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Article — Published Version

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KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie

Provided in Cooperation with:

Springer Nature

Suggested Citation: Franke, Annette (2025) : The Potential of the Sociology of Emotions and Affect Studies for Understanding Ageing Processes, KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, ISSN 1861-891X, Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden, Vol. 77, Iss. 4, pp. 633-660,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-025-01038-5>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/335510>

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The Potential of the Sociology of Emotions and Affect Studies for Understanding Ageing Processes

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Received: 14 July 2024 / Accepted: 21 October 2025 / Published online: 20 November 2025
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Abstract In everyday life as well as in scientific discourses, ageing as a social process is often associated with the highly affective term of loss—e.g. of autonomy, choice, self-efficacy, social networks, or physical losses—and, therefore, age and ageing are commonly linked to emotions and affects such as grief or anger. Even though loss in older age might be an emotional experience, sociological theories of ageing rarely consider emotional and affective dimensions of ageing processes in their theoretical and conceptual thinking. We propose to link ageing with the theoretical concepts of emotional capitalism and emodities (Illouz 2007, 2017) as an example for the sociology of emotions, and resonance (Rosa 2019) as an example of affect studies. By applying these theoretical lenses to the field of ageing research, we aim to get a deeper understanding of how ageing and the losses associated with it appear through the lenses of the sociology of emotions and affect studies. Additionally, we link those perspectives to gerontological approaches and highlight how they might be enriched by including concepts that explicitly deal with emotions and affect. Through this reflexive exploration, we seek to renegotiate how the understanding of ageing in the social sciences is characterised by preconceptions about the associated emotional and affective processes, and we highlight the potential of theoretically sensitising existing gerontological perspectives with insights from the sociology of emotions and affect studies.

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Keywords Gerontology · Illouz · Emotional capitalism · Emodities · Rosa · Resonance

Eine Annäherung an Alternsprozesse mit Perspektiven aus der Emotionssoziologie und den Affect Studies

Zusammenfassung Alter(n) als sozialer Prozess wird sowohl in der Alltagskommunikation als auch in wissenschaftlichen Diskursen häufig mit dem affektiven Begriff des Verlustes – beispielsweise von Autonomie, Wahlmöglichkeiten, Selbstwirksamkeit, sozialen Netzwerken oder körperlichen Fähigkeiten – assoziiert. Alter und Altern werden daher häufig mit Emotionen und Affekten wie Trauer oder Wut in Verbindung gebracht. Doch wengleich die mit Altern assoziierten Verluste emotionale Erfahrungen darstellen können, berücksichtigen soziologische Alternstheorien nur selten emotionale und affektive Dimensionen von Alterungsprozessen. Vor diesem Hintergrund verbinden wir theoretische und konzeptuelle Überlegungen zu Alternsprozessen exemplarisch mit den Konzepten des emotionalen Kapitalismus und der Emodities (Illouz 2007, 2017) als Beispiel für die Emotionssoziologie sowie der Resonanztheorie (Rosa 2019) als Beispiel für Affect Studies. Indem wir diese theoretischen Perspektiven auf das Feld der Alternforschung anwenden, möchten wir ein fundierteres Verständnis dazu herausarbeiten, wie Altern und die damit verbundenen Verluste in Rückgriff auf die Emotionssoziologie und die Affect Studies definiert werden können. Darüber hinaus integrieren wir diese Perspektiven mit gerontologischen Ansätzen und zeigen auf, wie diese von der Verknüpfung mit Konzepten, die explizit Emotionen und Affekte theoretisieren, profitieren könnten. Durch diese reflexive Annäherung zeigen wir auf, wie das Verständnis des Alter(n)s in der Soziologie durch implizite Annahmen über die damit verbundenen emotionalen und affektiven Prozesse geprägt ist. Weiterhin weisen wir auf das Potenzial einer theoretischen Sensibilisierung bestehender gerontologischer Perspektiven mit Konzepten aus der Emotionssoziologie und der Affect Studies hin.

Schlüsselwörter Gerontologie · Illouz · Emotionaler Kapitalismus · Emodities · Rosa · Resonanz

1 Introduction

Over the life course, persons face a variation of different changes and emotional experiences. Prominent gerontological concepts from lifespan psychology suggest a dialectical gain–loss proposition when people are getting older (Baltes 1987; Heckhausen et al. 1989). From this perspective, ageing is characterised by age-related development, which permanently circulates in occurrence between growth and decline (see, for example, Edmondson 2015; Staudinger and Glück 2011). However, the ratio of gains and losses for older persons has, in contrast to childhood or youth, long been associated with involuntary losses (Carstensen 2021), be it the loss of memory, the loss of cognitive or physical abilities, the loss of loved ones, the loss

of remaining time, the loss of autonomy or independence, or, ultimately, the loss of one's own life. These losses are related to specific affects and emotions, for example the loss of a deceased friend or the daily experience of less control in mobility due to physical strains, which can stimulate specific emotions such as grief and bodily affects such as crying.

Both psychology and sociology examine emotions and affects, but from different perspectives and with different methodological approaches. While psychology tends to view emotions as internal states of the individual shaped by intrapsychic processes, genetic predispositions, and individual experiences, sociology understands emotions within social, cultural, and historical structures, and therefore emotions and affects as expression of power relations, social norms, and cultural practices. Hence, the everyday patterns of interpretation of emotions and affects in older age are associated with a certain cultural and scientific value, which is ascribed to ageing processes.

In our understanding, terms, concepts, and theories reflect how we—as social scientists—collectively make sense of and generate knowledge about social phenomena (Bourdieu 1992), and they are biased by “the *social and intellectual unconscious* embedded in analytic tools and operations” (Wacquant 1992, p. 36). At the same time, by generating knowledge about social phenomena, the social sciences take an active role in the emergence of the very same social phenomena (Bourdieu 1992; Wacquant 1992). As products of historical scientific discourses, theories and concepts carry with them previous understandings of the social phenomenon they are concerned with (Bourdieu 1992). We assume that the renegotiation of a social phenomenon from a previously omitted perspective enables us to reflexively approach the phenomenon and question or enrich established ways of thinking.

Hence, we cursorily look at how losses structure(d) our thinking, analysing, and theorising about older age. We then draw on concepts of the sociology of emotions and affect studies to reflexively approach the role of emotions and affect that processes of ageing might entail. For this endeavour, we chose two contemporary concepts referring to the socially shaped character of emotions and affects. Their approach is genuinely sociological, and they offer robust frameworks for understanding how emotions and affects are constructed, experienced, and circulated within social contexts. Because the chosen concepts are rooted in critical theory, they present appropriate perspectives for our reflexive approach.

First, we examine Eva Illouz's concept of emotional capitalism and emodities within the realm of the sociology of emotions. Illouz's work critically analyses how emotions are commodified and integrated into market dynamics, transforming intimate experiences and emotional expressions into consumer goods. We assume that this theory enables a critical examination of the role of losses and related emotions and brings new insights into the sociology of ageing and the quality of life for older persons in emotionally capitalist societies.

Second, we chose resonance theory as an exemplary concept in the affect studies developed by Hartmut Rosa. Resonance theory posits that by relating to segments of the world, subjects experience affective—that is, resonant or alienating—relationships with their surrounding world. Rosa emphasises the role of self-efficacy and feelings of uncontrollability and highlights the importance of affective connectivity in fostering a sense of belonging and well-being. Because these con-

cepts are also important in gerontological perspectives, we decided to take resonance theory as an example for affect studies.

