

## Acting Age on Stage: Age-Appropriate Casting, the Default Body, and Valuing the Property of Having an Age

Margaret Morganroth Gullette

Without flesh  
there is the constant worry  
of flight.

—Afaa Michael Weaver<sup>1</sup>

### The Default Body

We know that gender is a performance because we can see it feigned so well. About age as a performance, we need to start the arguments.

In the history of Euro-American cross-dressing since actual women were first permitted on the stage—“breeches” parts, Victorian *grandes dames* in tights, female impersonators, drag kings—gender probably didn’t need to be feigned well.<sup>2</sup> Now that it does, unintentional parodies, not to mention camp, remind audiences that the actor is not someone who learned that particular gendered behavior from childhood. From time to time a subtle portrayal across the still-persistent binary convinces you that a nonnative gender can be imitated utterly without strain. Adrien Lester, a six-foot Afro-British man born in 1970, was a convincing and charming Rosalind in the acclaimed all-male Cheek by Jowl production of *As You Like It* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1994. He established Rosalind in the first scenes as a long-boned adolescent tomboy not yet beguiled by femininity, naturally willowy but awkward out of modesty.

Gender always has an age too, although theorists rarely notice this. Let’s put life time into gender and gender into life time. Lester’s triumph at playing *younger* might be applauded more than his success at playing female if they were not inextricably combined. He and director Declan Donnellan chose for Rosalind a

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vivid turning-point of female adolescence: this was a girl pushing her way toward authority, easing herself into sexuality and love through the testing of Orlando in the Forest of Arden. She grew years in the forest. As Orlando's mock mentor, she developed a more assertive stance than the girlish droop and slight fidget forced on her by her initial passive circumstances; it gave her scope for wit, teasing, and self-mockery. Rosalind has been played—for the gag—as if she fell in love at first sight and dropped into static “deep womanly tenderness.”<sup>3</sup> The aging angle makes the part more nuanced line by line and the play more suspenseful.

The body's expressions are partly derived from socialization, as the body-mechanics experts realized first. Moshe Feldenkrais wrote, “The posture, attitudes, and facial expressions are acquired features fitting the environment, and therefore come under the heading of learning.”<sup>4</sup> Gender in real time has a performance history, which can become part of our life story if we learn how to tell it. Acting one's gender begins in early childhood. When you learn cultural attitudes and habits that early, they become second nature, as it were “native.” As Judith Butler points out, you can't fall out of character even performing them day after day, all day. Adolescents consolidate a first adult gender style somewhere between hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity, after observing elements from their culture's spectrum as performed by peers and people older than they are.

These consolidations of habit are not fixed and final. It would be wrong to assume, interactionist philosopher Shannon Sullivan says, “that prevailing custom molds one once and then never influences one again, as if the self's store of plasticity were somehow exhausted by its initial formation.”<sup>5</sup> During an individual's life course, people can opt for new bodily attitudes, habits, and self-descriptions. How many women raised in a pre-feminist era learned later, as I did, to harden our voices in public, to drop the questioning intonation at the end of a sentence, to stop punctuating utterances with giggles, to smile less and compose their faces a bit more sternly, signaling, “No longer a babe, an easy mark—no longer *that* young”?

Feminism didn't determine the specifics, only a broad goal. Perhaps encouraged by my vocal successes, I just as consciously changed my walk. I reduced the swivel, stretched the line, sped up the tempo. I did this after taking a job in an almost all-male administrative hierarchy at Harvard when I was thirty-five. The walk too, conveying the impression that I was always busily efficient, made me look older. My more mature voice and walk had physiological/subjective effects, making me feel more vital and authoritative and safer from being hit on. (Call such effects “physiomental,” to break down one area of Cartesian dualism.) Seeing all this as if I were applauding a successful actor, I embraced “older.” I cut my long hair. My first faint wrinkles came to seem a positive part of my age effect. I thought they helped me look more like the men in suits.

Some of the performance effects were intended; others no doubt were unwitting. Either way, our behaviors have associations with age because of the incessant

automatic functioning of the age gaze. It would be stupidly arbitrary for someone to say, of my steadier walk, “That’s pure gender!” or “That’s an age cue only” when the new signals blended (along with my whiteness, my ethnicity, my stature, etc.) into a coherent whole: me. Age studies cannot think of bodies apart from the history of the signs of age.

At first people who make such changes are merely sampling, but in time, if public opprobrium is not oppressive, they acquire a new native body that now feels permanent. They aren’t “acting” anymore. For feminists, the earlier degree of femininity they had discarded would be the act. They would feel as ridiculous as Dolly Parton wannabes. The new embodiment has become their new *default*—a package of habits. (I use “default” in the word-processing sense, where you can decide what will appear on your screen automatically.) My default body is the current visible manifestation of my selfhood, my embodied psyche in culture over time.

This example of people forming partially new native bodies over time suggests how a “meaningfully different performance can be enacted,” as Sullivan puts it.<sup>6</sup> “Age-on-the-body,” which is what is usually meant by “aging,” has traditionally been considered a continuum in which visible change is driven by *involuntary* mechanisms, such as biochemical processes or external stress, trauma, accident. This view makes us passive victims of “aging processes.” But age studies emphasizes the active side of interactive performances. Building on my example of Margaret-in-University-Hall, the alleged passivity of age appearances can be disrupted—occasionally, as needed—by the idea of *intentional* changes of behavior. A body, like an identity, is better thought of as a series of try-ons and reaffirmed performances: new consolidations. Age on the body can involve both passive accretions and will.

This kind of agency should not be confused with the willful practices of cosmetic surgery. Changing the default, for feminists, relied on each of us finely personalizing a way of feeling and moving. The mixed signals that resulted offered an alternative to racist/sexist/ageist visual culture, “the system of power relations that constructs the meaning of what we see,” in the words of Amy Robinson.<sup>7</sup> The men and women who get facelifts or liposuction, by contrast, try on a crude appliance to pass for “younger” to stereotyped eyes. Whatever else is wrong with this, it’s like stuffing in falsies or a pair of socks to represent gender. It’s both bad acting and a misreading of culture. They are treating “age”—or in this case “youth”—as a wholly separable identity. Obliterating a few of the obvious signals that everyone knows come solely from the age code, like “wrinkles” or “love handles,” they try to forget that in our culture the hypercritical age gaze notices all the more obsessively their other decline-linked signals.

Since Anthony Giddens considers similar practices “reflexive projects” of the self, my last example of changing the age-look of the default body comes from

*unconscious* intentions.<sup>8</sup> A friend told me decades ago an angry story about how his midlife father had prematurely started shuffling and making his shoulders sag. Nothing had happened to his health. He *wanted* to appear “old”—old enough to avoid responsibility for remedying his failures, according to his son. His foot-dragging and frail stance made him feel justified in giving up painful effort. He too was treating age as a separate, easily actable identity. The store of habits that he borrowed from was just as banal as the one the surgery patients use, but in his case it came from the shelf filled with decline prostheses. He had to cut out running with his dog—snip away all the spontaneous inconsistencies of his native body. He too was a bad actor (in his son’s eyes), but he easily convinced the sort of onlookers who expect only decline.

