Embodied anthropology: Anthropology from oneself[1]

Mari Luz Esteban

Departamento de Antropología y Filosofía de los Valores, Universidad del País Vasco - Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (Spain)

I have been doing research on health and the body from a feminist perspective for twelve years; for the last eight years I have focused on the issue of body image. One of the definite aspects for this has been the fact that the subjects, orientations and questions that have guided my studies are closely articulated with my own circumstances and experiences, of which I have been aware all these years[2]. I would not say that in my case both life and research have always been in agreement, but they have been closely connected and the achievement of the target of my research includes implicitly being able to understand the darkest parts of my own sexual, bodily, emotional and intellectual experience. I have never written about such links between life and the research process: I have only stated so during oral presentations of my work, always taking into account the audience I was facing. There are several reasons for this silence: self-consciousness when talking about myself, feeling naked in front of the audience, the risk of being misunderstood or rejected. And besides, we must bear in mind that I was a beginner in anthropology, that I came from another professional area and that my research had been around anthropology, and not anthropology itself.

But if the articulation between life and anthropology has been a general feature in all my research it is stronger when related to body image issues. The influence of what one has lived upon what one has written is so important that a few months ago I realised that if I wanted to carry on with my research in this field I had to focus on the connections between my own experience and my anthropological work. I think it is about time to make it explicit and to contribute to a minor but necessary discussion in our area. Thus, the main goal of this article is to reflect on how my research

work upon body image shows interactions with my own experience. Furthermore, at the end of the article I will refer to the relationship between self-ethnographies, mostly those coming from medical anthropology, and anthropology at home.

As far as my body experience and identity are concerned, there are three key elements:

–   the direct influence of contemporary Western culture on the body;

–   specific symptoms and problems;

–   the intersections produced in my own personal, social and professional identity, the multiplicity of selves that I have embodied as a woman, a feminist, a women's doctor and anthropologist, all of which have a tension between them, and something specific and converging around the subject-matter of the body.

I must say that I owe a great deal to feminism for making me understand that what is corporal is never natural, but always socially and politically constructed. And, mostly, I have to thank feminism for having given me the opportunity to understand the idea that the body is not only a place for discrimination but for resistance and confrontation as well. However, both my professional training and practice in a peripheral and alternative field within medicine, such as family planning is, have allowed me to make a "cultural break" and acquire an "anthropological sensibility" before getting in touch with anthropology as such, this being a positive influence on my further work. Only lately have I approached the body from an anthropological point of view, but, no doubt, it was a good final point for a process that started as early as the age of eighteen. Anthropology has been a first rate ingredient in this process. It allowed me to reveal some aspects related to my personal experience which were hidden up until then and to find alternative forms of approaching and facing them so as to understand the body culture in which we are immersed. Furthermore, it has been an incentive to value and legitimate a space for our own analysis, that is, an alternative analysis that is sometimes set against the dominant perspectives in other reference frames.

The fact of consciously and explicitly interconnecting one's own body experience and the research I will tackle later on is referred to as "embodied anthropology" by means of which I try to claim an anthropological exercise which takes into account this twofold dimension:

The first one is articulated with the analysis starting from the concept of *embodiment* [3] (*corporización* [4] in Spanish). A concept which brilliantly integrates the tension between individual, social and political body [5].

The second one referring to the "self" (self-observation, self-analysis) (Hernández, 1999), the relevancy of departing from oneself in order to understand the others, mostly when "we have gone through the same things".

An anthropologist faced with her self-analysis

In 1993 I started a study on body image that was within a European project but basically located in Spain [(6)]. I studied various phenomena with a certain general view, mostly on European grounds, such as regulation of food through diets or exhibition of the body and catwalk modelling, and advertising [(7)]. The main research techniques were: interviews with men and women who had significant experience related to their image (due to job, main activity or sexual orientation); active observation of various contexts (surgery rooms of various specialist fields; fashion-related venues and events, women and mixed groups, feminist forums, etc.) as well as national and international publications related to image and fashion.

However, I began to be interested in this subject when I finished secondary school as my body went through a radical change: suddenly I put on 15 kg and started to suffer hirsutism, which still prevails, although it has started to fade away thanks to electrolysis. From such significant changes as overweight and hirsutism, shame, guilt, and the routine of diets became part of my life for a long time. I kept the shame and guilt secret and, consequently, did not have the relief of confession [(8)].