In our discussion of these theoretical perspectives, we ask how the process of ageing or aspects of this process appear if we take those perspectives of emotional capitalism and resonance theory. We address how gerontological perspectives implicitly hold assumptions about emotions and affects and about losses and gains. We thereby aim to rethink which role emotions and affects might have in the process of ageing and link theoretical concepts of the sociology of emotions and of affect studies with gerontological perspectives in order to discuss the potential that an explicit consideration of emotions and affect can have for how we think about ageing. We argue that this conjunction enables the sociology of ageing to dive deeper into the understanding of symbolic representation and emotional experiences of older persons in modern Western societies.

2 The Concept of Loss in Sociology and Gerontology

Some psychosocial approaches to loss emphasise the interaction between psychological and social factors in coping with loss in terms of grieving. They examine phases of grief (Kübler-Ross 1969) or how personal coping strategies and social factors in coping work together to shape the grieving process (Lindemann 1994; Worden 2008). However, they do not negotiate the loss itself, but rather how it is dealt with *after* the loss occurred.

Similarly, loss itself is rarely defined in sociological theory. After making the criticism that loss is far from being a central concept in sociology, Andreas Reckwitz (2021) defines loss as “a disappearance that is marked, *negatively evaluated* and often associated with negative affect” (own translation, italics in original; Reckwitz 2021, p. 3). This definition closely links loss to negative affect and a negative evaluation of social changes. Reckwitz contrasts *loss* with the idea of *progress*, which (implicitly) characterises or dominates modern societies. Thus, a loss-related phenomenon is marked by negativity and *something* that is negated or to be prevented. The definition of which processes are a loss depends on how one experiences the process or which perspective one takes. For example, the increase of technology in daily life appears as progress and is positively defined as a gain from one perspective, e.g. regarding the possibility of keeping in contact over distances, whereas from another perspective this progress appears negatively as a loss, e.g. due to the decrease in face-to-face interactions. Even though the definition of losses is contingent, it is understood to be regressive in societal circumstances that contrarily promote the idea of continuous progress, and loss itself remains associated with negative emotions.

The process of ageing is often conceptualised as a phenomenon characterised by loss and negative emotions. Even though the loss-focused understanding and interpretation of “later life as a stage of inalterability or decline instead of change and growth are increasingly becoming outdated” (Wanka et al. 2024, p. 1)—especially with regard to increasing life expectancy and, more importantly, the improving quality of life in later life (Harper 2016; Phillipson 2013)—the loss-related view is

deeply ingrained in how we think about older age, and more so in how we analyse, conceptualise, and theorise the process of ageing in gerontology.

For example, the well-established psychological “AgeCog scale of self-perceptions of aging” focuses on subjective experiences of the ageing process and categorises perceptions as gains- and loss related (Diehl et al. 2021; Steverink et al. 2001; for a similar scale, see Brothers et al. 2019). The two loss-related groups of perceptions focus on physical decline (e.g. being less energetic and fit) and social loss (e.g. feeling lonely more often). The only gains-related group of perceptions focuses on continuous growth and ongoing development (e.g. continuing to make plans). With the distribution of the perceptions along the lines of gains and losses, we already see how loss-related perceptions are weighted higher.

Additionally, gerontological research often examines phenomena that are commonly characterised by loss and negative emotions, such as loneliness (see, e.g., Böger and Huxhold 2018; Dahlberg et al. 2022; de Jong-Gierveld et al. 2018), depressive symptoms (see, e.g., Engels et al. 2019; Mayerl et al. 2023; Sevick et al. 2000), widowhood (see, e.g., Kristiansen et al. 2019; Moon et al. 2011; Onrust and Cuijpers 2006), mortality and morbidity (see, e.g., Case and Deaton 2017; Case and Paxson 2005; Crimmins and Beltrán-Sánchez 2011), or risk for dementia (see, e.g., Brooker 2005; Heser et al. 2023; Mendes 2022).

Empirical research on the ageing process reflects the implicit assumption of ageing as a loss-related process. This is also reflected in theories about ageing. For example, disengagement theory (Cumming and Henry 1961) describes how individuals pull back from the world in face of their closely approaching death. With its explicit linkage to the end of life, this perspective focuses on the “ultimate” loss of life in death. Socioemotional selectivity theory serves as another example, as it assumes that with older age one becomes more aware of one’s limited remaining time, and thus one’s behaviour becomes more selective with regard to social and meaningful emotional relationships. As a result of one’s new relation to (remaining) time, one increasingly pulls back from the wider social world as one gets older (Carstensen 1992; for a similar construct, see the future time perspective, Kooij et al. 2018). Studies that have analysed relationships of older people through the lens of this theory have not come to consistent results because they confirm some aspects and cannot confirm other aspects (Carstensen 2021). These contrary findings might suggest that the theory leaves no room for ambiguity in the experience of ageing and the impact of cultural and social contexts in shaping emotions, as it focuses mainly on loss. Still, these theories and the way in which ageing has been analysed on their basis have shaped how we think about ageing and against which backdrop we theorise it.

Other concepts seem to take a more positive stance on the ageing process. According to continuity theory (Atchley 1971, 1989), people strive for inner continuity (regarding self-concept, personality, and beliefs) and external continuity (regarding social roles, relationships, and environments). Continuity is viewed as a coping mechanism that helps ageing individuals navigate the challenges of physical, social, and mental changes by relying on familiar strategies to achieve social and psychological stability. Concepts such as successful ageing (Baltes and Baltes 1998; Rowe and Kahn 1987) and active ageing (World Health Organization (WHO) 2002; Walker

and Zaidi 2019) highlight that due to progress in the sciences and culture, ageing can be successful in the sense that one does not lose one's energy or autonomy and stays physically and cognitively active and healthy. However, these concepts also refer to the assumption that age is a loss-related process: They describe ageing as a process in which losses are negated or countered, and thus locate the responsibility to cope with or react to losses with the ageing individual, e.g. to prevent negative emotions. Accordingly, even in theories that hold seemingly more positive assumptions towards getting older, it is implicitly assumed that the ageing process is characterised by losses.

These examples illustrate how the process of ageing is and has been analysed and theorised mostly as a loss-related process. Even though losses are part of human life—and here, too, discourses about losses are important in order to recognise the needs of people in certain critical phases of their lives—we aim to point out that an undifferentiated focus on emotions and affects related to loss in older age can be ageist. In more recent developments of gerontological theory, the master narrative of ageing as a loss-related process has been challenged (De Medeiros 2016)—or at least linked to theoretical perspectives that are better able to account for the complexity of the ageing process, such as the new materialism (see, e.g., Chapman 2006; Höppner and Urban 2018) and practice theory (see, e.g., Schroeter 2021; Wanka 2021). At the same time, some theories focus on possible gains of ageing, such as maturity and wisdom (Glück and Bluck 2018), or they contrast the Western idea of successful ageing with the non-Western idea of ageing as meaningful decline (Lamb 2014). Still, when ageing is conceptualised as a process of loss or of countering losses, it is presumed to be a process in which emotions and affects play a major role, since “when talking about loss, one cannot remain silent about affectivity” (own translation; Reckwitz 2021, p. 4). However, neither the sociology of emotions nor affect studies, which put the social aspects of emotions and affect in the focus, have been richly drawn upon in gerontological theory.¹

In the following sections, we delve into two central concepts of the sociology of emotions and affect studies and apply them to the ageing process.