Using these three willful examples from everyday life, we can now understand a little better how, where age is concerned, we both *have* a body and (for ourselves at times, if only briefly, and for others always) *perform* our body.

So what do I look like deep backstage—as sociologist Erving Goffman might ask—years later, say, walking in the park alone? Living from the inside out, I can’t often catch myself. But I know that in the park I can’t look one uniform age. Sometimes I squat like a kid, maybe even drop a giggle; sometimes I march like that 1980s administrator. When I’m utterly absorbed by a thought I know I fall into a slower meditative pace. Bits of past behavior survive, accumulated from stages of my life course to date. Our default bodies, always at work whether we are conscious of them or not, produce diverse age effects (and effects of other kinds). This variety is normal, not inconsistent but rather, as long as we are not feeling watched, integrated into a whole. Like movie stars, eventually we each have our distinguishing, unduplicatable *gestalt*. All we need is an audience trained to notice.

### Acting Age on Stage

To think further about age as a performance in normal life, it would be useful to think about how well or badly age can be feigned by professionals. The stage rather than film is the right venue for testing this: there actors are live (as we are), without retakes or lens filters, in a place where the entire body can be seen from most angles. Traditional realist productions more than experimental ones are where the risk is highest.<sup>9</sup> There you can’t have a character without projecting an age. Time passes, feigning has duration: Dropping out of character becomes a hideous possibility. There on stage the “meatiness” of bodies is inescapably vivid.

These are fascinating bodies from whom we cannot avert our eyes. On the stage, of course, no age is a priori worse than another. (Jessica Tandy in her eighties was more vivid than the dewiest starlet.) When the curtain goes up, all are potentially subjects worthy of our gaze, potentially suspenseful, lives in being. However you define “presence,” they’ve got it.<sup>10</sup> *There* is our ideal life world. Being able to forget the body, which some think a good deal for “older” people, would not seem

ideal if our bodies at all ages could be present in such compelling ways.<sup>11</sup> And while I'm in the theater, I do feel my own body-mind is thrillingly present and significant, like that of the actors I identify with. The empathy I feel with their movements and words makes the experience of going to a play psychosomatically intense.

Perhaps from this situation, age studies can draw wisdom for real life. Many theorists have treated bodies as if they had as little meat as puppets, subject to history and discourse even in sexuality, illness, and pain. I argued earlier that over our whole life, visual culture has tremendous power, setting the ways we can regard our own bodies and those of others (call this the historical side of "age specularity"). Theorist John Rouse rightly says that "[a]ll the signifying systems used by theater and drama are always already part of other cultural texts"—especially the text of the actor's body.<sup>12</sup> Thus our ageist ideology may infiltrate representation and interpretation by the audience. And yet . . . there in the theater are these peremptory bodies—of all ages. How do they, with our connivance, resist the decline gaze?

In turning to those bodies, I am trying to figure out another way to make the existing power relations around age work better for our whole life course. Earlier, I said that at our desire life-course narratives could be written to give us *less* body. But another criterion for a good theory of bodies in age studies is that it finds—or imagines the preconditions for—greater value in the always aging bodies we own and shape. I've said how I discovered more freedom and control in performing my body live in the office. Perhaps the stagecraft of bodies can next rescue me—and possibly current theory and ageist culture—from the bodiless overemphasis on the plasticity of bodies, from the neglect of age as a construct, and, where older bodies are concerned (especially female, racialized, or disabled), from knee-jerk devaluation and the lure of the "posthuman."

Is age a performance in every theatrical case? In playing younger and in playing older, by definition it must be. (It doesn't follow that either can be feigned well, or equally well.) Is age also being performed when, say, an actor plays an age within her own chronological age range? Remember an actor too has a default body constantly present, in innumerable ways itself, liable to peek out of his performance. Such curious questions could be precisely the tangential new angle needed for approaching the vexed issues of bodies in culture and culture in bodies.

Age theorists are able to address the specularity of age in visual media (helped by interactionists and phenomenologists even if they omit age). And age critics can begin to dialogue with theater and performance studies about playing age on stage. In the next three sections ("Acting Younger," "Acting Older," "Acting our Age"), I want first to sharpen the difference between *having* an age and *performing* an age on stage.

### Acting Younger

Recent plays by Athol Fugard, Paula Vogel, and Pamela Gien raise interesting questions about casting and age (and aging) because they are written in a form that is becoming more frequent on stage as the empire of autobiography spreads: the “memoir” in which an older self recalls a much younger self. In novels and other written forms that describe multiple temporal selves, the body that in life would accompany these changes is absent unless elements of it are proactively described. There’s no ever-present default.

In visual representations of auto/biography, however, the body comes to the fore. Presenting a self aging over long periods of life time has its conventions. In movies, the most common naturalistic convention is to cast two actors of appropriate ages: young-adult Pip routinely replaces child Pip in *Great Expectations*. The casting director provides a sequential shorthand for aging; the costume designer handles history. But, we may object, offering two different people for one selfhood denies an important subjective experience of temporality: as adults, we don’t feel or say that we have had two or more bodies. Only one, a grounding in sameness. In fact, without that palpable tie, the concept of multiple sequential selves might not have the foil it needs to seem like an interesting idea.

But when an age auto/biography is put on stage and two or more selves are played by *one* actor, as in our own subjectivity, representing age difference becomes more problematic. In Paula Vogel’s *How I Learned to Drive*, a fortyish woman (Debra Winger in the American Repertory Theater production I saw) played her midlife character and its younger selves, with many stops between eleven and eighteen. In *The Syringa Tree*, author Pamela Gien played her current self and other selves starting all the way back at six. In Athol Fugard’s *The Captain’s Tiger* (subtitled *A Memoir for the Stage*), Fugard, who was close to seventy, played his Latest Self and his twenty-year-old self.<sup>13</sup>

In all these instances, the actor before our eyes had passed so far beyond the younger self’s age stage that the ability to play younger was immediately in question. (This was not forty-three playing thirty, or sixty-three playing forty-five, or eighty playing sixty-five, which can often be read as “the same stage.”) All the actors conveyed the body language and voice of youth or childhood convincingly, and in Gien’s case brilliantly. She played twenty-seven other characters without a change of costume. Playing herself at six, this woman of forty chose a high-pitched voice with hyperperfect enunciation.<sup>14</sup> In one establishing scene, she amazingly made her arms seem short as a child’s. She was touching each fingernail of her left hand with the pointer nail of her right, holding the fingers stiff (the antithesis of pubertal languor) as in a demonstration that must be done ritually right. That careful voice repeated a magic prophecy about the future. “Grandpa George says you can *tell* how lucky you’re going to be if you look at those litt-ul white spots on your nails. White spots on your thumb means *gifts*. White spots on your index finger, you will

have *friends*. White spots on your middle finger, you will have *foes*.” Holding her fingers close to her bent head would have played as myopic if she hadn’t already had us reading her as a child. Little Pam’s faith in prospective narrative was also childlike.