Hirsutism, or the excessive growth of hair on a woman's face, especially when it takes place in the middle of youth, puts one in a rather ambiguous and painful situation. On the one hand, culturally it brings up the image of the "bearded woman" who is taken from fair to fair as a paradigm of error, horror, deformity and otherness. Besides, it symbolises sexual non-definition at an age when one is supposed to be building social and sexual identity in a society that is not prepared to accept or tackle ambivalence. It all produces negative feelings and reactions, which can be different as well: one can feel insecure, ashamed, powerless, enraged whereas the others can feel commiseration, pity or uncertainty towards you. They can also be cruel. In most cases, silence and a certain isolation builds up around you so that you remain under the other's gaze with no right of reply and you end up fixed, enchained and suffocated by their, sometimes, evasive gaze [(9)]. But this general reaction has nothing to do with the search for solutions. I mean that even though today there are rather efficient treatments, both my private and professional experiences make me think that young wom-

en suffering from hirsutism today are "left to their own devices" at an age when they have hardly started to make their own decisions. Their families and social background overlook them, even the health system underestimates the issue and considers it a second rate medical problem. Everything related to image has does not have the same social or professional consideration, but these discomforts are absolutely hierarchic, whatever one's own perception, experience or suffering are.

The case of being overweight, however, is quite different. Ideal thinness is so imperative that the danger of putting on kilograms has a disproportionate consideration and people are systematically pushed to going on a diet. By the way, this is also an option when one is not overweight, because what lies under it is an encouragement to discipline and self-regulation which, in the end, is an effective and sophisticated form of social and ideological control so typical of our society.

Diet became a substantial part of my living pattern, of my life. There were two main stages intertwined by means of transitional intervals:

–   "Personal and social success", where I used to lose weight and reconcile myself with my body, taking great care of my appearance;
–   The image of failure reflected in the mirror when my main goal was to erase my body definitely, trying to conceal it, for instance, under baggy clothes. In both cases, the role and valuation of others were crucial, shifting almost automatically from praise to silence, or to recrimination for "neglect".

The continuous alterations in weight made me eat compulsively and I suffered from bulimic attacks, as often happens in these cases [10]. As a result of this, I became gloomy and introvert at an age when I was starting to have my first love and sexual experiences and was wondering what on earth I was to do with my medical studies and professional career. Then, I got in touch with a group of feminists in my hometown, which is an industrial town. As often happened back then, what we called "the Basauri women's group" was to create a family planning centre [11] where, years later, I started to work as a doctor.

Suddenly my body became the main character and was enormously visible, both for me and for the others, going through a process of absolute hyper-objectivation and becoming the prism through which the me and the others valued what was going on within me. My "being in the world", my "existing in the body" was made into the visible, the external body [12], and the seen body [13]. What I lived or perceived beyond my appearance did not matter, but what did not match the social ideal did. For a long time I strongly felt that I was a victim. What had happened to me and the social stigma it

carried with it, because, as I have said before, ugliness and deformity are otherness par excellence (Chapkis, 1988). I was also a victim of silence and isolation: thousands of talks on weight, body and image, made by experts and non-experts alike, make up for a great deal of time and space in Western societies; but, generally speaking, they are mechanical, repetitive and stereotyped to the point of satiety [14]. People are worried about weight lost or put on, about firm, protuberance-free bodies (Bordo, 1990). People are worried about the body's social success or failure. That's it. Besides, the fact that either losing or putting on weight is not a serious illness and that there has not been a trend towards creating associations or regulating self-help practice, except for serious cases, makes it difficult to find real advice or help [15].

What was my family's role in all this? I think that the main point is the fact that I was socialised in a middle class background and that my parents were teachers. Like all the teachers of their generation my parents had a rather complex professional status during the Franco era, with social prestige, especially in rural areas, on the one hand, and a precarious socio-economic level which improved later on, on the other. They had a strong perception of their responsibility as educators and keepers of the social order. In my family, mind has always come before body and in this order the daughter's sex was of no importance (I have no brothers). So my family background was characterised by avoiding and silencing sex. This was characteristic not only of a given historical moment in Spain but of a given social class as well. And this does not speak for a good experience of the body. However, the gender neutrality has positive and negative dimensions. Positive because I have been allowed to grow an androgynous mind and intellect, which are really valuable for me; and negative, because I had to unlearn and learn many questions related to managing the emotional, the bodily and the feminine by myself. Being aware of the specificity of my own familiar and social locus has helped me to always bear in mind that the cultural dictates on the body have to be analysed in their historical and geographical contexts, at micro-experience level, but also at the social, political and economic macro-process levels.

The negative part of this personal journey has been the suffering I went through for many years, the feeling of having made a mistake, not only as a woman, but as a human being as well, in something I was not able to see but could intuitively tell as definitive. I thought that I had neglected myself, that I was in danger; because that is the way our society sees lack of control. Accumulated doses of resentment [16] have also been positive and negative. I felt resentment against those who daily reminded me of my

"error" or went on about other people's errors; and this resentment was aimed at the social system as well. But my targets were well defined: one was against my colleagues from the health system, who give overweight an importance that is out of proportion. The medical class, as I said before, tend to overlook other body issues, even aesthetical ones, that sometimes determine their patients' health and do not take into account positive and alternative elements underlying "other corporalities". Being as they are in a medical and social model "possessing the truth" and acting as a "roller", they are unable to see and hear things in perspective, from a suitable distance.