3 Ageing Processes Through the Lens of the Sociology of Emotions

The sociology of emotions is a dynamic field that examines how emotions are socially constructed, experienced, and expressed within various social contexts. Unlike psychology, which primarily treats emotions as an individual phenomenon, the sociology of emotions explores the interplay between individual emotional experiences and broader social structures, norms, cultures, and interpersonal interactions (Senge et al. 2022). The sociology of emotions applies mostly constructivist and cognitive

¹ Similarly, ageing remains an almost blank space in the sociology of emotions and in affect studies, or it seems to point to a specific category of negative emotions such as anger or grief (Charmaz and Milligan 2006; Schieman 2006). Affect studies especially often take social power relations as a vantage point to develop the theory. However, ageism as an inequality-generating power relation or discrimination category is mostly not considered.

perspectives on emotions “as responses to events that are linked with corporeal manifestations” (Lively and Heise 2014, pp. 51–76, cited in Lively 2017)—for which it is also criticised (Beyer 2022). However, a clear definition of emotions is still missing. While, for example, Kemper (1990) separates emotions (as response formed under specific conditions tied to situations) and sentiments (as fast positive or negative responses to a specific stimulus), Lawler and Shane’s (1999) definition of emotions underlines a brief positive or negative state of mind with physiological, neurological, and cognitive dimensions.

Theoretical development began with early sociological theorists such as Émile Durkheim (1897/2002, 1912/2008), who emphasised the collective nature of emotions in his work on the factual foundations of the effectiveness of moral orientations and under which conditions the types of moral rules become effective. He examined the emotional motives of suicide, punishment, and structural shaping of religious rites and underlined the social effects of shared emotions, such as the common perception of grief in mourning events. Gerhards (1988) describes Durkheim’s analyses as fragmentary; still, he located emotions in a sociological context with social triggering conditions.

Later, symbolic interactionists, such as Erving Goffman, advanced the study by focusing on the role of emotions in everyday social interactions and on the concept of emotional labour (Goffmann 1956). Although Goffman did not explicitly frame his studies within the sociology of emotions, his insights into how emotions are performed, managed, and regulated in social interactions such as dramaturgy, face-work, interaction rituals, and framing continue to influence contemporary studies in the sociology of emotions and how they are shaped by social life. Arlie Hochschild expanded Goffman’s ideas in her groundbreaking work, “The Managed Heart” (Hochschild 1983), examining the discrepancy between normative emotional expectations and one’s own sensitivities. She introduced the idea that emotions are often regulated and commodified in professional settings. With her concept of “emotional labour”, referring to the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, Hochschild argues that in certain professions, particularly in the service industry, employees are required to manage their emotions as part of their job to serve the well-being of the customer. This commodification of emotions highlights the intersection between emotional experiences and economic structures, which is also one of the pillars in Eva Illouz’s work on emotional capitalism (Illouz 2007) and the concept of emodities (Illouz 2017), which we describe in the following sections.

3.1 Emotional Capitalism and Emodities as Examples for Concepts in the Sociology of Emotions

Eva Illouz explores the transformation of emotions in contemporary society, particularly focusing on how emotions have been commodified and rationalised in the age of capitalism. Her explanations are based on the works of Hochschild, Hardt and Negri, Baudrillard, Friedberg, Weber, Bourdieu, and Foucault. Capitalism has made rationality an omnipresent feature of human action, and yet capitalist culture

has by no means heralded a loss of emotionality but has been accompanied by an unprecedented intensification of emotional life.

The question following this diagnosis is, how can human action be rationalised and emotionally intensified at the same time? In her analysis on the interplay between capitalism and emotional and economic life, Illouz (2007) illustrates how intimate relationships and emotional expressions are increasingly shaped by market dynamics and bureaucratic rationality, while consumer goods are increasingly *romanticised*. Using Bell's argumentation, she explains that capitalism creates a cultural tension because it is based on two opposing values: the Protestant ethic of rationality, discipline, and self-control of people on the one hand, and a culture of consumerism, hedonism, and expressivity of people on the other. The latter refers to Honneth's conception of the capitalist system, which is legitimised by supporting the autonomy and emotional fulfilment of employees. The recognition of emotions leads to higher motivation of people maintaining the economic structure and cultivates a new emotionality of working and private life. Ontologically, Illouz refers to Zelizer's work on the anthropological relation between economic rationality and intimate relations. She shows that, e.g., money can have different social meanings and uses depending on the context in which it is used. For example, money used for a gift is emotionally perceived differently from money paid for a service. This understanding builds the basis for Illouz's development of the concept of emotional capitalism.

3.1.1 *Emotional Capitalism*

With the concept of "emotional capitalism", Illouz describes the fusion of emotional and economic practices. She argues that the emotional realm, traditionally seen as separate from the economic sphere, has become intertwined with capitalist logics. The rationalisation of emotions serves efficiency and predictability, while emotionalisation creates new consumer needs and markets, and capitalism relies on fostering emotional attachments and affects to stimulate consumption. Subjects are both product and a producer of emotional capitalism. In emotional capitalism, the subject's identity and emotional experiences are strongly influenced by the market. Emotions become objects that can be acquired, manipulated, and used to achieve certain goals, whether at work, in social relationships, or in consumption. As a consequence, emotional experiences are now often mediated by consumer culture, in which feelings are commodified, bureaucratic, and marketed. Also, romantic relationships have increasingly been shaped by sterile market logics, in which emotions are calculated and managed like economic transactions. Intimacy becomes more standardised and impairs people's intuitive perception of passionate and romantic emotions. Emotions and their losses are thus not only experienced but are also interpreted in specific ways and displayed on social media and other platforms shaping emotional realities. This means that emotions are not only presented in films, television programmes, music, and social media but are also normalised and standardised. This representation influences how people perceive and express their own emotions; e.g. romantic films and series often set specific expectations about love, sexuality, and relationships that shape the emotional experiences of viewers in a rational way or through

feedback in the form of likes and comments. Potential consequences are fleeting and noncommittal romantic relationships, including the question of authentic emotions. Thus, emotional relationships are increasingly characterised by insecurity and unstable bonds. This instability and the associated losses can be understood as part of a new mode of emotional attachment characterised by flexibility, individuality, and consumerism. Illouz discusses how dating practices, marriage, and even sexual relationships are influenced by notions of efficiency, choice, and strategic decision-making. The commodification of love is evident in the rise of online dating and matchmaking services, which treat romantic relationships as markets in which individuals seek to maximise their emotional returns. This economic rationality can lead to the instrumentalisation of emotions, in which love and intimacy are pursued for their utility and endless romantic matches in online dating rather than for genuine connection.

One argument for this mediation is the rise of a therapeutic culture in postindustrial society that aligns with capitalist ideals. Illouz examines how therapeutic language, communication, and selfhood practices have permeated everyday interactions, emphasising self-awareness, emotional control, and self-improvement. In this context, losses—be it the loss of relationships, status, prosperity, or personal fulfilment—become emotional experiences that also have economic dimensions. Illouz explores how self-help literature, therapy, and media representations have contributed to the rise of emotional capitalism, promoting the idea that managing one's emotions is crucial for success and happiness, with individuals perceiving themselves as their own project of rational self-optimisation. Illouz critiques the ways in which therapy and self-help literature (as well as feminist discourses on self-care and mindfulness) promote this form of emotional management that aligns in a productive coincidence with neoliberal ideals when emotional well-being becomes a personal responsibility. This shift, she argues, often leads to the depoliticisation of emotional struggles, framing them as personal issues rather than as social problems transferring public arenas into private life. In an environment where emotional self-help, resilience, and personal development are marketed, loss becomes an opportunity for “self-optimisation” and the consumption of products that support this process.

