virtuosity of their dancing. However, instead of being abandoned, the corporeal code of ballet-based dance becomes modified in their dancing. Movement becomes more nuanced and smaller, with a concomitant enlargement of what some describe as emotional expression, as a comment from one interviewee suggests:

Nicholas (63, dancer): “You dance, you’re still dancing, but it’s more fine ... it’s more concentrated, it’s more fragile ... and my dancing is becoming smaller and smaller ... but ... on stage I perform, we are performers, we can say a lot. Sometimes we can say a lot without any words, and it’s what we are doing, we don’t need words, we are there. We are people who are with vibration, we give you electricity, we give you magic things ... but ... it’s fine, it’s subtle, because we cannot dance like the people of 20. We can analyze things much better than the people of 20. And talking about control, I think we are more controlled than those people because those people they throw themselves on the stage. I put so much more from my heart and from my soul in what I am doing now.”

Physical ‘decline’ in performance becomes eclipsed by mature dancers’ use of the body in ways which divert attention from technique as primarily physical towards an integrative approach incorporating emotion, to give a complete performance. Technique becomes a minor aspect:

Sylvia (43, dancer): “Technically, some things start to fade away perhaps, the brilliance of your pirouettes, the extension of your legs, the height of an arabesque. What happens as you get older is you find ways to use your technique in a way that people don’t really look any more at how many pirouettes you do, people aren’t looking at how high your leg is, they actually are looking at how you turn and how you brought your leg up, and how you’re able to bring them into your world, because you’ve developed a way of not just using technique, but how to use your body, emotion, technically, physically, again, it’s complete, all rounded, all those things come into play, and I think technically in terms of what someone’s looking at, a dancer matures.”

Others have rejected the balletic vocabulary. Their connection with dance over maturity instead entails a building on and challenging of the body’s history of movement, of doing things ‘differently’ as a means of reinventing their dance identity:

Gabrielle (55, independent dance performer): “Now the young dancers are coming and I see how nicely they can do the *plié* and the long lines and everything, but I’m not so interested any more, I did it for 15 years, so there must be something else to do with me, and my love for dance. You do the *pliés* differently, let me try how I can do it differently. Give me a chance to feel my individuality.”

Comments from the interviews suggest a maturational change from the ‘what’ to the ‘how’, from an emphasis on formal qualities of movement (technique) to its content and meaning (spiritual and emotional), from the dancer as aesthetically pleasing elite athlete to the dancer as personality, as performer. In addition, an intelligence in using the body becomes more apparent in maturity, informed by an awareness of the body’s physical capacities. The mature dancer places more emphasis on aspects such as ‘personality’ or ‘stage presence’, and this is based on a realistic attitude about what their bodies can and cannot do.

Interviewees' comments also suggest they achieve *stronger* bodily control in maturity because they know their physical limits and work with more concentration on correct placement of the body. Finally, the use of the body by mature dancers diverts attention away from physical ability and incorporates emotion to give a 'complete' performance (physical, emotional, spiritual), in which technique becomes a minor aspect rather than a primary criterion of accomplishment. Dancers draw on an increasing connection with self to inform their practice, and this can take the form of finding an 'inner quietness' before a performance, or of finding one's 'inner essence':

Marie (49, dancer): "I was always nervous before a performance ... but it had deepened in a way that now ... I get very quiet before a performance in terms of that I have to concentrate from inside and prepare myself in terms of finding my quietness and my own world, and that has become much stronger."

On the other hand, those who engaged in more experimental practices, that are more 'open' and less codified than ballet, report an increased sense of connection by engagement with the body's history of movement along with exploration of possibilities of developing new corporeal codes through resistance to existing codes that have become entrenched in their bodies. Perhaps here the issue is not so much the 'what' or 'how' of dancing, but of 'where'—where the body can go in terms of its corporeal potential for eliciting new forms of movement. This is only tangentially connected with ageing as it does not involve 'decline' in the ability to reiterate existing, external movement codes, but rather 'progress' to new ways of dancing.

3.3.7 Bodily conformity to dance codes

This theme relates to the style of dance practice (balletic dance forms), and to gender (that is, it primarily addressed the appearance of female dancers). The concern with slimness mentioned by participants is consonant with the arguments of social constructionist theorists such as Featherstone (1991) and

Gullette (1998) in relation to self-monitoring and weight control. Putting on weight was seen as equivalent to letting go of the discipline and control endemic to dancers' habitus, which supports Turner and Wainwright's (2002) Bourdieusian framework, while connecting it more specifically with gender. In so doing I suggest that developing the notion of sexual capital in relation to gendered ageing is useful in understanding the gendered basis of bodily conformity to codes governing physical appearance and instrumentality. Finally, generational shifts in gender codes in dance were noted by participants, which lends support to Sullivan's (2000) and Butler's (1993) positions that cultural codes can be subverted gradually through minor deviations from their 'correct' reiteration.

Statements from participants often referred to a felt discrepancy between the dancer's body type and the ideal type valued in their dance practice. Some forms of dance require higher levels of bodily conformity than others. Classical ballet, for example, is a highly codified system with specific prescriptions for the type of body and its physical range or articulation (such as the much valued 180 degree turnout of the legs). Other, less 'closed' dance practices are more flexible in this respect; in some, body type is considered irrelevant.

A comment from one of the men interviewed directly addresses the difference between classical ballet and contemporary dance as one of 'textbook' control versus a relative laxity of precision that is more 'forgiving' on the older dancer's body. In a highly coded movement system such as ballet, progressive wear and tear occasioned over repetitions of the same movements 'naturally' limit the lifespan of the dancer's career, analogous to repetition strain injuries:

George (37, director, teacher, choreographer): "I respect the classical technique so much now, because you can get away with a lot more in a contemporary style. You can ... let the body go and explode more through energy, in a position that not necessarily has a textbook ... idea to it. So you can basically make something up as you go, and it's still movement ...

whereas your energy and strength in classical comes from being able to control the technique. So you can probably be a little bit more out of control with your contemporary work. And so therefore as you get older ... although it's still very strenuous, it can be a little bit more forgiving on the body, because you don't actually have to land and lock into those positions; you can allow yourself to be a bit more forgiving in placement."

Physical aptitude plays a major role in both classical and ballet-derived contemporary dance forms; the difference is that its evidence in the dancer's performance is more immediately evident in classical ballet, which is based on a visual, external and therefore highly specific code of movement that makes little allowance for the material specificity of the dancer's body. However, in both forms ageing results in a perceived, age-related 'decline' and the ultimate cessation of performing and practice.

3.3.7.1 Gendered conformity to dance codes

Participants frequently commented on the pressures of bodily conformity in dance, particularly in classical ballet. These comments generally reflected the dancers' experience of not fitting particular stereotypes of body shape and presentation. This was particularly so for women, as Meredith's comment illustrates:

Meredith (31, dancer): "In my younger days, it was really important for me to look like a dancer ... because it was very focused on my image attitude, and, of course I enjoyed what I did, but then that became so destructive through an eating disorder ... I think a lot of dancers spend their lives—as *I* did—looking in the mirror for hours every day, and this festered an unhealthy relationship between me and that image, as I was never satisfied with what I saw."

The irony is that the 'perfect body' in classical dance is an unattainable ideal, therefore the female dancer never feels 'good enough'. Her body becomes coded as 'lacking' in falling short of this unattainable ideal, toward which she

constantly strives, in intense competition against other female dancers. Alana recalls finding herself disillusioned and dropping out of ballet school in her youth by the ethos of what Dempster (cited in Summers-Bremner, 2000) has called a 'conditioning to fail':

Alana (43, choreographer, experimental dance performer): "[The ballet school] was awful. I felt so insecure, there were so many anorexics around, throwing up in the toilets and ... it was foul. You get caught up in the mentality of never being good enough; it's taken years to get over that."

Conforming to the normative body code for a female dancer is a body project requiring ongoing self-monitoring and weight control to maintain the desired physique. Significantly, only one of the male participants referred to the issue of weight in performing, and his example is a female dancer:

Martin (41, dancer): "I wouldn't pay money to go and see a person who's like fat and frumpy and trying to do a classical ballet, and she's fat and frumpy and rolls are hanging off her. No matter how old she is, I don't care if she's 20 or 30 or 40, I wouldn't do it."

In classically derived dance forms the ideal *appearance* of the female dancer's body is prized so highly that individuals will undergo significant body modification to attain it as an entry ticket to employment. Meredith recalls a case of a dancer who opted for plastic surgery in order to be accepted by a prestigious ballet company:

"When [a friend of mine] was studying at the [dance college], one of the people that went through the same year as she did, who was a very, very good classical dancer, was offered a position with the [dance company], but her boobs were too big. She had everything else, she had the right physique, but she had large breasts, and they actually suggested that she get a boob job, and she did, and they employed her ... she reduced the size of her breasts and got a job with a professional ballet company."

Her own response to the bodily conformity associated with the gender stereotypes in ballet was one of refusal from an early age:

“I never had the ballet dream even as a child, ballet was too girly for me ... But I didn’t have the hope that ... ballerina ... dainty, precious ... petite, protected, princess sort of role. (Objectified...) Oh, totally, yeah, and very gender specific. When I was younger I couldn’t give you those reasons, I didn’t know what the reasons were, I just knew I didn’t like it.”

Another female participant was unable to aim for a career with a prestigious national ballet company because of lack of height rather than lack of ability. A former pupil of the company’s school, her adult height was predicted by the school at age 13, which determined whether or not she would have a future performing career with the company:

Brittany (46, dance teacher): “I actually started at nine, and stayed [at the School] until I was 13. They take wrist x-rays, so they know how tall you’re going to be ... and they judge very accurately in most cases. So they knew I was going to be too small for the company. So when I hit 13 they said that I could stay on and train to be a teacher, or move on somewhere else.”

Height requirement in partnering work is an issue for women, not men, because of the shortness (and shortage) of men dancing. Most female dancers remain in the *corps de ballet* (the rank-and-file) for a significant part of their dancing careers, therefore uniformity of height is important, as Brittany’s comment indicates:

(So the height requirement ... I’ve heard somewhere it’s to do with when your partner is...) “Well, actually with the [Company] it was with the *corps de ballet*, because when I was younger they had the best *corps de ballet*, they were all the same height. Partner ... if you’re really brilliant, you’ll be found a partner, and it’s better for a female to be small than too tall, because not very many tall men do dance, unfortunately. So there were some very brilliant

small boys, men, but they had a lot of problems having parts, or parts had to be specially made for them, because girls when they are on pointe are another up to 10 centimeters in height.”

Significantly, it is women’s bodies that are evaluated on physical attributes such as height and weight (the short men had “parts specially made for them”, but not the women who didn’t fit the height requirement). This is partly due to the greater ratio of women to men ballet dancers. From Brittany’s comments on her daughter’s difficulty in joining a dance company in Australia, this applies across several generations:

“She’s very tiny, like myself; I sent her to France to the Conservatoire in Lyon, and she really enjoyed that. But then she decided she didn’t want to go and dance overseas, which is probably her only option. She wanted to be a classical dancer, so she just gave up, when she was 18. But it is hard when you’re small. It’s a lot of hard work; you have to dance better ... It’s, you know, soul-destroying sometimes ... Physique is very important.”

In the following comment, another interviewee provides a good example of how deviations from the ‘accepted’ standards for the dancer’s body can provide an opportunity for humiliation within the dance industry:

Margaret (49, high school teacher): “And the thing that stops me going [to a gala function] is, ‘Oh God, I’ve put on too much weight’ ... I think, what sort of mentality is this? And my son said, ‘Mum, just go!’ And I said, ‘yeah, but I know exactly what’s going to be said, and even what’s not said’. This sort of implied meaning that comes through various body languages and things like that. You know exactly what they’re saying up here, it’s not coming out there [points to mouth]. You know. And it’s like: ‘*Darling!* You look so *well!*’ [laugh] And you think, ‘bitch!’ [laugh] And you think, well at least I don’t have a hip replacement.”

Another participant referred to the pressures of bodily conformity in ballet, but saw them as historically variable. She comments on the change in body type (from waiflike to a more muscular shape) in the new millennium's professional ballet dancers:

Pia (60, dance lecturer): "I think it's gone away from that anorexic look a bit, that you're getting a little bit more back to the ... earlier days, when there seemed to be a bit more flesh and people were quite happy with that. I think it's nice to see ... bodies that are ... not skinny, they're covered, and they're worked bodies ... they have some boobs and things."

Indeed, according to another, it is not merely body shape that is changing but also contemporary codes of dance performance, permitting the emergence of challenges to bodily conformity, especially for women:

Nicholas (63, dancer): "The women are coming in the ballets now more strong almost than the men, I find. On stage, men and women are equal. Sometimes the women are more strong ... I mean mainly in contemporary dance, because in classical dance the girl will be always a princess of beauty, a Cinderella, and the man will be the prince. But in contemporary dance, the woman gets very close to the man, and you see in a lot of ballets that a lot of women are lifting the man. And they are strong, the personality is equal now. In life it's also like that."

Whereas in the above comments the emphasis placed on the appearance of the body is significant for women, for men it is more the *act* of dancing that is important. Some female participants referred to masculine stereotypes impacting upon opportunities for men to dance. One perceived this as working to the advantage of boys in that, because of the stigma attached to boys dancing, those who do decide to dance have greater opportunities for performance than girls:

Sinead (27, Irish dance teacher): "It's harder to get a boy into class ... because boys feel it ... men may do this but it's not right for any man, boys ... how can I

put it? A girl will go dancing quicker than a boy does. It is a great thing for a boy to know how to dance because it's great opportunities, more so for boys, because there's not many of them that do it, so ... they'll have a better chance of getting into these big shows because ... they need a boy. In theatre dancing also you need a boy."

Another participant's comment refers to the stigma for a man in a heterosexist culture to become a ballet dancer, a phenomenon which she sees as historically variable:

Lynette (68, yoga teacher): "It was much more difficult in those days for men to be a part of the ballet company. And generally in those days again most of the guys were gay, which is fine, but I think now that's changing a bit, and that's good, and I think more guys are interested in dancing now. It doesn't have the stigma attached to it that it had then."

In summary, the above comments all in some way refer to the degree to which different practices of dance are coded in ways that include or exclude bodies from participating in them. In styles such as ballet and mainstream contemporary dance, the strictures placed on the appearance of the body require women dancers to conform to an 'ideal body', strictures that are mediated through reliance on external cues (mirrors, scales) and discourse. There is some indication in interviewees' comments that this and other forms of coding the dancer's body have changed from the previous generation (more muscular bodies; women performing moves previously considered only for men). However, other dance practices that are not as heavily coded and, significantly, not as culturally valorized, offer more opportunities for dancers to express individual qualities. Here dancers rely on internal cues to their progress, and appear less concerned with bodily conformity to normative ideals.

3.3.8 The dancer's body-mind relationship

This theme relates to the way in which interviewees saw themselves as fundamentally constituted as dancing body-selves; that is, whether they drew a binary distinction that privileges mind over body but requires instrumentality of the body in performance (which becomes problematic for them as they age). Those who did so came from a balletic tradition, and for them the 'mask of ageing' theory is supported, as the body as an 'old machine' requires a mindfulness of what it can and cannot do 'at this age'. However, comments on this theme were varied. While some showed an adherence to a dualistic 'mind-body' connection (e.g., the view of the body as 'instrument' or 'machine'), others voiced more phenomenologically informed understandings of themselves as embodied as both subject and object simultaneously, according to which self, others, the lived body and movement are inextricably interconnected (Merleau-Ponty, 1968; Diprose, 1994b). Yet others still drew a psychoanalytic distinction between body and self, where the body is 'mirror to the soul' (i.e. the psychic interior) in an ongoing journey to psychic and bodily integrity.

There was also a clear relationship between the dancer's body-mind relationship and her or his chosen practice, which both supports Gardner's (1997) framework and extends it to ageing. For example, a classically trained dancer has been taught to treat her or his body as an instrument that faithfully copies a 'text' in which the material specificity of the dancer's body is denied or erased by conformity to an ideal. Other approaches, such as those based on expressive dance, or informed by body practices such as Body Mind Centering or Release techniques,²⁰ encourage a greater extent of experimentation and attunement to

²⁰ Body Mind Centering, or BMS, is a technique developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and Releasing Technique is pioneered by Joan Skinner. Both are part of a range of disciplines "predicated on the idea that the complex of body, mind and emotion constitutes the self and that the mind inhabits the whole body ... in Australia contemporary dance practitioners in particular have used them in training and as bases for making and performing dance" (Innes, in Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell, 2003, p. 88).

each body's capacities. I therefore suggest that, as dancers age, their approaches to embodiment impact on how they perceive and experience their dance practice.

Selected comments below illustrate how participants saw themselves as either predominantly embodied or as 'split'. For example, Sinead's comment indicates a dualist approach to mind and body, in which the body can perform a habitual movement sequence, under the mind's instruction:

Sinead (27, Irish dance teacher): "when you go out to dance, your mind actually speaks to your body. When you go out to dance you are concentrating also on the music and on your timing. And I feel that...if you know a dance your body would just do it. Because you know—you should know it well enough to do it ... I was told, on numerous occasions, 'just let your body go and work', because it knows how to work, because your mind is telling it to work."

Here she refers to a clear demarcation between mind and body as a hierarchical relationship ("your mind is telling your body to work"), but she also describes dancing as a form of unreflective corporeal habit, preceding thought; where "the act must come before the thought, and a habit before an ability to evoke the thought at will" (Sullivan, 2000, p. 27). Thus one's body's knowledge of 'how to work' is paradoxically a prerequisite for one's mind 'telling it to work'; in other words, one's knowledge "has become sedimented as part of my body" (ibid.). The 'split' between mind and body, between thought and action, treats both intentionality and action, the mental and motor aspects of a learnt activity such as dancing, as essentially separate but interdependent.

Classically trained, Martin also sees body and mind as split, and places this in the context of bodily ageing, using the metaphor of the body as a machine, an 'ageing machine' that cannot be pushed beyond its limits:

Martin (41, dancer): "Especially at our ages we're not a machine any more. We're an old machine, okay? So you have to take a lot of care and I'm really

conscious how ... an old machine ... doesn't work that way. You have to take care, you have to specifically do what that machine is capable of doing and not put it through too much stress, because if you put it through too much stress then it does show that the machine is old."

Martin's distancing from his body is evident in, for example, his reference to it as 'the (old) machine', rather than as 'my body'. Instead he discursively associates himself with the culturally normative older body ('at *our* ages'). Here the bodily agency of the dancer practicing her or his dance form is a crucial concern. In classical ballet, for example, the agency inherent in the body's articulation of its materiality (including its maturity) is suppressed.

Dance differs from music or other art forms in that in western cultures the dancer's body has been traditionally understood as the instrument itself. However, this representation of the dancer-as-instrument is paradoxical. The dancer's agency is either relegated to the (disembodied) mind, as in western dualist thinking, or placed in a simultaneous relation of subject (artist) and object (instrument). ²¹ This ambiguity between subject and object is fundamental to Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1968) phenomenology of the body and to Diprose's (1994b) argument, according to which agency only becomes possible through an intersubjective self-identity, in which the body relates to other bodies and to the world, as noted in Chapter 1.

Nicholas's comment illuminates one dancer's struggle with this dilemma, an outcome of dualist reasoning, in which language ultimately fails to express the body-mind relationship:

Nicholas (63, dancer): "Artists like us, we are the instrument. A pianist is a human being, and there is the instrument. We are in one, we are the dancer and the person; the human being and the instrument goes together, we are

²¹ A useful analogy is the drawing by Albrecht Dürer, *Drawing Hands*, one that depicts the reciprocal subject-object relationship of two hands simultaneously drawing (i.e. creating) each other.

way together. We have no competition with a piano or with a ... we are in competition only with ourselves. Our instrument is our body, we are an instrument, that makes sense, I don't know, I think so."

Gabrielle's account, on the other hand, is a phenomenological reflection on the inextricable interconnectedness of self, the lived body and movement. It also transcends the problematic dilemma articulated by Nicholas. As a practicing artist drawing on German expressive dance, for Gabrielle the performer is both the movement and the medium. Hers is a corporeal subjectivity that integrates thinking, feeling, moving, and connecting with other elements, such as the context of performance. Gabrielle's comment reflects the phenomenological position that it is through actions on the world that we bring ourselves into being:

Gabrielle (55, independent dance performer): "We are the movement; painters and sculptors are looking for movement, but we are the movement and the movement initiates the process of art. This is very important because we are the medium, the instrument. We are the instrument of creating art, of creating images, of creating connections between space and sculpture and sound and light, architecture, atmosphere. Dance is so close it's nothing closer, the voice singing and dancing is so close to your life, this is your life, you are, whatever you do whatever you see wherever you are, you feel as a moving body, and it belongs to you as your hand. I could never separate it."

For many others, however, a sense of duality was more or less apparent. For example, Marie's comment below connects her performing body with her emotional self. A shrinking psychic self consumed by self-doubts and anxieties is for her reflected in a 'shrinking' body; to externalize these anxieties ('to talk to somebody') is seen as a means of purging oneself of them. Thus both 'mind' and 'body' are connected, but treated as duality, where the body acts as a sort of 'mirror of the soul'. For her dance is a journey towards a psychic and bodily integrity, and one that is never resolved:

Marie (49, dancer): “Accepting that I get depressed ... accepting it. That’s I think very important. And through these processes I think your body will stay healthy and ... your mind will stay healthy because you’re able to free those things in an honest way. They are healing ... they become a positive energy. You know what I’m trying to say? That you don’t walk around, and you get smaller inside and more insecure, and you don’t allow it to break it, to tell it to somebody. I need to come out with it, I need to clean myself from it, because it bothers me and it makes me ... shrink in my body too. Because if you are very down, for some reason, or depressed, it’s almost impossible to dance on the stage, for me anyway. It’s something you maybe cannot separate. I think our bodies, they are so connected ... mind and body.”

Marie’s form of dance practice is based in both training and modern (Graham) inspired training, and her emphasis on body and mind working together to maintain psychic health reflects this dual background.

Overall, responses from classically trained dancers indicate a distinct body-mind split, unlike those pursuing more exploratory forms of dance. Also, female dancers’ comments suggest their experience is more embodied than the male dancers’, who were more likely to espouse a ‘split’ between disciplined body and governing mind-self. As those who subscribe to this duality age, the ‘body-as-instrument’ controlled by the mind becomes the ‘old machine’ or ‘instrument-in-decline’ that has let the (youthful, inner) self down. The self becomes split from the ‘instrumental’ body.

However, one interviewee believes that, as the dancer’s body ages the body-mind connection needs to become more fluid, in order to discover new movement codes that are more relevant to the dancer’s mature subjectivity:

Ruby (50, experimental dance performer): “About the body-mind thing ... you can see it in the kind of dance vocabulary people use. And either they never get tired of that particular vocabulary, which is very limited, depending on their kind of mind, they hold on to a vocabulary which over the years

becomes less and less meaningful, in that context in which it's shown. Take Graham technique ... nobody does that anymore, it's really different. And if you have someone who hangs onto that technique, for grim death, and adheres to that, it's like the material, the concepts even, that that material expresses, have become slightly vacuous, they don't have that kind of punch they used to have, in the world today ... this is what I call the mind-body split, the stuff that they're trying to say, and the material that they say it with, and they don't recognize that the material means something different to what they want it to ... And if you lose the body-mind connection, then you lose the capacity to do physical exploration in dance.

What this comment suggests is that, as dancers age, the means which they use to communicate in dancing (i.e. the forms of dancing) must change in order to accommodate the changed context in which they live, and is contingent on their ability to open the body to alternative movement experiences by breaking with existing ones. To Ruby, the body-mind connection is intrinsic to the capacity to 'do exploration in dance'. Such exploration involves breaking off from the reiteration of the habitual bodily movements of a fixed subjectivity and forging new ways of moving.