Other specific objects of resentment were my feminist colleagues (except for many good and valuable people) who usually barely scratched the surface of this issue and had great difficulty in applying the same criteria they used on issues that are of equal or greater importance, such as motherhood or work. However, the women's movement was able to use the body issue as a political weapon and an alternative and counter-cultural identity tool, especially during the 70's and 80's. Belonging to this family has allowed me to look closely at personal and collective contradictions, which has not always been pleasant. Nevertheless, there has been a positive dimension in all this: the urgent need to understand why it was so and the obligation to think about something over and over again until you see the light. It has given me the chance to improve my ability of looking at things, of looking at others, and myself and to undergo compulsory "training" which has proved a useful process of learning about research.

Moreover, some theoretical and bibliographical references were absolutely healing from a personal point of view and really encouraging from an intellectual perspective. I should mention three of them. The first is *Tu cuerpo, tú misma* by Susie Orbach (1987) [17], which is set against the background of a therapy with women and weight problems. Orbach poses a question which for me was thought-provoking and new: the relationship of obesity with issues other than eating and the pleasure of eating and the benefits of a body not recognised by society. A body that, despite not being normal, can provide distance and shelter against other cultural imperatives such as beauty, aesthetics and sexuality, which women in particular pay a price for. It is a book I have read and reread many times and which I have kept within the file of key readings. Another basic theoretical reference is Janet Polivy and Linda Thomsen's article "Los regímenes y otros transtornos de la alimentación" (1992) ("Diets and other eating disorders") warning against the physical and psychological dangers of dieting, mostly when it becomes a constant habit. After reading it, I became anti diets and

controlled eating, even though I have varied this position over the years. Finally, I must mention Susan Bordo's (1990) theoretical argument on body regulation in Western societies. Bordo argues that in our society there is a twofold and apparently contradictory principle that urges us to consume and overvalues self-control. Besides, she makes a precise diagnosis of gender implications in advertising, fashion and mass media, taking into account changes that have occurred for both men and women.

Some conclusions from within myself

More than twenty years have passed since I first embarked on this experience and I look back serene and satisfied. The most important symptoms and discomfort have disappeared, although new ones arise as I get older. I think that I see my experience around the body as the management of my own life, varying and combining diverse meanings and techniques. Discovering and learning to value the "power of the physical" [18] within myself has been very important. This power has sometimes been influenced by gender, but many other times it has been totally neutral. I must underline the significance of understanding that my appearance, rather than being an addition to my ability to think, was the union of the two and that the external appearance could be the centre whenever I wanted, without the other suffering any disability. It was always myself.

In this elaboration and reconstruction of my own process many different issues and protagonists have taken part. Particularly important for me was the fact that I lived within a social context that has continuously revised its cultural canons, as regards esthetical ideas, sexual practices and ways of being a man or a woman. Being a feminist with a leftist background with many contradictions regarding the body, has been very important, and enjoyable, for me was to set my body working in very different ways both within and beyond cultural conventions. Also very important was the fact that I worked for a decade as a doctor in a family planning centre, a privileged laboratory for personal, sanitary and political work and reflection.

Therefore, the general argument has been the construction of my own self as an adult. Later, this led me to make the image issue my anthropological object of study, a process with different stages, contents and questions. For example, I was a vegetarian for a long time and this allowed me to accept my body in a more autonomous way and to strengthen my critical position towards the official medical system. However, later I realised that naturism has the main characteristics of our culture as far as the body is concerned:

it contributes to the above mentioned hyperobjectivation of one's own body, and shares the same trend that urges us to consumerism and self-discipline. So, it is another version of the Western regulation of life through the body.

Not long ago I spent some time in Leon (Spain) and went through a meaningful experience with a group of cover girls. They were very young and rather dependent on their interaction with men (an experience I lacked when I was their age) but willing to find their equality space in society. The experience made me think about youth, image, being a man or a woman, womanhood, masculinity and neutral sexuality and, personally speaking, I reflected upon my appearance, my desires and/or my difficulties for exhibitionism, that is, seduction and interaction with others. Besides, I had the opportunity of trying out different roles, skills and images in a city where nobody knew me, which was a lot of fun. It also allowed me to come into contact with a wide business and commercial world, where models are just one element, even though sometimes the most visible: a stage with male and female characters, individual and collective, multiple and different, with diverse responsibilities for keeping a certain body culture.

I will mention one significant episode. The Leon girls taking part in beauty or modelling contests told me that during the interviews they were asked about the fashion shops they liked best. It seems that their answers were important for the contestants' final scores, so they answered carefully. This, and other facts, made me realise that in practice what there is at stake around the image issue is not only a question of gender ideology but a wider one, where a certain political and economic model is asserted and where gender speaks for a whole social system.