3.1.2 Emotions as Commodities for “Repairing” Loss Experiences

In the introduction to “Emotions as Commodities” (2017), Illouz lays the groundwork for understanding how emotions have become commodified in contemporary capitalist societies. She coins the term “emodities” to describe emotions that are transformed into commodities and explores the various dimensions of this process. Consumer goods facilitate the experience of emotions, and thus emotions are transformed into objects as “emodities”. Thus, the gaps between rationality and emotion as well as between subjects and objects and between authenticity and commercialisation are transformed into consumer practices. “Emodities” are emotions that have been packaged, marketed, and sold as products; they encompass atmospheric or mood-creating commodities, all of which have the purpose of changing and enhancing the self, e.g. in coping with losses. This commodification of loss means that

emotional experiences, traditionally seen as intimate and personal, are increasingly becoming things that can be treated and “fixed” by the market. Through emodities, modern capitalism offers numerous products, services, and technologies to compensate for losses, which become a driver for the market. Examples include therapeutic services, coaching, holiday destinations, and consumer goods designed to provide emotional comfort.

Emodities give emotional promises, and paradoxically, they are often successful in overcoming emotional problems or improving personal relationships when people experience positive emotions after consuming them. Illouz therefore avoids moralising, even when she makes the criticism that these forms of emotionalisation are often instruments of control and conformity that make subjects shape themselves in accordance with capitalistic ideals.

3.1.3 Postnormative Critique of Emotional Authenticity

Illouz argues that while the market provides new ways to experience and express emotions, it also undermines the authenticity of emotional life. She also describes how authenticity historically became one goal of therapy and the pursuit of mental health. As a result of the rise of a therapeutic culture, authenticity became something that was created in the consumption of emotional goods, e.g. travelling to holiday destinations to (re)discover the inner self or to find answers for developing an authentic—and better—version of self. Authenticity is used in emotional capitalism as a cultural frame and solution for personal fulfilment, which serves as a basis for the development of emodities that give people the answer to how they should perceive their inner self. She therefore asks how people could assess emotional truth and authenticity given the fact that our emotions are shaped by emotional capitalism.

The commercialisation of emotions can lead to superficial and transactional relationships in which the true value of emotional experiences is lost in the pursuit of economic gain, and distinguishing between “authentic” and “artificial” feelings is hardly possible. The authentic self is subject to the conditions of emotional capitalism and perceived as true in the experience of emotions. Illouz uses the American talk show host Oprah Winfrey as an example. In her show, Winfrey presented a book that was the memoir of a former drug addict, but later it turned out that this memoir was partly fiction. Winfrey, first embarrassed, pointed out that the feelings people had when they were reading the book nevertheless remained—and that these emotions cannot be normatively wrong.

Illouz’s solution or response to emotional capitalism is not a moral critique but rather an invitation to deep reflection and a cultural and social reorientation. She argues that subjective emotions, for example when visiting a concert or attending a yoga retreat, cannot be denied, and she avoids criticising people in their personal perception of authenticity. Illouz argues for a rethinking of our emotional norms, relationships, and the ways we deal with emotions in the context of the capitalist system, in which our authenticity is mediated by capitalist market logic and situational and historical dynamics.

This calls for an understanding of the mechanisms by which our emotions are commodified and how this affects our relationships, our self-perception, and our

cultural practices. This reflection should enable people to recognise the inauthenticity and instrumental nature of many of their emotional experiences and to find alternative ways of emotional expression.

Illouz argues for a postnormative critique and openness to the concept of ambivalence. This postnormative critique also implies a deeper understanding of the power structures of emotional capitalism and a willingness to empathise and question the dichotomy between subject and object. In a world in which emotions are transferred by goods, situations, or atmospheres, individuals must learn to reflect and uncover the historical origins of emotions without moralising.

3.2 Ageing Authentically with Emodities in Emotional Capitalism?

The sociology of emotions offers a dynamic framework for understanding the complex interplay between emotions and social structure, norms, and expectations. From the early theoretical contributions of Durkheim and the symbolic interactionists such as Goffmann and Hochschild to contemporary developments such as the work of Illouz, this field provides valuable insights into how emotions are socially constructed and experienced. By emphasising the social dimensions of emotions, this approach gives more light to the discussion of how emotions shape and are shaped by the broader social world or capitalist systems. This understanding can help in analysing the phenomenon of collective emotions or of how emotions are implicated in identity formation and socialisation throughout one's life.

Although we revealed that Illouz does not directly address life-course aspects, age, or ageing, her concepts of emotional capital and emodities can bring new light to the emotional landscapes that older people traverse in a capitalist society. For example, ideas about what constitutes "successful ageing" or "active ageing" or what is "age-coded" (Krekula 2010) can be strongly influenced by cultural narratives and consumer offers. With regard to losses, they are understood as central moments that reveal the conditions and logics of the emotional economy. Age-related losses, e.g. in physical functions or social relationships, may thus become opportunities to form emotional identity and at the same time incentives for the consumption of goods and services that promise emotional fulfilment and distinction from less attractive lifestyles. Older people are also consumers and are targeted by the industry to buy products that promise to fulfil their emotional and social needs for "successful ageing". The promises in commercials of nostalgia and of staying young and being productive and happy as active seniors may influence how older people construct and experience their emotional and social identities related to memories or authenticity. Anti-ageing beauty products, therapy services, new dresses, and diving courses can be seen as markets in which emotions such as satisfaction, security, or a sense of a middle-age lifestyle are "sold". In contrast, goods or services that evoke emotions of being older hardly exist. Even though children and younger persons sometimes consume products to appear "older", they do not aim for older age but rather for young adulthood or middle age. At the same time, some products related to health and need of care, such as medication or aids, may be more necessary in older age. Interestingly, ageist emotions associated with such goods can even lead to nonconsumption. Age-coded support stockings, for example, can be emo-

tionally rejected by people and thus lead either to nonconsumption or, contrarily to the consumption of emodities, to a purely rational–functionalist attitude towards the product. In a more youth-centred and achievement-oriented society, goods and services may be consumed out of the need for a sense of belonging and the feeling of not being alone as an older person. This could, for example, be reflected in the purchase of autobiographies by celebrities of a similar age. At the same time, age and the emotions associated with it can also be used productively in capitalism. Health issues, the transition to retirement as an event, or family transitions such as separation, widowhood, and grandparenthood can be reflected in specific products in emotional capitalism.

However, we could also argue that older people are less receptive to new impulses in the context of continuity theory and may tend to maintain their existing lifestyles in some areas. Thus, they prefer using former known practices in order to maintain their self-perception and self-image by seeking continuity in their roles, activities, and social relationships (Atchley 1971). At a young age, adventurousness and self-actualisation may be paramount, whereas as we age, other needs, such as safety, stability, and security, may become more important. This means the emodities for older persons can be diverse: maintaining the consumption of goods, services, and products; omitting “age-coded” emodities; or exploring new emodities in older age to cope with losses.

The therapeutic culture that Illouz describes places great value on emotional self-optimisation and control. This culture also affects older people, who are encouraged to cope with critical life-course transitions and emotional challenges in older age through self-help literature and therapy services. Life-course transitions in older age, such as the birth of a grandchild, divorce, or the loss of family members, can have an ambivalent character for older persons with experiences in a prism of different emotions. This variation of emotions during the life course and different life-course transitions is not recognised in Illouz’s concepts. In addition, the emphasis on individual emotional management can lead to structural and social problems associated with ageing being neglected.