Performing a younger self doesn’t try to hide the presence of the actual, older person. (Anne Basting, an age critic in performance studies, describes the *butoh* artist Kazuo Ohno dancing everything from a baby to a flirty young woman with his own nearly naked eighty-six-year-old body plainly visible.)<sup>15</sup> When actors play *younger*, we are willing to see double. In Western, realist, autobiographical drama, make-up, hairstyle, and clothes are chosen to be suitable to the older body-self. Building a younger character then starts with the dialogue that is right for that particular child or adolescent. Gien’s child felt so densely multilayered that one thought of Stanislavski’s decree that “even the little toe on his right foot should belong to the character.”<sup>16</sup>

But that’s not true. What isn’t said is that the little toe and everything else you *don’t* work on come from your default body. Playing a younger age does not require the actor to work very much off the default. The illusion is simplified by statements about age, above all. Vogel’s play is full of casual statements indicating how old the girl is in each scene; without them, the audience would be lost. When *The Captain’s Tiger* opens, Fugard’s current remembering self has a poetic monologue about the past that ends by *saying* he was twenty. Fugard then made the switch to the younger self by simply grabbing and buoyantly sitting on a box, enthusiastically writing a letter out loud. “SS Graigaur, Somewhere in the Red Sea. Dear Mom, I sincerely hope you didn’t faint when you read [this] address.”<sup>17</sup> The boyish letter-from-camp style and the ingenuous relationship to a mother sufficiently indicate his youth. If an imitation of youth or childhood doesn’t attain an Actor’s Studio ideal of mimicry, it can be effective without that.

“The stage actor has an audience trained to contribute a great deal to the dramatic illusion,” Lionel Barrymore once observed, “The film audience is not so trained.”<sup>18</sup> In staged memoir, we accept a sketchy age-likeness that depends on simple age-associated cues. Individual as Gien’s six-year-old was, she also pitched her voice higher, stood on a swing, skipped. Signals of “childhood” are so well marked that every spectator will get them. An actor can select two of three of the following: voice (intonation, volume, breath, or “timing”), face (nuances of expression, musculature), movement (gesture, stance, stride, posture) and forget the rest.

Specifically, what makes playing younger so easily credible (compared with playing older) can only be our culture’s unconscious shared understandings of the default body’s development. First, Gien *has been* younger psychologically and physiologically: she could draw on sense memories from her own childhood as well as observation. Dana Ivey has said that her performances depend on “taking

on characters that I've exhibited since I was a child."<sup>19</sup> Anne Basting calls the stylizations of Kazuo Ohno across the life course "an exercise in seeing in depth"; "time is *produced by [his] body*."<sup>20</sup> This works because viewers of dramatic memoir accept a few good big moves as deep, privileged access to the character's past.

The illusion depends on our not noticing how much an actor relies on the default body of the older self to fill in sameness as well as change. Phenomenologist Bert O. States notices that even when a character "changes with every scene . . . the eye and ear get the notion that something called character is iterating itself."<sup>21</sup> He asks why. The answer must lie in the default body, which unconsciously projects elements that the audience must unconsciously read as samenesses across the character's life. Putting his arms akimbo didn't confer on Fugard any particular age. The little toe doesn't change. Much default behavior, picked up over many years of life, has *no special, fixed age-associations*. As Joan Williams says about reading gender from kids' behavior, "gender-appropriate traits are attributed to gender, whereas [other] traits are attributed to personality, birth order, or some other explanatory system."<sup>22</sup> Age performances are policed, but not as sternly as gender. One proof is that only in fragments does age behavior work through drastic oppositional codes (skipping signals "youth" and looks "funny" for doing "old age"). If a few elements are coded as exclusively "age," many unnamed age effects swim alongside, also produced by the default body.

Casting an older actor for a two-self autobiography relies on one of these cloudy age effects: that where there is age difference, the older self is superior. The use of an older actor as a framing device jumpstarts the assumption that older comprehends younger in memory, judges its experience, has authority, possesses the last word. The presence of an older self thus implies that the life course involves some progress. The progress narrative—I discover, a bit to my shock—is deeply embedded in casting age appropriately for the Oldest Self. Fugard's play, it turns out, is a *Kunstlerroman*, a story about his discovering his artistic vocation, as well as a psychological thriller, about the way loving your mother and hating your father and repressing these feelings get in the way. All this Tiger had discovered by twenty; Fugard didn't need a sixty-seven-year-old narrator for that. So perhaps they could have cast a young man for Tiger at twenty, who would play older to do Fugard at sixty-seven?

That would have deprived us of Fugard at sixty-seven playing Tiger at the time he left home and went to sea as a slight, timid virgin. For those youthful characteristics, Fugard's own frailty was not a bad stand-in. Shrinkingly cupping his hands over his privates, he parodied a boy's fear of emasculating heterosexuality. Fugard also conveyed an attitude about that fear appropriate to his later age: that it was recollected truthfully, that it had been excessive, that he was not making fun of it. Fugard did this by using technique (cupped hands) against the wreckage of his native face; kind tones of voice against the ironies on the page. How could an

undisguisably young actor *play* an older body playing a younger body with loving detachment, as Fugard did so easily?

The default body is so powerful that it can also inadvertently undermine a play's message. In *How I Learned to Drive*, L'il Bit's Oldest Self is telling about a juvenile relationship with her uncle that turned incestuous. Debra Winger appeared first as a fortyish L'il Bit, looking slouchy, a little hunched over, maybe worn or shy. Winger also played herself at the prepubertal age when her uncle is no more to her than the most compatible member of her dysfunctional family, and then at the adolescent age when uncle can take niece out alone with the excuse of teaching her how to drive, and then Winger moved on to the college-age self who lies in bed in a hotel room with him and at once ends the confusing and anguished relationship. The uncle was played—another consequential decision—by a man who looked the same age as Winger: in real life, her husband, Arliss Howard. He had the mien Vogel wants: the fatherly Gregory Peck type from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The problem of casting Uncle Peck no older than L'il Bit worsens as the level of incestuous abuse rises. Despite Winger's ability to play younger/hurt/innocent, the bedroom scene appeared to be between midlife consenting adults. Casting a child actor as the younger self would have been undesirable on several levels, as pedophilia and because the question at issue—as in Gien's play—is whether adults can repair their past.<sup>23</sup> But Winger's midlife body got in the way of Vogel's script, which is clearly about the long-term irreversible damage of abuse.

