

PRESENTATION

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In the *Thematic Section* of issue number 117, *Relaciones* examines a particularly important topic, and one that can never be analyzed sufficiently: the human body. In many of the reflections in the theory of culture, from the most varied and distinct viewpoints, including hermeneutical, semiotic, anthropological, philosophical and linguistic approaches, among many others, the body is not only a central referent, but a universal and obligatory one for all that which concerns the human being, because it is the starting point of its entirety. Theories of knowledge from all periods take the body as the starting point to build their models of access to, and understanding and construction of, the universes with which they co-exist and from which men and women emerge. Clearly the birthplace of philosophy, the body is also a permanent and unavoidable referent of history, a machine for creating worlds, forging realities and leading them to the nesting place of human dreams. Myths emerge from the body, but so do poetry, the paradises of different epochs and the most varied literary universes. Though philosophers such as Plotinus hold the body to be the prison of the soul, others, like Leibniz, maintain that the soul cannot exist without the body because the latter is the clothing that imbues it with existence. The tradition of divination (*mántica*), on the other hand, postulates that the body is actually a sign of the soul. If all of this is true, then the body is both a matrix of experiences and a specific mode of being lived. Through their creation of the universes in which they live and are nurtured, human beings have come to constitute themselves as the nucleus and source of all the symbolizations that make up the entity we call “culture” and, though it is said that man is a political animal, it may also be that he is a semiotic animal, a kind of machine for creating symbols, signs, dreams, worlds, in short, everything.

Reflections on this theme are the guiding thread of the articles in the *Thematic Section* of this issue. Thus, in the first article, “The Body: A Journey,” Jorgelina Bover presents a series of reflections on the body that be-

gins with the construction of subjectivity and then expands to deal with the awareness of decadence, disease and the threat of death, all of which generate myths. The author's discourse takes us into the labyrinths of the discordance between the body as constituted by its primordial subjection to a prevailing social-cultural order and the body as a biotechnological entity of postmodernity. Her starting points are as follows: as an object of knowledge, the body presents itself to us as something beyond our grasp; and the body as semiotic in that it is not just a biological being but also a system of signs, a language in itself made up of its corporal appearance and movements, gestures and learned behaviors. In her study of the body from corporality, Bover opens a complex and contradictory field of inquiry because, though it is possible to encounter realities that are in plain sight, there is something about corporality that always remains hidden: all representations of the body end up as only fragmentary allusions, partial references to what we suppose, or intuit, as integral, but that we can only experience in this way with great difficulty.

The author conceives of experience as a unity of meaning that knits, filters and interprets all existence, because the way in which each individual lives her / his body, and what she / he feels inside it, establishes a vital truth that colors and gives meaning to all our lived experiences and that emerges in gestures, acts or words, though never revealing itself completely in externalities because the experience of the body is singular and, as such, has much room for the ineffable: if the body emits a plurality of meanings, then all knowledge of the body must entail an ignorance of its own plurality. According to Bover, it is in the body that life's journey towards death begins. Body and life precede all thought because they underlie the conditions of existence itself. The article ends by arguing that postmodernity promotes a new form of psychic structuring, one characterized by a social-cultural system that is gradually losing its ability to act as a symbolic referent. This is the epoch in which the image predominates and the prevailing discourse is defined by a rupture with historical time.

The second article, "Constructing Histories with Our Bodies so They Never Again Remain Silenced..." by Dayana Luna Reyes and Jorge Gómez Mancera, examines a work experience that began with the creation of an institutional group set up to do research on, and intervene in, the problem of HIV / AIDS in the State of Hidalgo; but it then delves into the subjective interstices of the actors involved, all of whom were deeply

affected by a profound journey that consists in coming to know oneself in, and from, sexuality through participation in the field of social intervention. The essay analyzes group processes and their complex interrelationship with the issue of gender, and the place of the intervener-researcher who may encounter diverse discourses that bring her/him to deconstruct her/his disciplinary praxis and human experience.

The essay begins with a deconstruction of the research space through an act that first breaks it down and then analyzes its individual elements in order to discover their respective functions, the origin or validity of the characteristics of that space and, finally, proceeds to reconstruct the whole on the basis of the new signs and referents that emerged from the analysis. Indeed, the article itself is written as a process of deconstruction of an institutional group whose *raison d'être* was to do research on, and intervene in, HIV/AIDS, as its assumptions, processes and consequences all clearly reveal. Underlying the group's assumptions was the postulate that all social space is constructed by the particular culture in which the subject is immersed, though the individual tends to lose sight of this fact. This means that any social space in which a person intervenes becomes less alien; thus, it also becomes more difficult for one to forget that the social sciences are, indeed, gestated in interaction, regardless of the discipline, tendency or nature of that intervention. The authors' fundamental proposal is that the social scientist chooses projects that entail interaction with the objects of study, and then makes other decisions while elaborating her/his reflections on the reality studied. Research centers primarily on unraveling the intersubjective networks that constitute the subjectivities immersed in a specific process, and thus descends into the difficult and obscure corners of subjectivity, until it reaches a series of deconstructed identifications that entail passing through that of the researcher's own history. This essay ends with a group reflection on the body that, it is assumed at the end, is a discourse in process. Finally, it adds a series of proposals for the transformation of our bodies.