3.3.9 Performing and stage presence in maturity

This theme suggests that increasing maturity increases focus and stage presence for both men and women (although women reported it as more difficult to achieve the confidence to establish this). It therefore contradicts Burt's (1995) and Young's (1990) frameworks and those of classic gaze theory according to which men's stage presence and focus is problematic in dance, and where women cannot break out of the gendered limitations on this presence, as they may achieve this in maturity. This theme also relates to the increased associativeness with others (O'Connor, 1997), and a greater desire to communicate with the audience as dancers mature. However, O'Connor's dancers communicated with

each other, not with an audience, as they were practicing social dance rather than theatrical dance.

As they matured, many participants noticed an increased bodily awareness and confidence in communicating to their audience during performance. One of the ways this is expressed is through their use of focus to connect with the audience. Some interviewees commented on learning to focus as they matured, and some used this focus to inform their stage presence. Significantly, more men commented on this than women.

In *The Male Dancer*, Burt (1995, pp. 50-51) argues that stage presence is connected to power. Power is linked to the act of looking, and looking defines an identity that is gendered masculine in a heterosexual context. Contrastingly, Banes (1998) describes eye contact as a “nondiscursive way of establishing a subject position”, the use of which became important in creating a powerful feminine subjectivity in postmodern dance. Certainly, in everyday social relations in many societies, eye contact forms a significant component of learnt, gendered nonverbal behavior. For instance, according to the canon of ‘feminine modesty’ young women are taught to minimize their social presence and power through avoiding looking directly at men, as to do otherwise might signal ‘inappropriate’ intentions such as sexual interest or availability.²² This arguably works to constrain women in establishing a passive social presence in a heterosexual milieu in which their modesty defines their social/sexual identity. ‘Focusing like a girl’, to paraphrase Young (1998a), would thus represent an inhibited intentionality, and yet, as Monique suggests below, it is one which it is possible to change over maturity.

²² In the pop psychology, essentializing words of Desmond Morris in relation to gaze behavior, “a direct stare indicates intensely active feelings of an amorous, hostile or fearful kind, while a deflected gaze is linked with shyness, casual superiority, or downcast submissiveness” (Morris, 1982, p. 106). While Morris’ view can be criticized on the grounds of its biologist and reductionist nature, I believe it reflects prevalent cultural conventions governing eye contact and social (gendered) status, which then as now privilege adherence to biological, reductive explanations for human behavior over more critical approaches.

Monique describes her change in focus in relation to her inexperience in earlier years, citing an instance where she felt afraid to meet her partner's gaze during rehearsal. She felt that the confidence to look her partner in the eye took years of performing experience to arrive at:

Monique (42, choreographer, teacher): "I can remember being 19 and dancing with someone who was an *incredible* performer and I was really in awe of him [laugh] ... it took me a week to look at him, he was dancing and said 'you're not looking at me', I'm saying 'sorry ... sorry' [laugh] ... he had these piercing blue eyes, it took me ages to get the confidence to meet that gaze, you know. And I think ... there's something in that for me that's quite important about performance, and I notice if I'm performing with someone if they don't look at me, or they look at me but they're not really there. And I think that's something where...they're looking at you but they're looking *through* you ... off to the great something out there beyond ... I believe that an audience sees that difference, and certainly as a performer you feel it. And that's the sort of thing that as an older performer I know I can do that younger dancers maybe aren't there yet."

'Looking at', as distinct from 'looking through', acknowledges the recipient of the focus, and opens the possibility of further communication, which is an unknown quantity. As Banes (1998) notes in relation to postmodern dance practices, avoidance of eye contact with the audience in Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* (1966) has a different meaning from the convention of 'glazing over one's eyes' of dancers, or the deliberate confrontation with the audience by eye contact in Trisha Brown's *Inside* (1966). In western cultures, the act of looking in social life is often used as a way of indicating aggression or sexual interest, according to who is doing the looking, who is being looked at, and the prevailing cultural norms governing gender relations. In the context of a dance rehearsal or performance, 'looking through' can be a means of maintaining professional distance, of avoiding the ambiguously defined boundaries between stage comportment (as a performer) and social comportment (as a gendered person).

Looking establishes a socially present subject, and can also play a crucial role in the stage presence of the performer.

However, not only focus but bodily comportment also can contribute to an experienced corporeal enlargement of the performer's self on stage. A comment from Anthony refers to an embodied stage presence, one that he describes in terms of a kinesthetic, central core of the body from which all movements emanate in an expansive way:

Anthony (55, dancer): "I think it's a kind of a drive inside you that wants to express more than just the limits of your skin and bones. There's a way of standing there and holding your arm out there which may look very aesthetic and articulate, but there's a method of invigorating it with some kind of internal pressure that allows the energy to flow through, through the muscles ... it's just a ... filling your own being with more importance somehow ... a focus that comes from your centre, and ... emanates into the extremities ... elongating one's imagery, extending one's imagery further than your own being ... I think of the arms as being like branches of a Moreton Bay fig tree that have those huge things that extend right down in the roots, so your lateral muscles are there which hold the arms out, not your deltoids in the shoulders, but the arms grow from the trunk, that's what holds them out."

The use of an arboreal analogy is particularly interesting, as this style of comportment establishes an image (perhaps an illusion) of a stable, core self. There is also a notion of the performer prosthetically projecting through her or his body extremities into the world, from this core of a central body-self. Recalling Martin's earlier comment depicting the body as an 'old machine', he develops this by distinguishing between the younger dancer's body as 'instrument' and the older dancer's as 'personality', and links what he perceives as a 'decline' in bodily capacity (the 'old machine') to an increased 'presence' in performance. This 'presence' serves to 'mask', or attempt to conceal, the technical shortcomings of the aged body by drawing attention to itself as a form of decoy.

In this presence of a 'personality', expression is mediated through the performer's 'look':

Martin (41, dancer): "We could actually walk across the stage and still hold attention on the audience whereas somebody who's 20 years old can't really walk across the stage and really hold the attention ... just by standing ... something that he uses, uses part of the body that is seen in the eyes, a spiritual communication with an audience, or just in the look, a look can actually convey a whole entire physical solo, you don't have to actually do all the pirouettes and jumps at this age, you just look and convince the audience that they've actually just seen you jump and pirouette. I think you do reach a certain age where you have to do less to present more, because the older you get the more you physically tax the body, the less it responds ... physically. So in that way then you actually start using your experience ... and just convince the audience that you've done 4 pirouettes and you've just stood still."

Another participant's development of stage presence in performance was informed by his interest in acting. He identifies the performer's focus as a powerful medium of communication, where the body's movements become more subtle and less grandiose than in youth, and the performer establishes himself as subject through his focus:

Magnus (46, choreographer, teacher, performer): "It's almost *the* most important thing. (How you're focusing?) Where you're focusing in space, when you're dancing with someone where that focus is, how you're looking."

Movement becomes smaller and more nuanced; stage presence becomes expansive, and the inner, felt experience of connecting with self and audience in dancing becomes externalized through focus and presence. Male ballet-trained dancers commented on this 'presence' or 'focus' more than female dancers, with some exceptions. For example, Monique speaks of her developing confidence in using stillness and subtle movements in performance, and contrasts this with 'competing' physically in her earlier years:

Monique (42, choreographer, teacher): “I’m a person who likes subtlety, not everybody does, you know, I think it’s just something that’s taken me a while to ... to probably have the confidence to ... allow that to be strong enough so that it can be seen. But it’s that whole thing about the power or the stillness or the quietness, and then how to use that. And not to feel that you have to compete by flapping around, which is what it used to feel like to me: or to *focus*, which is what I would look at and go, ‘this looks completely fake to me’, whereas ... I think if you didn’t go further and find that real *honesty* in something, it takes a lot of courage to let other people see that. It took me a while to get there.”

Notice, however, that Monique’s experience is strikingly different from that of Magnus. Both suggest that dancers can develop a confidence in maturity, the confidence to not let technique alone speak for you, but to render visible the bodily engagement of the performer. However, she articulates the struggle to establish this confidence, which seems to come more easily to Magnus, Martin and Anthony. Marie also suggests how difficult it can be for women to establish a subject position through direct focus. Women are perhaps more likely to internalize the constant criticism in ballet training into self-criticism and self-doubt, making it more difficult to confidently emanate a stage presence:

Marie (49, dancer): “Dancing I think is one of the hardest professions ... from a young age on you’ll be criticized ... so our consciousness of ourselves is so fragile. You know, we are so critical towards ourselves, that the hardest part I find is to overcome that and to trust yourself, and that has to do with being nervous, or with being afraid ... it’s the fact of trusting yourself, of telling yourself, yes, you can do it.”

What the above comments from participants suggest is that ballet-trained dancers, as they mature, establish their presence on stage and connection with the audience through a more subtly nuanced physicality and an increased reliance on focus. Revealing one’s interiority is part of this connection; one of the

ways this occurs is through the performer's focus, another is through the use of the entire body to enlarge the visibility and communicative effectiveness of the performer. This becomes more salient in maturity, as less reliance is placed on the physicality and technique of the dancer to fulfill this function. It also appears to be one site of difference between male and female dancers, in that female interviewees' comments reflected more difficulty in gaining confidence and overcoming self-criticism in this respect. Importantly, stage presence can be used as a form of masking; that is, diverting attention from perceived physical decline in performing ability. This will be further taken up in the following chapter.

3.3.10 Age and body management

This theme supports the frameworks of Mauss (1934) and Bourdieu (1984) in that participants appeared to refer to specific techniques of the body that related to their growing older and being aware of the increasing limitation of their physical capacities. It also connects with Foucault's notion of regimes of self-care, regimes governed by discipline and moderation, via Connell's (1995) concept of body-reflexive practices, in which past experiences of injury due to lack of proper care inform their mindfulness of their bodies' capacities. Turner and Wainwright (2002) have called this mindfulness 'self-management', and their study addresses the issue of injuries and ageing in dancers from a large ballet company.

The comments below are predominantly from dancers with a classical background. In the classical tradition of striving to perfect and reflect an ideal body type, self-care for the dancer is an ongoing bodily mindfulness involving regimes of healthy diet, sufficient warm-up, and mental preparation for performance. For mature dancers, it becomes increasingly a case of self-preservation (see, e.g., Nagrin, 1988, Ch. 6). This has already been evident in dancers' comments on 'not letting themselves go' or becoming 'fat and frumpy', discussed above.

Some mature dancers also attribute their continuing ability to perform to various idiosyncratic factors, such as 'good genes', enhanced by taking care of one's health through adequate diet, rest and exercise:

Martin (41, dancer): "A person at 41 who's considered 'old' as a dancer ... if you've taken care of your body, if you are lucky and you've inherited a very good physical ability and your muscles are still good, you can still do as much as a 20 year old ... and I suppose I'm one of those lucky ones in that I've just inherited very good genes that will stand in good stead, and have stood you in good stead right up until now."

Anthony (55, dancer): "I think I denied it for a long time that I had those ... I had it in me, through my mother and also through my father who was an athlete and everything, so there was a great physicality in the genes, that just needed to be tapped into to be projected into a different area rather than just surfing and sport and disco dancing."

Regimes of self-care mentioned by participants involve a mindfulness of potentially hazardous factors such as injury due to insufficient warm-up. Dancers approach these regimes with the same mixture of discipline and moderation that is part and parcel of being a ballet dancer:

Nicholas (63, dancer): "I [pushed] myself always. Tired or not tired, you go to the class. Do your exercises, make your body an activity. Slowly, to get to the performance. 'Not today, today I don't do class'; that I see is not right. It's like pushing a car to 180 k in one second ... Discipline, moderation. You can do everything if you do it with moderation."

Sylvia (43, dancer): "I've always liked to take good care of myself as well as I could, I always thought of it as 'I need to do this in order to look a certain way, I need to eat really well, take my vitamins, I need to sleep', do all those things that you need to do, but I'm not super strict either ... I don't want to be

fanatic about anything, I want to lead a really comfortable, normal kind of life, but I take care.”

Marie’s comments relate most directly to the ageing bodies of dancers, which she believes will never markedly deteriorate because of their inherent sense of discipline and the importance of bodily control: “We always will take care of our bodies. It is naturally in us. The discipline of taking care of the body.”

These dancers are highly aware of what their bodies need to perform to their standards and their perception of audience expectations. Becoming older is not seen in itself an impediment to dancing on stage, as long as performers observe basic commonsense rules and do not ‘let themselves go’. This mindfulness extends to rest, good nutrition, adequate warm-up, taking heed of the first warning signs of injury, and generally maintaining the discipline learnt through years of dancing. These experiences can be seen as becoming embodied through what Connell (1995) terms body-reflexive practices. Body-reflexive practices are practices in which bodily experience, via socially constructed fantasy, leads to new constructions centering on new bodily interactions. Dancers are highly aware of how injuries are likely to arise and how dearly they will pay for them in terms of time taken for healing and rehabilitation. Related to this is the qualitative difference in using the body in performance that comes with maturity.

However, one should not take this to mean that an awareness of and intelligent way of using the body is *only* reached in mature years, as Michael’s comment below illustrates. He argues, firstly, that it can be taught to young students, and secondly, that if they develop this, dancers can maintain their physical capacity for a much longer time:

Michael (64, dancer, teacher): “I believe that if a student approaches the actual training process with a much more open mind and anatomically analyses the movement and not blindly tries to copy or follow the exercises that are being taught to him or her at whatever age, but really as I say analyses the reason

behind and the way in which the movement can be *done* from within the body, that dancer will maintain his or her *physicality*, his or her technique, much, much longer and into a much older age. A 20 year old dancer ... 90 per cent of the time I would say, by experience, *wouldn't* have this unless it's been introduced to them in their training."

Nevertheless, this mindfulness and intelligence becomes informed by life experience (such as past injuries) and awareness of the physical limitations of individual bodies, which can only come with maturity. Waning stamina can also be a motivating factor, according to several participants:

Vera (49, dance academic): "I think it's more the physicality of it that largely changes. There's more knowledge in the body, there are more restrictions happening maybe in the body, so we are more informed in the way we move. But at the same time, there's less of the stamina, there's less ... ability to move ... in terms of flexibility or whatever, and that may be OK, as long as you stop and start. I'd say stamina is the big one. You don't have as much stamina as when you were young."

In its exacting standards, classical ballet technique places a higher amount of wear and tear on bodies than most other dance forms. Classically trained dancers who continue to perform in their 40s and later believe they must adopt an approach that takes into account their physical limitations, in order to maintain their technique. That is, dancers in midlife and beyond adjust their self-management on the basis of their accumulated corporeal knowledge of what their bodies can and cannot do.

3.3.11 Performing one's age

This theme strongly supports Featherstone and Hepworth's (1991a) 'mask of ageing' in that participants' comments reflected how they assumed others perceived them 'at this age', and the need to protect themselves from social ridicule by not 'making a spectacle' out of themselves. However, while this was

important to participants practicing ballet-derived dance styles, it appeared less so for those who chose more experimental forms less reliant on physical aspects of performance. Specially designed choreography for older dancers in the balletic tradition defines their dancing as age-appropriate (i.e. normative) and offers a means of self-protection from social ridicule, which is consistent with masking theory (e.g., Woodward, 1991; Biggs, 1997). Diprose (1994b) and others would argue that such age-appropriate choreography erases the potential ambiguity of performance that is problematic for western cultures in which consistency of performance is required in body-subjects, and this theme supports such a position.

The previous theme dealt with the experiences of changes in physicality, and their management by dancers as they aged. However, also of importance is the social context of performance and its 'appropriateness' for the age category to which they had become assigned according to normative expectations. Comments from some of the participants reflect a keen awareness of social expectations of appropriate age-related practice for dancers, and the importance of protecting themselves from social censure (not looking 'ridiculous' or being a 'curiosity').

This age-appropriateness is both in relation to the appearance of the body in performance, and to performing in pieces designed as suitable for a particular age group (avoiding the 'mutton dancing as lamb' scenario). Some interviewees express a strong desire to avoid making themselves vulnerable to social curiosity or potential ridicule, by not trying to compete with younger dancers and instead focusing on their stage personas as mature artists with skills and qualities different from those of their youth. This suggests a fear of defying normative age boundaries through 'making a spectacle' out of oneself, which in the interviews is common to both female *and* male mature dancers.

Also evident in the experiences of interviewees is the importance of choreographers in customizing dance repertoire for a mature age-group. Sylvia

and Martin are performing with a company that employs choreographers to create works specifically for them:

Sylvia (43, dancer): “Everything is created towards our capabilities and more, it’s not that we don’t push ourselves any more, because actually a lot of things I’ve been doing I’ve been pushing myself to do better and more. But we work a certain way. You work the way you can, with what you have to offer at this point.”

Martin (41, dancer): “It’s a very, very delicate thing. You have to have the right choreographer for this type of company, and very often it’s a choreographer who’s totally unknown, and whose work does not look good on the younger dancers. It has to be right for the mature dancer, it has to show the mature dancer up to the best of *their* ability and also at the same time communicate on the same level with the audience, it’s no good taking an older dancer and trying to make them look like a younger dancer, it’s not going to work, and immediately the audience will see that.”

In this case the movement vocabulary has been strategically modified to accommodate the mature body’s capacities (that is, building on the strengths of experienced artists in their 40s and beyond). Importantly, however, it is impossible to distinguish individual bodies from culturally constructed bodies ‘of this age’. For example, choreographic conventions will take into account what western audiences expect to see older dancers perform: a movement vocabulary appropriate to their normative age, as another interviewee noted.

Indeed, Marie reflects on her changed body and how she feels it would be inappropriate for her now to dance in a role she had danced 15 years ago, suggesting there was now a generational shift in her representation, from ‘young girl’ to ‘grandmother’:

Marie (49, dancer): “You would also look pretty ridiculous if you would do that now ... They now rehearse a ballet that I danced for 12 years 15 years ago.

I would know every step but I would really feel ridiculous dancing it now, because it needs a young body ... the piece needs a young girl. I would look like a grandmother who was trying to dance the twist or something."

Nicholas' comment below echoes this awareness that to pair older bodies in dance with a role connoting youth violates age-based normative codes, thus making the dancer vulnerable to social ridicule:

Nicholas (63, dancer): "It's something very serious and very dangerous, very fragile. Dangerous because it can be ridiculous, that's what I mean by dangerous. It can be ridiculous, and we don't want to be ridiculous on the stage. That's why everything is made especially for us. You've heard about Rudolf Nureyev, the great dancer ... he was still dancing when he was 50, he was still dancing these things that he was dancing when he was 20, 25. I respect and have great admiration for him, but I think it can look a bit ridiculous sometimes because you cannot be a prince when you are 50."

Other participants also gave examples of performances they had seen where 'old bodies' were juxtaposed within a youthful context. For Susan, the visual impact of the 'elderly' dancers she describes in terms of body shape ('no longer thin, [but] middle-aged women') performing in an 'inappropriate' piece (that is, violating the implicit cultural coding of how dancers should look) evokes a sense of the 'uncanny':

Susan (53, dance academic): "There's a beautiful piece that Tudor did, and he was a young man when he made the piece, and it's about three prostitutes and their clients who come into the brothel. And he redid that piece for a big fundraiser held in New York and they did a big performance at New York, probably at ... Centre for the Performing Arts there, the Lincoln Centre, and he did that with the original cast and all of those people were in their 60s and 70s and some ... the piece, it was amazing, it stole the evening because these people were not young and alluring any more, they were ... it was a very seedy and quite strange dark piece, because these women were now quite

elderly, seducing these elderly men, and that was extraordinary, just extraordinary ... amazing. It definitely had a very dark undertone, that I don't necessarily think was there when all those people were performing at a much younger age. You know, those women ... they were no longer thin, they were middle-aged women and looked very different." ²³

Gabrielle's inability to distinguish whether the older dancers in a Pina Bausch piece were trained or untrained is, on the other hand, a blurring of the boundaries between professional and non-professional dancers. The technical demands of the more avant-garde style of dance in this piece did not differentiate between younger ('abled') and older ('in decline') bodies:

Gabrielle (55, dance performer): "There was a very interesting project of Pina Bausch, which was across time. She had an old piece called *Kontakthof*, and she was collecting people who liked to dance, men and women, but who didn't have any official education in dance. They were called lay dancers, non-professional dancers, and they were all from Wuppertal. And they were old—60, between maybe 50 and 60 and even more, men and women. And a dancer of her company who did the dance *Kontakthof* 20 years ago, she was working with these non-professional dancers ... I saw both pieces, the piece with the professional dancers 15 years ago, and ... this new set, these non-professional dancers in the same piece, and I thought they were *dancers*, what would you think? Do you think they have an education in dance or not? I cannot see the difference."

In another instance of combining younger and older bodies in dance, Vera comments on her reaction to seeing a highly revered choreographer, crippled with arthritis in advanced age, performing with his group of young dancers. She contrasts 'young-beautiful' bodies with 'older' ones, and then immediately qualifies this:

²³ Antony Tudor's *Judgment of Paris*, with music by Kurt Weill, was first performed by the London Ballet at the Westminster Theatre, London in 1938. Its Australian premiere, performed by Ballet

Vera (49, dance academic): “He couldn’t walk ... couldn’t walk on the stage. So what’s the point, unless you’re going to be sitting down or something, he had literally no technique, you see, on the stage. I would suggest then that if you’re going to put in a person who has got those talents in a performance that is going to allow them to move ... but then they would be with other bodies that are different, rather than all these young, beautiful bodies ... and I’m not suggesting that older bodies don’t have to be beautiful, but ... and that was such a contrast and ... it didn’t work.

The common factor these views share is the ambiguity in the visible attributes of the dancers and the context in which they have been placed, an ambiguity that disturbs because it elides codification according to normative understanding; to paraphrase Kristeva, it is ‘at the borders where [normative] meaning collapses’. The blurring of boundaries is only disturbing because the boundaries exist, in dance forms in which they, and the (generational) interpretations of ‘older’ bodies, have been encoded and naturalized in the notion of the ‘ageless’, classical body. In other, more subversive forms, such as that of Bausch’s piece, ambiguity is not problematic, and indeed can be used for resistive purposes.

So far, eleven themes have been subjected to a descriptive exegesis, with minimal theoretical interpretation. In the remaining two chapters, issues arising from these themes will again be taken up in relation to the theoretical frameworks of phenomenological, poststructuralist, and social constructionist research, with particular emphasis on how dancers from various dance genres negotiate gendered ageing within the constraints of their institutional environment. These issues will be reconnected with the theoretical concerns of Chapters 1 and 2. Thus this chapter, although descriptive rather than analytical, is in a sense a fulcrum on which the thesis folds back on itself.

Rambert, was on 4 October 1948 in Sydney, Australia.

Chapter 4

Dancing between construction and experience

This chapter relates the findings presented in Chapter 3 to broader structures of ageing and gender, focusing on how age and gender based cultural norms are institutionally mediated and experienced by dancers. Drawing on participants' narratives and available research on institutional policies and practices, I ask how these norms might prescribe gendered ageing, and how they might be maintained or changed through performative practices and relations.

From the beginning of this project, a major assumption has been that the experience of becoming an 'ageing dancer' is an embodied one, that the dancer's subjectivity is inextricably embodied. That is, the aesthetic practice of dance and its associated discourse, while to a significant degree socially constructed, is experienced and embodied by dancers in terms irreducible to discourse. The dancer is unique among other media of artistic expression. Unlike the musician or even the singer, the dancer *is* her or his expression, the dancer's body is not a prosthesis of the performer's 'self' in expression (like a musical instrument to a musician)—it *is* that self-in-expression embodied. However, the dancer's 'body' has predominantly been constructed as an instrument in western thought, and under the sovereignty of the 'mind'. As evident in the interviews, some of the dancers share this perception of the body as an instrument.

As discussed earlier, a persistent problem for theorists such as Foucault, Butler and Rose, who contend that nothing exists outside language or discourse, has been that the dancer's body in its materiality is not totally reducible to the discursive. Butler, for example, argues that the discursive and extradiscursive cannot be delimited, since this presupposes the prior delimitation of the extradiscursive, and in doing so, what is delimited as extradiscursive is "formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself" (Butler, 1993). This very marking off of a boundary, she maintains, "will have some normative force and,

indeed, some violence, for it can construct only through erasing", whether this occurs tacitly or overtly. Thus the body (and the body that dances) has been interpreted as 'mute' or 'dumb', since it lies outside language and, therefore, a speaking position (Burr, 1999).