When playing younger is not about memoir, many instances are linked to a star's need to go on working and an audience's desire to see her do so. Bernhardt in midlife played *Hamlet*: the audience wanted to see their icon. In 1995, Carol Channing reprised herself as she had been in *Dolly* in 1964, three decades past being the midlife widow of Westchester. It's not exactly "passing" in the street (as white, or of a higher class, or younger), where the goal is to get viewers not to look twice. Everyone could seek the signs of her being "old for the role." But many in the audience—especially spectators closer to Channing's age—wanted the charisma to succeed; they admired the likeness more if they noted a disparity because they'd been taught that Channing's imitation of youth was the sauciest female retort to ageism.<sup>24</sup> There is more leeway for stars. Hired to show "some aspect of herself that the audience finds identifiable," the star is given more slack than "the character actor [who] is hired to seem to *be* the character" (as Kathleen Chalfant nicely puts it).<sup>25</sup> But Marcello Mastroianni, nothing if not a star, saw the limits of age appropriateness as narrower; and although film gives immense leeway to aging men to play young, he applied the limits to himself. "The important thing is to know what season of your life you are living, and not to try to be something on the screen which is ridiculous. Maybe that is the only planning I ever did: not to take on parts that were outside of my ability, both physical and psychological."<sup>26</sup>

## Acting Older

“[S]tereotype exists where the body is absent.”

—Barbara Kruger<sup>27</sup>

Playing an *older* character in realist theater is much harder than playing one younger. At every moment this is a question of “passing,” where if the audience has to look twice the game is up. A younger actor dare not relax control; relying unconsciously on the default body will only reveal its unwanted youth. There was an era when playing much older was admired as art. In the eighteenth century, certain actors could start as young as twenty playing “old men”—that was their line of business. Goethe mentions one who created “the most perfect illusion” and adds what I said about playing younger, “we can also remember the double pleasure the actor gave us.”<sup>28</sup> Today’s twenty-year-olds would no longer dare (or care) to specialize that way.

Hiding the younger default body as thoroughly as possible is now necessary to the illusion of playing older. In Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* in New York City, the talented Kathleen Chalfant played (among other characters) a rabbi of eighty-six. When she played a male doctor her own age, she felt she had to work hard, for example, on such nuances of “gender” as the exact shade of aggression some midlife men have acquired. As the rabbi, her disguise built the character: the brevity of the part, a floor-length gabardine, a beard and sidelocks, a marked accent, plus a New York audience appreciating the *shtick*.<sup>29</sup> This was sufficient for Kushner: had he auditioned fourteen eighty-year-old rabbis and Chalfant, he might still have chosen her.

The opposite of this, you might say, was French film director Emmanuel Finkiel’s decision to cast a feature film using actual Yiddish-speaking immigrants to France who were also required to be between the ages of sixty-five and ninety-five and to have Ashkenazi rather than Sephardic accents. He auditioned four hundred nonactors over nearly a year. *Casting* (2001), based on the extraordinary footage saved from the auditions, shines philosophical light on meticulous documentary realism. When six women (who in group identity appear to have everything in common) say a single line, what is salient is their astonishing variety. First, hard as it may be to credit, in their *accents*; then, in the age cues they emitted. In many cases, I could not tell their ages within the thirty-year span but the ambiguity was even more striking because in *Casting* they move and speak. Finkiel acquired a faithful record of each in comparison to all—a rebuke to those who think “old age” has a simple set of codes any actor can quote.<sup>30</sup>

Actors and acting schools have a vested interest in believing that the body of the actor is an empty vessel, fillable with whatever otherness the director pours into it. Directors, casting directors, and rehearsal spectators know better. Casting is “the first reduction . . . from what may also be imagined,” Herbert Blau says;

“the actors who are not cast are always telling you that.”<sup>31</sup> And actors too can be modest—humble specifically about the ability to play older. Matthew Sussman, who understudied Ron Leibman for the part of Roy Cohn in *Angels in America*, says, “Roy Cohn . . . was a twenty-five year stretch and a very different temperament than my own.” There’s a scene between Cohn and Joe, a young Mormon who’s just coming out. Sussman says that as Leibman conceived it, “[i]t’s a scene about being older, about fathers and sons. Ron does that scene great, but I couldn’t bring the weight of age to it.” Sussman used a gray wig but otherwise did not play for age, emphasizing instead “unbroken physical contact . . . a human-scale seduction.”<sup>32</sup>

Since playing the midlife is impossible for most younger actors, playing *much* older—“carrying a cane” (as if in answer to the riddle “What has three legs in the evening?”)—becomes an ever-present temptation. The older relatives in *L’il Bit*’s family were cast using students from the A.R.T.’s training program, the Institute. Vogel’s notes suggest that the mother and aunt be played by women “between thirty and fifty” and the grandfather by a man “thirty to forty.” The family is not meant to be realistic; they don’t age along with the child. But the Institute twenty-somethings were left to grimace, hee-haw, and jiggle. Grandma fled from sex like a cartoon virgin; Grandpa bent out his knees like a cardboard geezer. (I can’t help but think of the man who became my husband stroking his beardless chin at age five.) The pastiche of age awakened in the audience “that still latent feeling that [according to Fredric Jameson] there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic.”<sup>33</sup> The effects—as the uncle and niece advance toward incest before the students’ unseeing greasepaint-wrinkled eyes—were grotesque.

One reason for having quite young people play older is financial. The head of a regional company believes that “he has an obligation to assign minor parts to deserving National Theatre Conservatory students—each of whom represents a \$30,000 per year investment by the Denver Center—even though [older] local actors might be qualified to play those roles.”<sup>34</sup> As job offers disappear (not for this reason alone), older actors abandon the career, leaving fewer available.

The practical critic’s objection to this kind of age-blind casting is that it so often looks amateurish. Insufficiently corporeal twenty-year-olds play midlife parents to their same-age “children”; as Cleopatra nearly anticipated, undergrads girl her greatness. Some students do manage to look older than their peers because of native body-shape, physiognomy, girth, or beards—in nothing do people differ more than in their age, even at twenty-five. But when thespians cannot natively pass for older, they’re rarely adept enough for the immense continuous effort it takes to simulate an older age well. “Acting is more like juggling,” Hollis Huston says.<sup>35</sup> Many things on stage must be done “as it were unconsciously, leaving the intelligence free to grapple with the intellectual and emotional requirements of the part”: this was the general rule promulgated by actor John McCullough in 1882.<sup>36</sup>

More specifically, when playing older, younger actors lack the default body-mind, its vast range of sense memories, the psychological relation to the past. (Likewise, while elderly subjects in a test see in themselves traits considered both young and elderly, young adults mostly see themselves in the far more limited terms of youthfully named traits.)<sup>37</sup> An excellent midlife actor playing Miss Daisy copied her grandmother's voice, used her own Southern accent, recalled her sensations when she had once had to relearn to walk, and still discovered "that I was getting too old too soon." As Anne Basting says, "This forward imagining is tricky territory."<sup>38</sup>

Surely I am not the only spectator who notices that younger actors often feign older ages badly. Some liberatory evolutions seem to be raising the standard of "realism" with regard to age. In film, it wasn't just close-ups and high resolution that ended the hegemonic practice of putting white actors in blackface or having them speak pidgin for 'Oriental' roles. That occurred because a historical movement made whites ashamed of stereotypes and hiring exclusions. When Native Americans or Latinos are cast for roles written for them, we don't use "realism" as a slur meaning "essentialist," "timid," or "reactionary." That has become a norm for roles from categories we are truly watching. (For a Russian, let's say, we're not watching so hard.) Movements for "representation" in performance and politics have power over our eyes.

