

**The Body, Outpost of the Mind:  
Corporeal Temporalities, Aging, Literature, and the Arts**

International Conference  
Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 14-15 May 2026

Keynote Speakers:  
**Jean-Michel Rabaté** (University of Pennsylvania)  
**Liz Barry** (University of Warwick)

*Call for Papers*

When, at the start of the new millennium, Jean-Luc Nancy published his provocative book *Corpus* (1992; 2008), he challenged us to confront the bare body, the body unburdened of the vestments of representation and language. The body, Nancy argued, has been “ex-written,” obscured by layers of meanings. Do we really know what we talk about when we talk about the body? Since then, inquiry into the body has evolved and flourished in new multi- and interdisciplinary directions, with wide-ranging edited collections (Hillman and Maude 2009; Hall 2024), new critical series (*Gender and the Body in Literature and Culture*, Edinburgh University Press) and noteworthy monographs (Boxall 2020; Esposito 2015; Davidson 2019). Simultaneously, research in neurobiology has illuminated the profound alignment of mind and body in life's homeostatic regulation (Damasio 2003; 2010), and philosophers and humanities scholars are now spotlighting a primary cerebral “auto-affection”—a constant, invisible internal “auto-interpellation” that constitutes the very unconscious of subjectivity (Malabou 2008; 2012).

These approaches have raised anew the question of the self, presenting it as inherently temporal and precarious, fundamentally changing also our perception of aggressive diseases like Alzheimer's (see Malabou's “New Wounded” 2012). Rather than solely being destructive, these conditions become unexpected gateways to new understandings of the self, revealing it as unstable and always on the brink of redefinition. Acknowledging fragility as a primary experience has become central, and scholars are increasingly looking outside of the human for new intellectual and ethical resources. At this critical juncture, feminist thinkers take us to a limit zone

of thought marked by the poverty of the body, a stark scenario of bodies “naked and poor”, wherefrom it might be possible to cast a new gaze on the self and others beyond the impasse of biopolitics (Putino 2011). Parallel to this, new theoretical perspectives are re-examining the inherent tension between language and the body.

Any inquiry into the body cannot be done by leaving out its condition in time. Yet, although the body stands at the very center of any discourse about aging, a critical reflection on the historical and theoretical significance of bodies has paradoxically entered the debate on aging only recently (Katz 2010; Öberg 1996). Whereas functionality has grown into a paradigm through which to interpret and handle the aging process and aging subjects (Katz 2010), the aging body lends itself to other interpretive dimensions. For example, the experience, in aging, of becoming a “mere body [...] intransigent materiality [...] mass rather than energy” (“the most extreme human authenticity”) deserves further reflection (Améry 2010; Hamilton 2019).

Our conference keys into these vital discussions by combining research on the body and research in age studies. We wish to encourage a reflection on the body as the challenging limit or outpost of thought in ways that will help explore how mind and body *adapt* to each other over time, and contribute to creating different corporeal temporalities. How do these temporalities mediate between the subjective and the collective, between the old and the young? How does our changing experience of the body determine us and our relationship to human and non-human others? How do others define us in connection with our body changes? We wish to address these issues from the vantage point of literature (fiction, poetry, memoirs etc.), the performing and visual arts (cinema, photography, dance, theater etc.), and critical theory in the Anglophone context. We invite interdisciplinary papers that focus on the body while branching out into aging, intergenerational relations, and illness. Our aim is to explore how the body challenges the boundaries of thought, pushing us to forge a new ethos for our collective future.

We welcome contributions that key into the following strands. We understand these strands to be rather capacious and encourage prospective participants to interpret them in line with their research interests:

- Theories of the body and the body/mind relation in time;
- Aging or/and ill bodies as shaping forces of literary/artistic forms;
- The aging body as affected by/affecting the social context (shame/bodyshaming, embarrassment etc.), the non-human context (human-animal kinships etc.), and the material context (objects aiding/replacing/surviving the body);

- The body beyond itself: history (bodies at work, bodies as machines, the aging body at work, resisting-protesting bodies) and transcendence (mystics, saints, and their corporeal practices etc.);

Please send a 250-word abstract in English by **Dec 5th, 2025** to the conference organizers Simone Francescato, [simone.francescato@unive.it](mailto:simone.francescato@unive.it) and Mena Mitrano, [filomena.mitrano@unive.it](mailto:filomena.mitrano@unive.it). Notification of acceptance will be sent by **January 15th, 2026**.

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