While some have argued that western dance is a 'feminized' and marginalized aesthetic practice, locating the female body within a patriarchal society that has denied dance its status as a signifying practice (e.g. Albright, 1997; Daly, 1989; Dempster, 1988; Sanchez-Colberg, 1993; Thomas, 1993), this very extradiscursiveness and feminization of dance may be an enabling condition for modes of signification that imbricate both the discursive (inscribed) subjection to normativity *and* the extradiscursive aspect presented by the material specificity of the dancer's body. For example, critical psychologist Vivien Burr criticizes the 'reduction' of the body to a 'text' that is evident in social constructionism through its emphasis on language and discourse (Burr, 1999, pp. 113–126). For, while bringing the body into discourse serves to foreground it in theories of gendered subjectivity, it is problematic in the sense that, since the body as 'text' is presumed to be constituted by cultural, historical and social discourse, there is no possibility of changing that discourse. Burr argues, however, that the extradiscursive dimension of the expressive body, which social constructionist thinking would deny, offers opportunities for resistance, particularly in body-based forms such as dance (*ibid.*, p. 119). She notes that:

power which operates discursively may be resisted through the expressive capacities of the body. The meanings expressed by the 'mute' or 'dumb' body cannot be countered from within discourse. It is precisely because the body does not 'speak the same language' as discursive power that it is able to resist it.

Thus, if dance is marginalized as a 'feminine' aesthetic practice within mainstream cultural discourse, a practice that conforms to and reinforces patriarchal values, it may also paradoxically offer women a voice. As Helen Thomas maintains (Thomas, 1993, p. 81):

Dance, which is characterised by its attention to the body, primarily by its non-verbal mode of expression, could provide a prime site or a gap for women to voice their difference(s), their otherness, to break through the dominant (public, male) discourses, to which they have been denied access and through which they have been silenced.

The difficulty dancers often find in expressing their experiences of dance in conventional language attests to the extradiscursive dimension of the experience of dancing. Thomas, in "An-Other Voice", notes that the dance students in her interviews repeatedly found it difficult to verbally articulate their experience of dancing (Thomas, 1993). This does not necessarily imply that dancing is 'prelinguistic' or in some way inferior to language, merely because its experience by dancers and audience cannot easily be put into words. Instead, Thomas suggests the possibility that dance coexists with language as a mode of expressiveness, to communicate the ineffable—that which cannot be articulated through language (ibid.). This has important implications for those age theories that presume a body-mind split, such as the 'mask of ageing' theory (Featherstone & Hepworth, 1991a). For the practice of dance credits the dancer's body, in its extradiscursive materiality, with a flexibility and agency that these age theories cannot match. The dancer's body may have the capacity to resist and undermine culturally normative ageist stereotypes. For example, one interviewee practicing experimental movement considered her age to be unimportant in her decision to keep dancing. For her, what is important is 'what the body can do', what possibilities it opens up for movement:

Joanne: "A long time ago my age became irrelevant, and I think that's an attitudinal thing, that has some connection to what you're talking about. And I'm not sure when that occurred. But there is something in the work, and the inquiry that has contributed to that, I'm sure of it. It doesn't matter how old one is; it's totally irrelevant. But in terms of my physicality, my body, I don't ... dwell on it. This is how something's moving, this is where it can go to."

Perhaps the practice of dancing as both a material and discursive phenomenon can best be described as what sociologist Robert Connell terms a

'body-reflexive practice'. In his book *Masculinities*, Connell describes body-reflexive practices as practices in which bodily experience, via socially constructed fantasy, leads to new constructions centering on new bodily interactions (Connell, 1995, p. 62). That is, they are a pattern "with bodies both objects and agents of practice, and the practice itself forming the structures within which bodies are appropriated and defined" (ibid., p. 61). Connell urges us to "assert the activity, literally the agency, of bodies in social processes ... where bodies are seen as sharing in social agency, in generating and shaping courses of social conduct." (ibid., p. 60). Accordingly, bodies are not simply 'marked', inscribed or produced by discursively produced and maintained social norms, but possess the agency to transform their social world and themselves. Through body-reflexive practices, then, individuals possess the agency to shape their subjectivities according to their translation of the meanings of their bodily experiences, within the constraints of the social institutional milieu that both structures them, and is structured by them.

While bodily practices themselves may not be discursive, their meanings are constructed through discourse. A social construction of an event or a practice is a discursive tool dealing with a phenomenon that can be considered both extra-discursive and discursive (the practice and its meaningfulness within that culture). The dancer's body need not be seen as a Foucauldian 'docile body', for even in the most highly codified discipline of ballet the body's materiality will always resist total classification, codification and grading. Discursive and extradiscursive languages are inextricably 'imbricated', for dance forms that resist or subvert dominant frameworks of embodied subjectivity must do so within language and culture. As Gardner argues, "To argue for a resisting form of dancing is not to go back to the idea of a preverbal or extra-verbal body. It is rather to see dance practices as being able to engage with the question of the relationship of bodies to language, of practices to discourses" (Gardner, 1997, p. 37). The key to resistance is to focus on embodied experience, and upon the interpretation of the meanings these practices hold for the body-subject, in order

to establish counter-narratives to hegemonic gender-age discourses, and thus of alternative readings of what an 'older' dancer can be and do.

Therefore, in this chapter I will focus on how it might be possible to 'read' the ageing, gendered dancer as both lived and constructed, as existing somewhere between the extradiscursive and the discursive, as both subject of, and subject(ed) to culture. I will draw on participants' reflections on how they negotiate the structural constraints of their institutionalizing culture, in order to ask how we might theorize the corporeal subject within these constraints, and what forms resistance or subversion might take.

4.1 Cultural norms, institutional constraints and habitus

In Chapter 2 I examined Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' in relation to ageing, noting that studies such as Turner and Wainwright (2002) do not make explicit how, if dancers' actions are always structured through institutional factors, they might be able to transform (or re-structure) these structures. Below, I will outline how institutional structures impact on dancers of the age of, or in transition, practicing in Australia. Following this, I will consider how corporeal habits and actions might function to perpetuate or subvert cultural and institutional norms, drawing on Shannon Sullivan's (2002) analysis of Butler's concept of performativity and Dewey's notion of the plasticity of habit.

In my introduction I noted that dancers, by view of their profession, confront the 'spectre' of ageing much earlier than their non-dancing peers. That is, the effects and experiences of ageing in theatrical dancers are not comparable to those in most other occupations. Rather, it has been simply taken for granted that professional dancing, like competitive sport, is a special case in which the physical body 'naturally' gives out after a certain time—end of story. Much of the literature on ageing has, of course, focused on older post-retirement age groups (the 'over 65s') than those found in most forms of professional dance, at which a 40 year old employee is well into retirement age and, in contrast to those in a 'normal' job, faces an uncertain economic future. Conventional age-research

cannot therefore be automatically extended to dancers or others in comparable careers, such as athletes or models. In the case of catwalk models, it is evident that 'early retirement' has little to do with the physical capacities of the body and much to do with its increasing inability to represent cultural stereotypes of youthful attractiveness. In ballet-derived dancing as an aesthetic as well as an athletic practice, however, *both* physical and representational capacities must be evident in the dancer's body for the continuation of a performing career in dance.

Secondly, the issue for dancers and elite athletes or models is not one of 'retirement' (with its connotations of retiring from working life altogether), but rather one of 'transition' to a second career that enables them to successfully embody and reiterate (through physical and representational means) age and gender-based cultural norms. Indeed, dancers' transition programs both internationally and in Australia aim to provide opportunities for retraining for dancers at an age at which those in other professions do not face the imperative to change their profession (and professional identity).

I contend that this lack of acknowledgment of the different status of dancers through official policies enables the ideology of 'decline' to operate through *informal* institutional processes, facilitated by the relative lack of formal provisions for the retraining or retirement of dancers, let alone of notions such as 'retirement pensions'. Thus, despite a historical trend to achieve parity of conditions of employment for professional dancers with those in employment in areas outside the performing arts, the result has been an overall failure to provide formal guidelines for such conditions as provisions upon retirement and parental leave. Hence there is no parity between dance as a profession in Australia and other, non-arts professions that do not require a particular body type or physical skills.

This works to disadvantage dancers throughout their careers, but it is most salient at the point of transition. It is also women who have traditionally been disadvantaged most. In relation to maternity leave, for example, comments from

the interviews in this study suggest that the absence of formal provisions for leave entitlements has conventionally resulted in women resorting to more informal arrangements, such as child care assistance from female family members or friends, to enable them to continue in their employment. Thus, because the 'need' for child care is invisible—grandmothers or aunts unofficially pick up the slack—it has received little attention from policymakers and government. Yet it is an issue of structural gender inequality, and one that is tied to specific historical perceptions of gender roles in western cultures. Some dancers in this study commented that in the 1970s it was customary for female dancers to retire from dancing once they became pregnant. However, comments from other female dancers suggest that, in the 1980s and 1990s, it became possible for a woman to continue dancing as long as no financial 'burden' was placed on the company by demanding maternity leave entitlements. Resort to informal arrangements, such as family members caring for children, ensured minimal disruption to women's productivity. Productivity is here defined according to criteria tailored for men, who are much less likely to have their careers disrupted by child rearing. This structural inequality between men and women dancers has been traditionally ignored by dance companies at the institutional level; they have failed to acknowledge it and offer formal support.

Researchers such as Hanna (1988) and Rogers *et al* (1993) have argued that institutional structures in dance companies are predicated on gendered cultural customs and practices that favor men. The former dancers of the Royal Ballet studied by Turner and Wainwright (2002) worked within such a highly structured institution, in which notions of productivity and performance are defined in a 'ballet habitus' that reflects a hierarchical chain of command and clearly defined levels of authority and subordination. Following Hanna, I would suggest that this dance company milieu is allied with a 'masculine' form of operation. The alliance of ballet with masculinity and hierarchy, and of experimental/contemporary dance with femininity and co-operation ('democracy'), raised in Chapter 2, is reflected in the gendered representations of cultural customs and norms in movement vocabularies, dancers' bodies and

creative roles. For example, Rogers *et al* (1993, p. 70) note that, in ballet companies, “interviewees described dancers as being trained as puppets for male choreographers”, which suggests that the agency for representation lies with the (male) choreographer rather than with the (predominantly female) dancer. Interviewees’ comments in my study suggest that mature dancers by and large practice as independent artists, having dissociated themselves from this hierarchical ‘chain of command’.

Dance historian Amy Koritz contends that movement has historically been disconnected from the dancer’s body, its sexual specificity and subjectivity, through the influence of modernism. The material specificity of the body has become dissociated from the ‘discourse’ of dance, accordingly rendering the dancer’s body subject to marginalization and subjection to patriarchal norms of ‘sexed’ (male) knowledge (Koritz, 1995, cited in Gardner, 1997, p. 38):

The idea of ‘movement’ is, historically, an idealisation which at one and the same time both effected and reflected a displacement of the performer as a crucial element in the production of the performance. This idealised ‘movement’ transcends the embodied and sexual specificity of the performer. Through the essentially (modernist) literary idea of ‘movement’, subjectivity and ‘creativity’ become disembodied, able to be attributed no longer to the performer, but only to a non-performing artist/creator. These positions, of performer and artist/creator, are gendered — the bodiliness of the feminised performer is the material for, but also the potential obstruction of, the ‘ideas’ of a disembodied God-like creator.

Koritz here contends that movement has become appropriated by the (masculine) choreographer/creator. Such appropriation, I would argue, also results in the feminization of the ‘ageing’ body of the dancer as ‘other’ by a masculine ideology of ageing, that is, as a period of decline. In ballet, it is the dancer who performs, it is the dancer’s body that is seen to be aged. It is the dancer who is predominantly female, and who, because she is visible to the public eye and judged on her (ageless) physical perfection, is likely to be more confronted by her physical ageing (as a loss of ‘cultural capital’, in Turner and Wainwright’s (2002) terms) than the male choreographer, manager or artistic director ‘pulling the strings’. The construction of the dominant human-aesthetic

discourse on how the dancer's body should look and perform is both gendered and age-graded.

Furthermore, as apparent in the interviews, it is in ballet that ageing becomes particularly problematic, and this is enabled by the discipline's highly competitive nature (particularly for female dancers) and its youth-oriented ethos. Ageing disrupts the culturally constructed and perpetuated stability of the dancer's subjectivity and, as I will argue more fully later in this chapter, it is this notion that subjectivity is 'stable' that more experimental dance genres challenge. The ageing (male) dancer in a large ballet company will not be as disadvantaged, *if* he has more opportunity to move into a key creative management position within the company, than his female counterpart.

The post-retirement provisions of mainstream dance companies may structurally disadvantage women relative to men. This is facilitated by the absence of official policies and guidelines relating to retirement provisions for dancers in Australian dance companies. It is in dancers' 'transition' from a career as dancer to other forms of employment, either in administrative or managerial positions in dance companies or outside the dance industry altogether, that structural gender inequality manifests itself most clearly, as access to the positions available to dancers in dance companies after 'transition' is gendered (Hanna, 1988; Rogers *et al*, 1993). However, as comments from the interviews suggest, both male and female professionals who try to continue to perform in maturity are disadvantaged, particularly if they have other commitments, such as dependent children.

Another way in which the ideology of age-based decline is made manifest is through the way in which the dancer's professional identity is understood in western cultures. The dancer's identity as *dancer* is a key concern in understanding dancers' experiences of retirement from dance. In Turner and Wainwright's (2002) words, "Being a dancer becomes the embodiment of identity". In Australia, this identity is contingent on several forms of distinction,

in the Bourdieusian sense. The first distinction is based on practicing the 'right' form, locatable within a hierarchy of valorization. Thus classical ballet or classically based contemporary dance as a 'high-art' form enjoys an economically and culturally more privileged status than other forms, such as experimental dance, character dancing or what was known as 'vaudeville'. Here it is interesting to note that, with the exception of experimental dance, it is precisely these latter dance forms that older dancers traditionally switched over to.

There is thus a link between a culturally privileged dance form (ballet) and ageing, as older dancers retire or move into less privileged forms. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, being recognized as a ballet dancer in what is a highly exclusionary practice²⁴ bestows a high distinction on the practitioner, based on her or his physical capital. However, as Bourdieu maintained, physical capital declines with age. White and Guest's (1995, p. 50) findings included a recommendation that dancers practice alternative dance forms that are not as 'demanding on the body', yet these are precisely the forms that are comparatively marginalized and devalued in western cultures. This was the 'traditional' route of ageing dancers two generations ago, as one participant's comment suggests. There is hence a sense of 'demotion' towards a less prestigious dance form, one associated with a reduced emphasis on physical ability:

Adam (72, actor, teacher, examiner): "A girl can't really dance classically beyond late 30, and the same for a man, classically. But ... if they've been a classical dancer, and *first* classical dancers, they can go into character work if they wish, but a lot of them don't *want* to do that, especially when they've been first class classical dancers. (Is that because character makes less physical demand?) Oh, yes, much ... character work is more like acting, being an actor. (So people used to do that more than nowadays?) Go into character work? Yes. More than what they do now."

²⁴ See, e.g., Novak (1993, p. 42). In the words of one participant (Vera): "Ballet is something, or western dance is something that ... we don't do it in general, not everybody does ballet. You go and see it. In fact it's not something that you do ... it's not something that, you meet with your friends and you do ballet. You don't."

This comment suggests the possibility that recent trends towards earlier 'retirement' by dancers are associated with a refusal to accept a 'lower class' status as dancer in taking up less culturally valorized forms and roles.

Secondly, the concept of the 'professional dancer' in Australia is defined predominantly in economic terms. This involves being salaried or on a contract; in the words of one participant, to be a professional "meant that you got paid". This model was seen by another participant as not endemic to dancers in all western cultures, but as peculiar to Australia:

Helen (40, dance academic): "There's very much that attitude [in Australia] that, if you can't *do* ballet, you don't do ballet, well, that means you're not a dancer, you're not a professional dancer. Whereas in America, there are people who have hardly ever done ballet, and have done modern all their lives and are fantastic dancers, and there's this whole, I think much broader, and much more blurry sense of what a professional dancer might be in America, in that the funding situation's so different ... it wasn't so much I think to do with how much you got paid for dancing, as a stance of validity of your status as a dancer ... some of the most prestigious choreographers in San Francisco, their companies are out waiting tables in the evenings."

Thus the economic distinction between the professional and the non-professional, or amateur, can be seen as a culturally and historically variable phenomenon. The meaning of 'being a dancer' is clearly not fixed (for example, in terms of attaining a specific physical standard in performing ability). Rather, the dancer's professional identity is located in a complex mesh of culturally and institutionally normative discourses and practices that prescribe the performance of gender, age, class and other classificatory concepts. It is within the larger economic and cultural systems that certain practices, dance forms, bodies, and age groups, are legitimized and others are either excluded or marginalized.

Bourdieu is one of the few theorists whose concerns included the ageing body, and its positioning within social classification. The 'legitimate' bodily forms and

those most valued in the high-art form of ballet are selected according to stringent criteria of inclusion and exclusion. He describes the legitimization of specific bodily forms in terms of class supported by the prevailing hegemonic groups (Bourdieu, 1984). As Shilling notes of Bourdieu: "Central to the value of different forms of physical capital at any time is the ability of dominant groupings to define their bodies and lifestyles as superior, worthy of reward, and as, metaphorically and literally, the embodiment of class" (Shilling, 1993, p. 140). Thus, the struggles over bodily forms that are most valued in a society can "include definitions of what counts as a legitimate body, and the legitimate use of the body in society. These struggles are related to the production and realization of physical capital, but they also go beyond matters of resources" (ibid., p. 145). However, the dancer's distinction, her or his physical capital, atrophies with ageing, a process that occurs at an age at which most of those in other professions are in the prime of their careers.

A dancer's identity can be seen to be constituted across a number of domains: at the *physical* level, at the level of *representation* of cultural norms and values, and at the *economic* level. The 'physical capital' of the dancer relates to physical appearance and skills (what she or he can do), but it is also a form of embodied cultural capital, and it is already gendered in its inscription through training, as I have noted in Chapter 2. At the level of representation, too, the dancer's embodied cultural capital is gendered and age-graded. One form of embodied cultural capital is 'sexual capital', or what in everyday language we might call 'sexual currency', which is a concept that I will develop more fully below. I will argue that it is a more useful way of understanding gendered ageing than gender-neutral terms such as physical or cultural capital. Finally, at the economic level, the ballet dancer's identity is secured in practicing an art form of higher cultural distinction than, say, experimental dance or musical theatre. Classical dance is an art form that reinforces and perpetuates cultural ideals, and is one that (at least in theory) earns the dancer social recognition and value through financial support in continuing their practice. Ageing dancers thus negotiate their self-identity across these domains.

4.2 Agency, seriality and habit

I now want to shift the focus of my discussion, by examining how dancers might negotiate and possibly subvert cultural norms, as gendered, age-graded body-subjects engaged in an aesthetic practice. Here I will draw on three crucial notions: bodily agency, seriality and habit. Earlier I discussed Young's conception of gender as a series rather than as a cohesive group, as a means of avoiding essentializing women (Young, 1997), and have argued that by opening up the category of gender in this way one can also open up the category of age. Secondly, the notion of 'habit' has been described as a means of transforming cultural norms surrounding ageing and gender in dance, and of offering possibilities for reinscribing or transcending cultural codes (e.g., through reiteration of norms 'differently'). Performing, or 'dancing', one's age is thus just as much a means of articulating bodily agency as it is of bodily conformity to normative modes of comportment and action.

Concepts such as seriality and habit can therefore help us to theorize the body's transformative potential, and its openness to change, including changes in corporeal movement codes. Further, opportunities for transformation, such as changing the form and concerns of one's dance practice, can be reconfigured as a productive aspect of ageing, rather than one necessitated by physical decline. Disruption of habitual forms of moving, therefore, can be a means by which the individual's practice is updated to reflect where that person is 'at' at specific points of maturity.

How then do the notions of agency, seriality and habit intersect in relation to broader culturally normative codes that prescribe gendered ageing, and how might this inform the practice of dance? Butler (1993) has pointed out that it is impossible to consciously adopt a preferred gender 'at will' and perform it, as we are always already gendered by culture. What means of resistance, then, might be possible? Here Young (1997) and Sullivan (2000) provide some useful insights. Young's conceptualization of gender as a form of seriality paves a way for

understanding how gendered, ageing bodies might inscribe, and be inscribed by, previous practices. In my study, dancers practiced diverse movement forms; that is, they did not all share a common practice that might define them as 'dancers'. Indeed, while they agreed to be interviewed in a study of dancers, which implies that they saw themselves as belonging under the seriality of their profession (i.e., as dancers), they sometimes defined themselves as 'performers' or 'movement artists', having over time moved away from classical movement codes. This raises the issue of how ingrained, inscribed habits might be transformed over time and thus escape the circularity of actions both structured by, and themselves structuring, actions. This is an issue that Sullivan addresses in her analysis of Dewey's 'plasticity of habit' and Butler's concept of the performativity of gender (Sullivan, 2000).

The notion of the classically trained dancer's ongoing repetition of movements versus the experimental dancer-choreographer using the body in all its material specificity as a 'laboratory' of discovery is an appropriate case for analysis. For if we adopt the position that our bodily comportment unwittingly reflects cultural norms (such as age and gender norms), the notion of 'agency' in performing these norms is brought into question, here literally in the body-subject's performance. This is a problem that Young (1997) appears to leave unresolved.

In her analysis of the social performance of gender norms, Sullivan (2000) questions how habits and cultural norms can mutually transform each other without simply legitimizing each other; that is, she asks whether corporeal agency is possible in any real sense of the term. She argues that, for Dewey, human existence is *bodily* existence. Bodily existence itself is constituted and structured by habit, and habits, as forms of comportment, inscribe the embodied self-in-the-world. Gendered embodied habits are thus set and formed by cultural conventions and norms, and fundamentally characterize bodily comportment. However, Sullivan argues that habits are not counterproductive to agency. Instead, they are productive in that they offer the self the agency to transform both itself and the cultural constructs that structure both habits and

comportment. Sullivan outlines the means by which such a transformation can be achieved, and through which the undesirable circularity of the argument that bodily habits and cultural customs can only work to legitimize each other is avoided. As Sullivan notes (*ibid.*, p. 32):

Agency is found in variations of the gender performances we are constrained to repeat ... Change of the prevailing cultural norms that inform our bodily habits and gender performativity can come only through the transformation of those norms that takes place through their reiteration. Agency and the change that it can provide are located in subversive repetition, which does not mean deciding to engage in gender performativity but rather deciding how to perform (the habits that are) one's gender.

For Butler (1993), the subversive process of reiteration of one's gender is "working the weakness in the norm". Norms are artificial and require reiteration to constitute them as norms. Therefore, Sullivan argues, as habits can be embodied and performed differently, slight variations are possible that displace and, over time, gradually lead to change in cultural norms. As one interviewee from my study commented in relation to her practice, "you do the *pliés* differently. Let me try how I can do it differently" (see Chapter 3). The knee-bends (*pliés*) of the young dancers need not be normatively reiterated and reinscribed. They can be subverted through slight or moderate variations in performance and in this way their normative balletic status can be undermined. The performer of the knee-bends is then transformed from being an ageing dancer no longer able to adequately reproduce a normative movement exercise to a creator of non-normative movement practices.

Furthermore, norms, like *pliés*, can never be perfectly reiterated anyway. Sullivan contends that "we can reconfigure our culture in and through the ways we embody it. We alter, however slightly, the grooves engrained in our selves when we re-trace and re-groove them through our habitual actions" (*ibid.*, p. 33). That is, the subject is conceived as subject(ed) to cultural norms that are in turn subjected to individual variations in their performance by (aged, gendered, classed) bodies.