If an age studies movement had similar power, what would it ideally want of theatrical casting, in order to change visual culture? We have many more old people than in Goethe's day: Can we use their presences to teach ourselves to watch representations of *age* as connoisseurs—with eyes more like Finkiel's, say? Why should we be forced, by an only 90 percent successful stage illusion, to notice the stubborn material of the default body? Omit performance art, which has its own criteria. On the mainstream stage, perhaps—except in the two-self memoir or the rare life-course exhibition (Cicely Tyson playing Miss Jane Pittman, Gielgud playing the Ages of Life)—we will not want to see age feigned on the mainstream stage at all.

What problematizes my discussion of performing "age" on stage is that I haven't said what "age" is, visually or behaviorally. Indeed, believing that it is usually not best treated as a separate performable identity, I've tried to make it harder to define. We recognize race by color and ethnicity by accent and gender by femininity. But there's no prompt book for doing "the midlife" and little more than a tattered anachronistic copy for caricaturing old age. You earn age effects—on life as on the stage—by living a certain length of time.

Age-appropriate casting is a way of advancing into these complex unfamiliar issues. Is it, by itself, the solution? There is a difference yet to be formulated between *embodying* one's native age in a default way and *playing* a character of one's own stage of life in a play in which age matters.

## Playing Your Age

The real has “the ease of identity”

—Peggy Phelan<sup>39</sup>

In 1997, Vanessa Redgrave mounted an *Antony and Cleopatra* at the Public Theater in New York and played Cleopatra herself. I was eagerly awaiting the performance. Cleopatra can be played as a midlife woman, as we would say now: she had Caesar in her youth, these are no longer her “salad days/When I was green in judgment, cold in blood” (I.v.73-74). Redgrave was close to the top of the age range plausible for Cleopatra. She made her first appearance moving swiftly on bare feet. Her punk-cut red hair swayed in a mass above her forehead “like quills upon the fretful porpentine.” She twirled; she twisted her neck alertly; energy flowed out of her wrists, her knees, her chin. The problem was that she was *playing* at youth and youth alone. She did Cleopatra as a Baby Boomer afraid of going over the hill. She started too high, as if the queen were often aware of needing to hop through a public market.

I didn’t like the concept; indeed, I grieved over the concept. Anachronistically reading this into Shakespeare’s lines is now all too easy; it’s a sad symptom of the sexist middle-ageism of current Anglo-American culture. Yet disliking the anxious concept is from my larger point of view irrelevant. I left just as convinced that except in period productions using boys, Cleopatra should be acted by women in their middle years—the age that Shakespeare’s text broadly indicates, transposed to our era. Not every midlife actress can play Cleopatra, but anyone who is right must have the range of behaviors that goes with having a long memory and an older look. Only an age-appropriate actor finds that some of the age-effects she or he needs to convey will be expressed even without knowing what they are.

Remember my walk in the park, spotted with inconsistencies no ordinary observer would notice? I want to make more of the curiously underacknowledged fact that having an age consists of no uniform set of age-associated behaviors. Stephen Spinella applied this general truth to acting when he said of his character Prior that “when he’s charming and clever he has a queen’s [fluid/young female] body, and when he’s serious or angry . . . he has the body of his father.”<sup>40</sup> One reason we nonactors too can’t fall out of character with reference to our native age is because having an age contains so much variability. Complexity and even contradiction in character are crucial to all great acting and dramatic development. An actor finds it easier to play *against* or *around* type when it takes less effort to maintain. Let me give one example of using this range.

The Captain in Strindberg’s *Dance of Death* is supposed to be married twenty-five years and is ten years older than his wife. Ian McKellen, playing Edgar in New York City, used a stiff carriage and an ability to caper to establish the Captain’s bodily norm, his self-presentation to his wife, played by Helen Mirren, and his

soldiers.<sup>41</sup> McKellen as the histrionic Edgar evinced more vitality than the considerably younger David Strathairn, as Alice's cousin Kurt. But two or three times, McKellen sketched "elderly" mannerisms: the "hee-hee" of an actor doing old age as a cackle, the slight shuffle that could also convey fatigue or depression. In the audience, swept along by the multiple intentions of this intelligent production, I noticed these effects without stopping. After the Captain collapsed, however, sitting in bed out of uniform with his bare arms stringy, his gray hair wilder, Edgar looked innately vulnerable. This was no facile cliché but the actor going slack, doing the bare, forked creature that his real age made visible and plausible. Yet the Captain's late-midlife robustness became prominent again in the next act when he came back from the doctor's, boasting spitefully to his wife that he will live another twenty years. He is lying: he is dying. Playing only his "own" age (unlike Gien, Winger, Fugard), McKellen relied on having his body operate appropriately without intention. But—witness those stringy arms—he and the director also deployed some of its wide range of age-appearances with savvy about our age codes. The value of the default lies not just in the younger parts of the spectrum, but in *all of them*. "This whole psychophysical spectrum is mine!" we could all declare.<sup>42</sup>

An age can be feigned—backward down the life course much more easily than forward—but once so much can be lost, why bother?

### Age Hierarchy

There's another reason why age works best as an unconscious ground of being, on stage and in life. This involves age hierarchies.<sup>43</sup> Age-inappropriate casting risks evading the substantial differences in knowledge, self-control, power, and moral responsibility that separate younger and older people in our ideal cultural imaginary of age and in many of our real human relations. Plays mostly stage relationships between people at different phases of the life course, where the actor's stage of life is a proxy: innocence for childhood; judgment for middle-age. Age hierarchy or its abominable alternatives suffuse dramatic representation, as *How I Learned to Drive* suggests. If the people in question are parents and their children, this difference is no shallow or discardable proxy.

At the climax of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, the great general's great mother pleads with him not to destroy their native city, Rome. To save Rome, she requires him to defy his only allies, the Volscians, who will inevitably kill him. I followed this implacable postmaternal decree at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, watching—from high up in the gods—Ralph Fiennes as Coriolanus and Barbara Jefford as his mother Volumnia. Finding her arguments met with silence, the mother stood in the center of the stage ready to scornfully turn her back on her son forever.