I cannot say that in my case research has been exactly a form of therapy, and, though "healing", it has been a form of redemption or expiation [19]. But it is clear that the elaboration and reconstruction of my own process have found a final projection in anthropological work. Although on a very primary level, I have seen some of the current dilemmas on body analysis clearly reflected in me. Now, I can easily place and rebuild on me this "post-structuralist body" that Terence Turner defines as «abstract, singular, intrinsically self-existing and socially disconnected, individual» (1994: 46) and which is associated with passively determined (disembodied) social behaviour, personal identity and cultural significance by authorised power discourses (ibidem). But, simultaneously, feminism has taught me to understand the body as subjective and objective at the same time, full of material, personal and social significance, an agent receiving and producing discourses (ibidem).

If this is what I perceive and experience, why should I not think that other women – even those who are most "exposed", those who "risk their bodies" (models, prostitutes) – bear the same contents, contradictions and tensions? Why don't we start out from the idea that making an in-depth study of these women is one of the keys for anthropological study of the body because it will make us understand that we can change our culture? As Turner argues, in contemporary capitalist societies the body is the locus for social inequality, but also for empowering (1994). And I think that in me and other men and women those two components are confronted and it is easier to speculate about them than to analyse them. We are worried about the analytic difficulty that this tension carries, but we should be even more concerned about not being able to guess what the future outcome of the struggle will be. Therefore, it is necessary to revise what it means for men and women to be both social agents and agents of their own life by means of the body [20]. And this implies alternative analytical approaches [21].

Anthropology of the body has developed a lot during the past decade. However, I always wonder whether we are empirically demonstrating a mere passing wave or speciality, or whether we are really attempting a new way of thinking about, of tackling, the human being/experience, which is something that should turn the discipline upside down.

I am arguing in favour of putting to one side excessively linear anthropological analyses and of going more deeply into the complexity of processes and the variety of contexts and experiences. Anthropology can be very valuable for understanding and tackling situations in which there are high levels of social suffering by discovering all the cultural, social and political factors that are part of a given situation. I think it is also necessary to reconsider how anthropology focuses on cultural diversity. Whenever we speak about body or image we tend to consider our culture as uniform (Becker, 1994) so it is necessary to mention which collectives we are referring to and distinguish between ideal and real levels of experience. I also think that the difference established between cultures is excessive. It is true that relationships between self and body vary in different societies and that in Western societies there is an individuation of the self and consequently of body experience not found in other contexts. But the new theoretical approaches to the body insist on making the dominant vision on the identity construction and the individuation and personification processes more complex and diverse. These should help us to make more precise analyses and to be more aware of the historical changes and inner variability of each social group.

My stance has not always been as welcome as I should have liked in the different backgrounds I work and live. The argument that in the world of body exhibition, especially in modelling, there are ambiguous and complex, positive and negative elements, as well as changes for women, has been the most controversial issue [22]. In my opinion, both social sciences and feminism tend to make a restrictive analysis of image and gender, which prevents us from seeing all the meanings and contexts associated to it. The models represent not only a physical ideal but a social character as well, and the so-called top-models are nowadays a paradigm of autonomy, social success and economic power (values traditionally linked to masculinity) in a particular political and economic model (Soley, 1995). The fact that they are women and that their autonomy and success come from using their body does not matter. Thus, modelling is a basic reference when critically analysing the new work and social mobility patterns [23] for women.

I am against seeing women as victims in their experiences regarding image because they cannot be seen as social agents. And I think that we must deeply revise some issues, such as social contradiction between beauty and intelligence or the use of seduction in public or in the work place, which is maliciously and mistakenly referred to as "women's weapons". These issues I reject because they contribute to the social underrating of women. I am fully aware of the fact that my arguments are slippery and need to be thoroughly investigated. But I have never been so sure about what I am saying, because there is something in me that rebels against simplification, against victimisation and pushes me to go further.

I am particularly interested in the influence that social sciences have on ruling behaviours and homogenising culture. That is much more evident when talking about such scientific fields as Biomedicine, or anthropological periods as colonial expansion, but which dies out as we get closer to the present time. Even though the anthropology or the social sciences that deal with the body seem to be critical and aim to unmask, I am sure that they have an influence upon behaviours and discourses, an influence totally matching the ideological system they serve and which they are a part of. In this sense I am worried about the fact that from the anthropological field we keep on dividing humanity into two groups: the one made up by anthropologists, intellectuals, or feminists, and the others'. As if we were subjects, and the others were victims. I am worried because we all make up the group of the others, even if the starting point and the living conditions are rather different. And that is why I see the same need for a critical gaze, as for self-reflection. It would be interesting to analyse the importance of the appearance of the seen body, in academic and scientific life, to deter-

mine the physical profiles promoted, how image and body are ruled in our field, how "normal" and "abnormal" are constructed, and what all this has to do with other requirements such as group belonging or social self-legitimisation. A restrictive and narrow definition of otherness going beyond "good and evil" determines the anthropological task. Talking about oneself from one's experience, about one's contradictions, conflicts and pleasures, without giving up or censoring one's own body is a basic condition for this task.