Illouz underlines how romantic relationships are shaped by economic rationality. However, it remains an open question what this development implies for older people. On the one hand, their biographical and collective experiences with romantic relationships were less shaped by the commodification of love, and online dating did not exist for most of their lives. On the other hand, relationships in older age are structured by specific temporalities based on “post-(re)productive free time and remaining time” (Bildtgård and Öberg 2015, p. 1505) that could interact in specific ways with the logic of economic rationality. Following, for example, the socioemotional selectivity theory and future-time perspective by Carstensen (1992), older persons tend to prioritise emotional goals, such as the pursuit of satisfaction and emotional well-being. This could lead either to a higher probability for emodities, or emotional preferences regarding a limited future could be less influenced by market logic than by limited time frames. The research field of romantic relationships in older age, or more generally of social relationships, e.g. with adult children, could benefit from the linkage between the sociology of emotions and ageing studies in order to explore the extent to which these are characterised by economic rationality.

Applying Illouz's concepts to ageing research allows us to examine how older people cope with the demands of emotional self-optimisation, how they perceive the rationality of intimacy over their life, and how they navigate emotional relationships in a market-driven context. With regard to the benefit for sociological research of ageing processes, her theory argues for deep reflection, cultural change, and an examination of the existing social structures that shape the emotional life of older persons. Through a better understanding of the mechanisms of emotional capitalism and by developing more authentic and responsible forms of emotional life, older people can begin to free themselves from the constraints of the market and find new paths to a more fulfilling and authentic life when ageing.

However, we would like to point out that the concepts of emotional capitalism and emodities do not distinguish which phases of life, for example, are differently susceptible to specific patterns of consumption. Nor do they take into account the fact that long-term relationships can be quite stable, although, according to Illouz's approach, they should hardly exist. Therapeutic literature can also evoke a critical-reflective view of a capitalist-materialist world and thus oppose consumption, as, for example, approaches to degrowth do. Furthermore, Illouz's approach could benefit from greater awareness of ageing by further explaining what it is like when older people are treated as consumers or what the possible physical or monetary barriers for goods and services are in contrast to their emotional comfort.

4 Ageing Processes Through the Lens of Affect Studies

Affect studies are an interdisciplinary research field that developed mainly in cultural studies and critical theory in the beginning of the 1990s (Clough 2010). This research field came into being "in response to what they argued were limitations of poststructuralism and deconstruction" (Clough 2010, p. 206). There is no clear-cut definition of affect, but most definitions rely on Spinoza's definition: "Affect—which Spinoza construes as: relations of affecting and being affected" (Slaby et al. 2019, p. 4). Affect is then characterised as "dynamic, non-categorical, and relational" (Slaby et al. 2019, p. 4) and goes beyond the subject's consciousness (Clough 2010; Seigworth and Gregg 2010). The conceptual definition of affect usually extends the definition of emotions by highlighting the bodily matter, the social context, and the spatial/material setting in which affects emerge.

The theoretical concepts and perspectives of affect studies expand mainly on the works of Spinoza, Deleuze, and Guattari (Clough 2010). Current influential theorists include Massumi (1995), Ahmed (2010), Clough (2010), and Berlant (2010). This perspective is becoming more relevant and increasingly drawn upon when emotions are a focal point of research because they allow researchers to systematically account for the bodily dimension and decentre the subject (Beyer 2022).

The theory of resonance by Hartmut Rosa (2019) focuses on an *affective* relation of the world. Even though he elaborates on how the emergence of resonance is contingent along the lines "of a multiplicity of biographical and sociocultural experiences and placings" (Rosa 2019, p. 388 f.), he has not systematically connected his conception of resonance to the life course or the ageing process. In the following, we

present central aspects of resonance theory as an exemplary theory of affect studies and discuss how ageing appears through this theoretical lens.

4.1 Resonance as an Affective Relation to the World

Rosa defines his central concept—resonance—as a mode of relation that emerges “between an experiencing subject and the segments of world it encounters” (Rosa 2019, p. 381). One is touched or moved by the human or nonhuman other and responds with one’s own voice, and within this experience both the self *and* the other are transformed adaptively. Resonant experiences are affective in the sense that one is, e.g., overwhelmed or touched and thus transformed. Rosa understands the longing or search for resonance as an “anthropological or rather ontological constant” (Rosa 2019, p. 393). We—as humans—relate to the world hoping to experience resonance, even though we can neither know nor control how this relating will turn out.²

Resonance theory can thus direct our gaze to the possibility of reciprocal transformations in the uncertain relation between the ageing self and encountered segments of the world. By highlighting the potential transformation and the relationality, resonance theory enables us to think about how ageing emerges in the “in-between-ness” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, p. 2) of the self and the world. It thereby opens up space to negotiate the fluid realms of ageing.

4.1.1 *The Dialectical Architecture of Resonance and Alienation*

The relationship between the self and the world does, however, follow a dialectical arrangement of attraction and repulsion, within which humans are situated between a fear of alienation and a desire for resonance. Resonance can accordingly only be thought of on a continuum with its co-constitutive counterpart alienation, which Rosa understands as a muted or even repulsive relation to the world. Alienation entails indifferent disengagement with a nonresponsive world up to hostile–repulsive connections that appear aggressive toward the self. Thus, resonance can only be experienced with alienation lurking in the background.

Furthermore, Rosa conceptualises resonance by explicitly referring to Brian Massumi’s definition of intensity and states that “resonance is not an emotional state, but a mode of relation” (Rosa 2019, p. 168) and therefore categorically different from a feeling or an emotion. This aspect is critical in the concept of resonance: Our relation to the world can neither a priori nor “objectively” be categorised as positive or negative, resonant or alienating. An experience, encounter, or emotion that is normatively expected to be negative does not necessarily lead to alienation. Take, for example, the negatively connoted feeling of anger: In the encounter between the self and the world, the latter could appear as aggressive, the former could answer to the aggression with anger, and in this process their relation to each other transforms into an alienating repulsive one. However, the same encounter could also result in a resonant relation, when the anger—even though it might not necessarily be expe-

² In a similar manner, other strands of affect theory assume “that affective relations are ontologically prior to individuated actors and actants” (Slaby et al. 2019, p. 4).

rienced positively—results in a self-efficacious answer to the aggressive world by, e.g., fighting against its aggression. Accordingly, the experience of resonance or the implication of being affected “is neutral with respect to emotional content” (Rosa 2019, p. 174; see also Massumi 1995).

Resonance theory can not only highlight the fluid in-between-ness of ageing, but it also emphasises how the affective relation is not predetermined in its ascribed meaning and is at the same time ambiguous and constantly moving between resonance and alienation. Thus, the perspective of resonance theory confronts us with the inherent ambiguity of both ageing and affects and thereby enables us to reflect on our preconceptions about them. We can thus ask how the ageing process is experienced instead of asking how it is coped with. We can approach age-specific experiences, such as the loss-related experience of widowhood or the gains-related experience of grandparenthood, and ask about *both* the alienation-triggering *and* the resonance-enhancing elements of these experiences. In this way of thinking, we can approach age-specific experiences in their potential for gains and losses, without omitting one or the other, due to our own—meaning the social sciences’—biased perception of them. With resonance theory, we can open up space to renegotiate experiences of ageing in the sense that they appear *simply as a changing* relation to the world in which agency or self-efficacy is being transformed and experienced in another—not a priori negative or positive—way than before the change. Therefore, taking in this perspective challenges presumptions and beliefs about ageing as a process of increasing loss, without negating it but rather facilitating it to adequately account for the ambiguity of lived experiences.