The ageing ballet dancer who is 'hooked' on practice is an example of such attempts to reiterate embodied norms of how male or female dancers' bodies should look and perform. This reiteration requires specific physical skills and bodily attributes in order to successfully reinforce the gendered norms of youth, athleticism and beauty in dance (the dancer's embodied cultural and sexual capital). For the ageing dancer, attempts at performing these norms may invite social ridicule or, at best, curiosity. In one participant's words, forty-plus dancers "are a curiosity" for audiences. Classically-based contemporary dance is no longer appropriate for this age group, and the primary reason for this is not because the body has become more limited in what movements it can perform, but primarily because its chronological and visible age *already* excludes it from public performance. The 'habit' of dance practice that constitutes the dancer's self through its reiteration has become inappropriate and outmoded as the dancer ages. In this way, ageing for classical dancers represents a disruption of subjectivity.

One of the interviewees provided a telling example of how older dancers performing out of context violate the implicit cultural coding of how (old) dancers should look and perform (indeed whether they should perform at all). Susan's earlier comment on the Antony Tudor ballet (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.11) indicates that the juxtaposition of older dancers costumed in a youthful way made a powerful impact on her, which she could not clearly identify. The original cast, now aged, performing a work choreographed for young and 'alluring' dancers, revealed a violation of the normally unnoticed norms describing (and prescribing) what is both a theatrical and social performance; if you like, their performance exemplified 'a norm incorrectly reiterated'. Practices, or 'habits', that once constituted dancers as subjects now, as 'aged' subjects, *subject* them to social critique and potential humiliation as 'excluded', illegitimate, or abject bodies, while simultaneously charging the choreography with a subversive power that would be lacking if the piece were performed by young dancers.

The conflation of the terms 'seedy', 'dark', and 'strange', on one hand, and 'middle-aged', 'elderly', and 'no longer thin', on the other, discursively constructs the older body in performance in Susan's narrative as a body 'in decline'. This perception of bodies in decline is at odds with a performing context in which proper normative signification of youth and sexuality requires bodies that are 'young and alluring', bodies that are 'thin.' The discursive conflation of ageing ('elderly' and 'middle-aged' are used interchangeably) with a 'no longer thin' body shape and a loss of sexual 'allure' indicates how the 'proper', norm-conforming body-subject of the older dancer is discursively constituted in contemporary western cultures.

It should be noted at this stage that it would be a gross oversimplification to assume that institutional practices and discourses exert a uniform, consistent normalizing effect on body-subjects. Foucault always maintained that power is not monolithic in its techniques and effects, and that the heterogeneity and conflictual nature of its constitutive elements is a productive component of power, offering possibilities for resistance within power (what he termed 'bio-power'). Thus dominant discourses are themselves not operating in synchrony, but operate in a more complex way. A dancer's identity as 'dancer' cannot, for example, be theorized as simply a response to being interpellated as such (as 'in retirement', through promotions, social recognition and appreciation, everyday discourse, and so on). For example, in Chapter 3, a major theme—the cultural valorization of dance and dancers—highlights just how resistant dancers can be to normative interpellations of their identity. The picture is therefore much more complex, and requires a consideration of local practices of resistance.

Elsbeth Probyn's analysis of cultural interpretations of the anorexic body is one example of the body as a site of resistance to competing discourses (Probyn, 1987). Probyn has articulated a framework that credits the female anorexic body with agency denying the impact of institutional and cultural power in shaping subjectivities (ibid.). Her work also points to the conflictual nature of dominant discourses that compete with each other. She questions the conventional

interpretation of the anorexic (female) body as an understandable response to the 'dominant interpellations for women' that is constantly reiterated through the media, which presents anorexia as another 'example of being hailed' or interpellated by dominant (patriarchal) discourses. Rather, she argues that practices such as the anorexic's can "come to be negotiations of discursive positioning" (ibid., p. 202). She cites the example of Sarah Jacob, a young peasant girl living in mid-nineteenth century Wales, who starved herself on ostensibly ascetic grounds (as a case of fasting as a manifestation of miracle, or *inedia miraculosa*), and who invoked two competing institutional discourses: the Church and medicine.

Rather than adopting a stance of either 'strict interpellation' or 'full human agency' (with its connotations of voluntarism), Probyn maintains that this was not a case of being interpellated by any one discourse but rather one of being positioned by the discursive articulations within an apparatus (ibid., p. 206). She suggests that:

anorexia can be taken as a practice or a strategy for negotiating discourses. Anorexia leads us to consider the contradictions within and between discourses, and the negotiations carried out against and across them. To my mind, this constitutes a site for the possible emergence of what Foucault has hinted at: namely that there are 'forms of understanding' which the subject creates about himself.

Probyn sees the site of anorexia as not only a complex negotiation of a specific historical moment or means of showing up the contradictions of the hegemonic discourses of that moment, but also as "a local practice used against the exigencies of place, time, gender, biography, age, family, etc." (ibid., p. 210).

Such 'local practices' can be read as analogous to Butler's (1993) notion of 'working the weakness in the norm', without resorting to conscious strategies impelled by 'free will'. Rather, these practices emerge in response to the inconsistent and conflictual nature of the discursively mediated norms themselves, norms that are constituted by competing disciplines. The 'recalcitrance' of material bodies, in failing to subject themselves to full

discursive inscription by perfectly reiterating these norms, can again be seen as a form of agency in making sense of and taking advantage of these inconsistencies as they negotiate these constraints, as Connell (1987, p. 83) suggests:

That the body is intractable and recalcitrant is important ... The body-as-used, the body I am, is a social body that has taken meanings rather than conferred them ... In the most extraordinary detail my body's responses reflect back, like the little mirrors on an Indian dress, a kaleidoscope of social meanings. The body, without ceasing to be the body, is taken in hand and transformed in social practice.

As an example of negotiating competing discourses, a number of mature dancers 'still' practicing dance informed by the balletic code attributed their longevity as practitioners to factors such as 'good genes' and 'good diet'. In doing so, they presented themselves as exceptional cases, or serendipitous genetic anomalies in defying the medical norm of bodily decline after age 40. Thus, they were able to both conform to, and subvert, normative expectations of older dancers (as 'in decline'). They conformed by acknowledging their age through explaining that being able to continue dancing in their 40s is exceptional to the norm, while simultaneously defying it. However, their defiance of the norm, in their being a 'special case', nevertheless serves to perpetuate it, for it is the existence of this norm that makes their aberration from it possible in the first place.

When we turn to the expressive body in older age, negotiating institutional discourses becomes less relevant in some practices than in others, since more experimental approaches to dance can enable an abandonment of the reiteration of regulatory norms. In Chapter 2 I noted that dancers practicing different styles of dance express themselves differently, a phenomenon that results in distinct dancing subjects (Foster 1986; Gardner, 1997). Comments from the participants suggest that, as they age, the interior, emotional component of dance expression becomes stronger as the physical component lessens, *if* they practice a form that stresses virtuosity. However, if virtuosity is deliberately suppressed, and the 'thinking', articulate body is divested of emotional connotations, 'expression' in

dance becomes a different concern that works *with* the body's changing materiality to explore new movement connections, where the older body does not signify a norm—it simply represents *itself* in all its materiality.

Compare, for example, the comments by two participants working in contrasting dance genres. The approach of Alana, a choreographer-performer practicing a style informed by body practices such as Body Mind Centering and release work, is radically different from that of Nicholas, a classically trained dancer:

Alana: “I suppose the inquiry's got richer for me, the older I've got ... I'm really interested in ... the thinking that's going on in my dancing, and in my body, and in the composition, and that's been what's happened in the last five, six years, I suppose. Before that I was kind of dancing and emoting and feeling, whereas now I think my body's *thinking* a lot more. [...] In general I feel that my body's what's articulate, and getting more articulate actually as I get older.

Nicholas: “When I was young I was thinking only of the challenge, what you should put in your technique and things like that ... But now ... steps are becoming smaller, we have space to put more who we are. My personality, and we are more personal ... I put so much more from my heart and from my soul into what I am doing now.”

While Alana's comment replaces emoting with a form of bodily thinking, Nicholas' concerns itself more with the bodily expression of what he refers to as 'soul'. These two views polarize the distinction between ballet-based dance and experimental dance practices which becomes more salient as dancers age. Thus in ballet, there is a reduction of the physical aspect of an enlarging of the interpretive artistry gained over years of life experience; technique is no longer primary, but becomes subservient to an emergent emotional maturity, stage presence and focus. In experimental dance practices different concerns emerge in maturity, such as an abnegation of congealed movement habits or technical

virtuosity in the ongoing exploration of new connections of movement, new ways of articulating the expressive body:

Joanne: “I probably move better now than I did then, if I was going to be judgmental about it, because it’s more informed. And ... the movement is different; I don’t *attempt* to get my legs up around my ears, it’s not important. It’s not important to have a flat 2nd, or to be able to stand on my toes. So because those things are no longer important, um, they’re not restrictions. (What is important then?) What is important? Um ... to be fully present in the moment ... and that’s talking about how the movement is embodied.”

In both approaches technique becomes submerged by expression: in experimental practices, by the expressive *body*, that is, through the generation of meaning through the movement itself as embodied in the performer, and in ballet-informed dance, by the expressive artist *within* the body, through expressive qualities that presume an extrinsic influence on movement. For in experimental practices the connection between movement and expression is not one whose mode of representation is imitative or representative (Foster, 1986). Rather, it is one where movement and expression are fused. The body-mind distinction (the body as ‘instrument’ to the mind) gives way to the embodiment of movement born of the specific materiality, history and capacities of the dancer’s body, and it is ironically *through* ageing (i.e. cumulative bodily experience through ongoing movement exploration) that transformation becomes possible.

However, it should be noted that neither approach is in some sense more valid than the other; both simply represent two of a number of ways in which dancers approach their practice as they become older.²⁵ In distinguishing the approaches to ageing dancers take in relation to their style of dancing, I have taken care to avoid establishing a binary distinction between ballet and the forms

²⁵ There is of course a crucial distinction between the bodily ‘practice’ of dance and the ‘performance’ of dance, for practice can be done in isolation whereas performance necessarily always involves a social context, such as other performers and/or audiences.

of contemporary dance that are informed by it, on the one hand, and 'postmodern' dance on the other. The reason for this is that it is difficult to draw clear conceptual distinctions in labeling dance styles when these very distinctions are subject to academic dispute, an exposition of which is beyond the scope of this paper. Dance scholars such as Selma Jeanne Cohen in the early 1980s, for example, have warned of the problems of dividing dance periods into distinct genres, and in conflating 'style' and 'genre' in dance. Cohen argues that ballet and modern dance could be seen as genres insofar as they are broader categories that subsume a number of styles, but that, while styles can be defined, there is appropriation among them. This is not to claim that different styles do not exist; rather, Cohen contends that the properties of a style such as classical ballet are neither unique to the form nor sufficient to enable it to be distinguished from other forms, but can be considered as a sort of 'family' of qualities that in combination distinguish the form. Therefore, one needs to question the usefulness of broad generic categories such as ballet, modern dance and postmodern dance as contrasting dance 'forms' or 'styles' in constituting 'mature' dancing subjects. Perhaps a more productive tactic, one that I have tried to take here, is to focus instead on the *approaches* to dancing taken by participants, through which they experienced ageing differently, and to argue that bodily conformity to cultural norms—whether in dance or in everyday life—leads to one's constitution as 'in decline' where these norms reflect an ageist culture.

This chapter opened with a discussion of structural gender inequality as an outcome of institutional practices that, at least in ballet-based dance, are patriarchally biased and operate through informal rather than formal channels. That is, informal institutional practices conceal a narrative of decline that informs the subjectivity of older dancers through sometimes competing discourses. Still puzzling is the question of why the representation of bodies in dance requires a particular form of embodied cultural capital: youthfulness and its attendant qualities of stamina, flexibility, virtuosity, and so on, qualities that are

understood to diminish with ageing. If performing presence mirrors social presence, and if the latter diminishes for women as they age (the 'becoming invisible' syndrome), then older female dancers have traditionally become either absent (invisible) in performance, or cast in stereotypical roles that mirror social perceptions of older women, which has been the case in classical ballet repertoire. I will approach this phenomenon through the concept of 'sexual capital', and, in the following section, will address this concept and its usefulness for theorizing gendered ageing in dance, as well as in social life.

4.3 Sexual capital and the gendered category of 'age'

In attempting to understand the alignment of the terms 'beauty' and 'youth' as culturally constructed rather than somehow 'natural' or innate, it is useful to invoke a rather confronting concept, that of a cultural valuing of bodies that signal potential sexual availability, or that possess 'sexual capital'. Sexual capital is a term derived from Bourdieu's concept of embodied cultural capital, and it implies a social consensus on sexual desirability rather than a 'natural' or 'given' attribute. In their paper 'Theories of sexual stratification: Towards an analysis of the sexual field and a theory of sexual capital', Martin and George (1997, n. 29) note the difference between 'capital' and 'resources' by referring to capital "not as a thing, but as a relation". They continue that "it is such a relation that ... is equivalent to a consensus regarding desirability." Sexual capital, then, is defined as a (social) relation rather than a (natural) attribute. It is based on a culturally normative privileging of (heteronormative) sexuality, and, like other forms of capital, can be drawn on as a sort of currency to gain social status and prestige. Moreover, sexual capital is gendered (Martin & George, 1997). I would also argue that for women it has a generational basis: it is confined to the present generation of potential mothers (somewhat analogous to Banes' (1998) theory of the marriage plot).²⁶

²⁶ Here I am not using 'sexual capital' in the context of unequal (patriarchal) gender relations. For example, Martin and George critique feminist Lynn Chancer's understanding of sexual capital, which she terms 'looksism', in her book *Reconcilable differences: Confronting beauty, pornography, and*

Bourdieu never explicitly developed the concept of sexual capital. Martin and George argue that, although Bourdieu addressed sexual attraction and desirability, he did not theorize it as institutionalized in a particular field. Moreover, like others, he equates, at least to some extent, sexual desirability with exogenous beauty, or an 'accident of birth': "Bourdieu assumes that what is specific to sexual attractiveness as opposed to the valorization of class bodies is 'natural', which is clearly incompatible with a notion of sexual capital" (ibid., p. 27). To further develop an understanding of how sexual capital might be constituted, then, necessitates a consideration of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and Martin and George's (1997) work towards the definition of sexual capital.

In his essay 'The Forms of Capital', Bourdieu defines capital as 'accumulated labour' which is either materialized or embodied, as "a force inscribed in objective or subjective structures ... (and) the principle underlying the immanent regularities of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). Cultural capital, for example, can take one of three forms: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. It is important to note that capital is founded on a principle of structural social inequality; it "is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible" (ibid., pp. 241–242). Structural inequality is, according to Bourdieu, maintained through hereditary access to cultural capital. In fact, Bourdieu equates capital with power (ibid., p. 243). In the embodied state, cultural capital cannot be transmitted, but is "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body" (ibid.); i.e., in the form of habitus.

the future of feminism (Chancer, 1998). They argue that Chancer conceptualizes sexual capital as possessed by women but used by men, a resource that women are 'forced' to have and that both disempowers them vis à vis the power of men and—paradoxically—is a possession their bodies need to reclaim in order to liberate themselves from male domination (Martin & George, 1997, n. 30). Thus, while Chancer's use of 'looksism' as a form of capital is valuable in that it shifts the focus from understanding concepts such as sexual beauty as natural to seeing them as socially (consensually) constructed, and thus shows how relations of power intersect with perceptions of beauty, she does so from within a heterosexist framework of oppression of women by men, who in her view do not possess sexual capital. However, it can be argued that sexual capital can be a relation pertaining to both women and men, even within a patriarchal context.

Bourdieu's theory of capital was iconoclastic in that it subverted the commonly accepted notion that academic success, for example, was due to individual talent; Bourdieu instead located such success within inequitable (class-based) access to opportunities. Another characteristic Bourdieu gives to cultural capital is that it is also predisposed to function as *symbolic* capital, that is "to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence" (ibid., p. 245). Finally, he stresses the interdependence of all forms of capital with economic capital, which is foundational to them (ibid., p. 252):

Economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and ... these transformed, disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root.

Bourdieu also defines another form of capital, which he terms 'social capital' (ibid., pp. 248-249), which consists of:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

In order to maintain or reproduce social capital, members of groups must engage in "an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed" (ibid., p. 250). This requires effort and commitment to the common cause, the preservation of social capital. Bourdieu's structural theory of the inherent class-based inequality in social relations is useful in that it de-naturalizes these relations and exposes the unequal access to social power (in the form of capital) that individuals from different class and family backgrounds encounter. It shows, for example, that something as individual as how we perceive a work of art or dance piece can be shown to stem from our structural opportunities and class habitus, rather than 'naturally' from within us (ibid., p. 3):

The encounter with a work of art is not 'love at first sight' as is generally supposed, and the act of empathy, *Einfühlung*, which is the art-lover's pleasure, presupposes an act of cognition, a decoding operation, which implies the implementation of a cognitive acquirement, a cultural code ... the 'eye' is a product of history reproduced by education.

Bourdieu relates something as personal as women's self-rating of their beauty to their position on the social hierarchy: "Thus the proportion of women who consider themselves below average in beauty, or who think they look older than they are, falls very rapidly as one moves up the social hierarchy. Similarly, the ratings women give themselves for the different parts of their bodies tend to rise with social position" (ibid., p. 206).

As noted earlier, Bourdieu also maintains that specific types of bodies are culturally legitimated to perform certain practices, such as theatrical dance, elite sport or modeling. These gendered bodies of the dancer, the elite sportsperson and the model also fall within a certain range of adult biological maturity at which the signs of sexuality match the potential to reproduce. I contend that it is these bodies that signify 'sexual capital' in western cultures.

The usefulness of sexual capital in understanding the cultural basis of gendered ageing is that, through problematizing concepts such as natural (exogamous) attractiveness, it enables a strategic loosening of the binary of beauty-youth, by providing an alternative account of how aesthetic (or sexual) looking might function, if not innately or 'naturally'. Markson and Taylor's (2000) study of the representation of male and female actors has made a direct link between the loss of reproductive years and female sexuality, which supports my argument that sexual capital, for women, is delimited by the period of potential reproduction.²⁷ While this deviates somewhat from Bourdieu's

²⁷ They note that the negative stereotyping of older women in American film reflects "the still persistent cultural belief that a woman's essence lies in her youthfulness – itself a symbol of procreative potential" (Markson & Taylor, 2000, p. 156). See also Lock (1993, p. 377) on the status of menopausal women in the US: "In North America ... normality means youth and vigor, regardless of gender; the middle-aged and especially the elderly are deviations from the norm ... among women, normal means to be of reproductive age, both in terms of the whole woman and biology ... But middle-aged women ... lose their reproductive potential; they go against the grain and in so doing are no longer truly female".

emphasis on class and family/kinship networks as formative elements of our feelings and experiences, it does suggest that feelings and experiences, such as the aesthetic experience of beauty, or the visceral reaction to feats of virtuosity in dance, can never be described as a purely 'natural' experience, but rather are to a significant extent enculturated. Behind what we understand as 'truth', 'beauty' or 'reality' lie conditions of social power and social inequality that have become embodied in us and are reproduced by us.

While Martin and George (1997) attempt to delineate 'sexual capital' by drawing on Bourdieu's framework in addressing the issue of the social organization of sexual desiring, their paper falls short of defining what sexual capital is in anything but sketchy terms. Rather than locating sexual capital within a sexual 'market', as the authors they critically review have done, they approach this question in terms of the possibility of a 'sexual field'. All social fields, according to Bourdieu, generate a specific form of capital to distinguish them from other fields, co-ordinated through the habitus (the internalization of the structures of fields). Furthermore, every field's 'interest' (significantly Bourdieu also calls it 'libido') is endogenous to that field and not given from outside.

It is in order to overcome this problematic inconsistency between, on the one hand, sexual desirability as a bodily indicator of one's 'trajectory through social space', and on the other, as a 'natural' and untheorizable phenomenon, that Martin and George propose the notion of a specifically sexual field. This field is associated with sexual capital, "a bodily capital that is not wholly indexical (i.e. that has no value in itself, but merely points to the value of the person in some other social space), but—to the extent that the field is autonomous—has its own genetic logic" (ibid., p. 28). The nature of sexual capital, within the sexual field, would then be a specific set of properties and field conditions that allow it to function as capital: "to understand the production of sexual capital we must investigate not only what properties are conventionally labeled as 'attractive', but how they index a trajectory through the sexual field" (ibid., p. 30).

Martin and George are tentative in their definition of sexual capital: “When fully exteriorized ... sexual capital, we hazard, is ... a network property of a node, as opposed to an attribute of an isolated unit. When fully interiorized, sexual capital is wholly a matter of the body and its ‘bearing’ or ‘deportment’” (ibid., p. 31). Nevertheless, they go on to suggest that what we understand by ‘gender’ is a means of referencing how we accumulate sexual capital (ibid., p. 31):

It is possible for the degree of sexual capital to vary in degree of objectification ... but also for this degree of objectification to differ for men and women. Indeed, it is possible that ‘gender’—i.e. our cultural understandings of sexual difference—is a kind of pre-sociological attempt to reference the differences between the strategies of sexual capitalization of men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, normal and deviant.²⁸

One could extend this framework to argue that the performance of age (by age-appropriate comportment, bearing, and so on) would suggest a form of ‘age capital’, and in a non-ageist society where elders are venerated it might indeed be so. Yet physical and symbolic capital declines with age in western cultures, because ageing is culturally devalued. Paradoxically, the performance of age-appropriate comportment, bearing and so on (as appropriate to the visible, ageing body) is culturally mandated, with the risk of social censure or humiliation consequent on inappropriate performance, underpinned in western thought and discourse by a binary distinction between beauty (allied with youth) and old age. As Woodward notes (Woodward, 1999, pp. xvi-xvii):

A cleaver-sharp binary between beauty and the so-called ravages of time, between health and disability, figured as old age, is encoded daily in the stories and advertisements in the mass media... In feminist theory and in queer theory much recent work has focused on theorizing both sex (female and male) and gender (femininity and masculinity) beyond the number of two. This has been a difficult project. We should also think beyond youth and age, young and old, a project that would seem to be altogether easier.

Vera’s earlier comment, in relation to dancers perceived as ‘differently abled’ due to their age, that “they would be with other bodies that are different, rather

²⁸ One difficulty arising from Martin and George’s thesis is that the performance of gender (difference) already presupposes what it is held to constitute.

than all these young, beautiful bodies ... and I'm not suggesting that older bodies don't have to be beautiful", reflects this 'natural' binary between age and beauty, one which she immediately problematizes (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.11). It is a distinction that is discursively mediated and perpetuated so that it becomes unnoticed and unquestioned. For example, a media release on the website for the Melbourne's International Arts Festival in 2003 contains the following comment: "The festival celebrates the body through dance and movement and will include the elegant bodies of dancers, beautiful young bodies and sprightly ageing bodies".²⁹

Beauty, then, is something that older bodies have 'lost', something euphemistically replaced by terms such as sprightliness or feistiness (see e.g., MacDonald & Rich, 1984). This perpetuates the belief that 'old is not beautiful'. Such a belief is not a 'natural' human response; rather, it can be argued to be a belief produced and perpetuated through a hidden ideology through which it has become naturalized.

Thus, Martin and George's (1997) Bourdieusian framework on sexual desiring is one way in which to destabilize this binary connection between beauty and youth. Their theory of sexual capital aligns the concept of beauty with a socially constructed, rather than biological disposition, according to which our perceptions of beauty are enculturated rather than a 'natural' response to the bearer of a 'natural' form of physical capital. A significant implication of Martin and George's argument for age theory is that the enculturation of standards of beauty organizes our very perceptions of what is beautiful and desirable, perceptions which, rather than emanating from 'natural' preference, have already been culturally overcoded by other factors, such as gendered access to social power, that perpetuate dominant discourses equating youth (i.e., young

²⁹ The *Australian Macquarie Concise Dictionary* defines 'sprightly' as "animated, vivacious, or gay; lively". Here these terms are used to make a binary distinction between young dancers' bodies and older dancers' bodies. The German word for sprightly is *rüstig*, but also in a particular context: as an adjective describing an old person (*Collins German Concise Dictionary*). In the English language dictionary, this distinction is not made explicit.

adult maturity) with beauty in contemporary western cultures. Importantly, by theorizing perception (including the perception of someone as 'old', or as 'beautiful') as enculturated rather than innate or natural, counter-discourses become possible.