As far as I am concerned, a minor and peripheral dimension of anthropology could be developed: self-anthropology or anthropology from oneself, that is, a radical form of anthropology at home [24]. This has been controversial because some methodological principles key to the previously dominant positivism have been actively restated, such as the status given to objectivity or to the distance between researcher and research object. However, this practice is useful for evaluating other means of expression or other approaches to social reality, and it recognises the value of the personal, the subjective in scientific or academic fields, without breaking down the anthropological task [25]. And for some people this implies a real epistemological menace (Hernández, 1999).

Self-ethnography and medical anthropology

Medical anthropology, the framework of this congress, is a suitable field, an emerging context, for self-ethnography, although there are only a few people who have spoken about their experiences of illness [26]. In general, those who have done so have survived serious cancer processes, disabilities caused by accidents or various illnesses that have pushed them to make a break in their lives [27]. At the same time or later on, they retrieve this experience and analyse it in an attempt to search for legitimisation, as a need to understand what has happened and inscribe it back on their biographies, sometimes facing arguments, perspectives and even colleagues from their own field.

In all these works the limits between researcher and object of study is blurred, and so are the boundaries between the subject who thinks and systematises and the subject patient, between perception, experience, emotion and elaboration. Their narratives are full of feelings and pain and become the thread to explain and understand multiple aspects that are related not only to health care and the relationship with professionals but also to the experience of illness and disability. But beyond their power to be touching, it is

their power to convey and rebuild states, situations, roles and experiences in an absolutely committed, septic and intentionally non-neutral manner that is most striking. For what makes these ethnographies special is mostly their authors' skills at reflection, observation and self-observation, the details and thoroughness of interpretations, which do not contradict a balanced, self-critical and relativist analysis. These self-ethnographies are fed and re-fed by high doses of passion, rebelliousness and resentment: against the health system, against discipline, against society, against destiny. And this is an excellent starting point for scientific creation as I said before. They are works that captivate readers and place them in situations that force them to commit, to take a stance, even if they have not undergone them themselves.

One's own experience is a knowledge resource, but it is also a sharp shock and that is essential. Analysis of this experience is claimed to be an exceptional strategy to reach experience contents and interpretations otherwise unreachable and which risk being excessively intellectualised in other studies. But because they complain, this field does not always welcome studies like these. These issues are frequently criticised for being individual and personal, as well as for getting carried away by emotions or experience. Behind this patronising and apparently generous attitude there is an essential question for the discipline: what is the right and precise interpretation of the facts? This attitude is patronising about what can and cannot be done, which is nothing but an expression of fear about the possible lack of control which broadly characterises our culture and which has been an important axis for constructing social and anthropological thought.

Authors who apply self-ethnography to them do not accept limits to their professional fields, their research task or knowledge, which seem endless at first sight. I do not mean the logical conditioning of theoretical models, but self-control, a filter that the discipline sets up and legitimates it. Despite all the changes, since the 19th century the dominant scientific framework gave priority to what was quantifiable and had the social function of standardising and normalising behaviours. These methodological principles also affect anthropology, for it has adapted them to its specific features, clearly stating what is scientific and what is not. It is true that society's borders are accounted for in anthropological analysis and this grants it singularity against others, but it does not prevent it from building other borders, other abnormalities that are more difficult to incorporate and which are quickly confronted. In self-ethnography, informant and researcher as one claim their right to speak till the end. And this may bring unrest.

As Donna Haraway (1995) pointed out, all observation, all analysis is placed on it and is subjective, partial and incomplete, while at the same time real, privileged and necessary. Self-ethnographic tales have the same doses of partiality as the others, but are absolutely privileged and essential. Besides, they have an advantage typical of anthropology: as a result of the bad conditions in which observation occurs and develops, and because of the legitimisation difficulties from the start they are more aware of their own limitations than anthropology itself. However, I am not only claiming the need to tackle experience, but to use one's own experience as a way to attain the cultural, political and economic dimensions of the analysed phenomena, from local to global and from individual to collective.

Consequently, self-ethnography, self-anthropology, are a good way of re-setting old scientific debates and of establishing new ones, a good way of fighting against chronic anthropological or feminist illnesses, of enriching theory and methodology, of making a deep revision of the discipline and social sciences in general. A scientifically necessary exercise because it allows the merging of positions and realms of the human that we still consider as being irreconcilable. But what make them essential are not only the precise results, its methodological and epistemological contributions or their right to be taken into account, but legitimisation of the anthropologist's self, his/her own existence and, therefore, the feasibility of anthropology itself.