Karine Tinat and Victor Manuel Ortiz present the third article: "The Case of D.: The Errant and the Aberrant in an Anorexic Body," a study of a male case of anorexia from two distinct visions—one sociological, the other psychoanalytical—that develops a reflection on the body, its meanings and its relation to the environment that transforms it into an anorexic one. In other words: to what degree does D.'s case—crisscrossed as it is by

a range of practices both pre-existing and unexpected/ uncommon that come into play— prefigure corporalities that may become generalized in the near future? The study identifies certain elements as a contribution to reflections on the body; perhaps the most important of which (according to the authors) may be to explain, first, how it was that they found this man, whom they call D.; and, second, how they pieced together his story.

The first of the authors' reflections consists in reconstructing D.'s story. I say "reconstruct" because the excerpts from the interview reproduced in the text are, naturally, only a selection of the main elements that Tinat and Ortiz consider relevant to their analysis: D.'s experience is transformed into a story that intermingles fact and fiction. In the second part, the authors offer analytical clues for the interpretations of D.'s story. This part is sub-divided into two sections that correspond to the authors' own epistemological postures. Taking the viewpoint of sociology, the first section examines the degree to which D.'s anorexia, marked by certain relations with the body and food, may become a site upon which societal phenomena are inscribed. To close this circle, Tinat and Ortiz return to the theme of anorexia and D.'s relationship with his body in order to explore how his conflicts of *habitus* and his interaction with different social classes are inscribed, and to what degree it is possible to consider that D.'s anorexia and corporal relations represent a kind of "total institution."

The second section of part two adopts a psychoanalytical perspective that reflects on possible psychotic or perverse readings of D. Here the authors call into question the notions of otherness and the Other. As mentioned above, the aim of the article is to reflect upon the body and show how the 20th century seems to have brought about and emphasized new forms of behavior that correspond to changes in subjectivity caused by a series of very diverse factors, such as technological advances, social movements, the so-called globalization, lifestyle changes and the proliferation of models and life options. All these elements combine to make up a labyrinthine subjectivity in which the errant and aberrant transform survival (instinct, discernment, alertness, self-preservation, etc.) into a kind of wandering in which the subject neither wishes to, nor can, know more about her/himself. This is the conclusion to which the authors' reflections on D.'s story bring us. They say that this leads us to think that human beings survive in spite of themselves, in spite of their

surroundings and in spite of their subjection, thanks to the continuous resignification of the body and its ability to adapt to a new environment that it constructs through asphyxia. D. is a subject who cannot know anymore about himself; but his power lies precisely in this inability to do more. It is through these possible orientations and strategies of action that the subject searches for answers to the ontological question that in its most general form asks: "Who am I?"; that is, the attempted responses to, or confirmations of, identitary processes common to the subject, arise through such orientations.

In the fourth article, "Eve and the Apples: Women Adventists and Nourishing the Temple of God", Gabriel Vázquez Dzul presents Eve as a metaphor for womankind in the Adventist conception of women's tasks, where woman, as the cause of sin, earns redemption by caring for the body of the "other" through her role as food-preparer. This conception of the feminine role in purifying the body-as-temple is, to a certain point, manifested in practice, the dimension where women become the central figure of a worldwide congregation. The main objective of the article is to describe and analyze the Adventist conception of the body as the repository of the Holy Spirit, and to reflect on the figure of women as the possessors of the practical elements of self-care.

The questions that orient this study include the following: According to Adventists, what role do women perform in the care of the body?; and, What ritual place do women occupy in this edification of the Temple of God? A rigid alimentary code and a singular asceticism are two of the primary elements that attract new Adventists because of their potential to relieve converts' pre-existing health problems; which may include anything from respiratory infections to cancerous tumors. It is through this structure of alimentation and temperance that women have established their presence both within the limits of local temples and well beyond them; though in daily life this alimentary regimen may be somewhat flexible, especially for the young.

The Adventist's body is one that is purified by ingesting the foods that their religious diet allows and by observing certain doctrines. This is a never-ending process because each individual must remain ritually clean. In reality, it means the process of constructing a body that has a starting point but no end: Adventists begin this process at the moment of their conversion and it can only be interrupted by death. Converts

place their faith in the second coming of Christ when the resurrection of the dead will take place. This article is part of a broader research project centered on the topic of gender relations and the construction of Adventist femininities and masculinities; an analysis that places special emphasis on the religious participation of the female and male members of the *Adolfo López Mateos* center of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the city of Chetumal, Quintana Roo.

The fifth study, and the last one in the *Thematic Section*, is called “The Meaningful Body: Identitary Emblems in Plain View: The Fetishist Movement in Guadalajara.” Here, Rogelio Marcial examines tattooing and other corporal modifications as processes of the construction of identity that several juvenile cultures systemically use as symbolisms and artistic expressions to manifest their expectations, visions of the future, discontinuities, yearnings, frustrations, doubts and certainties; all with the intention of manifesting cultural difference due to the lack—at times, absence—of spaces for expression available to Mexico’s younger generations.