Chalk-white, Ralph Fiennes took so slight a beat that it could not even register as a deferral. He fell over his mother's hand in a collapse as immense and slow and inevitable as if a snow-top cracked from its base and toppled sideways in one piece

before an adjacent iceberg. The movement had the grandeur of the nineteenth-century theater of gesture. And yet it was not a tableau held for the sake of our visual pleasure. It asked no pity, and yet it said “You have no pity for me: you do not put me in the balance even as a feather.” The son fell before his mother’s monstrous decision without protest, accepting the nullification of his life. It was the tragic fulcrum of the play, a gesture Shakespeare did not write but to which all his means tended. It was an “inarguable” moment of theater, as Herbert Blau describes such moments.<sup>44</sup>

Oh mother, mother!  
 What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,  
 The gods look down, and this unnatural scene  
 They laugh at. (V.iii.182-185)

Fiennes is notable for his posture, rigid almost beyond the perpendicular. As Coriolanus, he had up to this point reared back out of contempt for the world. No other actor could have made bending forward such a capitulation. But to what inexorability did the stiff-backed Fiennes as Coriolanus bow?

The moment of tragic *geste* worked because of the Volumnia to whom Barbara Jefford brought her full seventy years. The power that was in her, like a god or a fate, depended on the hierarchy between mother and son. Only a woman could make credible that she was once a mother of an infant, who now boasts, as Coppélia Kahn says, “her achievement in transcending affection to invest, as it were, in government bonds—in the honor he wins in a ‘cruel war.’”<sup>45</sup> By getting him to sacrifice himself, *she* will save Rome. Only a woman of that age can have envied her son his martial manhood as long and as hideously. The history of that relationship was symbolized by the age-difference between their bodies. His slender rigidity and quick determined gait had been counterposed throughout the play to Volumnia’s mountainous solidity of form, energetic heavy-footed pace, and dour inflexibility of maternal ownership. Her body was voluminous: Shakespeare punningly led the costumer to its form. Her expanse of matriarchal chest seemed as remote as possible from breast milk, a carapace better adapted to display the medals a male general of her years and mettle would have worn. Jefford added to this gender ambiguity a fixity of feature that was like a mask: habit overlaying monomania as if worn daily over the course of actual years. An actor who understood “seventy” as confinement, reduced physiomenal energy, or diminution in size, could not play this Volumnia.<sup>46</sup> Jefford wielded her default body for its *gravitas*: the weight of time, familial history, authority.

But for all this to move us, the mother’s dominance also has to be recognized on our side of the fourth wall. It must be conferred by us. Yet in contemporary culture, postmaternal authority has been much attenuated, even in visual symbolism:

Many women who are no longer girls aim at the almost anorexic form and youthful gesture that abjure power. These days some mothers are weakened vis-à-vis their adult children by “empty-nest syndrome.” Others are detached from the traditional pattern of “living through their children” by feminist egalitarianism, alternative work, and postmaternal friendship with adult offspring. Many adult sons have a record of indifference to maternal opinion. Yet men’s anger at postmaternal control survives such changes and probably feeds revivals of *Coriolanus*.<sup>47</sup> It is amazing that age hierarchy as a structure of feeling has not yet disappeared from the avant-garde halls of BAM.

One counter-argument to age-appropriate casting is that age is not always the most salient feature of a character. Herbert Blau told me that he once directed a twenty-eight-year-old who was extraordinary as Lear. Michael O’Sullivan played the misogynistic and sexually embittered sides of the king with powerful ferocity. In the storm scene, he created a gesture of someone tearing off his genitals. Blau wanted that rage then. O’Sullivan wore a long-haired white wig and a long uneven white beard, a floor-length feathery smock that hid his native body. Blau says now that he was “hallucinatorily older than anybody, of whatever age, I’ve ever seen in the role.” O’Sullivan’s age was “a matter of presence. His just being there, regal, knowing, with a sort of seductive wit, conveyed what you couldn’t conceivably have unless you’d lived a long time.” But, Blau said to me, “I was only twenty-seven then myself.”<sup>48</sup>

Most actors lacking an older default body would have a hard time dealing with Lear’s vast arc. Lear needs credible strength to start with—at what might be called his age/wage peak—because his unjust power must awaken in the audience anxious, needy, rebellious, infant, and adolescent feelings. A director can lose the arc by casting Lear too old—too frail, or senile—for that moment of (his) arbitrariness and (our) resentment. In the scenes with his other daughters, he needs to be strong enough to resist being stripped of his long-held identities as king and father. Only when carrying the dead Cordelia, after hours of real time being battered, does he finally describe himself with an age, the mythic/ironic “four-score and upward, not an hour more or less” (IV.vii.60). This declaration should not be read backward into the beginning of the play as if it were a literal fact.

Without age hierarchy, subversions of it in the nontraditional theater would also fail.<sup>49</sup> (In Tina Howe’s *Birth and After Birth*, for example, the four-year-old child is supposed to be played by an adult. “The children are monstrously knowing and controlling, while grown-ups cultivate infantile behavior.”<sup>50</sup>) If we lose the relative privilege and modest authority of midlife, if age hierarchy were to erode further, this loss could also steal away the intelligibility—and the poignance, tragedy, and irony—of much literature and performance.

### Beyond Age-Blind Casting

Age-appropriate casting arises as a topic for age studies at a particularly interesting moment in theater history and critical theory, because in precisely the same decades in which racially and ethnically appropriate casting has become a norm, “crossing” or “transgressing” other traditional bodily categories has become the avant-garde rage.

So I am bringing up some of the issues of representing the-body-in-time and the-body-over-time on stage at a moment when the simplest way to respond might be to retort, “Age too shouldn’t matter.” Since *King Lear* has been played by a much younger man, by age-appropriate women white and black—why not a younger woman? Or, to take an intriguing triple-cross: Why couldn’t Beckett’s Didi and Gogo be played by talented twenty-year-old women of color, performing the exhausted, irritated, and stoic hopelessness of some ghetto youth? The change from old men to Boricuas would reveal that for Beckett a decline version of “old age” was made to stand in for *all* the sorrowful human conditions. Bodily decrepitude in old age has been a powerful metaphor for loss in Western culture since Sophocles’s *Oedipus at Colonus*. We saw that majesty reduced to pathos in Strindberg’s Edgar sitting up bare-armed in bed. Once we know to look, the *geste* of decline is everywhere in contemporary plays. It is now ripe for conscious critique.

Up to this point, I have argued on behalf of the dominant mainstream performance practice of age-appropriate casting, as not just esthetically right (and deeply satisfying when well acted) but as powerfully counter-cultural, a force for sustaining threatened bodies and age relations. But I can also advocate revisionism in age casting (e.g., those twenty-year-old Puerto Rican women) when this would advance an anti-ageist agenda by making startling theater. Such choices wouldn’t be “age-blind” even when they chose to be “age-inappropriate”; they would be wise to culture, refusing to strengthen our own over-fed belief in decline. This could have the resistant alienation effect that Bertolt Brecht described as essential “to underline the historical aspect of a specific social condition” or to show up “the dominant viewpoint as the viewpoint of the dominators.”<sup>51</sup> Will performance-theater regard age-wise casting as one of its missions? How will it transcend its potential life-course blindness?

