



**BODY AND HEALTH: A LOOK FROM ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this text, we present an approach of the body from an Anthropological perspective, seeking to understand the insertion of health in this construct that is the body, and in this way re-think the human body in its anthropological dimension, which takes place by the understanding of the processes that assign it meaning and by the understanding of the relation between identity and human body in its cultural referents, within a historical and social context, which is concrete and dynamic, in this way the body reconstitutes itself from cultural processes that mark ideological processes that end up happening between health and disease, as an assignment of a whole that only constitutes the biologist part of it.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The body has been approached from different conceptions and disciplines throughout history. Some derivatives of the Cartesian tradition have proposed it as an object with its own quality, container of the soul or as its instrument, but irreducible to them, this long tradition of thought strongly influenced the social sciences, postponing the appearance of studies that would be occupied of corporalities in sociocultural life (López, 1976). The process of body symbolization is intimately related to the sociocultural context and the particular ideological universe, therefore the concept of body synthesizes the understanding of the universe of a culture. In the case of complex societies, divided into classes and ethnic groups, the concept of body varies according to each of them.

For 1936, Marcel Mauss called for the corporal techniques of each culture to be the object of anthropological study, it was not until the 1970s that the Anthropology of the Body began to be delineated as a specific field of study, from the works of Mary Douglas, John Blacking, Paul Ekman, Judith Hanna, Andrew Strathern (Citro, 2013), among others

***The Body through the social conception***

Everyone in our culture believes that we know what we mean by pronouncing the word body and, on the other hand, Anthropology (for which the body has been an object of research and a classic theme in their work) has taught us that the matter must be treated in a complex way.

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Especially from 1980 to 1990 a renewed interest in exploring the practices, uses and experiences of the body has emerged, and from this some research has been reappropriated from the perspective of Marcel Mauss as the theoretical proposals of Le Breton, which emphasizes the breaking of that western conception of the body as censorship and the enclosure of ego sovereignty, inviting a genealogy of the modern body (2007).

Thus the body is erected as the result of the social construction of the medium, it does not belong to the subject but to the context, it is the emission of a totality that we know as a society. Mentions Le Breton:

*"At all times the subject symbolizes, through the body (gestures, mimics, etc.) the tonality of relations with the world. In this sense the body, in any human society, is always significantly present" (Le Breton 1990: 122)*

Moreno mentions about the work of Mary Douglas;

*"... he warned that the physiological properties of the body are the starting point for culture; they constitute a mediation, and their identity unfolds in significant symbols. In fact, the author argues that there is a natural tendency in all societies to represent the body, since the body and its physiological properties, as well as its residual products, feed the culture with a rich resource for symbolic work, the body it is capable of feeding a system of natural symbols" (Moreno, 2010: 152)*

This means that the body is a means of expression at the same time highly restricted, since it is very mediated by culture and expresses the social pressure that it has to endure, but capable of accepting the open, infinite variety of experience. Le Breton mentions that the body is present-absent:

"At the same time pivot of the insertion of man in the fabric of the world and support sine qua non of all social practices; it only exists, for the conscience of the subject, in the moments when it stops fulfilling its habitual functions, when the routine of everyday life disappears or when the *<silence of the organs> breaks*" (Le Breton 1990: 124).

Thus, the shaping of the body's meaning from intersubjectivity and interaction leads to conceiving the body as a system of symbols, as a social and cultural construction and knowledge of society. That is to say; the social situation is revealed in the body and framed in patterns of action, gives shape to its concrete realization; thus, the body becomes a symbol of the situation. Moreno helps us to better understand this, she suggests that:

"If we think then of the symbolic character of the body, the subject expresses itself symbolically in its corporeality; that is to say, he expresses his thoughts, emotions, desires, feelings, affections, and even the vicissitudes of his vital development, in forms and processes of meaning materialized in symbolic expressions" (Moreno, 2010: 152).

The body is the result of the social construction of the medium, it does not belong to the subject but to the context, it is the emission of a totality that we know as a society (Campos, 2010). When the person recognizes, assumes and approves his body is when he has knowledge of him, becomes aware of his body and is able to communicate from it. It supposes the fact of meeting and facing the world, with the other, with a regime of meaning and a way of building, based on inherited regularities and assumed our own reality.

#### ***Corporeity as body consciousness***

In corporeity lie the roots of individuality, intimacy and the sense of morality, which are projected into the inviolability of personality, the world where privacy, integrity, respect and confidentiality are evident.

Moreno mentions in this regard:

"To become aware of our body is not only the experience of what we feel through it, but the set of meanings that we attribute to the world from it, inserted in a game of reciprocal recognition with the others" (Moreno, 2010: 152).

That is to say; the experience of what we perceive from that body while we assume it as an effective communication reality. Corporeity is a constitutive reality and reference of communication. Through corporeality, our own, social and intimate image is outlined, so that from it others understand and relate; it involves both an always equivocal but unobjectionable revelation of our intimacy and the revelation of our availability as Moreno points out that corporeality is a mode of human existence and therefore the body immediately takes part of the individuality and particularity of the person. Thus the symbolic body considers the use of the body as a metaphor / symbol capable of organizing the world around us, therefore:

*"The body is a symbol, creator of symbols and support of multiple symbolic processes of culture and society where we are immersed, think and understand the body brings us closer to the understanding of the world that surrounds us, the symbolic reality that together with carnality is part of our being, giving meaning to the subject"* (Moreno, 2010: 153).