Among these juvenile cultures we find the so-called “fetishers” (*fetichistas*), better known as the “modern primitives” (*primitivos modernos*), who consider the body to be the ideal vehicle for bearing (and displaying to others) the identitary emblems that synthesize their particular worldview; images that will, in fact, remain on their skin for the rest of their lives. While examining the cultural context from which this juvenile culture and the characteristics of the identity processes they construct as a group emerge, the article analyzes the cultural conditions in the city of Guadalajara (Jalisco, Mexico), emphasizing the process of social stigmatization that tends to arise around those who, though aware of their exposure to this process, insist upon expressing their worldviews by modifying their bodies through tattooing, dying their hair, piercings (corporal perforations), branding (marks made with a red-hot iron), scarring (using a pointed or sharp instrument to etch a chosen design) and other body modifications.

Turning to the *Documents Section*, we present “The Theoretical Astronomy of New Spain: Francisco Dimas Rangel and the *Aurora Borealis* of 1789” by Heréndira Téllez Nieto and Juan Manuel Espinosa Sánchez. After a thorough bibliographical history of the period that includes references and notes on the *Aurora Borealis* in general and, more specifically, the one that occurred in México in 1789, the authors present a version of

a document entitled, *Discurso físico sobre la formación de las auroras boreales* ("A Physics Discourse on the Formation of the *Aurora Borealis*") by José Francisco Dimas Rangel, an expert watchmaker from Valladolid, who in his lifetime crafted eleven mechanical clocks for churches, including one for the Metropolitan church and another for the city of Lima. The event that gave rise to his "*Discurso...*" was, as just mentioned, the *Aurora Borealis* seen in Mexico City in 1789 and that, as tended to happen in such cases, triggered heated discussions not only among men of science who exchanged opinions on the phenomenon in the most prestigious media of the time (such as the *Gaceta de Literatura* and the *Gaceta de México*) but also among lesser known and less publicized voices, including that of Dimas Rangel with his *Discurso físico...*, the document presented here. This discourse was not included in any of the aforementioned publications and was probably printed in a modest run of looseleaf pamphlets, reason for which the *Discurso físico...* has been little studied up to now. Though cited on several occasions, its limited availability has left us largely unaware of its influence on other important discussions of the *Aurora Borealis*.

The *General Section* of this issue opens with an article by Roberto Martínez González: "On the Existence of a Purépecha *Nahualismo* and Cultural Continuity in Mesoamerica." In this essay, the author delves into the question of the cultural unity of Mesoamerica through an analysis of a symbolic system that was widely disseminated in this macro-region: *nahualismo*. Taking the Purépecha culture as his case study, Martínez González begins by asking whether the ideas of that culture that associated anthropomorphic entities with non-human forms pertain to what he has called *nahualismo*. He turns to contemporary ethnographic information to construct a more global image of all those personages, practices and beliefs that could be associated with the figure of the *nahualli*.

This essay demonstrates, and concludes, that to reach an understanding of the complex cultural dynamics that gave rise to the Mesoamerican formation, we must begin by defining both those phenomena that did indeed exist, as well as those that were absent in the different regions, not in terms of cultural features, but in relation to a more or less similar worldview to which numerous societies became integrated, though many others remained distanced in different times and areas. This angle allows us to speak of both a Mesoamerican prehistory in which we can recognize, though only in an isolated manner, some of the elements of

their worldview as contemporary Mesoamerican peoples and a Mesoamerican way of interpreting the modern world. This entails recognizing that cultural transformation is a process that began well before the arrival of the conquerors and has continued into the present.

Relaciones closes issue 117 with the article “The Mexican Apostolic Catholic Church in Chiapas (1925-1934)” by Miguel Lisbona Guillén, which deals with relations between Church and State. This essay affirms that the post-revolutionary period in 20th century Mexico witnessed one of the most controversial aspects of the relations between the Catholic Church and the National State, aside from the well documented anti-clerical policies and the violent confrontations that occurred primarily in western Mexico. Lisbona Guillén refers to the schism that opened when a recently created religious group separated from orthodox Catholicism to create a new cult: the Mexican Apostolic Catholic Church (MACC), an institution that showed its willingness to support government policy and establish itself as a national level religious organization. The article narrates the problems that emerged due to the presence of this new religious proposal on the coast of Chiapas (more concretely, in the city of Tapachula), and shows how the conflicts caused by its existence had a common denominator in the erratic performance of institutions in Chiapas when it came to implementing the anticlerical measures that were desired –or said– to be national-level policies.

According to the author, in the wider picture, the postrevolutionary religious conflict showed the degree to which legislators in Chiapas were subject to national power, though he also places in evidence the lack of coordination among those same national level institutions, and between them and state-level powers. In many respects, the role played by the MACC seems to be that of a rather awkward political instrument, though it also exemplified the anti-clerical policy instituted by the national State. More than the religious content that it offered on the coast of Chiapas, its mere presence, together with that of the priest José Ramírez, demonstrated that Chiapas was indeed integrated into the Mexico that emerged from the Mexican Revolution.