In Chapter 2 I have argued that ageing, like class, has been used in the service of social positioning, and serves a regulatory function in delineating a form of class. Like class, the regulatory function of age is 'invisible' to us because it is naturalized (Cranny-Francis, 1995). However, the expression of its embodied forms, developed through the individual's interaction with her or his habitus, may be subjected to critical analysis. For example, the embodied experience of ageing in the dancers interviewed (bodily changes, injuries, awareness of appearance in relation to cultural codes of self-presentation such as costuming, and so on) illustrates the transparency of what cultural 'common sense' takes as a 'natural' process of bodily decline.

The practice of age-tagging referred to in Chapter 1 (Mellencamp, 1992) constitutes another example of the delineation of a particular social positioning. For dancers, such positioning is felt in economic terms, as for example through the institutional practice of the non-renewal of a longstanding contract with a dance company (as in Michael's case), and more diffusely in the uncertainty of ongoing work and limited performing opportunities for older dancers. However, it is also at the level of representation that this cultural practice operates and is experienced. It is at this level that we also age-grade ourselves through our perception of how others perceive us, what Diprose (1994b) refers to as syncretic sociability (see Chapter 1). Comments from dancers in this study, such as "you cannot be a prince when you are 50", and "I would look like a grandmother who was trying to dance the twist", attest to their consciousness of the age norms that set the context for how they are perceived by audiences.

Sexual capital, in its embodied form, is thus an important concept in understanding the gendered nature of age-grading. Dancers, like professional

sportspeople and models, experience an accelerated age-grading because their livelihood is intimately dependent on the youthfulness and optimal sexual capital of their self-presentation and their bodies. Thus, I argue that we are aged, gendered, and classed in relation to sexual capital through our embodied self-presentation and performance—in everyday practices and habits, actions and comportment—as we in turn reify and perpetuate the systems of our classification through this performance. However, precisely because we have this agency to perpetuate the performance of body-identity, we also have the agency to subvert it, either gradually, as Sullivan (2000) would argue, or through more radical modes of self-presentation and bodily practice, in which ambiguity serves a powerful, productive function.

It is possibly not coincidental that the performing life of ballet dancers is somewhere between 18 years and 35 years. For women, at least, this period of life is likely to be coeval with the peak period of sexual capital. In fact, it curiously evokes Sally Banes' (1998) perception of female dancers as predominantly 'young women at the peak of their powers' (see Chapter 2). We can take this to refer not only to physical powers, but also to sexual powers in the sense of the dancer's location at that point in life at which women are traditionally represented as available for marriage, prior to their consignment to the role of wife and mother.

Thus, if sexual capital is gendered, as Martin and George (1997) maintain, it is also age-grading (and de-grading). For women, unlike for men, sexual capital (like physical capital) has been constructed to reflect a culturally recognized 'expiry date', which in social understanding is marked by the predicted advent of menopause. Conformity to this social asexualization is through the matronization of older women (both through the untuned, matronly body and through dress, comportment, and so on), and attempts at resistance are made through defying appropriate body standards by, for example, bodybuilding (see e.g., Frueh, 1999). As Woodward (1999, p. xx) maintains: "The built body, often shocking in its hyperarticulation, also serves for Frueh as a rejoinder to the

matronly body, one of our culture's models for the older woman, a woman who is outside of the circuit of sexual desire".

Since dancers retire at a relatively 'young' age when compared to most other professions, this exit from the 'circuit of sexual desire' is presumably accelerated. The 'die young, leave a pretty corpse' trope evident in the fate of the heroines in the repertoires of many traditional ballets (Juliet, Swanilda, Odette, La Sylphide, etc.) can be interpreted as a means of foreclosing the possibility of an 'ageing' female dancer's body, therefore preserving and protecting the fantasy of ageless women dancers (Banes, 1998).³⁰ I will explore this contention more fully below.

A common representation of older women in dance is in the form of the 'witch'. Banes argues that the character of witch is neither victimized nor celebrated, but instead signifies the gender ambiguity and therefore threat that older women pose in western cultures (ibid., pp. 4-5):

Although each witch is unique, the category of "witch" on the dance stage often embodies an enduring social ambivalence toward old women—their ambiguous status in terms of both sexuality and gender; the respect shown for their wisdom, but at the same time the fear felt regarding the powers and secrets of assertive women who are, according to folklore, knowledgeable about mysterious biological processes and who preside over births and deaths. On stage, these figures are simultaneously outcasts and sources of power. They possess knowledge and skill, yet they often use these for evil ends; their dancing is both grotesque (violating classical lines) and attractive (strong and vitally energized). Positive and negative qualities intermingle in the figure of the witch on the dance stage to form ambiguous images of power and its distortions.

All forms of capital, including sexual capital, are consistent within the particular sexual field to which they pertain. If they were 'unique' to the individual, social structures would not be able to function. What the above quote suggests, however, is that the character of the older woman as witch in dance in relation to embodied capital (i.e. social power) is inherently—and heretically—*ambiguous*. Ambiguity, as Diprose (1994b) and others remind us, is intolerable to

³⁰ Yet there are just as few performing opportunities for men dancers also: older male bodies, too, are invisible in ballet except in stereotypical 'aged' roles.

the fixed identities and clearly defined boundaries of institutionalized western cultures. Yet ambiguity of identity is a productive disruption, for it produces hybridity, and is an enabling condition for transformations and refigurations of norms. Moreover, Diprose argues, it occurs at the site of the body: here the body performance of the witch in dance is ambiguous. We thus locate the ambiguity of aged bodies in the culturally recognized disruption they pose to the unity and knowability of a normative subjectivity. Their performance impairs the possibility of their translation into cultural norms. In other words, the categorical ambiguity of the 'witch' can be considered a threat to homogenizing institutions, or the (regulatory) law to which Butler (1993) and Diprose (1994b) refer, as it violates the requirement for consistency of normative gender performance. It refuses, in other words, to be classified by taste.³¹ However, this duality of the 'grotesque' and the 'attractive' in Banes' quote suggests that there may be female agency and power in the older woman's character as 'witch'. For example, her analysis of Mary Wigman's *Hexentanz* (1926) suggests that Wigman, as a young woman in post World War 1 proto-Nazi Germany was able to negotiate the cultural limitations on women at the time and thus avoid the dutiful wife and mother stereotype in order to become a creative artist on a par with men.

Ageing can therefore be argued to be ambiguous as a 'category', both in theatrical performance and in social life. Part of the reason for this is also because, since ageing cannot be clearly and consistently marked across individual bodies, it has to be signalled through practices that unambiguously perform the self as aged. Thus, as a category, age is even more problematic than gender in western cultures. Gender is socially recognized on the basis of biological bodily characteristics enhanced by modes of presentation (dress, comportment, practice, discourse), which makes it relatively easy to distinguish 'male' from 'female' on the basis of such characteristics.³² Ageing, as Robert

³¹ The category of the witch in traditional fairytales is represented by grotesqueness rather than classical beauty.

³² This can of course be medically facilitated, as for example in surgically altering genetically 'intersex' persons' sexual characteristics to render them as unambiguously male or female as possible.

Butler has argued in Chapter 1, is not so easily marked and therefore identifiable, as individuals manifest signs of ageing at different rates from each other. This may be one reason why age-tagging is such a popular practice in the media: it functions to facilitate the categorization of older people into the appropriate age-habitus. Ageing is therefore an ambiguous category, for it is difficult to affix a firm age-identity on body-subjects through formal means that rely on the 'visible' signs of ageing.

Ageing as a normative category, based on the marker of chronological age in western societies, is therefore even more problematic and dependent on continual reification through reiteration of its culturally normative properties in the social performance of individuals (and in the 'taste' of its social collectives). As noted earlier, the reasons cited by older dancers for continuing to be able to dance in their later years (the inherited 'good genes' and care of the body cited by participants) can be seen as offering these dancers a means of discursively supporting and perpetuating these norms, whether or not this is borne out in their practice. For the category of age has historically been inversely aligned with another category—sexual capital—which in turn is culturally recognized as marked by youth and sexual power or desirability.

The cultural proscription against age-inappropriate self-performance (comportment, dress, behavior, and so on) may thus partly account for the increasingly earlier ages at which dancers retire from performing, some as early as their late 20s (Leach, 1997), when compared with their peers a generation ago. It is quite probable that these dancers seek to avoid the social humiliation of being discursively labeled 'old'. That they do this at a 'precocious' age (after all, even as dancers, they are not generally considered old in their late 20s) firstly suggests the possibility that they wish to retire before reaching what is *culturally* understood as their physical peak and avoid facing the humiliating prospect of being interpellated as 'old' dancers. Secondly, and more disturbingly, it signals to other dancers that the very fact that these dancers are retiring is because it *is* their time to do so; that is, that by the very fact that they are retiring these retiring

dancers must be 'old'. This in turn might prompt their younger peers to retire at an even earlier chronological age, thus resulting in a progressive downward spiral where chronological age as a marker becomes increasingly lowered by the average age of those just retired, and where ageing for these dancers becomes a target for paranoia, one that is an eminently understandable response to a real threat. This form of precocious ageing is a phenomenon that Gullette (1998, pp. 13–14) has described in late 20th century US culture:

Practices internalize meanings; they deepen the feelings *as* they enact the world ... [There is] a system for producing precocious age-self-consciousness ... Beauty is a code word for youth, although not all the young are beautiful ... The construction of a 'peak' moment is crucial. The young may not be dazzled by the hype at the time, but they learn to associate all these values with one short time of life: and as they age, they come to believe they are losing their best chance to get these goods and learn to call this closing down of the future 'aging'.

However, it would be erroneous to attribute precocious retirement ages in dancers to this explanation alone. In Chapter 1 I discussed the gendered effect of ageism in creating structural inequality. The experience of ageing in female dancers is complicated by their family commitments; for male dancers, this is less so, since a normative social expectation still prevails that it is the father who is the breadwinner in a family, and the mother the primary caretaker of children.

Research discussed earlier in this chapter suggests that the outcome of retirement or transition for men in assuming positions of power in institutional dance forms such as ballet and contemporary dance is likely to be more favorable than that for women. However, this cannot be generalized. For example, some male dancers, like Anthony, forego opportunities for steady, higher income employment in order to preserve their family lifestyle, often for their children.

As I argued earlier, dancers need to undergo a 'transition' to a second career that enables them to successfully perform age and gender-based cultural norms. To continue as a dancer can mean becoming increasingly 'unsuccessful' at this performance, and I contend that this is partly attributable to the inverse

relationship between the dancer's ageing and the successful performance of sexual capital in western culture.

4.4 The faciality of ageing

We can now revisit the question, how are dancers' bodies marked as aged? We have examined two sites across three registers: the site of the performing body's capacities to reproduce a corporeal code (what the body can do), and its representational ability (how it looks), across the physical, economic and representational registers. We have considered the dominance of the biomedical model of ageing as progressive physical decline in relation to the first site, and have explored the potential of the notion of 'sexual capital' in relation primarily to the second. It is the second that I find more intriguing, for it is here that widespread cultural denial limits discourse on the subject.

Theorists such as Bourdieu, Mauss, Cranny-Francis, Dewey, Butler, and Young among others contend that we socially mark ourselves (as aged, gendered, and so on) by such factors as how we move, what we eat, what we wear, our facial expressions, how we generally present ourselves, what and how we speak. These ways are a means of social classification (and therefore regulation). For example, according to Bourdieu (1984, pp. 192–193):

The sign-bearing, sign-wearing body is also a producer of signs which are physically marked by the relationship to the body ... There are no merely 'physical' facial signs; the colour and thickness of lipstick, or expressions, as well as the shape of the face, or the mouth, are immediately read as indices of a 'moral' physiognomy, socially characterized, i.e., of a 'vulgar' or 'distinguished' mind, naturally 'natural' or naturally 'cultivated' ... The legitimate use of the body is spontaneously perceived as an index of moral uprightness, so that its opposite, a 'natural' body, is seen as an index of *laissez-aller* ('letting oneself go'), a culpable surrender to facility.

Like Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari have also written on the social significance of the human face, referring to what they call the 'faciality machine'. The faciality machine is a concept they link to forms of power in contemporary

western societies, but it is interesting here to note that they attribute signifying power to *faces* rather than entire bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 181):

The social production of face ... is it performs the facialization of the entire body and all its surroundings and objects, and the landscapification of all worlds and milieus. The deterritorialization of the body implies an overcoding by the face ... The semiotic of the signifier and the subjective never operates through bodies ... At any rate it can be related only to a body that has already been entirely facialized.

In mainstream professional dance, as in social life, it is the face, rather than the body, that appears to be socially perceived as a primary marker of age.³³ One classically trained male dancer interviewed made the following candid comment in relation to his self-perception as marked by age:

Martin (dancer, 41): "I mean, you know, 20 year olds, they look at my body and they say 'I wish I had a body like yours', and I'm lucky because my father is rake thin and my mother is very slim ... You know: put a paper bag over my face and you won't be able to *tell* my age. The face that a person gets, with the wrinkles, then you can actually tell."

Notice the emphasis Martin places on the social origin of his physical capital (of 'good genes' from his parents), one that produces an age-defying body, but not an age-defying face. The physical capital of Martin's dancer-body is in an ambiguous relationship with that of a specific part of his body—his face. The face is located as the primary site for signifying ageing, yet in dance, facial appearance, unlike a strong, well-muscled body, is *unrelated* to 'what the body can do', but very much related to 'how the body should look'.

In fact, if we presume a primary function of the face to be a sign-bearer of intersubjectively shared, internalized social meanings, such as inner feelings, moods, attentiveness—these meanings that are 'readable' or decodable from

³³ At the time of writing, Hollywood actor Sharon Stone was featured in the Australian women's magazine *New Idea* as having spent an estimated \$40,000 on facework to preserve her youthfulness.

facial expressions³⁴—we could argue that these facial signs reinforce other signs that signal class membership and social status. In the course of physical ageing, as the skin loses its elasticity these expressions or ‘signals’ become literally inscribed on the face as permanent lines. The loss of plasticity, which would otherwise erase its history of communicative signs (the frown lines of anger, the laughter lines around the eyes, and so on), thus produces an ambiguity of signification, resulting in the cultural perception of the face as ‘aged’.

Hence I suggest that the face, more clearly than the body, becomes the primary signifier of the history of corporeally inscribed social interchange. The unsettling effect of perceiving facial expressions on deeply lined faces is due to the ambiguity involved in ‘reading’ them. For example, a smile appears simultaneously with a frown, as the lines for each remain on the face. Conversely, it is possible that the absence of visible expression due to surgical interventions (facelifts, Botox injections) has a similarly disturbing effect on a perceiver already socialized into preferring unambiguous facial expressions. For while the surface of the body, consisting of larger muscles, can be covered by clothing that serve to enhance its shape, the face, by contrast, remains uncovered, exposed to the elements, the many small muscles constantly involved in portraying intricate expressions in daily sociable congress. The ambiguity of the older face is perceived as a threat to the stability of an ageless identity.

Could it be then that the face is a primary signifier of sexual capital? The ambiguity that Martin perceives between his ‘young’ body and his face that shows its age, is echoed in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Old Age*. Beauvoir cites an example of an older woman who experiences being followed in the street by a man who, as he overtakes her, signals on seeing her face that he has interpellated her as aged rather than as sexually desirable (Beauvoir, 1972, pp. 320-321):

Since it is the Other within us who is old, it is natural that the revelation of our age should come to us from outside—from others. We do not accept it willingly ... I have known many women whose age has been revealed to them

³⁴ See, for example, the pioneering work of anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell (Birdwhistell, 1970).

by the same kind of unpleasant experience that happened to Marie Dormoy: she told Léautaud how a man, deceived by her youthful shape, followed her in the street; as he overtook her he saw her face, and instead of accosting her he hurried on.

Martin's 'paper bag' comment reflects an acute awareness of the social function of the face as a marker of age. Sexual capital, then, can be presumed to exist in a face that reflects normative expressions that are unambiguous rather than complex, a face that is capable of the muscular plasticity of erasing previous expressions that might contradict current ones, a face that reflects the plasticity of the performing self. For this dancer, the face as a marker of age manifests its recalcitrance (or increasing inflexibility) in correctly performing normative expressions.

The face, of course, 'belongs' to the body, yet there is evidence of a 'split' or incongruity between face and body as potential sign bearers of age. This, together with its gendered nature, is evident in participants' comments in relation to the performer's face in relation to performance, or indeed whether they commented on it at all. Apart from Martin's quote, male participants never referred to the face as either marked by, or as a marker of, ageing. Instead, for them it connoted a conduit for manifesting an increasingly powerful stage presence in maturity. For female participants, on the other hand, the face was more likely to be described as an object open to the self's critical appraisal. Marie, for example, shows resigned acceptance of wrinkles in her face as she ages:

Marie: Of course I have to accept my wrinkles ... What can I do? Maybe I want to have a face lift in a few days. [laugh] Like that, we have to accept it you know, you grow older, of course my face has changed, you know?

Her reference is to her face as object, and she places herself in a category of 'to-be-looked-at-ness', using Mulvey's (1975) term, rather than as the subject of the act of looking. By contrast, a female participant practicing a non-western form of dance provides a strikingly different perspective on the dancer's face:

Nina: The dancers I've seen in India, a lot of them have really aged very beautifully, now you see that maturity in the face and their presenting themselves as a woman, and how they present themselves as dancers has become very powerful.

This comment suggests that the confidence to project a feminine self, and the power of presentation developed in maturity, may be possible in other cultures' dance forms, but apparently not in western mainstream dance forms.

For some of the male dancers interviewed, the face is possibly linked to a masculine culture of 'looking', rather than a feminine culture of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'. Magnus' comment in Chapter 3 in relation to the importance of focus in performing presence ("You don't make faces; you think, and it's reflected in the small muscles of your face") is immediately related to his identification with the masculine:

Magnus: "It's getting into gender things and being a man, you know, I feel like my knowledge through history, that men in a lot of cultures and a lot of primitive cultures always remember that ... *often* remember that. They do it as an empowerment, they do it for different kinds of ritual."

Magnus sees the dancer's face in maturity as reflecting inner thought process or feeling behind it through tiny, nuanced muscular movements. He then specifically links this presence and focus to being a man, and to the ritual use of dancing for men throughout history and across cultures. For him, the act of looking mediated by the face connotes a social power that is part of 'men's culture', rather than being a marker of ageing. Yet in dance forms such as classical ballet, the male dancer's face has traditionally been as typecast as the female dancer's, as a marker of a particular character (the male romantic lead) that is a reflection of cultural taste rather than 'natural' disposition, according to a comment from another male participant who did not fit the male *danseur noble* mold:

Malcolm: “If the proportions are not good, if the face is not at least *acceptable* as a romantic face, then you’re never going to do those roles.”

Here Malcolm refers to a perception of the male dancer’s face as object, in what essentially amounts to a cultural objectification. His own face was the ‘wrong’ medium for communication in romantic lead roles, roles that require a precise type of classical beauty, but it *was* appropriate for character dancing and musicals. In Bourdieusian terms, one might say he lacked the physical capital required to play a specific gendered role in a culturally hegemonic dance form. However, for Malcolm this type of physical capital was *independent* of ageing. Rather, whether young or old, it represented a coded type suitable for certain expressive roles and unsuitable for others. Nicholas, on the other hand, refers to the loss of physical capital with age when he states that “You cannot be a prince at 50”.

Overall, it is useful to invoke the concept of sexual capital as a form of physical capital that is perceived to decline with age, a perceived decline that is gendered. I have taken a small but socially highly significant part of the body—the face—as bearer of the communication of meaning and of the cultural position of the body-subject, and have found evidence of differences between male and female ballet dancers in their experiences of ageing in relation to it. This does suggest that, for female dancers, the face is more likely to be seen as a marker of their age (as Marie’s comment on wrinkles illustrates). Contrastingly, for male dancers the face can reflect an increased social power through looking that is more likely to be an outcome of maturity. For the mature male dancer, what is significant is the function of the face, rather than its appearance; its use in establishing a subject position rather than an objectification of the corporeal self.

As noted earlier, Bourdieu contended that physical capital decreases with age. Yet the term ‘physical’ *already* subsumes a particular (enculturated) interpretation of material bodies. For we are inexorably making that interpretation from *within* our cultural habitus, from that ‘durable set of dispositions and tastes’ that

structure our perception, and in the perpetuation of which as 'natural', we are (more or less unwittingly) complicit. Such a position has affinities with Merleau-Ponty's view of the body as embedded within culture, as inextricable from others and from the social world. The question remains, given this constraint on our aesthetic perception, how can we subvert it, if we are consigned to do so from within the cultural habitus that structures it?

One interviewee commented on the possibility of 're-educating' audiences to appreciate bodies of difference on stage, through ongoing exposure of audiences to other body types. Such a view is based on the assumption that people can be re-educated to change their aesthetic perception:

George: "(Audiences) are used to seeing lithe bodies of ballerinas, and also male dancers of strong, princely stature. And so therefore all of a sudden if they went to see a dance performance of a group that was more strictly contemporary, those bodies might be a lot more muscular and a lot more solid. And some people go, 'No, I don't like that. I've always thought dancers were supposed to be so thin and waiflike'. And so really it takes years, and Australia's had to really educate people to say, 'Well, it's not necessarily the same as the modeling industry; you don't necessarily always have to be anorexic and fly away with the first breeze that comes along.'"

According to this view, even durable dispositions can change by means of a gradual process of 're-education', eventually leading to cultural acceptance of these body types as possessing the physical and sexual capital to legitimately perform dance on stage. However, the notion of 're-education', as Gatens (1996) has pointed out in relation to the sex-gender distinction discussed earlier, involves a tacit assumption of equality (as sameness) and a denial of difference; in this case an erasure of the possibility of age as difference as surely as that of gender as difference. Gatens' (1996, p. 9) contention, cited in Chapter 2, that male and female bodies have distinctly different social value and significance, and that it is not gender but sexual difference that is differentially valorized, suggests that,

while theoretically we are all 'the same', in practice, the older female dancer's body is still undeniably subject to structural inequalities. It is still a body that is 'different' in a culture that values the 'correct' signification and bodily performance of youthful beauty. It would therefore be difficult to imagine a successful social re-education of audiences leading to appreciation of older dancers, if such re-education were based on the same fundamental assumption of 'sameness' as the degendering proposal critiqued by Gatens.

4.5 Ageing bodies that matter

Instead of perceiving the inherent ambiguity of ageing bodies as a disadvantage, I have argued that this very ambiguity is a *productive* condition in the constitution of the mature body-subject. Here the work of Judith Butler is important (Butler, 1990, 1993). Butler's theory of subject formation, based on her notion of performativity, also outlines a form of ambiguity which, drawing on the work of Kristeva, she describes as the 'abject'. Butler approaches abjection from a perspective according to which it plays a productive rather than threatening or disruptive role in the constitution of gendered subjecthood.

Butler argues that the 'matrix' by which subjects are formed is *exclusionary*, as it "requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings ... who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject". These "fortify the regulatory norms" by providing a boundary of exclusion. The subject is therefore constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, a process that produces an 'abjected' outside which is nevertheless 'inside' the subject "as its own founding repudiation". The subject is permanently "grounded in a repudiation whose consequences it cannot fully control", and has to continually disavow the identification with abjection (Butler, 1993). What distinguishes such a view from, say, that of Theweleit (1987) is that this productive force of abjection is a fundamental requirement for subjectivity to exist at all. Furthermore, subjectivity is not continually built up because its stability is repeatedly disrupted by

instability; for Butler, this very (positive) instability is its fundamental defining characteristic, its condition of possibility.