### Conclusions Offstage and On

Ideally, our culture needs a robust and profound general conviction that (barring exceptions that a director would feel the need to justify) age-appropriate casting is powerful and “right.” But my main point is really quite different. The long march through age-inappropriate casting has been a ploy to get readers to think about the manifestations of age on the body in the dazzlingly bright light of *presence*. I have tried to show that age—*having an age*—is already unconsciously treated in some venues as a valuable “property” whose value grows over time.<sup>52</sup> Thematizing bodies

often reinforces dysfunction, critics worry.<sup>53</sup> But not in this case, where the whole psychophysical spectrum is in play, in ordinary life as it is on stage—wherever much of what is called “character” is conveyed by age apparent on a default body.

In going to the theater, I found a bigger hole in age ideology’s cult of youth than I expected. The notion that there might be more value to having an “older” age already exists in many people’s minds, but in limited ways: defensively on the part of the beleaguered (“We’re still able”), piously on the part of gerontologists, the positive-aging movement, and the allegedly favored young. American age activism needs more radical kinds of help. Loving both acting and many properties of aging, I had an instinct that seeing bodies with age *as if they were on stage* would give this now-utopian idea—of aging as cultural capital, increasing over time—more kick and more sincerity.

With the public or specular bodies that age studies deals with here, an individual’s culture and psyche and age are indelibly, uniquely, precociously embodied. Such body-minds are much less vulnerable to “the spectres of Cartesian dualism, biological reductionism, and essentialism” that some critics worry about. These are likelier to haunt the static bodies or bodiless minds that theory so often addresses.<sup>54</sup> From an age studies perspective, the concept of “the default body” responds to these spectres in some interesting ways. It signifies. Even when from the neck down the body is lost in urns, or the actor paraplegic, signification emerges. On the street or in the park too, the physiomental equipment of “the actor” is not dual, genetically determined, or fixed. Expressivity is an ontological property that grows over time, visibly, through our default bodies. This is not a property of its owner in isolation but is read through the social (the spectator’s perception in relation to our symbolic age codes and the actor’s ability to play with the codes).

Recognizing our exhilaration in the theater can lead to looking at all “actors” who are no-longer young with intense witnessing of the age effects of their bodies and a fine learned appreciation of the value of our accumulated acquisitions. Don’t start this experiment with people decades older than yourself. Start with you and me, in living motion. Using the connotations of the default body, how can individuals reconceive *themselves* as bodies with watchable presence?<sup>55</sup> There’s a touch of the magic wand here, but these applications may stir your imaginations and eventually purify the age gaze of the crowd.

My final worries concern the extent to which the theater, as both art and business, can let itself be run by decline values. One issue is whether actors can do age on stage over their whole working life. A talented twenty-five-year-old actress thinks something like, “Ideally, Ophelia now, Cleopatra in ten-fifteen-twenty years, Volumnia later yet.” Her male counterpart thinks, “Hamlet now, Othello in ten-twenty years, then Lear.” That idea of age sequencing seems right. If professional directors do more age-blind casting, they will almost certainly hire younger actors to play parts that are scripted for older people, not the other way around. Unchecked,

the theater might move imperceptibly toward the condition of the movies, where hiring young has become a general practice, severely reducing work for people over forty (who make up only one-third of those working; 73 percent of them are men).<sup>56</sup> Scriptwriters aren't asked to write as many older parts. The result of this vicious cycle is that film is a youth ghetto in which few actors survive past their own native youth. Hiring young is sexist—because in our visual culture women appear to “age” sooner than men—as well as middle-ageist and ageist. Hiring young because it is cheaper, which corporate America is trying to make acceptable in other lines of work, should be scorned in the professional theater.

A culture needs to see people of all ages on the stage of the world, rather than the increasing *disappearance of older default bodies* that results from the cult of youth, marketing to youth, midlife downsizing, age segregation in housing, and so on. As it is, these practices confirm younger people in their culturally cultivated inability to imagine older people as viable centers of self, or to imagine themselves older as still specularly fascinating. In midlife and old people, the absence of same-age bodies in visual culture constantly reinforces decline feelings, to the point where terrifying nonbeing is a risk. Or it leaves the edge of irritation that comes from helpless knowledge. It would be harmful if the professional realist theater too failed to live up to one of its unstated missions: representing a complete bodily life world with all our ages in it.

Life-course blindness is as real as other kinds (racialized, gendered, homophobic). To ignore it in the theater—or on life's other stages—is wrong, not just on the legal grounds of job discrimination, but on esthetic, ethical, developmental, cultural, and democratic grounds: that it lessens the value of aging as a rightful growing property, which each of us could enjoy in others and accrue for ourselves.

## Notes

1. Afaa Michael Weaver, *The Ten Lights of God: Poems* (Lewisburg: Bucknell UP, 2000) 22.

2. Before women appeared on the European stage, the gender-cross would have been incomplete. Historian Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix credits Peg Woffington in 1740 with producing the first breeches role acted with verisimilitude (*Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000] 34).

3. Rosalind was described by Helen Faucit in 1893 in typical Victorian terms as feeling a passionate love “at the core” (“Rosalind,” *On Playing Shakespeare: Advice and Commentary from Actors and Actresses of the Past*, ed. Leigh Woods [New York: Greenwood Press, 1991] 142).

4. Moshe Feldenkrais, *Body and Mature Behavior: A Study of Anxiety, Sex, Gravitation, and Learning* (New York: International Universities P, 1949) 34.

5. Shannon Sullivan, *Living Across and Through Skins: Transactional Bodies, Pragmatism, and Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001) 95. Sullivan and I are both qualifying Judith Butler's

emphasis on reiteration in performance, which Elin Diamond has noticed in *Performance and Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1996) 5.

6. Sullivan, *Living* 95.

7. Amy Robinson, "Forms of Appearance of Value: Homer Plessy and the Politics of Privacy," *Performance and Cultural Politics*, ed. Elin Diamond (London: Routledge, 1996) 248.

8. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991) 3, 9, 148. What Giddens calls reflexiveness does not always involve a high degree of consciousness.

9. Richard Schechner gives his own reasons why mainstream theater is an "incredibly fertile area" for Performance Studies in "TDR Comments: Mainstream Theatre and Performance Studies," *TDR* 44 (summer 2000): 4-6.

10. See Elinor Fuchs, *The Death of Character: Perspectives on Theater after Modernism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996) 70. After quoting Michael Goldman, she examines the undermining of the "presence-effect" in twentieth-century theater.