Notes

[1] This paper has been translated into English by Eli Tolaretxipi.

[2] I think that this kind of articulation characterises scientific work in general, though connections between biography, research and social and historical context is not always linear.

[3] The concept of *embodiment* is central to the current study of the body, even though it is generally used in this area mostly in Anglo-Saxon backgrounds and not used exactly in the same sense by all authors. There are authors who prefer to use the term *bodilyness* (Csordas, 1994). The notion of *embodiment* aims to overcome the idea that what is social is inscribed in the body, to refer to the bodily as the real ground of culture as the "material process of social interaction" (ibidem) underlining its potential, intentional, intersubjective, active and relational dimension. The body as: «Agent in, and as locus of intersection of, both an individual psychological order and a social order, and as well as for seeing the body as both a biological being and a conscious, experiencing, acting, interpreting entity (...) The interactive dimension of agency acquires a broader basis when the social actor is understood as an embodied agent» (Lyon and Barbalet, 1994: 55,63).

A perspective searching for the break of the main dualities of Western thought: mind/body, subject/object, objective/subjective, objective/preobjective, passive/active, rational/emotional, language/experience; or, what is more important, a perspective that discusses them. I consider that within the notion *mindful body* first used by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret Lock (1987) for their

proposal of body and health analysis, this conjunction between rational, emotional and bodily processes is well reflected.

[4]   In Spanish there is no agreement as to how to translate this concept. Some authors are using "encarnación" (García Selgas, 1994; Del Valle 1999). Others prefer "*corporización*" (Capitan, 1999) trying to avoid the religious content of the former term. There are also those who use the term in English (Orobitg, 1999). I have chosen the adjective "*encarnado/a*" and the noun "*corporización*".

[5]   In any case, present social theory derives from Michel Foucault's work, where, for instance, the concept biopower is underscored. See, for example, Foucault (1987,1992).

[6]   The project was called "*La Construction des sexualités en Europe du Sud*" (1993-1996) and apart from me, there were representatives from Greece, France and Portugal. This project was coordinated by Marie-Elisabeth Handman (Laboratoire d'Anhropologie Sociale-E.H.E.S.S. de Paris) and consulted by Teresa del Valle (UPV-EHU). Subsidies were received from *the Ministère de la Recherche* and the A.N.R.S.- Agence Nationale de Recherches sur le SIDA from France and the Programa de Cooperación Franco-Española from Spain.

[7]   The most important papers I have published so far are the following: "*El cuidado de la imagen en los procesos vitales. Creatividad y miedo al descontrol*" (1997/98) focused, among other things, on reflections upon diets and weight regulation; and "*Promoción social y exibición del cuerpo*" (2000) which analyses the exhibition of the body in careers such as catwalk modelling and advertising.

[8]   In her book *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Ruth Benedict (1974 [1946]) makes a distinction between guilt cultures (Western cultures) and shame cultures (like the Japanese culture) stating, among other things, the fact that in Western cultures confession is used as an expiation of guilt. However, I think that for some marginal body experiences shame and guilt are closely linked.

[9]   In *Perder la* piel (1996) Marta Allué thoroughly explains and analyses the experience of being observed when one has a look that socially generates contradictory feelings.

[10]   Some authors warn against continuous dieting, which is something that young women in particular start at an early age, because of its physical and psychological consequences. Besides, bulimia can often be related to dieting. See, Polivy and Thomsen (1992).

[11]   These centres, mostly promoted by feminist women, were established during the post Franco era with tight boundaries with the public health movement and other left-wing movements, and were very significant in Catalonia, Madrid and the Basque Country.

[12]   I use this expression to refer to the body image and everything that surrounds it, as opposed to "internal" body that has been related to women, especially with everything related to reproduction. See Esteban (2000) for the relationships between the two terms and the risks involved in this differentiation.

[13]   I must thank Rosa Medina for making me aware of the notion of "seen" body, which is not exactly the same as "external" body, which is the term I have used most frequently. She has warned me about the risk involved in excessively reducing my analysis by not taking into account other dimensions of body identity and experiences other than the visible.

I must also thank Beatriz Moral, Carmen Díez, Edorta Arana, Iban Ayesta, Luisa Etxenike and Raquel Santiso for their comments and suggestions about the first draft.

[14]   There are some qualitative changes from time to time, such as the discussion on sizes in the fashion and design industry in Spain two years ago after some models and ex-models reported weight and size restrictions and requirements in their job. Anorexia associations because of the influence of fashion designers, editors and advertisers also made complaints on social trends regarding the body. As a result, a commission was created in the Spanish Chamber and a report written, by means of which some agreements were reached with various textile firms and fashion designers about the different steps to be taken. The only news I have heard on the evaluation of this campaign was at the *Pasarela Cibeles* fashion show in Madrid (2001). An association called *Anorexicas* reported that the agreement on the standard size of the models had not been fulfilled, and that the standard size was 38 and not 40.