As noted earlier, ageing, illness or other bodily conditions such as pregnancy or menopause, can be instances that cause 'disruption' in subjectivity. The visual signs of ageing are marks of such disruption and are evaluated against an ageless (i.e. youthful) and arguably masculine ideal, according to which wrinkles and sagging flesh become feminized, become 'abominable', signs of the body's failure to properly signify agelessness. The experience of loss as a function of ageing can be conceived of as a loss of a masculine form of being that defers to a regulatory ideal (the 'classical body' that is 'smooth', 'sleek' and bounded), one that has been naturalized (or neutralized) as normative. According to this view, ageing can be construed as representing a dissolution of the boundaries that regulate gendered subjects, and as a progressive social emasculation and fragmentation of the body, which in western cultures is viewed with fear and denial (Beauvoir, 1972).

The way in which bodily changes in the course of ageing are interpreted, however, need not be via the assumption of unity and stability, a corporeal ideal we are in time bound to 'fail'. A cyclical temporal model of the body in terms of 'potential-peak-decline' is a highly selective reading of a multiplicity of possibilities for the 'ageing' subject. If, on the other hand, subjectivity were conceptualized in terms of multiplicity, transformability and, as Butler argues, *instability*, there is nothing, no stable, fixed self, to disrupt. Ageing becomes a part of the process of becoming of a corporeal subjectivity that is never a fixed or quantifiable entity.

This chapter has focused on how age- and gender-based cultural norms are corporeally inscribed and experienced by ageing dancers in western theatrical traditions. I have addressed the tension between the discursive and extradiscursive aspects of the dancing body, where the latter mode has the potential to operate outside and disrupt the former's normative practices and

relations that prescribe gender and age. Specifically, I have drawn on the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu (1984, 1986) and others to develop the notion of 'sexual capital' in western dance, and to argue that the inherent ambiguity of bodily ageing can be productively invoked to understand the inscription and experience of gendered ageing.

Theorists such as Bourdieu maintain that specific types of bodies are culturally legitimated to perform specific practices, such as professional ballet, elite sport or modelling. My argument is that such body types also fall within a specific range of young adult maturity at which the body's capacity to emit cultural signs of sexual attractiveness is aligned with a gendered and discretely defined generational status. The concept of 'sexual capital' enables the analysis and deconstruction of the culturally prevalent conflation of physical beauty with youth. This conflation can be seen to be a socially constructed and lived disposition, rather than a 'natural' or innate human perception. For, if our perceptions of beauty are enculturated, that is, if perception is a naturalized rather than a 'natural' response, as Bourdieu argues, the conflation of the terms 'youth' and 'beauty' may be undermined. An awareness of the artifice of the culturally normative standard of beauty that dancers are expected to correctly signify may therefore facilitate our understanding of the gendered nature of age-grading.

Further, while the livelihood of dancers is intimately dependent on their youthfulness and the optimal sexual capital of their self-presentation and their bodies, ageing offers sites of resistance, since it can be argued to be an inherently ambiguous category. This very ambiguity of an 'ageing' identity is far from pejorative, since its characteristic hybridity and resilience enables transformations and refigurations of normative understandings of gendered ageing to occur.

Earlier I referred to the potential of various approaches to dance for offering different pathways to ageing. In the following chapter a key concern will be an

analysis of the experience of embodiment in dancers practicing different dance genres, and ways in which this relates to how dancers can develop a more interpersonal subjectivity in maturity. Secondly I will examine two phenomena elusive to the discursive domain: the bodily passion and moments of sublimity experienced by dancers, which is linked both to the Greek concept of *ekstasis*, or 'standing outside of oneself, or outside of place', and the notion of 'body memory'. Both phenomena are taken as instances of a corporeal consciousness, as distinct from the consciousness of the mind/brain of western cultures. I will suggest that this 'corporeal consciousness', that cannot be articulated through language, is therefore to some degree also inaccessible to discursively based age and gender norms. In the final section of this chapter, I will address Foucault's concept of 'self-care' in relation to possible modes of being, or 'crafting an authentic self'. I ask how mature men and women dancers might craft a subjectivity that retains a coherence and meaningful continuity and is sufficiently flexible to resist the oppressive effects of normative classification.

Chapter 5

Dancing the self through ageing

This chapter pivots on the role that embodiment, embodied consciousness and extradiscursive experiences, such as 'body memory' and *ekstasis*, play in the maturing of the body-self through various forms of dance practice. As discussed in Chapter 1, 'embodiment' has emerged from poststructuralist theories of corporeality as a third term that disrupts the distinction western thought has traditionally drawn between body (as subordinate, immanent and feminine) and mind (as superordinate, transcendental and masculine). Embodiment is therefore a useful concept for problematizing dualistic theories of ageing, such as the 'mask of ageing' theory that splits the inner self from the body. For ageing dancers it is a means of negotiating the challenge posed by the ageing body's physical changes.

In this chapter I will argue that the degree to which the dancing self experiences itself as embodied can offer alternative conceptions of a mature subjectivity than one of 'decline'. I will also suggest that there is a development of an increasingly 'intersubjective' self in the course of maturing, as ageing dancers negotiate physical, economic and cultural (i.e. representational) constraints. Finally, I will explore the notion of what can be called an 'authentic' mature self. However, it should be noted here that I am not valuing some modes of being as more 'authentic' than others. Instead, I ask what modes of being can be inferred from the different approaches to dance that participants have taken in order for them to continue their dancing.

5.1 The intercorporeal self in dance

In his analysis of an ethos of being, Sean Carey has drawn on Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh' to argue that the body's inherent ambiguity lies in its ability to simultaneously encompass presence *and* absence, incarnation *and* transcendence, being *and* consciousness (Carey, 2000). Just as the arboreal history of Western

philosophical thought can be seen as a mere variation of the rhizomatic (c.f. Mansfield, 2000), so Carey maintains that the 'flesh' of Merleau-Ponty is a primordial 'field of being', of which western calculating thought, which reduces the objective world of things to 'mere objects' or isolated units existing side by side, is a derivative. This primordial 'field of being' is a generative principle or style of being, a principle existing in latency among the entities of the world (Carey, 2000, p. 32). The absent, invisible or latent is part of the present and visible, but it remains concealed if perceived in reductive terms; that is, as a mere object. According to Carey, the body-consciousness dichotomy of western thought can therefore be seen as merely one variant of the possibilities of the 'flesh', of bringing into being certain ontological possibilities whilst excluding others.

Flesh, as discussed earlier, is characterized by reversibility: bodies; 'sensible sentients', visible seers and tactile touchers, are a variation of it. However, while Carey maintains that there is a hiatus between the toucher and the touched, he is careful to emphasize that this hiatus is not a void but rich in ontological significance. That is, it carries deep ontological meaning, as "the invisible 'zero point' between two solids that enables them to join together like the interstitial space between the cells of living bodies" (ibid., p. 32). The flesh, then, is a sort of potency for being, which exists in a latent state, through which specific forms of being already there in embryonic form become possible. It is the *enabling condition* for being and for intercorporeity: as Merleau-Ponty (1968) contends, the flesh of my body is the flesh of the world.

Another consequence of the reversibility of senses such as touch and seeing is that the self according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology can achieve intercorporeity through its ability to become other *to itself* (Carey, 2000). Merleau-Ponty uses the example of the capacity of each eye of the one body for perceiving, and of each hand for touching, which combine in unified, bimanual touch or stereoscopic vision. One hand touching the other can only be a

touching—touched experience, never a simultaneous ‘touching’ or ‘being touched’ by both hands (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, p. 141):

My two hands touch the same things because they are the hands of one same body. And yet each of them has its own tactile experience. If nonetheless they have to do with one sole tangible, it is because there exists a very peculiar relation from one to the other, across the corporeal space—like that holding between my two eyes—making of my hands one sole organ of experience, as it makes of my two eyes the channels of one sole Cyclopean vision.

Merleau-Ponty thus asks if it is not possible to imagine “other landscapes besides my own”, an intercorporeity rather than the traditional western conception of the body-subject as subject only (i.e. as seer and toucher): “If there is a relation of the visible with itself that traverses me and constitutes me as a seer, this circle which I do not form, which forms me, this coiling over of the visible upon the visible, can traverse, animate other bodies as well as my own” (ibid., p. 140). If the corporeal self is ‘other to itself’ yet “sustained, subtended, by the prereflective and preobjective unity of my body”, through the circle of reversibility it becomes essentially an *intercorporeal* self (ibid., pp. 142–143):³⁵

What is open to us, therefore, with the reversibility of the visible and the tangible, is—if not yet the oncorporeal—at least an intercorporeal being, a presumptive domain of the visible and the tangible, which extends further than the things I touch and see at present ... there is finally a propagation of these exchanges of all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch—and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transitivity from one body to another.

For to move—indeed to dance—is for the self to touch both itself and the other. Movement involves an embodied connection with self and other, with other dancers and with audiences. The reversibility of touch in Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, in which one hand touching the other belongs to the same organic body, can also be taken to mean that the body touches itself in

³⁵ Contact improvisation in dance is a perfect illustration of this transitivity of bodies, this intercorporeity of being, an intercorporeity that essentially involves the reciprocal constitution of the ‘body-subject’ and the heterogeneity of ‘bodies’ within the ‘organic’ body that is taken as a baseline for the ‘unified subject’, as well as by other bodies, through vision (focus) and touch.

movement. The body is, in this instance, other to itself, inasmuch as it is not governed by a unified consciousness but rather by a *collection* of consciousnesses (Merleau-Ponty, 1968).

However, in performing a corporeal movement code such as ballet, touch possesses a different function. It involves simultaneous resistance, in a constant striving for verticality. The body is grounded, yet seeks to free itself from this groundedness; transcendence has been argued to be bound up with immanence (Levin, 1983). Muscles work against each other, push away from each other, Consider, for example, the tensions and counter-tensions involved in performing a *plié*, a foundational movement in classical ballet, in order to achieve this verticality. To perform a ballet barre amounts to an experience of literally ‘pulling yourself apart’, a striving for a negentropy of an organic body that is subject to entropy (‘decline’), a body that, uninscribed by exercise, shrinks and sinks into itself. In the daily discipline of the ballet class, touching becomes fighting against entropy; the body fights (the other in) itself to achieve the necessary tension to carry off the illusion of verticality, of ‘reaching to the sky’, of ‘reaching to the gods’ (Levin, 1983). Earth and sky, and, in between, the dancer’s body, never belonging to either domain, never transcendent or immanent, but constituted through the tension required to connect with, or touch, both. *Embodiment*, as the body-self’s mode of presence and engagement in the world (Csordas, 1994, p. 12) here is founded on, and conditional on, an irresolvable tension between transcendence and immanence, constituted as a state of indeterminacy, that is its enabling condition.³⁶

Levin relates the grounded-airborne tension of classical ballet to the concepts of ‘beauty’ and ‘sublimity’, through a formalist analysis of Balanchine’s works, drawing on modernist art theory (Levin, 1983). He distinguishes between beauty and the sublime, where beauty is related to the horizontal field of poise, in which

³⁶ For example, Thomas Csordas argues that “the essential characteristic of embodiment is existential indeterminacy...in which embodiment is reducible neither to representations of the body, to the body as an objectification of power, to the body as a physical entity or biological organism, nor to the body as an inalienable center of individual consciousness” (ibid., p. xi).

the body is drawn back to its objecthood, and the sublime to the vertical field of the phenomenon of grace, which reflects escape from objecthood. Levin argues that the material affirms objecthood (as beauty), whereas the optical (pictorial) recreates the body within the optical field (as sublimity). Further, he maintains that “the possibility of achieving, through formalism, a purely optical reduction of corporeal mass and weight in accordance with the modernist aesthetic is certainly latent in most of the classical ballet positions” (ibid., p. 137). Classical ballet’s body is reduced to an illusion, an optical lightness that is a chimera of transcendence, and its corporeal materiality is negated. In this setting, intercorporeity therefore becomes an impossibility, as the dancer’s body disappears. In other words, there is no ‘body’ to relate to other bodies.

French psychiatrist and movement scholar Hubert Godard, offers a somewhat different account of the gravitational countertension of ‘earth’ and ‘sky’ in movement, one that is founded in intercorporeity (Godard, 1994). According to Godard’s developmental model, the dancer’s spine subtends her/him between earth and sky. Movement is animated by the motor centre for the arms and that for the legs and the centre of gravity for the body as a whole, enabling a foundational double earth-sky movement. Godard explains the relationship between the dancer’s self, earth and sky as “a triangle, and like a sea-going vessel, we will locate ourselves by successive triangulations – triangles that are not without similarity to the first triangle that presides over the emergence of autonomy in the child. The quality, the richness, the clarity of gesture will be but a reflection of this first support system” (ibid.). Godard contends that the body’s relation to earth and sky, and all movement that is generated, is developmentally founded in the infant’s body’s gravitational relation to the mother and in her/his attainment of the tonic function (Godard, 1994; Dobbels & Rabant, 1996). That is, all movement has a *relational* foundation; it is movement that relates to the other.

In dance practices such as contact improvisation, the body both touches itself and other bodies, who in turn reciprocally touch it and themselves. Here the distinction between touching and being touched becomes dissolved in an

ongoing, reciprocal play of identity and alterity. Movement, as a form of touch, therefore assumes *a line of communication rather than a boundary line between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the body*, a proprioceptive and haptic 'listening' and responsiveness to the other's body.

Contact thus becomes an ideal medium for sociality and for an ethics of touch rather than an ethics of violence to the other (through erasure). For, according to Merleau-Ponty, the flesh is both animate and the source of animation for all beings (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). It has the power to espouse, a transpersonal and animating dimension that, Carey (2000) argues, frees the body from metaphysical dualisms, and blows apart the notion of the objectivity of the body as an isolated (i.e., untouchable) self.

This is not to suggest that the subjectivities of ballet dancers cannot become more interpersonal with maturity. The comments from mature ballet dancers in this study instead showed that they were increasingly aware of, and responsive to, their audiences, and suggests that they develop this sensitivity in maturity. They develop an attunement to the other that increases their enjoyment of performing. Performing no longer becomes a matter of 'being seen' but also invokes the reciprocity of 'seeing', where 'to-be-looked-at-ness' gives way to 'looking-at' ('touching'?) the other, the audience through focus. Focus might therefore be described as a visual 'touching' of the other, an intercorporeity of a potential multitude of body-subjects mutually constituting each other during the event of performance. At the same time, through this process focus also establishes the dancer's subject position, as constituted through self-other and world.

In Chapter 2 I noted O'Connor's association of Frank's (1991) narcissistic (monadic) and communicative (associative, or 'other-related') body types with age-inclusive and age-exclusive dance forms. The associatedness of the communicative body, which "extends to the body of the other(s)", aligns well with the foregoing discussion of a developing intercorporeity and

intersubjectivity in the mature body-subject in dance. However, while some dance forms might encourage associatedness more than others, as O'Connor would maintain, comments from a number of interviewees suggest that the 'communicative' or intersubjectively orientated body is more easily facilitated by, but not necessarily confined to, particular styles of dance. These comments support the notion that dancers can develop this tendency in maturity, regardless of the level of codification of their movement vocabulary (or deliberate negation of it). The fact that some of the interviewees, who were professional ballet dancers performing in their maturity, commented on their maturity as a time at which they were more aware of the audience than in their earlier years, suggests that, even in a highly codified dance style such as classical or contemporary ballet, it is possible for the 'communicative body', and a sense of an intercorporeal self, to emerge.

5.2 *Ekstasis*, body memory and intersubjective selves

One of my key arguments has been that the extradiscursive dimension of the dancing body offers potential as a site of resistance to discursively mediated norms. However, so far I have not provided any examples of the operation of 'the extradiscursive' in dancers' bodies that emerged from interviewees' comments. What forms might it take? In this section I will refer to two examples of extradiscursiveness: *ekstasis* and body memory. I argue that both *ekstasis* and body memory can provide a way for dancers to transcend and resist the normalizing discursive categorization on age and gender stereotypes. However, I interpret *ekstasis* in dance not as a standing outside of one's body, a form of disembodiment, but rather as the experience of sublimity while engaged in a bodily practice.³⁷

Earlier I noted that comments from interviewees that refer to the theme of bodily passion and moments of sublimity that emerged in experiences of dancing

³⁷ It is analogous to Levin's alignment of 'grace' with sublimity, reflecting an escape from objecthood.

included observations that these experiences were difficult to articulate through language (see Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5.2). I also argued that these experiences were timeless. *Ekstasis*, then, does not mean ‘body-less’, but rather ‘time-less’, and is not a disembodied state but rather an embodied experience outside time. For how else can we explain moments of *ekstasis* as instances of absolute embodiment, while paradoxically standing ‘outside’ of one’s body? Perhaps, then, the fusion of thought and movement that Gil (2002) notes in Cunningham’s dancer’s ‘virtual’ body is a more useful way of understanding these phenomena, typically characterized by expressions such as “it all comes together”, and “for a moment you are *there*”. These experiences can be described as transient moments beyond conscious control, where body-mind becomes fused in a flash of experience. This experience of fusion is independent of the ageing of the body.

Sublime and cathartic experiences accessed through dance can be theorized in various ways: as glimpses of the unified self in the Lacanian mirror stage, of melding into the world and becoming indistinguishable from it—what Caillois defines as mimesis (see Briginshaw & Taylor, 1996). Or they can be taken as a manifestation of the eastern form of embodiment of *samadhi* or ‘no mind’ (Carey, 2000), or, what Merleau-Ponty (1968) sees as the individual self not centered in the ‘usual’ way, as the familiar distinctions between self and non-self are collapsed under a more transitive and intercorporeal notion of flesh.

Common to all these is the experience of *ekstasis* as discursively incommunicable, when in it ‘all coming together’ the body-subject is bound to the world. This experience does not share the teleological emphasis of language, in which actions achieve ends—you are not ‘trying to get somewhere’, signaling an intention of an as yet unrealized action: you are ‘already *there*’. It is experienced rather than enacted, invisible rather than observable, independent of, rather than dependent on, a body which *may* be characterized by youth and a capacity for virtuosity, but may equally be old. *Ekstasis* does not depend on “how high you can get your leg up” or “the brilliance of your pirouettes”; the oldest, frailest and least mobile body is capable of this experience. This has important

implications for my study of ageing dancers' bodies, as the experience of *ekstasis* suggests that there is no stage of life at which such experience peaks: it is continuous throughout life, it is the glue of a corporeal subjectivity that transforms itself through ageing and dancing.

Another example of an extradiscursive phenomenon that defies the body-mind binary of traditional western thought can be seen in the references interviewees made to what one defined as 'body memory'. The tenet of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the body—that consciousness is inextricably embodied—is evident in dancers' reports of a memory of movement sequences performed many years ago and inaccessible to conscious efforts at recall. One interviewee's account of remembering a dance learnt long ago provides a powerful illustration of how inerasably she has embodied it:

Monique: "One day when I was remounting a work on students and trying to explain to them what it was, and them just not getting it ... and the music went on and just *did* it, and it was [laugh] quite amazing, because ... when did I do that, it was about 8, 9 years ago, and it's still so familiar, it was still so much in my body I just have to actually not think about it, and it just happens ... it was more just [the choreographer's] particular way of moving, of getting into the floor and getting out, and joining one movement to another, it still was so familiar ... it was still there so clearly and strongly in my body. It was kind of, like, it had nothing to do with me, in a way [laugh], it was just still there, and I found that just amazing. And it makes you wonder how long those ... you know, are they imprinted forever, those kinds of things?"

Another interviewee referred to the bodily capacity for 'remembering', at the cellular level, every movement throughout life:

Gabrielle: "The body never forgets any movement, it keeps it, it keeps all the experience of the movement you did in all your life ... so you are very rich, you are very rich when you moved all your life, your body is so rich because every tiny little part remembers what we did."

Phenomena such as body memory can lend a cohesiveness to the subjectivity of the performing body-subject, which develops and intensifies in the course of maturity. Bodily fragmentation and 'decline' is thus contradicted by an increased body awareness and sense of embodiment. Furthermore, since such a 'corporeal intelligence' is inaccessible to direct (cerebral) consciousness but rather resides in bodily performance ("I don't know how I remembered it; I just did it"), it resides in the very fabric of the body.

Cellular consciousness, the foundational element of movement styles such as postmodern choreographer Deborah Hay (see Foster, 1986), is an issue that Carey touches on in connecting non-western modes of embodiment with recent developments in psychoneuroimmunology, or PNI (Carey, 2000). Carey connects eastern modes of embodiment with recent developments in PNI, in which empirical evidence suggests that the body's cells receive and transmit information-bearing chemicals—not solely the brain. This implies that the entire body is an intelligence bearing organism. The emotion-instinct circuit is body-based as it is not directly connected to the cerebral cortex but operates on another level.

This phenomenon of body consciousness, which body memory suggests, also appears in other research on movement and comportment in relation to life-threatening illness. For example, Godard describes the effect on breast cancer patients' body schema post surgery: "after classical rehabilitation, according to conventional tests a patient will recover their strength and full articulation. However, a very detailed movement analysis allows us to notice a qualitative modification in the way the body is managed" (Godard, in Dobbels & Rabant, 1996, p. 17). The interesting aspect is, however, that these aberrations from previous comportment and movement were already evident *before* diagnosis of illness and surgery (ibid.):

What was surprising was to discover subsequently that in general this impairment was already present before surgical intervention. What produces

this instability in the 'body image': the illness working on the corporeal structure, or the fact of knowing oneself to be ill?

Godard suggests that patients had an 'instinctual' awareness of an anomaly which was inaccessible to cerebral consciousness, but which manifested itself in altered movement patterns. This supports the notion that the body has an intelligence that is to some extent independent of cerebral consciousness; that is, a corporeal consciousness.

Both the out-of-body experience of *ekstasis*, of moments of sublimity, and the ability to recall movement through body memory, support the notion of embodied consciousness, and there are other examples of this. At the beginning of the thesis, I referred to two relevant themes for dancing: "*losing self*"—a synchronicity with something larger, being incorporated into a larger social constellation, and *euphoria*—drug- or endorphin-induced wellbeing, positivity, harmony with self and environment. Some of these emerged spontaneously in interviewees' comments, as discussed in Chapter 3, Section 3.2.5.

The notion of embodied consciousness is crucial for understanding why an ageing dancer might continue to dance in the face of a cultural narrative of 'bodily decline'. It calls up a third category in addition to that of 'losing self' and 'euphoria': *recovering self*. *Recovering self* through dancing relates directly to body memory; dancing can be a way of incorporating past into present, of maintaining continuity of self. Recalling Featherstone (1991), I would suggest that body memory may be an important concept in relation to ageing in a postmodern world of impression management and 'performing' selves, for it promises the body-subject an authenticity, a cohesion and continuity through the body's capacity for non-conscious remembrance of movement.

In the field of discourse analysis it has been recognized for some time that, while speech may be a discursive phenomenon, it is always embodied and active. That is, discourse includes the social context in which it is embedded—which includes aspects such as the embodied markers of the speaker (e.g., Poynton,

2000). In the present discussion, it is the body and its corporeally inscribed memories of movement that, in the face of physical ageing, offers the embodied self the possibility of rescue from fragmentation, insofar as the subject of postmodernity is regarded as without a history, outside discourse.³⁸

One way in which the embodiment of extradiscursive phenomena such as *ekstasis* and body memory operates is through severing the connection between language and movement, as an enabling condition for the experience of fusion referred to earlier (Gil, 2002). One of the interviewees who moved from training in classical ballet to pursue her experimental dance practice recounted such an experience, and described it as an ‘awakening’ to an inner musicality grounded in embodied movement patterns. Unlike consciously directed visual, kinesthetic or sensory imagery, a common tool in improving performance in the psychology of dance and sports (e.g., Taylor & Taylor, 1995), this participant’s musicality was more diffusely arrived at, lending support to the idea that it may be possible to ‘bypass’ language without sacrificing intelligibility. Her experience is worth citing at some length:

Alana: “I was in Arnhem, and there was a Belgian woman, it was her that I corresponded with, I was really interested in her ideas. And I met her in Holland when I was there in 1991, and ... we worked together a bit during that year, then we did a project together in 1992, which was funded through the Belgian Arts Ministry, and that was all improvised. It was an improvised work, and we’d improvised together for five months.