#### ***Symbolisms of the body: for an interpretation of health / disease***

In all societies, the body has been meaning in different ways, the process of body symbolization is related to each particular universe, so the notion of body synthesizes the understanding of the universe of a culture. It is necessary to point out that I understand culture as a world structured by rules, to put it in a very general way, culture is the body of identities, to better support this García Canclini gives us an interesting definition, he indicates that culture is:

"The production of phenomena that constitute through the representation or symbolic reworking of the material structures to understand, reproduce or transform the social system, that is, all practices and institutions dedicated to the administration, renewal and restructuring of meaning" (García, 1982 : 41).

This conceptualization refers us to the symbolic plane, which is exclusive of human beings, that is to say; culture as a world structured by rules, to put it in a very general way, we are symbolic beings and all human practice means. For this reason, he placed me from the Symbolic Anthropology, understanding it as one that considers that culture is a system of symbols and meanings shared by a community, and that focuses on studying the way in which subjects manifest through symbols, the relationship between some symbols and others where the importance of these in social action.

In the framework of symbolic anthropology, the symbolism of each culture is studied, the body as a symbol, as a metaphor, analyzing the products of the body and representing the social culture. All societies organize a certain use / practices of the body, articulating differently the understanding of the body, and vice versa.

In this sense, the body constitutes a container of meanings and symbolizations constructed in correlation with a cultural environment, thus generating particular gestures, emotional expressions, modes of sensory perception and techniques of daily body movements, rituals and aesthetics, as well as various representations and meanings around health and illness.

The body constitutes the "symbolic pole" that organizes, articulates and interprets everyday life following Duch and Mèlich (2005), it is the substrate of our identity as individuals, as a group and as a society; it is the reference point from which we build our social space and order daily life; since all this influences the form of attention, whether medical or not, that provides to his suffering, being the disease a cultural fact since it represents and means, besides being a sociohistorical product where each society and culture have their own forms to conceive, experiment, use and give meaning to the body and the facts that are based on it.

Ramírez mentions in this regard:

"Therefore, (each society) produces its own representations about the nature of these, constituting socially and culturally elaborated knowledge" (Ramírez, 2002: 2).

Since in the order of the natural the disease does not exist as such, it is not a problem in itself. What does exist is that biological phenomenon that can be distinguished by breaking with a certain continuity of events, with an order of processes that have been occurring, but if the eye is not the witness of the human being who comes to give a meaning to that event,

nature lives harmoniously with these contingencies. Mentions Ramírez;

"The representations and practices on the body and its conditions such as illness, death and attention must be analyzed from the meaning of the experience that refer to the representations and practices of common sense, as well as to the representations and scientific practices". (Ramírez, 2010: 9)

Since they have multiple characters that reflects social, cultural and ideological relationships, so their analysis allows an interpretation not only of the belief systems or health care models, but also of the current society. But these interpretations must be analyzed from their permanence, multiplicity, diversity and contradiction. Since it is from the same body that is based the point of view that moves to the construction of meanings and actions, where the disease is evident in each of the acts of life.

When we speak of body, we are referring to a construction, a biosocial unit where physical characteristics or attributes, body schema, sensations, pleasures and desires are signified and acquired by particular senses (Aguado, 2004). Life is a bodily experience, we all have a body, because with it we feel, we desire, we act, we express ourselves, we create and we apprehend reality. In this sense the body represents a field of perception, a space in which they converge and from which all social practices are propagated; the body is in itself, an essential vehicle to act in the world, the basis of our identity as individuals and as a group.

The human body, as an immediate reality, is a meaning body. It is a dynamic structure in which the physiological processes are woven in a complex way with the symbolic ones. From the perspective of Aguado (2004) body image is the specific configuration of a subject that gives evidence about the self. The body image is configured from a ritual process in which are delineated (meaning) evidence about the body of the subject that contain a cultural sense and that "anchor" the body from the experience (Kirmayer, 1992), for that reason it involves the sensation, the perception, its affectivity and its cognitive process; that is, his corporality. That is, following Bourdieu (1985) is through the habitus that is inscribed in the body, under the rule of rhythms, gestures and words, a whole relationship with time and space that the subject lives in an organic and natural way. The re-thinking of the human body in its anthropological dimension involves the understanding of the processes that assign meaning to it and the understanding of the relationship between identity and the human body in its cultural referents, within a specific historical and social context.

## CONCLUSION

A very particular reference of health, was that the body was captured by the medicine since it began in this the location of the morbid process with its respective signs and symptoms, which initiated the great cascade of syndromes, so the medicine started from its look a position that allowed him to legitimize in the body a vast knowledge space, capable of being used with his character of power and give way to a dominant order, where medical knowledge was converted from positivism into absolute truths, the body was sequestered and dominated for a science that cohabitates between health and illness - suffering - of the individual or collective. There is no space allowed to doubt the appropriation of a science that placed its cultural ties within a resignified place as something unique and unrepeatably.

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