4.1.2 *The Affective Agency of Objects, Spaces, and Atmospheres*

The concept of resonance goes beyond subject-centred theories in the sense that the segments of the world that participate in the specific transformative mode of relation to the self are not only human (subject–subject relations) but also nonhuman entities, such as institutions, ideas, and objects (subject–object relations; Latour 1996). Resonance theory conceptualises how the relation between the (non)human entities emerges and transforms both the self and the (non)human other. Accordingly, nonhuman entities also possess agentic power. They can speak to the self or (not) appeal to the self. This stance towards nonhuman entities questions the clear distinction between humans, or the living, and nonhumans, or the inanimate, and accounts for the circumstance that “‘speaking things’ play a far more important role in [...] how we position ourselves in the world and in life than our rational or cognitive understanding of the world can explain” (Rosa 2019, p. 230). The relation between human and nonhuman entities is thus a fundamental everyday mode of relations. Similar to feelings or emotions, objects do not contain a priori resonance-enhancing or alienation-triggering qualities; instead, *how* the affective process of relating proceeds is decisive for a resonant or alienating relation between the self and the nonhuman segments of the world.

Resonance theory also highlights how spaces, rooms, atmospheres, and ambiances carry agentic power. They enter the relation as a nonhuman-encountering segment of the world and are considered to bear the possibility for the emergence of resonance,

as they can set a tone for the encounter between the self and the world, by being, e.g., kind or repulsive, melancholic or jolly. In the interactional context—in which the self and the world encounter each other—rooms, atmospheres, and ambiances carry within themselves a distinct resonant quality, “which exists or stretches between the two” (Rosa 2019, p. 383) and which imprints in the physicality and bodily involvement of the self and the world. However, the spatial and ambient dimension do not determine how an encounter will be experienced, i.e. resonant or alienating. The impact rather “depends on both the state of the subject and that of the world it encounters, as well as on their correlation to each other” (Rosa 2019, p. 381).

Thus far we argued that applying central concepts of resonance theory to the ageing process emphasises its fluid in-between-ness and its ambiguity. The importance placed on the relation to nonhuman segments of the world highlights how ageing *cannot* be understood detached from its material and spatial context. Take, for example, one’s home, which can be a place of resonance, bearing the memories of one’s life. Accordingly, one might want to continue to live at home, even though the home itself might transform into a dangerous, hostile environment during the process of ageing due to its size or number of staircases or rugs and become an alienation-triggering place. In this process, the home speaks repulsively to the ageing person and co-constitutes the ageing process by transforming into a place that is no longer age-appropriate and by transforming its inhabitant into a subject who feels too old to live in its home. In this example, the spatial segment triggers feelings of alienation in its encounter with the ageing person. Therefore, resonance theory enables us to widen the gerontological gaze towards nonhuman entities and towards which role their agentic power plays in the affective experience of ageing.

4.1.3 Critical Stance Towards Late Modernity

Resonance is not only emerging in spaces and atmospheres but is also embedded in or entangled with the wider social context. Rosa (2013) understands the social context of modern capitalist societies as being decisively shaped by acceleration, which he critically links to the tendency to strive to *expand one’s share of the world* (*Weltreichweitenvergrößerung*), entailing an increase in time pressure, competition, and mastery of the world. Paradoxically, with the striving for more material goods, new technologies, or a further collection of life events (Baudrillard 1981 [1994]), the perception of *unavailability* (*Unverfügbarkeit*) grows, which might imply a loss of quality of life or even disconnection with one’s experiences (Rosa 2013). In a similar vein, resonance theory questions current neoliberal standards of productivity and self-optimisation that entail a constant pressure to expand one’s share of the world and lack experiences of self-efficacy. Even though resonance theory is affirmative of the will to create, it also highlights how this might be undermined by alienation-triggering experiences of being systematically overworked and/or underpaid under capitalist circumstances (Lijster and Celikates 2019).

In this context, Rosa distinguishes between *world appropriation* (*Weltaneignung*) and *world adaption* (*Weltanverwandlung*). While the former describes the hegemonic modern mode of a self–world relationship that tries to force the world into an affective relation and is likely to lead to alienation manifesting itself in issues

such as the crisis of democracy, the environmental crisis, or increasing burnout and depression rates, the former describes a relation to the world that is momentary, unavailable, and contingent. This distinction points to the attempt to make the encountering segments of the world, such as objects like songs or food, expressive or responsive. For example, if I have trouble walking but wish to be able to walk and try to use a walker, I try to relate to the walker or make it speak to me. This can go smoothly in the sense that the walker helps me to walk again, and it fulfils its purpose. Then the affective process becomes one of world adaption resulting in a resonant relation—because I can feel the ground beneath my feet again and feel self-efficacious. But if this attempt to use a walker fails, I cannot make the object expressive, and the affective process becomes a form of world appropriation resulting in an alienating relation; because I cannot use the walker to walk, it remains a meaningless metal structure with wheels, and I cannot—in my experience and against the backdrop of my wish—relate to the world.

Resonance theory directs our outlook on ageing not only on its fluid in-betweenness, its ambiguity, and its material/spatial dimension, but also on its capitalist/neoliberal dimension. In older age and due to the transition of retirement, people no longer participate in the working world, which can serve as a harbour of resonance in modern societies. As the potential harbour of resonance and thereby a source of fulfilment and self-efficacy deteriorates, the retired individual is potentially left with a void and the wish to make the world speak again. This assumption—even though it might be true for the experiences of many retirees—yet again associates older age with loss and emptiness. However, through the lens of resonance theory, the transition to retirement can appear as initiating a searching process. In this process, one might find new ways of relating to the world outside of the neoliberal logic in the sense of world adaption, or in the sense of world appropriation fail to relate to the world—even though, or precisely because, one might have consumed emodities (Sect. 3.1.3)—and find oneself in a muted world (Bischoff et al. 2021). At the same time, the concepts and expectations of successful ageing, active ageing, and anti-ageing, which make the individual responsible for a resonant ageing process, refer to the circumstance that ageing poses a challenge to the goal of the *expansion of the world* (*Weltreichweitenvergrößerung*; Rosa 2019, p. 163). They represent the attempt to stop or reverse the ageing process and to control the ageing body, even though it is an unavailable and inevitable process.

4.1.4 *Embodying Resonance*

Rosa assumes that the striving for resonance is a basic anthropological constant and that both the ability and the sensitivity for resonance can be acquired. He assumes that these aspects of resonance might “be biologically determined (or at least codetermined)” (Rosa 2019, p. 395). Consequently, the body plays a central role in the relation of the self to the world as we experience the world through and with our body. Rosa highlights how we are connected to the world when we walk barefoot over soft earthy surfaces, or we might be disconnected from the world when we wear shoes. Similarly, our skin serves as a “semi-permeable membrane” (Rosa 2019, p. 48) in our relation to the world, which manifests itself in reactions of the skin to the world

and can make resonant or alienating experiences visible, e.g. when the skin reacts with goose bumps to a touching moment or with a rash to a repulsive environment. At the same time, breathing as well as both eating and drinking are a direct connection to the world, which (materially) transforms the bodily self and the surrounding world. Accordingly, the body and its biological composition moderate both the ability to resonate and the resonance sensitivity. Following this conceptualisation, biological and cognitive decreases serve as a starting point for discussing resonance in an age-specific way, since ageing is sooner or later accompanied by bodily changes. For example, frailty could make the relation to the world at least uncertain, if not disruptive, if we have to have our feet on the ground in order to experience resonance. In the same way, if eating and drinking are an incorporation of the world, this aspect of resonance is missing when a person is, for example, artificially nourished. If we focus on bodily and cognitive decline with increasing age, it seems reasonable to assume that relating to the world might become more difficult.