She didn’t speak much English and I didn’t speak any Flemish, so we sort of tried to speak in French but my French was really bad, so we didn’t really talk (laugh), actually, we’d just go into the studio and improvise.

³⁸ This has fascinating implications for dance therapy. For example, it would suggest that people with Alzheimer’s disease, which is dreaded as a ‘death of the self’, retain this corporeal consciousness and memory of movement throughout their life.

I remember, after a couple of months I started hearing music, in my head, this *musicality* and ... it was like, you know when you have these experiences where you go out into the wilderness and something happens and you're irrevocably changed. And ever since that time, I hear music when I'm dancing.

(What sort of music?) A kind of a ... like a musicality. It's very in my body, but it's not just a rhythm, it's actually a musicality with different tones, that's really probably the loudest and most dominant feature of an improvisation. When I start to try and catch some movement or remember some part of it to choreograph, it's always the musicality that's the trigger for me, how to locate that again, or what it is that I'm storing when I'm doing it, that I'm going to be using to create from ... what is it I'm remembering about the work when I'm in that play of musicality, and it happened that it just suddenly woke up in me then ...

Because we didn't talk, I think. (You shut off the language part?) Yeah. Another form of listening. I think that's what happens. I don't know whether it would have come anyway, but it was really pronounced ... (Is it guiding your movement?) No, it emerges from the movement. I get moving and then I ... hear it. And I realize I've got on a stream then, and that that's what is buoying me along and that's what I can follow then to stay on it. (So it does influence the movement in a way?) Well, it's a way of putting parameters around the movement once I hear it, because it's sort of like a signature of the movement and I can ... keep playing it for myself then.

And probably what's happened now is that ... there may be some musicalities that are recurring that I'm then dancing off. I kind of wonder about that. (Do you think they're crystallizing into certain structures?) Well, everything forms patterns in your body, you know, and habits make tracks. You know then you find yourself going over them without even realizing it, although I imagine

that I probably am ... But I keep trying to interrupt it, and I do constantly try to develop new ways of ... breaking my patterns, to opening up new things.”

Alana’s musicality does not guide or facilitate movement as the use of imagery might; rather, it emerges from it.³⁹ It was triggered (‘irrevocably’) by a *collaborative* situation in which the use of language as a structuring (and stricturing) tool was blocked. Rather, an isomorphic relationship appears to exist between the music (the ‘tones’) and certain movements, and she uses this inner music as a memory aid for the movements. The point I am making here is, because it does not involve language, this felt connection between inner music and body movement is an extradiscursive experience, yet nevertheless it is one that can coalesce into ‘patterns’ in the body, ‘tracks’ made by habitual reiteration, but tracks that can also be ‘interrupted’ and redirected. It is not clear, however, whether the emergence of her musicality through improvisation is a function of maturity (i.e. experience), and therefore related to ageing, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to do more than speculate, but such phenomena are a fertile area for further research. Thus, while stronger experiences of body consciousness and body memory may not be endemic to the body-subject’s maturation into later life, I would argue that they may nevertheless become a strategic condition of possibility for ‘forms of becoming’ for mature dancers.

Alana’s experience of musicality as a structured (but not a *structuring*) structure of movement in the above quote evokes the issue of resistance to corporeal traces of movement that have become congealed by habit. In what follows I want to briefly revisit the issue of bodily resistance to habitual practices (i.e. practices of inscription), because of this affinity between striving to overcome habitual comportments that ‘classify’ one in everyday social life, and of adopting a radically new corporeal code in dance. Both of these approaches involve a concerted effort to overcome ways of moving and of presenting the

³⁹ Interestingly, many interviewees recounted their dancing in response to music as one of their earliest memories of dance in their childhood.

(aged, gendered) self, whether in a theatrical or in a social context, ways that have become naturalized through corporeal inscription and reiteration.

This process of 'unlearning' congealed forms of comportment and movement in order to open the body to alternative modes of articulating the body-self has, of course, been a concern in dance research focusing on experimental dance styles and body practices, practices that initially emerged in a therapeutic context. These include the release-based technique and Body Mind Centering practice that Alana studied, practices that were initially employed more as a therapeutic adjunct to more mainstream contemporary dance practices than dance styles in their own right (see, e.g., Dempster, 1994). However, these practices can—and do—evidently function in a non-therapeutic context, through their emphasis on body awareness, and a re-education of the body in order to enable alternative ways of moving, as the experiences of participants such as Joanne, Gabrielle and Alana attest.

Through these practices the 'naturalized' codes of dance movement are deconstructed for the limited variations that they are—variations of the 'flesh of the world' of Merleau-Ponty, or arboreal variations of rhizomatic assemblages of Deleuze and Guattari, and so forth. The ability of dancers to corporeally reinscribe themselves with previously unimaginable forms of moving suggests an agency, an ability of humans as social beings to radically transform their bodily comportment and practices, practices that have become sedimented through their ongoing reinscription and reiteration. This has important implications for ageing studies. Corporeally inscribed, gendered and age-graded forms of comportment, locomotion, dress, an entire hegemonic 'semiotics' of age can potentially be uninscribed, opening the door for the possibility of alternative 'modes of being' and of doing or constituting the self. This body-self's 'organic unity' is never self-contained, but always already attuned not only to itself but to other selves and to its world. An intersubjective self constitutes, as it is constituted by, the other and negotiates the cultural strictures circumscribing being and doing, by the invisible as much as by the visible.

Thus, rather than as 'habits' inscribed on the body's visible surface that can be changed gradually through imperfect reiteration (Butler, 1993; Sullivan, 2000), might not corporeal (re)inscription also occur at the cellular, invisible level of the body-subject's experience of itself as embodied? An interpretation of the hands of the old woman as visibly 'deformed' from years of hard labor in Bourdieu's *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984) reflects only what is 'surface' and visible, but not the invisible, that which, as Carey (2000) argues, imbues it with deep ontological meaning. How rich, then, is the body-subject of 'this old woman' or 'this old man' of Beauvoir, which we shy from identifying with. The emphasis on surfaces of western cultures does not acknowledge the invisible (always within-the-visible). The flesh of the invisible is interleavened with the flesh of the visible body; it is a latency that recasts the 'ageing' self as a lifelong 'becoming', rather than as a progressive 'disintegration', albeit a becoming that is negotiated through cultural and institutional constraints.

5.3 How to make yourself a dancing body-self

In Chapter 1 I noted that the problem with contending that the postmodern self is 'dispersed' rather than 'unified' lies in the impossibility of saying anything meaningful about the body. This dilemma pivots on the nature of the body-subject's relation to the world, specifically in the boundaries between self, other and world. Some have noted that no self can invent itself freely, that is, as a self without history, coherence or meaningfulness (Diprose, 1994b). Much is at stake here, for a mature body-subject, or what Biggs (1999) refers to as a 'mature imagination', becomes meaningless if stripped of its corporeal history, for this very history fundamentally constitutes its cohesion and continuity. The 'postmodern' or 'performing' self of Featherstone and Hepworth and others, the reflexive, revisible self that can choose an identity 'at will', becomes *disembodied*, a dispersed 'self', a collection of arbitrary, fungible selves without a foundational integrity.

How can the self revise itself fracturing the individual lifecourse-as-continuous-narrative, and thus rendering any notion of 'authentic' selfhood meaningless? As I noted in Chapter 1, it has been claimed that the denial of ageing denies one of the most valuable resources of older people—their age (Andrews, 1999). Ageing involves the accumulation of a history, a person's history that in western cultures is treated as something to hide (because it 'shows one's age') rather than as valued for what it is, a constitutive condition of a (mature) selfhood.

I have argued that there are means by which the integrity of the self can be maintained, while transformable and transforming, through the individual's approach to dance throughout life. I have suggested that body memory offers a means of resistance to normative categorization and control, and to the devaluation of ageing in the discourses of contemporary western cultures. Body memory is indicative of a corporeal consciousness through which the self is already characterized by consistency and continuity (here in the form of a movement history). The dancers in this study narrated a coherent, meaningful life history in dance. They certainly did not come across as reflexive, postmodern identities that reinvented themselves 'at will', but rather as coherent selves forged in response to often challenging social and economic constraints. For many, their practice of dancing matured with their bodies. For those who continued dance practice into the second half of life it increasingly became a central thread to their sense of self.

Body memory of movement therefore fulfils a particularly important function for ageing. That is, it enables a 'body history' through stored and recollected movement. This unique body history in turn helps to generate a cohesive, coherent and meaningful body-subject, which lies outside the discursive binaries of a culture that pejoratively age-grades its subjects. It is a foundational condition for a subjectivity constituted by an open-ended development of *that* dancing body's unique accumulated history, a history enabled through ageing, a 'dancing the self' through ageing. Here the ageing body does not represent the denial of

ageing or the loss of a fictitious, 'ageless' ideal. On the contrary, it is *through* ageing that the embodied connections that involve a relation of self to other selves and to one's world, emerge through dance practice.

Theories of gendered ageing, such as the masking and masquerade theories discussed in Chapter 1, struggle with this issue of coherence of the body-self. As I have argued, because these theories are essentially based on a split between an inner, eternally youthful self and an outer, progressively ageing body, they highlight a dilemma inherent in crafting a coherent identity. Comments from some dancers in relation to performing presence in maturity do suggest a form of masquerade; for example, those ballet dancers that claimed that particular ways of presenting the self on stage learnt over many years could 'fool' the audience into believing that they had just witnessed a feat of virtuosity. These ways of presentation, by acting as a decoy, attempt to mask the physical limitations of the ageing body.

But there is something awry with this performance of self, a lack of connection between body and self. For this notion of 'masking' presupposes a *unitary*, stable subjectivity (that is, the inner, youthful self) that is attached to an essentially *dispersed* body, a body that manifests its recalcitrance by a continuous process of unwittingly transforming itself as 'it' ages. The strategy of masking does not constitute a coherent self, but instead an identity that revises itself in defense against ageist cultural norms. The body-self, as it perceives itself and as it perceives others perceiving it, is thus in a state of ongoing tension in its effort to achieve coherence and social recognition or value.

Perhaps the 'mask of ageing' and 'masquerade' approaches may be more productively understood as attempts to reconcile the two *bodies* theorized by Merleau-Ponty (1962), the phenomenal body and the objective body; the 'lived', felt, thinking body and the body presented to—and perceived by—the social world. The objective, visible body is socially constructed in a way that it gives the illusion of an underlying self characterized by unity and continuity, in

conformity with cultural norms—almost as if by moral imperative (e.g., Albright 1997; Bourdieu, 1984). The phenomenal body that is invisible (to others) is, by contrast, visceral, sensuous, experience-seeking and emotional. Masking, then, can be seen as an attempt at reconciliation of the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ or, in Biggs’ (1999) terms, of the ‘hidden’ and ‘surface’ aspects of social beings in order to negotiate the norms of the culture they inhabit.

Dance practices can also be a means of integrating these bodies, as philosopher Philippa Rothfield has argued in her paper “Points of contact: philosophies of movement” (Rothfield, 1994). Rothfield distinguishes these two bodies in relation to particular dance forms, arguing that dance styles such as ballet and jazz dance primarily emphasize the objective aspect of movement (creating ‘a certain look’), with less regard to inner focus, whereas other approaches to dance, such as contact improvisation, place more emphasis on its phenomenal, felt aspect. Rothfield maintains that the objective/phenomenal body of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology pervades all dance forms to some degree, since, “for all of us, there is a continual play between phenomenal, objective, internal, external and visual dimensions of the body” (ibid., p. 84).

The objective/phenomenal body is also involved in the performance of cultural and social norms, whether in a theatrical or everyday context, and in some dance genres this is more visible than in others. When the comments of ballet dancers such as Martin and Sylvia suggest that performing presence in maturity can be a means of disguising age-related physical limitations in technical performance, it is important to note that this form of masking is related to a dance practice informed by classical ballet, which stresses optical and visual modes of representation.⁴⁰ As I have argued, the visual economy is one through which physical capital is most easily apprehended, and according to which

⁴⁰ Researchers such as Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull (1997) have argued that the dances of different cultures differ in privileging a particular sense: that of sight in western classical ballet, that of touch in contact improvisation, and that of hearing in traditional Ghanaian dances. Visibility as a dominant medium in most western theatrical dancing makes older bodies problematic, as the body’s appearance takes precedence over its experience of dancing.

ageing bodies, as bodies of difference, are classed as 'lacking', as falling short of physical ideals based on young bodies.

The notion of the mask as simultaneously expressing a truth, and of drawing attention to that which it seeks to conceal (Woodward, 1991), also suggests that masking is one way in which body-subjects mark themselves as aged by their very efforts to conceal (or perhaps defend) their ageing. Certainly, drawing attention to one's 'lack' through a form of concealment need not be seen as a 'failure' in itself: it is simply one mode of being, or of constituting a self. However, I would argue that, while the tactic of masking attempts to deal with the ageist norms of western cultures, the socially presented body-subject-in-masquerade is a defensive reaction to ageist norms, and through this very maneuver it could be seen to perpetuate such norms. The 'failure' of such a body-self in achieving 'authenticity' or coherence lies in the fact that, through masking itself, the body-self can only ever connect with other selves through the performance of a charade, a performance that becomes increasingly likely to founder.

What other modes of being, then, of constituting a mature subjectivity through dancing, are evident as participants age? In Chapter 3 I referred to self-care as a mode of 'bodily mindfulness' of dancers, a means of bodily self-preservation involving body regimes to maintain and optimize health, fitness and presentation in the context of a postmodern consumer society (e.g., Featherstone, 1991; Turner, 1984). In the final section of this chapter I will further develop the notion of self-care as it applies to the dancers I interviewed. Here I will take a somewhat different path, drawing on the late writings of Foucault on the 'care of the self'.

My reason for this is that I want to explore an alternative ethos of being important for ageing, one based on caring for one's self, as distinct from the ultimately unattainable goal of self-knowledge, self-mastery, or self-abnegation. Perhaps this ethos can rescue us from the fragmentation of the postmodern,

‘dispersed’ self, or the ‘self-as-masquerade’. The concept of ‘caring for the self’ offers possibilities for crafting a self that has a corporeal history, a cohesion and a continuity, and yet is sufficiently flexible to be able to transform itself in numerous ways. In the following section I ask how the self-management regimens and dance practices of the participants in this study might inform this kind of self.

5.4 Self-care as a technology of the body-self

In his posthumously published *Technologies of the Self* (Foucault, 1988) and *The Care of the Self* (Foucault, 1990), Foucault radically departs from his earlier emphasis on subjectivity as a product of historically contingent forms of institutional power, and focuses on a genealogy of the concept of ‘self care’. Foucault traces a history of western thought on the development of modes of being for the self, between the care of oneself and the quest for self-knowledge (Foucault, 1988, 1990). His concern is with how one might ‘take care of oneself’, how “a human being turns him- or herself into a subject”, through practices through which individuals “acted on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being in order to transform themselves and attain a certain state of perfection or happiness, or to become a sage or immortal” (Foucault, 1988, pp. 3-4). It is worthwhile here to go into some detail of Foucault’s work, as it connects with the comments of some of the participants in the study, in relation to their developing maturity both as dancers and as subjects involved in taking care of the self.

Through a historical analysis of ancient Greco-Roman texts, Foucault demonstrates that the principle of self-knowledge has historically evolved to take precedence over that of self-care. For example, self-knowledge became defined under Christian moral principles of self-renunciation in order to attain salvation in a future (after)life, whereas in Greco-Roman culture self-knowledge was a

product of the practice of self-care, rather than something that was achieved through an ascetic practice of self-renunciation.⁴¹

Most significantly for the subject of ageing, care of the self was not confined to youth but practiced throughout one's life by means of a range of 'techniques', such as introspection, vigilance, care of the body and soul, and writing as a practice of narrating the self. This perspective enables a view of older age as inherently productive rather than degenerative. It suggests an embodied lifelong ethos: to 'live well'—not in the sense of conspicuous hedonistic consumption, but to live an 'abundant life' into deep old age. It suggests that generativity, or what could be called 'generational altruism', is insufficiently rewarding as an activity in its own right *if* it implies self-abnegation, because self-abnegation is a form of not taking care of the self and thus results in an impoverished self that is unable to care for the other. Put simply, to 'give' to the other there must be a self that has something to give, apart from nostalgic narratives of the past. Thus even extreme old age offers the potential for completing a self, as Foucault (1988, p. 31) points out:

Since we have to take care throughout life, the objective is no longer to get prepared for adult life, or for another life, but to get prepared for a certain complete achievement of life. This achievement is complete at the moment just prior to death. This notion of a happy proximity to death—of old age as completion—is an inversion of the traditional Greek values on youth.

Foucault also shows us that the relationship between care of the self and self-knowledge at any 'stage' of life is historically contingent, changing significantly from the time of Plato to the Hellenistic age, both through a different conception of truth and memory, and through changes in ways of 'examining' the self. For example, one emergent form of self-abnegation was a 'culture of silence' in the relation of self to a 'master' (i.e. teacher), in deferral to an authoritative other, where the 'master/teacher' speaks and the disciple listens silently. Developing

⁴¹ Foucault, in 'Friendship as a Way of Life', distinguishes between asceticism and *askesis*: "Asceticism as the renunciation of pleasure has bad connotations. But the *askesis* is something else: it's the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear that happily one never attains" (Foucault, 1989, p. 206).

the art of listening, rather than the historically prior practice of cultivating scholarly dialogue, was seen as a positive condition for acquiring truth, both the truth spoken by the teacher and the inner 'voice of reason' of the self. One of the most obvious sites of this 'culture of silence' in the field of dance is in the pedagogy of classical ballet, in which teachers instruct (and sometimes chastise) and students do not speak but silently obey.⁴²

This practice of silent deference to the teacher is supported by interviewees' comments on being 'fed up' with dance company politics and being spoken to like a child as they matured. Such comments suggest that the discipline of docile bodies in class or rehearsal, the unquestioning obedience of, and absolute trust in, the teacher or choreographer, is a feature of young ballet dancers, but that the docility of the young dancer in a professional company has a time limit. As one participant commented:

Monique: Somebody said to me ... at some stage, 'Once you turn 30 you can't stay in a dance company because it's too ... I mean, you don't want to be treated like that any more'... I got to that point where I thought something about the structure was too much, and ... really wanting to be more like an adult or something.

Another participant saw possibilities for the dancer-choreographer relationship as a mutually enhancing partnership, in which both engage in a corporeal (and sometimes verbal) dialogue:

Anthony: Sensitive performers and articulate performers and performers of quality can really enhance a choreographer's work and I think that's a real art form ... to be nurtured ... one has to be generous with one's self working with a choreographer, you have to always be ... ready to present a new way of dealing with a certain progression of material ... that the choreographer that you're working with, wouldn't necessarily think of himself.

⁴² Some choreographers, such as George Balanchine, also fit this model of god-like authority.

One of the key components of self-care discussed by Foucault (1990) is the practice of self-examination. One technique for self-examination, *gymnasia*, or self-training, involves the individual in practices such as purification rituals, sexual abstinence, or physical privation, practices that have affinities with the striving for bodily self-mastery in the ballet dancer. Performing very difficult physical exercises or looking at tempting food and denying oneself the pleasure of eating it are examples of *gymnasia*, which has the Stoic function of establishing and testing the individual's independence from the external world. The self-denial of anorexia-prone female dancers who deprive themselves of food and exercise vigorously can in this way be perceived not as an illness or dysfunction, as it is understood in contemporary western cultures, but rather as a practice of *gymnasia*, a form of bodily control that closes the classical body from the influences and temptations of the outside world.

In Chapter 2 I referred to the theme of *self/bodily control*—confidence, shaping the body as a fine-tuned instrument under one's control; virtuosity. Institutionalized practices such as classical ballet and forms of sport such as gymnastics promote *gymnasia*, with an emphasis on control and mastery of a body that is seen as instrumental to the controlling mind, a bodily control and mastery in which older bodies are seen to progressively fail.

However, reflections from the interviewees, such as Meredith's overcoming her eating disorder as a young dancer, and Sylvia and Marie's emphasis on moderation in diet and exercise, again suggest that the extreme measures of self-denial of some young female ballet dancers are absent in maturity. The dancer—in particular the female dancer—learns, over time, to take care of her body and self through regimens of diet and exercise, to gain confidence and self-trust, and to question rather than defer to the authority of a teacher or choreographer.

Confidence and trust in one's self and performing abilities are qualities that some interviewees felt developed in their maturity, and this development of self-trust resonates with another key concern of Foucault: the historical shift towards

self-abnegation as a technique of the self (Foucault, 1990). Self-abnegation was marked in the tendency to self-disclosure, in line with Christianity's emphasis on salvation and confession, according to which the Christian self has a truth obligation (of faith and of self), to know the self's temptations, desires, faults, and to disclose them to God (through confession) or to others in the community. This invoked a form of self-destruction in order to attain self-knowledge, as, in Christian morality, penitence for the committing of sin does not try to establish an identity but "serves instead to mark the refusal of the self, the breaking away from self ... Self-revelation is at the same time self-destruction" (ibid., p. 43).

Foucault also outlines three consecutively emergent types of self-examination. One of these is "the examination of self with respect to the relation between the hidden thought and an inner impurity." It implies that there is something hidden in ourselves and that we are always in a self-illusion which hides the secret (ibid., p. 46). The self cannot be trusted to know itself and must rid itself of its 'impurity' through confession, since the self cannot distinguish thoughts of good quality from thoughts that are 'impure'. Therefore, in addition to self-negating obedience, the self must also engage in a permanent verbalization of thoughts to appropriate others; that is, to confess one's inner thoughts incessantly.

The notion that verbalization of thoughts purifies the self, with confession a technology of the self, was also evident in some of the dancers' comments in this study. For example, for classically trained Marie, purging the self of negative feelings by talking to a trusted other is a technique for bodily and psychic wellbeing, which positively affects her dancing. Such purgative processes of disclosure are seen as liberating and healing for the self; dancers such as Marie believe that, through them, "your body will stay healthy and ... your mind will stay healthy because you're able to free those things in an honest way. They are healing ... they become a positive energy".⁴³

⁴³ The practice of disclosing the inner self in movement was also evident in the ethos of modern expressionist dancer-choreographers such as Mary Wigman, who believed that "every true composition should be a confession" of the choreographer's psychic interiority (Foster, 1986), a

The mature dancers interviewed in this study perceived a strong connection between self, world view and practice. For them, their dancing is critical to how they perceive and experience themselves and their identity. Their dance practice constituted an exploration and elaboration of body-selves that sometimes conform to social norms and sometimes resist them. Each presented a coherent, meaningful life narrative, but modes of being and constituting the body-self varied according to whether they practiced ballet-derived dance forms or more experimental approaches. This meaning-making tendency, this rationalization of why they perform particular regimes in caring for their bodies, balance caring for self and mentoring the next generation of dancers, whilst often struggling to continue to practice their art-form, suggests an ethics of the self in which the mature self creates itself through both through self-care *and* care for others.

Maturity for the dancers in the study involved the acquisition of a deepening connection with their bodies' capacities and limits, a questioning of previously unquestioned authority (teacher, choreographer), and an abandonment of outmoded forms of expressiveness. This was partly in conformity to normative social expectations of older dancers, but, for some, also in part their transgression, as they explored where movement can go, how a corporeal code can be performed differently, how new connections can be forged between movement and the meanings it expresses. This element of transgression, of resistance to intersubjectively perpetuated normative perceptions and expectations of what constitutes an 'older' dancer, is crucial. Regimes of diet, exercise or preparation for performance as modes of self-care thus become meaningful in the context of how each maturing dancer constitutes her or his subjectivity within the wider framework of institutional and social constraints, as he or she find ways to keep dancing longer in an ageist culture.

preoccupation that became less of a concern with the advent of postmodern dance.

Conclusion

I now return to the questions posed at the beginning of the thesis, with the aim of providing not so much definitive answers but provisional positions. These questions concerned the bodily inscription and experience of ageing on dancers, the gendered nature of this experience, and their discursive and practice-based perpetuation at the institutional level. Importantly, they also address possibilities for resistance to these normalizing inscriptions.