[15]   Anyway, in some places in Spain such as Zaragoza there are compulsive eaters' associations modelled after the self-help groups in the United States.

[16] Juan José Millás, in an article published in *El País* in the second fortnight of August 2000, claimed that when young people come up to him for advice on requirements for writing short stories or novels he answers that writing needs passions and resentment, specifically directed or general. On reading this article I realized that resentment could be a good starting point for research and self-ethnography.

A "less passionate" more intellectual version of this resentment could be what Celia Amorós calls the "polemic referent" a concept that, she argues, we should all bear in mind when we read, posing the question as "against what is the author writing".

[17] From the same author, see: 1978, 1980.

[18] I have borrowed this expression from Manuel Puig. He used it in an interview with journalist and writer Rosa Montero in 1988. She asked him if he was scared of getting older and he answered that he began to be aware of the end of youth when his body started to change, he began to lose hair and become a bit curved, noticing the loss of his "physical power". See the article "*Pasión por entender*" by the same author, where she remembers the interviews and interviewees who struck her most.

[19] Ernesto de Martino, underlining the change carried out in *Tristes Tropiques* by C. Lévi-Srtauss in the preface to his book *La tierra del remordimiento* (1999), makes a very interesting point about the passions underlying ethnographical work. The following quote is very interesting. It shows the self-ethnographic process I am defending: «For the ethnographical journey we need not give up the world that we think rejects us to get it back through a mythical regeneration, but to be aware of certain humanistic limitations of our own civilization; it is an incentive to go 'further' not beyond humanity in general, but our own circumscribed humanity, 'put into question' by a certain historical moment» (*ibidem*: 19).

[20] The term *agency*, so difficult to translate into Spanish, came about by considering subjects as agents and holds an important place in current feminist anthropology, together with the so called "practice" theory of social action as follow up and confrontation and resistance against cultural ideals.

[21] An interesting approach is the one by Teresa del Valle in her article "*La memoria del cuerpo*" (1997) which focuses on the analysis of the lives of two women. Del Valle analyses the interrelations between experience dimensions such as illness and motherhood, where the body has a specific projection, and the reconstruction of their own memory by the two women.

[22] Of course I am referring to a certain way of showing the body, of using it in social interaction, which would not be exactly like the one occurring in nudism or sports. However, I consider that making a difference between fields and exhibiting forms of the body would not stand against joint analyses of "exposed" bodies and that distinction does not help much when trying to find new contents and clues.

[23] I am using Soley's expression (1995:22).

[24] Anthropology is not the only science that has included "self" in its theoretical elaboration, but it has affected all social sciences since postmodernism and feminism attracted attention to it during the last decades of the 20th century (Hernández, 1999). Self-awareness groups were basic for theoretical and practical activities of feminism (see Esteban, 1993 and 1996).

[25] Following this, Hernández (1999) underlines that self-ethnography has a double commitment: to culture itself and to the scientific and academic community, observing and analyzing implications derived from this simultaneous activity. However, there is something against this kind of anthropology. There have been more definite practices and ethnographies than elaborate theories, thus reducing its "scientific power".

[26] See, for example, the references included in Capitán (1999). Some cases mentioned by this author are: Robert Murphy's (1987), based upon his paraplegia-tetraplegia; Susan Di Giacomo's (1992) who has worked on her experience as a Hodgkin lymphoma patient; Oliver Sacks (1994), on paralysis of one of his legs; and Marta Allué's (1996), previously mentioned.

[27] There are other self-ethnographies that are not so specifically related to medical anthropology but close to it and based on intense discomfort experiences, such as the ones made by rape survivors who have later analysed their experience. See Winkler (1994).

References

Allué, Marta (1996) *Perder la piel*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

Becker, Anne (1994) "Nurturing and negligence: working on others' bodies in Fiji". In Csordas, T.J. (ed.) *Embodiment and experience. The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 100-115.

Benedict, Ruth (1974[1946]) *El crisantemo y la espada: patrones de la cultura japonesa*. Madrid: Alianza.

Bordo, Susan (1990) "Reading the slender body". In Jacobus, M.; Fox Keller, E. and S. Shuttleworth, (eds.) *Body Politics. Women and the Discourses of Science*. New York; London: Routledge, p. 83-112.

Capitán Camañes, Anna (1999) *Ángeles rotos. Las imágenes culturales de los amputados y sus modelos de gestión social*. Doctoral Thesis. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona.

Chapkis, Wendy (1988[1985]) *Beauty secrets. Women and the Politics of Appearance*. London: The Women Press.

Csordas, Thomas J. (ed.) (1994) *Embodiment and experience. The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Di Giacomo, Susan (1992) "Metaphor as Illness: Postmodern Dilemmas in the Representation of Body, Mind and Disorder". *Medical Anthropology*, vol. 14, p. 109-137.