With the perspective of resonance theory on the ageing process, the fluid in-between-ness, the ambiguity, the material/spatial dimension, and the capitalist/neoliberal dimension come into focus. However, the rather superficial understanding of the ageing body described above links it closely and solely to experiences of loss and suggests that the ability and sensitivity for resonance decrease with increasing age. Thus, it seems to narrow our understanding of the ageing process. Yet Rosa himself states, “In as much as developing *one’s own voice* and experiencing self-efficacy are necessary to cultivating a genuine capacity for resonance, *age* cannot be only a disadvantage” (Rosa 2019, p. 396). We could thus equally assume that resonance experiences simply change with a changing body—without normatively labelling this change as a deterioration. The bodily changes associated with increasing age could be a possibility for lifelong learning. In this process, the bodily changes could be met with an adaptation in which resonance capacity or sensitivity increases and the ability for resonance grows with age, i.e. we learn to resonate in a different way. Adapting to the bodily process of ageing and increasing the ability for resonance might represent a possible “side effect” of ageing—similar to wisdom or serenity. In this perspective, the body becomes more than a slowly failing organism, but rather a room that bears the possibility of (still) connecting to the world.

4.2 Resonant Ageing?

Rosa explicitly addresses ageing when he discusses how resonance is sensitive to the context in which the affective relations emerge. Rosa proclaims that one experiences less resonance in older age and suggests that older age is a life phase in which affects are muted or fade into the background compared to the phases of childhood or youth. He argues that this decrease in resonance occurs due to decreasing bodily functions. In this ascription of resonance sensitivity in different life phases, he implicitly reduces the process of ageing to bodily changes and focuses solely on his assumption that resonance emerges through the body. At the same time, Rosa assumes that different cultural axes of resonance may be important in different life

phases, such as music in youth, work in middle age, or family in older age.³ Additionally, generational belonging potentially influences political and historical axes of resonance through the succession of, e.g., historical events, which are experienced by different generations in different phases of their lives and entail a generational “map of resonance” (Rosa 2019, p. 395). These differences can, in his words, be described as “resonant affinities which are cohort-specific” (Rosa 2019, p. 395).

In his explicit negotiation of the possibility of resonant ageing, Rosa reproduces age-stereotypical assumptions, such as older age being a numb or boring life phase in which affects are becoming less important. Some critiques of resonance theory proclaim that it is middle-class-biased and a solely Western and Euro-centric concept (Costa 2020; Simoulin 2020; Susan 2020). In a similar vein, resonance theory can be criticised as focusing more on childhood, youth, and middle age than on older age. In how he describes resonance in older age, Rosa does not account for the complexity of the ageing process, making the heterogeneity of older age invisible and simplifying this life stage. Still, the theoretical concepts he develops in the perspective of resonance can be applied to the ageing process and enable us to broaden our understanding of the affective emergence of ageing processes.

5 Conjunction of Emotional Capitalism and Resonance with Gerontological Perspectives

In the previous sections, we first examined how our thinking, analysing, and theorising of ageing processes in social sciences are structured by losses and sometimes gains, which point to emotional and affective experiences. We then asked how we can conceptualise ageing in a fruitful conjunction by taking in the perspective of the sociology of emotions—more specifically, concepts of emotional capitalism—and the perspective of affect studies—more specifically, the concept of resonance. Losses and gains can evoke ambiguous affects and fuzzy emotions for the older persons experiencing them. Reflexively thinking about ageing processes in the terms of the sociology of emotions as well as affect studies sheds light on the impact of the social for the emotions and affects associated with older age and offers the possibility of diverse potential for a deeper understanding of the social dynamics associated with ageing. To conclude, we summarise how ageing processes appear through the lenses of these two perspectives and sensitise existing gerontological perspectives with some key implications from previous sections.

The sociology of emotions—here taking Eva Illouz’s concepts of emotional capitalism and emodities as an example—can contribute to a better understanding of the diversity and complexity of emotional experiences in older age. Illouz’s approach underscores the intersection of economic and emotional life, revealing the profound impact of capitalist structures on personal and collective emotional expe-

³ With axes of resonance, Rosa develops three durable relations to the world: a horizontal axis that entails relationships with human entities; a diagonal axis that refers to relations with nonhuman material entities such as work, school, and sports; and a vertical axis that consists of relation to nonhuman abstract entities such as religion, art, music, and nature.

riences. The making of emotional capital explores the transformation of emotions in contemporary society, particularly focusing on how emotions have been commodified and rationalised in the age of capitalism. Illouz offers a critical perspective on the intersection of emotions and capitalism and provides valuable insights into the commodification of emotions and the ways in which market logics permeate intimate relationships. In the context of ageing, this could mean that the emotions of older people are also increasingly viewed by the industry in terms of their usability and “usefulness” for creating new products and services. By examining how social interactions, relationships, and structures in emotional capitalism affect the emotional experiences of older people, e.g. in terms of successful ageing or active ageing, it can help in overcoming stereotypes and preconceptions about older persons and ageing and provide a more realistic picture of how older age is experienced, such as coping with emotional challenges and stresses through consumption or therapeutic literature. However, we also doubt the clear equation of emotional authenticity and its foundation in emotional goods for older persons. According to current approaches in gerontology and life-course research, the problem of ensuring continuity over the life course and consistency across social contexts is better solved through specific values (linked to learning processes) than through consumption (Bernardi et al. 2019; Lin and Marin 2022). As we argued in the previous sections, affect studies, and more specifically resonance theory, are mostly focused on middle age. However, if we go beyond what Rosa explicitly elaborates on the link between resonance and older age, we can use concepts of resonance theory and the understanding of affect to rethink how we theoretically conceptualise the affective relation between self and world in the process of ageing. Applying resonance theory with its focus on affective relationality, we see ageing as an open-ended and transformative process in which the self and the world (dis)connect with one another in the realm of a *fluid in-between-ness*, which means that they are not fixed entities, but rather are open to transformation in their encounter. Applying this aspect to ageing means that older subjects can transform in the same way as younger subjects when they encounter the world. Resonance theory additionally highlights how affective relations are not predetermined, which implies for ageing that we cannot clearly state to what extent it is a process of loss or decline and are invited to account for its *ambiguity*. Furthermore, resonance theory enables us to account for both the *material* and *spatial* dimensions of ageing processes because it stresses the role that nonhuman entities, such as objects or atmospheres, play in its emergence and in how ageing subjects experience their ageing process, not embedded in but in dialogue with objects and atmospheres. Not least, the differentiation between world adaption and world appropriation illustrates how in *capitalist* and *neoliberal* manner consumption functions as a means to control our encounters with the world. Concepts like successful, active, or anti-ageing support this idea but appear as relating to the world in the sense of world appropriation, i.e. failing to relate to the world in a meaningful way. Accordingly, with the perspective of resonance theory, ageing processes appear as uncontrollable and unavailable, but their *embodiment* is at the same time not determined by an understanding of the body as a declining organism but rather as a changing body that still allows the individual to relate to the world.

By applying the concepts of emotional capitalism and emodities in particular and of the sociology of emotions in general, as well as the perspective of resonance theory in particular and of affect studies in general to the ageing process, we aim to contribute to how ageing processes, and especially the associated emotions and affects, appear from those perspectives. Taking in these perspectives enables us to take a step back from a priori associating ageing with loss and at the same time from a priori categorising emotions and affects normatively, i.e. as positive or negative, good or bad. Instead, these perspectives allow a negotiation with emotions and affects themselves in a first step and a consideration of their implications for ageing and for theories of ageing in a second and third step. The individual aspects of the applied concepts do not unveil previously unknown terrain in the sociology of ageing; rather, connecting points can be found in various theories. However, they are seldom linked explicitly to the sociology of emotions or affect studies, even though they could profit from those perspectives in order to grasp the ageing processes more thoroughly. In the following, we cursorily suggest starting points to theoretically sensitise existing theories of the life course, age, and ageing with the presented perspectives.