Δ “How is the dancer’s body marked as aged?”

In this thesis I have examined gendered ageing as marked across three registers: the economic (e.g. through decreased opportunities for performing, through non-renewal of contract with their company), the representational (e.g. through age-appropriate roles and costuming in performance, and through styles of choreography tailored ‘for them’ so as not to appear as a ‘curiosity’) and the physical (e.g. awareness of and taking precautions against risk of injury, taking up dance forms ‘less demanding of the body’, a scientific approach to technique).

In western societies chronological age is used as a yardstick for predicting decline, with dancers practicing ballet-based forms of dance measuring themselves against what they perceive as socially acceptable practice for their age. Ageing is also marked discursively, through language framed in terms of decline and obsolescence. The phrase, ‘it’s time to hang up the dancing shoes’, exemplifies this. It is also marked through the institutional practice of often segregating ‘older generation’ dancers from younger dancers in performances by companies that employ both. In such cases, works are specially choreographed for older dancers on the basis of normative perceptions of their bodily capacities for representing cultural body norms, norms that are privileged in mainstream dance forms. Since these norms predominantly centre on youthful beauty in spectacular forms of dance such as ballet, older dancers have traditionally been

stereotyped into alternative roles, roles that are regarded as generationally appropriate for them.

This is not the case in experimental dance practices, in which mature dancers generally perform as solo artists and choreograph works on their own bodies, and some of the dancers in this study took this path. The hybrid nature of the dancer's corporeal code and the singularity of the dancer's body in solo performance thus renders comparison with other, younger bodies impossible, and the stereotypical marking of age becomes more elusive. However, working with kindred artists in an economic climate in which support for such dance forms is minimal, as is the case in Australia, is an economic struggle for dancers of any age, let alone mature dancers. This avenue for older dancers is available only to the select few who have a secure financial basis from which to operate projects, and are fortunate enough to successfully co-ordinate available time for rehearsals and performances with any others in their group. My research suggests that this is virtually impossible for mature dancers, for economic and lifestyle reasons.⁴⁴ Since broad-based institutional support for mature age dance companies is nonexistent in Australia,⁴⁵ the status quo perpetuates the naturalized ageist assumption that the virtual nonexistence of mature dancers is due solely to age-based physical decline.

Representational myths surrounding the ageing body can be argued to arise through the imaginary dimension of ageing as a culturally shared phantasy of biology, referring to Gatens' (1996) notion of the 'imaginary body' discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1. Western cultures have strangely ideologized the 'inevitability of loss' as a romanticized tragedy for the once-beautiful ballet dancer, a form of ageism masquerading as a trope that also pervades everyday

⁴⁴ At the time of writing, a mature-age dance company for dancers over 40 has been established for the first time in Australia. The West Australian based company Co-loaded, started by two mature independent performers, performed its first season in February 2005 as part of the Perth Arts Festival.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Craig & Lester (in Whiteoak & Scott-Maxwell, 2003, p. 425): "Few dance-company managers are schooled or skilled in obtaining sponsorship and Australian commerce and industry have no tradition of philanthropy towards the arts comparable with that in the USA".

life. The trope translates into something like this: It is 'inevitable' because it is 'natural'; it is part of the tragedy of life that beauty must wither, and older dancers (particularly women) must yield to social as well as performing invisibility. In this sense it can be regarded as a repressive mechanism that limits access to performing opportunities on the basis of age.

Older dancers' perceived loss of sexual capital (as a form of socially recognized currency) is not publicly acknowledged as such but is hidden behind a discourse of 'decline' in physical capacity and endurance. Ballet, particularly in Australia, is a 'sexy' art form requiring not only a 'classical body' but one endowed with sexual capital, as constituted by youthful beauty and prowess. Sexual capital, like all forms of capital, is culturally constructed, even though Bourdieu failed to develop this concept (Martin & George, 1997). It is not their bodily capacity that prevents mature dancers from continuing to dance in older age, since methods of practice that take care of the body (working intelligently, pacing oneself, diet, rest, and so on) ensure they can continue for much longer. Rather, it is the way certain valued dance forms, such as ballet, are structured as exclusionary practices that do not accommodate older bodies that 'lack' sexual capital. Older dancers are therefore 'faulty signifiers' in relation to ageist cultural norms.

Δ "How is the dancer's body experienced as aged? How might the dancer's experience of ageing be felt and expressed in bodily terms?"

The experience of ageing is the experience of the body-subject negotiating a socially ageist climate based on a discourse of physical deterioration. It is an embodied experience of a culturally normative process of universal 'decline', an embodied and lived cultural construct. Dancers, particularly female dancers, resort to 'acting their age' to avoid the possibility of social ridicule. Ballet dancers often cease performing and practicing in order to teach; the body demonstrates rather than expresses. The lack of performing opportunities for older artists is progressively apprehended by dancers, who suffer economic hardship and

rejection from dance institutions in which they are employed. Some think of their bodies as 'old machines' that need careful maintenance. However, for others, their age was of only tangential concern to what their bodies can do in movement at this point in time, as they find alternative means of continuing their practice into older age.

A useful way of describing dancers' experience of ageing at the physical level is at the level of body-reflexive practices (Connell, 1995; Dowsett, 1996). In body-reflexive dance practices, discursive constructions (such as ageist discourses) and experienced events (such as having one's contract cancelled, or experiencing a major injury) are integrated and embodied in the self to form new experiences. For example, in some cases embodied experiences of past injuries changed the way dancers approached their dancing (fear of injury, no longer having a full range of movement). Age is also experienced relationally; for example, ballet dancers feeling they are the oldest in their group and have no peers to compete with. This has little to do with chronological age and can, for example, occur at the age of 21, as Sinead's experience in Irish dancing shows.

This study also found that, while some dancers experience ageing as a personal crisis, a loss of physical and sexual capital (force and skill for men, youthful beauty for women), others experience ageing as a motivator for abandoning old patterns of movement and discovering new ways of moving. The dance form that they practice, in terms of whether or not its movement code erases and denies older bodies, may influence whether dancers experience the ageing process as a harbinger of loss or as an opportunity for transformation. Ageing thus becomes a 'crisis' and simultaneously an opportunity for developing new modes of articulating the self, through successful negotiation of ageist social assumptions.

However, the opportunities for pursuing dance in maturity are subject to significant institutional, economic and lifestyle constraints. Further, for ballet, there are physical and representational limiting factors, constraints that are

experienced by the majority of the dancers in this study. Dancers are not 'free' to choose an experimental dance practice and develop a career out of performing it, in the sense of the unlimited freedom of the postmodern injunction to 'reinvent yourself'. The experiences of the dancers in this study show that factors such as economic survival, comfortable living standards and caring for dependants limit their choices, especially when performing as freelance or 'independent' artists.

While 'decline' language certainly featured in many classically-trained interviewees' experience of being mature dancers, progressive physical 'deterioration' was not the overriding limitation. Many dancers suggested that changing physicality could be self-managed through the knowledge of one's body's limits (of endurance, flexibility, etc.), through developing a versatility in different dance forms, through a scientific use of the body, or through 'pacing oneself' or 'cruising', as several interviewees described it. We see how ageing is marked and experienced culturally in terms largely unconnected with physical capacity, that is, in economic and representational terms, and I have argued that these aspects of ageing have been masked by a rhetoric of 'physical decline'. Meanwhile, many 'older dancers' successfully manage to continue performing and exploring their potential.

Δ "How is this reflected in dance institutional policies and practices? How do these practices of codification and age-grading restrict performance opportunities for dancers older than the accepted norm?"

The experiences of dancers interviewed in my study confirms available research evidence that opportunities to perform beyond the 'glass ceiling' age of the mid-thirties become scarce, particularly within mainstream dance companies. The repertoire of mainstream dance companies predominantly draws on dance styles based on the highly codified movement vocabulary of classical ballet, and require young, athletic dancers to successfully perform this vocabulary. One interviewee commented that contemporary dance is 'more forgiving of the body', but even here there is a point at which it becomes increasingly difficult to

continue what is a very athletic discipline, and what is marketed to audiences as reflecting norms of youthful sexuality. Dancers therefore reach a period of 'transition' from their employment as performers with dance companies, and are expected to stop performing and move to a less physically demanding occupation.

However, dance institutions in Australia have traditionally exacerbated the difficulties for dancers in transition by failing to develop and implement formal guidelines on transition into other, non-dancing careers, despite the existence of guidelines for retirement or retraining in other, non-dance institutions. The problem is compounded for dancers by the fact that, by the time they contemplate retirement from dancing, they are much younger than those in less body-based occupations. This phenomenon reflects a tardiness, at the institutional level, in recognizing the special case of dancers as early retirees from generally low-income jobs (White & Guest, 1995). It also signals the lack of attention traditionally given to issues of ageing and ageism within government institutions and workplaces, not least in the poor financial and training support given by governments to dance companies already struggling with inadequate operational budgets. The poverty of regard in which dance as a profession is held in Australia thus intersects with the cultural values placed on youth, to the disadvantage of mature dancers.

Δ "How are the ageist effects of the valorization of youth manifest in cultural forms such as dance? Why is dance almost exclusively represented as a 'young art' in western theatrical traditions and as such is not expressive of all phases of life?"

That dance is almost exclusively represented as a 'young art' in western theatrical traditions, particularly in countries such as Australia, points to one of its cultural functions. That audiences are marketed images of youth as the norm (both in mainstream media and in dance), where older bodies are only beginning

to feature,⁴⁶ and where dance performance excludes the later phases of life except in generationally stereotypical roles, is puzzling. At the speculative level, it is possible that the sexuality of a body that has the potential for reproduction (irrespective of personal sexual *orientation*) is upheld as a paragon to emulate culturally stereotypical concepts of masculinity and femininity: the potent and the fertile, the strong and the beautiful. Full investigation of this hypothesis is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I will suggest that (a) the youthful dancing body is a signifier of sexual potency, and (b) the notion of potency also serves to signal potential, a future as yet undetermined, but a future of pleasures hoped for, dreamed of. Such notions of gendered embodiment at different ages require further analysis in cultural studies of dance.

The advantage of studying dancers—at first sight an odd cultural collectivity—is that, for them, cultural beliefs around ageing, decline and the end of productivity are intensified and accelerated relative to their non-dancing peers. What my study shows is that the impact of ageism in dance and on dancers varies according to the goals of the dancers interviewed, and the dance practices they chose in accordance with their goals. The ways in which dancers negotiate ageing through the abandonment or continuation of their art form may thus usefully inform ageing theory more generally.

Δ “What are the implications of gender difference in the discourse of bodily ‘control’ and its decline with age?”

It is telling that the images of ‘loss of control’ in interviewees’ comments are feminine: the fat, frumpy ballerina, whose appearance signals loss of self-control, who represents the abandonment of the moral imperative towards ‘*gymnasia*’, of self-knowledge through mastery over the body, and instead presents an abject image of uncontrolled indulgence. Yet the discourse on bodily control and ageing is curiously inconsistent with this image of indulgence. The trope of ‘acceptance

⁴⁶ A noted example is Sydney Dance Company’s *Nutcracker* with veteran performer Harry Haythorne tapping on rollerskates in his 70s.

of the inevitable' loss and decline is circulated in the discourse of dance without anyone questioning whether it is, in fact, inevitable, without seeing it as a piece of discursive fatalism, a cultural myth.

A useful example from the field of sociology is the work of Margaret Lock, who argues that western women who go through menopause are said to almost uniformly experience a loss of bodily control (the 'inevitable' hot flushes that interrupt one's daily routine), but that these symptoms of menopause are neither inevitable nor uniform across cultures (Lock, 1998). The medicalization of menopause in western cultures has resulted in its presentation as a personally catastrophic but inevitable event that threatens the core of a woman's sexual identity. Similarly, age-based retirement from dance is perceived as an inevitable event to which the woman (dancer) is supposed to resign herself, and a loss which she is supposed to accept with grace as a 'natural' fact.

The identification of dance as a youthful and 'feminine' art form is perpetuated by the fact that it is not only female dancers who retire early, but also male dancers. The masculine tropes of 'skill' and 'force' identified by Connell (1983) are allied to youth, and ageing for male dancers is more difficult if it involves the perceived loss of these socially valued capacities through a 'decline' in performing virtuosity as they age. That is, where ageing male dancers choose to continue performing, rather than moving into the position of the 'masculine creator' of movement that Koritz has outlined (see Chapter 4), the male dancer's body is pejoratively feminized as 'other' by a masculine decline ideology. The ageing male dancer is feminized by his refusal to signify masculine instrumentality, his failure to move into a position of controlling movement through direction, rather than representing it in performance.

Martin's and Nicholas' comments that the ageing dancer's body is an old machine, or an old instrument, aligns masculinity with instrumentality, whereas Martin's other comment addressing the 'fat, frumpy ballerina' who has 'let herself go' aligns femininity with desirable weight and sexual attractiveness.

Such comments reinforce my argument that discourses of bodily control have different implications for male and female dancers as they age.

Δ “Does the dancer’s gendered subjectivity conform to, live out and perpetuate age and gender-based norms, or is she or he in a position to find opportunities for resistance and subversion?”

As discussed in Chapter 4, human agency is inherent in the variations in performances (of gender and age), even though we are constrained to repeat norms. One means of transformation of these norms is achieved through their progressive (imperfect) reiteration, whether in social practices or in the performance or practice of dance. In this way ageing can become productive in that it poses an imperative to ‘do things differently’, as a number of participants have expressed in their reflections on their practice. Gabrielle’s comment illustrates this succinctly:

Gabrielle: “Now the young dancers are coming and I see how nicely they can do the *plié* and the long lines and everything, but I’m not so interested any more, I did it for 15 years, so there must be something else to do (for) me, and my love for dance ... you do the *pliés differently*, let me try how I can do it differently. *Give* me a chance to feel my individuality.”

Possibilities for resistance and subversion of cultural norms are greater in experimental dance practices that strategically elide codification. Cultural regulatory norms, including age- and gender-based norms, are manifested in social and institutional practices such as the discursive practice of age-tagging and the institutional practice of early retirement of dancers. However, common across all dance practices is a key theme, one that can perhaps be generalized to maturity in everyday life. That is, as dancers age, they become more embodied. The dancers interviewed report feeling more ‘in their body’, knowing their body and what it can and cannot do, pacing themselves and working more intelligently and parsimoniously in order to continue dancing, and ultimately,

even though they might physically do 'less', their practice becoming more meaningful and enjoyable to them.

This project has attempted to provide an analysis of the bodily experience of gendered ageing in dancers practicing various forms of western theatrical dance, using a 'grounded' approach in which themes were identified from semi-structured, life-history interviews with mature dancers. It has focused on the ageing dancer's performance of self within the age- and gender-habitus of western cultures and dance institutions, and has delineated how ageing is marked and experienced within three registers, the physical, economic, and representational. It has explored ways in which ageing is productive in subverting age- and gender-normative stereotypes, stereotypes that superficially centre on decline of physical ability and mask the cultural link between sexual capital and youth, particularly for women. Age has been argued to be an ambiguous category, in constant need of reification through consistency of performance of self in the reiteration of these normative stereotypes. This is what gives it its productive power, the power to 'queer' age-appropriate norms through reiterating them ambiguously in self-performance.

My thesis has also explored what this self might be that performs itself, particularly within a postmodern consumer culture that valorizes youthfulness, through an examination of how different dance practices produce different body-subjects, through the lens of ageing. An intercorporeal, flexible subjectivity that is open to change is better equipped to negotiate the cultural and institutional constraints that constitute it, and experimental dance practices have been aligned with this form of subjectivity. Three implications arise from the preceding discussion of corporeal consciousness, which suggest that our selves can become more intercorporeal through ageing, and can through this very intercorporeity resist the discursive normalization that presupposes the unity and self-contained nature of the 'classical' body, according to which the ageing body of the dancer can *only* be described as in decline. First, the self in these experiences can be seen as both 'other' to itself and as fused with the 'flesh of the world', including the

other, as a form of 'syncretic sociability' (Diprose, 1994b). Secondly, such experiences support an integral connection between body-mind, in which the two cannot be conceptually distinguished from each other, which has always been Merleau-Ponty's claim and that of some non-western modes of thought (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968; Carey, 2000). Thirdly, because the embodied connection between self and world/other cannot be discursively represented, such moments cannot be categorized or preferentially valorized.

Of the many themes raised in the interviews with the dancers, there are some areas which it is beyond the scope of this thesis to further develop. Also, some themes were more easily defined than others. In particular, the themes relating to emotional expression, sublimity, and connection through dance, were both difficult to define and also tended to overlap. Further conceptual clarification of these themes is needed, and this task is also beyond the scope of this thesis.

The conceptual approach taken in this thesis has been eclectic, drawing on sociological, poststructuralist, phenomenological, social constructionist and feminist frameworks, rather than confining itself exclusively to a single theoretical framework. While the advantages of this approach include examining the notion of gendered ageing and subjectivity in dancers from a diversity of perspectives, it does not provide a unified conceptual account of possibilities for subjecthood in ageing dancers. This has never been my intention. Instead, I have tried to emphasize the heterogeneity of perspectives through which one might theorize how dancers' gendered subjectivity might be developed through ageing. I have examined strengths and shortcomings of different perspectives in relation to what are difficult questions concerning the self in relation to the body and its constraints and possibilities. However, the approach I have taken here has been exploratory and speculative rather than definitive, and my intention has not been to privilege one perspective over another beyond its capacity to illuminate the fluidity and resilience of the body-self negotiating ageing in an ageist culture.

Wainwright and Turner (2001), in the abstract to their paper 'Just Crumbling to Bits', state the following:

Ageing prompts the dancer to confront their body and their career. We focus on this potential epiphany, as it encourages dancers to reflect on their bodily habitus. We argue that the decline in a dancer's physical capital, the ontology of ageing, undermines radical social constructionist views that collapse biology into a branch of discursive sociology.

Wainwright and Turner's adoption of Bourdieu's framework enables us to see the influence of culture on the dancer's body, and how ageing is accelerated for dancers as it involves a disruption of their subjectivity as dancers. Like Wainwright and Turner, my intention in this study has not been to "collapse biology into a branch of discursive sociology". For, while I have drawn on the frameworks of radical social constructionists such as Gullette, I have also argued that the decline in a dancer's physical capital is itself a *perception* made from *within* the cultural habitus in which the dancer performs, and it cannot therefore exist outside that cultural predisposition as a perception of a 'natural' (i.e., acultural) decline. In other words, there is nothing 'natural' in the sense of 'given' or outside our enculturated perceptions that we can perceive and interpret, for we can *only* interpret a phenomenon such as ageing with reference to our enculturated predispositions. However, this does not make the experience of ageing any less real for us. Secondly, I argue that a theoretical position that regards biology as a variation of discursive sociology presumes that the body can be totally discursively represented. Such a position ignores extradiscursive corporeal phenomena such as body memory and *ekstasis*. This is one important reason why I have chosen an interdisciplinary perspective in my study.

An issue of significance for further research relates to the methodology used in this study. Some striking differences emerged between the early, 'pilot' interviews, in which a series of questions was posed by the interviewer, and the later, life-historical interviews. Not only did participants respond to the life-history format at greater length, their focus also appeared less concerned with bodily 'decline' than that of the earlier interviewees. This focus on the older

dancer as defying normative decline suggests that the interview questions, although developed in as non-stereotypical a language as possible, nevertheless bore an inherent social bias against ageing which structured their responses. Asking questions such as ‘what is an older dancer?’ invokes a discourse that is structured by ageist assumptions of ageing-as-decline and elicit appropriate responses, and highlights the difficulties of structured interviews—and indeed language—in eliciting experiences of ageing. This observation reinforces Russell’s (1989) argument, cited earlier, that much research on ageing unwittingly perpetuates the very categories and stereotypes it sets out to address. A more indirect approach that uses a life-history format, circumvents this undesirable consequence to a significant extent, and is thus an ideal methodology for further research in age studies.

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APPENDICES

- A -

INFORMATION STATEMENT

PROJECT ON AGEING AND DANCERS' BODIES

The project you are being invited to participate in is a study by researchers from the School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance at Victoria University of Technology in Melbourne. The study investigates the relationship between the experience of ageing and the practice of dance, what people in Western cultures believe about this, and whether this experience differs for men and women. For the purposes of this research, we are interested in the experiences, attitudes and practices of practicing and retired dancers over 40 years of age, and of key personnel of dance companies. These will be through qualitative, open-ended interviews. It will have an international focus, with interviews conducted in Australia and Europe.

We will be interviewing current and retired dancers, both professional and amateur, and key personnel from dance companies (choreographers, artistic directors, managers) and the print media (critics). Interviews will be of between 30 and 45 minutes in duration and will concern basic demographic information (e.g., sex, age, nationality), and open-ended questions on the following areas: early training, aspirations and expectations; the prospect/memory of leaving dance; the practice of dance (ageing and the body in practice of dance as an aesthetic practice); current involvement in dance; aspirations, future directions. All participants will have the opportunity to preview and verify transcripts before they are included in the study.

We will not be seeking personal details, or maintaining records about individual people. Interviews are entirely voluntary and anyone can withdraw from the project without prejudice or penalty. All interviews will be confidential. Tapes, transcripts and other records will be held in the University offices of the research and will be accessible only to researchers in the project. Transcripts will be submitted with the thesis.

This project is a PhD in the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Sydney being conducted Elisabeth Schwaiger (612 9351 6904) under the supervision of Dr Toni Schofield (612 9351 9577). In case of complaint, the University's Human Ethics Committee can be reached at 612 9351 4811. The mailing address of the Committee is: Human Ethics Committee, The University of Sydney, Room K4.01 Main Quad A14, Sydney NSW 2006 Australia.*

* The first half of my PhD candidature was within the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Sydney, and the remaining period of candidature (including submission) was within the School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University of Technology.

- B -

INFORMANT CONSENT FORM

I,

of

(Street)

(Suburb/town)

(Postcode)

(Country)

have been invited to participate in a research project entitled:

Ageing and dancers' bodies

In relation to this project I have read the Participant Information sheet and have been informed of the following points:

1. The aim of the project is to research current and retired dancers' expectations and experiences of ageing and age-related opportunities and obstacles that might influence their dancing career and practice.
2. The procedure will involve an interview of about 30 to 45 minutes in length in a place that is convenient to me. The conversation will be recorded on tape with my permission.
3. Should I have any complaint with regards to participating in this study, I am aware that I may contact the University's Human Ethics Committee on tel: 612 9351 4811, or by mail to: Human Ethics Committee, The University of Sydney, Room K4.01 Main Quad A14, Sydney NSW 2006 Australia.
4. I can refuse to take part in this project or withdraw from it at any time without penalty or prejudice.
5. I will not receive any money for my involvement in this study.
6. If the information I provide for this study is published, my identity will not be revealed.

After considering all these points, I accept the invitation to participate in this project.

Signature:

Witness:

(Of participant)

(Please print name)

Date:

Signature:

(Of witness)

Investigator's Signature:

Date:

QUESTIONS USED IN THE PILOT INTERVIEWS

- (1) When did you start dancing?
- (2) Do you think you will ever retire from dancing?
- (3) What does dancing do for you, how do you experience it in performance, why do you like to dance? Is there anything you don't like about dancing?
- (4) As a dancer how do you think about your body and how is it related to your sense of self, your identity?
- (5) What do you think is meant by someone being an "older dancer"?
- (6) Do you think the technical qualities of performance, technique, might change as you become older, is this positive or negative, and how important is it?
- (7) How might how the performing body looks change as you become older, is this positive or negative, and how important this is for a dancer?
- (8) Has how you feel when you are dancing changed over the years you have been dancing?
- (9) What you are doing now? Has what you are doing now evolved from your career in dance and are you happy with what you are doing now?
- (10) What are your plans for the future?
- (11) In general what opportunities should there be for older dancers or mature dancers and how does this compare with opportunities that are now?
- (12) Is there anything else that we haven't covered that you'd like to mention?