11. In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder makes a case for why this ideal of "forgetting the body" is so compelling. Adding American versions of ageism and middle-ageism strengthens this case, and shows where the argument for "remembering" the body needs to be joined.

12. John Rouse, "Textuality and Authority in Theater and Drama: Some Contemporary Possibilities," *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph P. Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 155.

13. I saw *The Syringa Tree* staged in the fall of 2000 at Playhouse 91. *How I Learned to Drive* was put on at the American Repertory Theater in 1998. *The Captain's Tiger* was produced by the Manhattan Theater Club (City Center Stage II) in 1999.

14. In November 2001, Pamela Gien kindly let me interview her to discuss these aspects of her performance.

15. Anne Davis Basting, *The Stages of Age: Performing Age in Contemporary American Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998) 137-39.

16. Mai Zetterling, qtd. in Bert Cardullo, et al., ed., "Some Notes on Acting," *Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 150.

17. Athol Fugard, *The Captain's Tiger* (Johannesburg: Witwaterstrand UP, 1997) 4.

18. Lionel Barrymore, qtd. in Bert Cardullo, et al., ed., "The Actor," *Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 79.

19. Dana Ivey, qtd. in Janet Sonenberg, ed. *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-Four Actors Talk about Process and Technique* (New York: Three Rivers, 1996) 289.

20. Basting, *Stages of Age* 141, 145 (emphasis in original). Since she says he represents experiences "from the moment of conception" (145), she includes non-conscious bodily "experience" in her definition.

21. Bert O. States, "The Phenomenological Attitude," *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph P. Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 373.

22. Joan Williams, *Unbending Gender* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 191.

23. Paula Vogel's script calls for a twentyish actress to play the Voice of the eleven-year-old, who is not touched and who appears only at the end. Vogel "strongly recommended" that this actress be of "legal age." She was afraid that the pedophilia would be too disturbing to the audience.
24. Basting describes the audience's applause of Channing in 1995, as "a complex gratitude. For the mask and for the reveal" (*Stages of Age* 178).
25. Kathleen Chalfant, qtd. in Janet Sonenberg, ed. *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-Four Actors Talk about Process and Technique* (New York: Three Rivers, 1996) 101.
26. Marcello Mastroianni, "The Game of Truth," *Playing to the Camera: Film Actors Discuss Their Craft*, ed. Bert Cardullo, et al. (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998) 155.
27. Barbara Kruger, *Remote Control: Power, Culture, and the World of Appearances* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994) 76.
28. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, "Women's Parts Played by Men in the Roman Theater," *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993) 49-50 and 51n3.
29. Chalfant, qtd. in Sonnenberg, ed. *Actor Speaks* 112.
30. Anna Eisenberg, "Casting," *The Thirteenth Annual Boston Jewish Film Festival, November 111, 2001* (Program Guide) 6 <www.bjff.org>.
31. Herb Blau, "'Set Me Where You Stand': Revising the Abyss," *New Literary History* 29 (1998): 257. Richard Fotheringham points out that "writing on live theatre that links the body to a notion of unique individual presence . . . is surprisingly hard to find" ("Theorising the Individual Body on Stage and Screen; or, the Jizz of Martin Guerre," *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 15.2 [2001]: 25).
32. Matthew Sussman, qtd. in Janet Sonenberg, ed. *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-Four Actors Talk about Process and Technique* (New York: Three Rivers, 1996) 1, 152-53.
33. Quoted in Philip Auslander, "Comedy about the Failure of Comedy: Stand-up Comedy and Postmodernism," *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph P. Roach (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 203.
34. Jim Lillie, "When Local Actors Get Cast—and When They Don't," *American Theatre*, Oct. 1999: 32.
35. Hollis Huston, *The Actor's Instrument: Body, Theory, Stage* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1992) 36, 88.
36. Leigh Woods, ed., *On Playing Shakespeare: Advice and Commentary from Actors and Actresses of the Past* 10.
37. John H. Mueller, et al., "Trait Distinctiveness and Age Specificity in the Self-Concept," *Self Perspectives across the Life Span*, ed. Richard P. Lipka and Thomas M. Brinthaup (Albany: SUNY P, 1992) 238.
38. Ivey, qtd. in Sonnenberg, ed., *Actor Speaks* 294-95; Basting, *Stages of Age* 141.
39. Peggy Phelan, "Crisscrossing Cultures," *Crossing the Stage: Controversies on Cross-Dressing*, ed. Lesley Ferris (London: Routledge, 1993) 164.
40. Stephen Spinella, qtd. in Janet Sonenberg, ed., *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-Four Actors Talk about Process and Technique* 286.
41. I saw *The Dance of Death* on November 10, 2001, at the Broadhurst Theatre.

42. The term *psychophysical spectrum* comes from Janet Sonenberg, ed., *The Actor Speaks: Twenty-Four Actors Talk about Process and Technique* 3.
43. *Age hierarchy* is an anthropological term I found in Jeanette Dickerson-Putman and Judith K. Brown, eds., *Women's Age Hierarchies*. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology* 9 (April 1994).
44. Blau is quoted in Huston, *The Actor's Instrument* 35.
45. Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997) 150.
46. As a college sophomore under the direction of Mark Mirsky, I played a few scenes as Volumnia—fortunately not this one.
47. See Margaret Morganroth Gullette, "Wicked Powerful: The Postmaternal in Contemporary Film and Psychoanalytic Theory" and "Response," *Gender and Psychoanalysis* 5 (Spring 2000): 107-139 and 149-54.
48. Herb Blau, private communications, 2002.
49. See, for example, Fuchs's *Death of Character*.
50. Rosette C. Lamont, Introduction to *Women on the Verge: Seven Avant-Garde American Plays* (New York: Applesauce, 1993) xvi.
51. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theater: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 98, 109.
52. The metaphor of cultural properties I take from Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, ed. Kimberl e Crenshaw, et al. (New York: New Press, 1995). In global ideology, "youth" is being given the appearance, and some of the realities, of being a valuable kind of property—like "whiteness," another property that few who have it recognize. To treat "aging" as a source of property seems to me faintly humorous and insidiously countercultural.
53. Leder, *Absent Body* 85; also 149.
54. John Cromby and David J. Nightingale, "What's Wrong with Social Constructionism?" Introduction to *Social Constructionist Psychology: A Critical Analysis of Theory and Practice* (Buckingham: Open UP, 1999) 11.
55. At the lecture I gave February 12, 2002, at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis, many midlife women in my audience instantly tried and failed to do this with older women they knew (their mothers) and used this "failure" as an argument against the whole imaginary exercise. That is why I ask us to start with ourselves.
56. In 1996, there were 56,308 jobs for members of the Screen Actors Guild. Only one in three went to actors over 40. Of these 18,479 jobs, 73 percent went to men and only 27 percent went to women (Dorothy Holland, "What's Death Got To Do with It?" Paper delivered at the Obermann Seminar on Later Life, University of Iowa, 1999).