Esteban, Mari Luz (1993) *Actitudes y percepciones de las mujeres respecto a su salud reproductiva y sexual*. Doctoral Thesis. Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona. Microfilmed

Esteban, Mari Luz (1996) "Relaciones entre feminismo y sistema médico-científico". In Ortiz, T. and G. Becerra (eds.) *Mujeres de Ciencia. Mujer, Feminismo y Ciencias Naturales, Experimentales y Tecnológicas*. Granada: Instituto de Estudios de la Mujer de la Universidad de Granada (Colección Feminae), p. 143-184.

Esteban, Mari Luz (1997/98) "El cuidado de la imagen en los procesos vitales. Creatividad y miedo al descontrol". *Kobie. Antropología Cultural*, num. 8, p. 27-54.

Esteban, Mari Luz (2000) "Promoción social y exhibición del cuerpo". In Valle, T. del (ed.) *Perspectivas feministas desde la antropología social*. Barcelona: Ariel-Antropología, p. 205-242.

Foucault, Michel (1987) *La historia de la sexualidad I. La voluntad de saber*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, (1st Spanish edition, 1977, Mexico).

Foucault, Michel (1992[1977]) *Vigilar y castigar*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.

García Selgas, Fernando (1994) "El cuerpo como base del sentido de la acción social". *REIS: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, num. 68, p. 41-83. Tit. num.: "Monográfico sobre Perspectivas en Sociología del Cuerpo".

Haraway, Donna J. (1995[1991]) *Ciencia, cyborgs y mujeres. La reinvención de la naturaleza*. Madrid: Cátedra. (Feminismos).

Hernández García, Jone Miren (1999) "Auto/biografía. Auto/etnografía. Auto/retrato". *Ankulegi: Revista de antropología social*, Special Issue, September, p. 53-62. Tit. num.: "Antropología feminista: desafíos teóricos y metodológicos".

Lyon, M. L. and J. M. Barbalet (1994) "Society's body: emotion and the 'somatization' of social theory". In Csordas, T. J. (ed.) *Embodiment and experience. The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 48-66.

Montero, Rosa (2000) "La pasión por entender". *El País Semanal* (Sunday, January), num. 1214, p. 36-40.

Murphy, Robert F. (1987) *The Body Silent*. New York: Henry Holt.

Orbach, Susie (1978) *Fat is a feminist issue-the antidiet guide to permanent weight loss*. New York: Paddington Press.

Orbach, Susie (1980) "La obesidad: una perspectiva feminista". In Cardaci, D.; Alvaz, L. (eds.) *Mujer y medicina*. Xochimilco: Universidad Autónoma, p. 19-30.

ORBACH, Susie (1987) *Tu cuerpo, tú misma*. Barcelona: Juan Granica.

OROBITG, Gemma (1999) "El cuerpo como lenguaje. La posesión como lenguaje del género entre los Pumé de los Llanos de Apure (Venezuela)". *Ankulegi-Revista de Antropología Social*, Special Issue, September, p. 71-82. Tit. num.: "Antropología feminista: Desafíos teóricos y metodológicos".

POLIVY, Janet and Linda THOMSEN (1992[1988]) "Los regímenes y otros trastornos de la alimentación". In BLECHMAN, E.A. and K. D. BROWNELL. *Medicina conductual de la mujer*. Barcelona: Martínez Roca, p. 321-330.

SACKS, Oliver (1994[1984]) *A Leg to Stand On*. New York: Harper Collins.

SCHEPER-HUGHES, Nancy and Margaret LOCK (1987) "The mindful body. A prolegomenon to future work in medical anthropology". *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, num. 1, p. 6-41.

SOLEY, Patricia (1995) "High exposure: a estudy of modelling and the postmodern self". MA Honours in Cultural History. University of Aberdeen.

TURNER, Terence (1994) "Bodies and anti-bodies: flesh and fetish in contemporary social theory". In CSORDAS, T. J. (ed.) *Embodiment and experience. The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 27-47.

VALLE, Teresa del (1997) "La memoria del cuerpo". *Arenal. Revista de historia de las mujeres*, vol. 4, num. 1, p. 59-74.

VALLE, Teresa del (1999) "Procesos de la memoria. Cronotopos genéricos". In CARRERA SUÁREZ, I.; CID LÓPEZ, R. and A. PEDREGAL RODRÍGUEZ (eds.) *Cambiando el conocimiento: universidad, sociedad y feminismo*. Oviedo: KRK ediciones, p. 331-352.

WINKLER, Cathy (with Kate Wininger) (1994) "Rape-trauma. Contexts of meaning". In CSORDAS, T. J. (ed.) *Embodiment and experience. The existential ground of culture and self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 248-268.