Circling back to the theories we discussed regarding the prominence of the concept of loss, the influential concepts of successful ageing (Baltes and Baltes 1998; Rowe and Kahn 1987), continuity theory (Atchley 1971, 1989), active ageing (World Health Organization (WHO) 2002; Walker and Zaidi 2019), and anti-ageing practices show great promise for the possibility to control and enclose the losses associated with ageing. From the perspective of the sociology of emotions, anti-ageing products or services consumed with the aim of ageing actively or successfully, such as wellness retreats, therapeutic literature, and e-bike courses, are deeply embedded in emotional capitalism. They can be categorised as emodities in the sense that their consumption does not necessarily aim at consuming the product itself. What is sold with these products and services are emotions such as feeling younger or feeling able to control ageing. Ultimately, they assist in enhancing the self, getting recognition, and perceiving oneself as a project. Taking an affect theoretical perspective, these seemingly positive concepts of ageing and the associated emodities do rather serve as “objects of desire” (Berlant 2010, p. 93) that promise a good life, or in this case *good ageing*, even though they cannot be fulfilled or achieved and serve as an example for alienating world appropriation. At least, they cannot be fulfilled in the longer term and are cruel because they make inevitable losses or changes even harder to cope with and pose a risk to well-being while one is experiencing the ageing process. Therefore, such concepts appear as a form of “cruel optimism” (Berlant 2010, p. 94).

With socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 1992) and the future time perspective (Kooij et al. 2018), ageing appears as a process in which one’s social life and one’s time become increasingly narrow. These perspectives make the underlying assumption that ageing is a linear movement in one direction, i.e. a linear process of decline. However, by applying the discussed perspectives to ageing, it appears in the sense of “emotional choreographies” (Adrian 2015) as a process in which one’s emotional landscapes and affective relations simply change. Against the backdrop of the fluid in-between-ness of ageing, which highlights how ageing subjects are not fixed but can transform in their encounters with the world and the stance on

ambiguity, which contradicts the idea of linearity, ageing could be conceptualised more openly as a cyclical and momentary process that is not predetermined by negatively connoted emotions or a focus on limited time—as socioemotional selectivity theory (Carstensen 1992) and the future time perspective (Kooij et al. 2018) partly suggest. Thus, considering the discussed perspectives, ageing appears as a possibly transformative process that is open to being experienced with complex emotions and ambiguous affects that we cannot a priori evaluate as positive or negative, resonant or alienating experiences.

Some gerontological perspectives are quite clearly fit for a linkage with the sociology of emotions or affect studies, such as critical gerontology or cultural gerontology, with a distinct stance on materiality (including the body) or spatiality (including atmospheres and ambiance; for a postbourdieusian perspective, see Amrhein in this issue; for “old” and “new” materialism, see Hahmann and Höppner). For example, material gerontology—or, more precisely, the concept of distributed age(ing) (Höppner 2023)—is interested in the role that the material and spatial world plays and how it actively participates in the ageing process. As “a critical concept that helps to analyse how, where and when specific phenomena are being produced and what is therefore made visible as a part of the phenomenon” (Höppner 2023, p. 5), it furthermore highlights how the ageing process is also produced by a scientific gaze and hence invokes a reflexive perspective on ageing. Nevertheless, the emotional or affective dimension of the ageing process is discussed only marginally in this body of theoretical gerontology. Linking the perspective of material gerontology with aspects of affect studies makes sense, as they both focus on the participation of nonhuman entities in the emergence of ageing, and both address the inherent ambiguity and fluid in-between-ness (for artificial intelligence as a nonhuman entity in the ageing process, see Gallistl, this issue). Furthermore, narrative gerontology as a variety of critical gerontology puts a focus on questioning narratives of decline and vulnerability in cultural phenomena (Zeilig 2011), which can be systematically linked with the concept of emodities and can thereby analyse how emotions within ageing processes emerge within the consumption of media and cultural goods.

With its distinct focus on objects, spaces, and atmospheres, the sociology of emotions and affect studies can also be linked to environmental gerontology. With a resonance-sensitised lens, the influence of the climate crisis and the vulnerability of older people to its effects can be seen not only as an experience in which one’s health and possibly life are at risk but also as an experience in which the encountering world acts in a hostile way towards older people and can thus be alienation-triggering. More specifically, the model of objective and subjective person–environment transactional elements by Hans-Werner Wahl and Frank Oswald (2016) could be linked to resonance theory in the sense that the belonging that emerges in experiences can be interpreted as resonant relations to the spaces surrounding the ageing individual. The stance on agency can be linked to the importance that resonance theory places on self-efficacy. Additionally, the possibilities of *ageing in place* can be linked to emodities by focusing on how the possibility of feeling at home or ageing in place is mediated by social inequalities and thereby can highlight how the emergence of feelings is influenced not only by one’s psychological well-being but also by the socially structured position of older individuals.

Other existing perspectives are not as evidently suitable for a theoretical sensitising with the presented theories, such as the life-course perspective and the concept of cumulative advantage/disadvantage. Still, path dependencies between, e.g., life-course transitions (Bernardi et al. 2019) and the cumulative advantages and disadvantages of capacities (Dannefer 2003) could be linked to resonance sensitivity. This linkage could highlight how certain life-course transitions in combination with social positions enable or prevent the development of resonance sensitivity over time and in older age. Furthermore, the stance on social inequalities could be linked to the affective dimension in the way proposed by Kolehmainen et al. (2022), who conceptualise affective inequalities as “a specific form of those subtle mechanisms of inequality, that are generated and registered through affect” (p. 3).

The integration of ageing research and the sociology of emotions and affect studies underscores the need for intersectional analyses that consider the interactions between age and other social categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, and sexuality (for the intersection of age and gender, see Calasanti and King, this issue). This linkage between affect, social inequalities, and the life course is still very schematic, but it is promising for future conceptual developments in the sociology of ageing, especially because it is not obvious.

The linkage between gerontological perspectives and the sociology of emotions and affect studies serves as a starting point for systematically linking these theoretical concepts in order to develop an affect- and emotion-informed theory of ageing.

Additionally, future research projects could address the diverse and sometimes ambivalent feelings in older age as outlined here. Discourse-analytical and ethnographic approaches, image analyses, or experimental studies of physically inscribed emotional norms or reflexive mixed-methods approaches could be applied to shed new light on emotions and affects of older persons. Based on different approaches, research fields could include, for example, different cultural practices, everyday lifestyles, aspects of ageing in place or in care homes and belonging, consumption patterns, therapy and counselling arrangements, or social relationships. Questions similar to the following could be considered: How can emotions and affects of older persons in emotional capitalism be discussed without the respectful recognition of subjective relevance and authenticity? How can we empirically investigate emotions and affects as the result of emodities or of experiences of resonance over the life course and in different stages of life? How do quasi-emotionalised images of a *good* older age produce age-specific goods and services, and how are images of older age reproduced in turn?

To conclude, in this article we reflexively applied Illouz’s concept of emotional capitalism and emodities—as a concept of the sociology of emotions—and Rosa’s resonance theory—as a concept of the affect studies—to our understanding of ageing processes. Sensitising existing and well-established gerontological perspectives with the discussed concepts of the sociology of emotions and of affect studies could not only enrich our theoretical discussions on ageing but also enable empirical perspectives on ageing that consider its complexity, ambiguity, and fluidity. With the critical stance on the predetermination of emotions and thereby of ageing as a loss-related process, we do not want to negate the losses that ageing processes

entail. We also do not want to proclaim that ageing is mainly a positive process when one manages to age actively and successfully.

Funding Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

Conflict of interest L. Bischoff and A. Franke declare that they have no competing interests.

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Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

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