

1.8 *Antonio Gramsci and medical anthropology now: hegemony, agency, and transforming persons*

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Introduction: Antonio Gramsci Today

This paper pursues a single objective: to demonstrate the urgency within contemporary medical anthropology of a direct and reflexive re-reading of the works of Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). In 1984 Michel Foucault declared that Gramsci was our most quoted and least known author. At a distance of twenty years from this evaluation, Gramsci continues to be evoked, in an indirect way, by some influential currents of Anglo-American medical anthropology⁽¹⁾. One important contribution was made in 1988 in an issue of the "Medical Anthropological Quarterly," edited and directed by Ronald Frankenberg (FRANKENBERG R. 1988, FRANKENBERG R. ed. 1988); a testimony of how essential a direct reading of Gramsci can be to the critical renewal of a discipline grounded in a closer relationship between anthropological theory, ethnographic practice, and political commitment. In the English-speaking world, Gramsci came to be known primarily through the cultural studies and reinterpretations of Raymond Williams (WILLIAMS R. 1977), studies whose "textual" limit seems to produce contradictions with Gramscian thought, which is strongly anchored in praxis. There is a dramatic and reflexive attention in Gramsci for the understanding of subjective aspects and forms of embodiment of the social dialectic in which he is intimately involved through participation in political struggles. But there is also a participatory attention, which I do not hesitate to call ethnographic, for the microphysics of social transformation, the hegemony of the state, as well as individual and collective agency. Just last year a valuable study by Kate Crehan of Gramsci's concept of culture, was published in the United States (CREHAN K. 2002). Crehan's work demon-

strates how a direct reading of Gramsci allows anthropologists to defamiliarize themselves with the classic vocabulary of the discipline and gain access to a theory that is radically critical of the concept of culture. As early as the first decade of the last century, in his youthful, pre-prison writings, Gramsci elaborated a breakdown or deconstruction of the concept of culture, which precludes any essentialist notion of the term and leads to the consideration of culture as thought in action, as a dialectical process involving knowledge, production, and transformation of the self, within a field of historical forces.

In Italian anthropology the situation appears to be different since there have been decades of debate on the importance of Gramsci's writings for anthropological research, beginning in 1948 and immediately following the publication of his letters from prison and the first prison notebooks⁽²⁾. Yet today, Gramsci seems to be neglected in general anthropology. This situation is in contrast to the extraordinary growth in historical, philosophical, and political studies of Gramsci in the last ten years in Italy and around the world, and particularly in Brazil and throughout Latin America⁽³⁾. But in Italy as elsewhere this rich reflowering of research has in turn found it difficult to interact and dialogue with anthropology. In the early 1950s the young Tullio Seppilli⁽⁴⁾, in parallel with Ernesto de Martino, laid the groundwork for the foundation of a Marxian-Gramscian medical anthropology, freed from ideological reductionism and mechanical positivism. Pursuing that same line of research he is engaged today is a scientific anthropology that reflects critically on health policies and on their strategic centrality both in the restructuring of contemporary capitalism and in the imagination of new perspectives of political commitment.

In this context, I have begun a seminar on a direct reading of Gramsci's works (PIZZA G. 2001-2002). As we have read Gramsci in our seminar we have found ourselves trying to come to terms with a dialogical and experimental way of thinking that eludes all the interpretive classifications furnished by the exegetes or by anthropological theory. What has emerged from our reading is not so much the importance of an "anthropological use" of Gramsci but his outright *anthropological vocation*. I should add immediately that it was Gramsci himself who defined his philosophy of praxis (a term with which he referred to historical materialism) as a "living philology" and, in another section of the notebooks, as an "anthropology." Here's a quote from Gramsci's text:

«One may say that the economic factor [...] is only one of the many ways in which the more far reaching historical process is presented (factors of race,

religion etc.), but it is this farther reaching process that the philosophy of praxis wishes to explain and exactly on this score it is a philosophy, an 'anthropology', and not a simple canon of historical research» (Q17§12).

In Gramsci, the term "anthropology" has to do with his idea of man as "historical product," and with his rigorous critique of the naturalistic reductionism of the biological sciences. This involves a political attention for the "living," which has not always been understood. As Athos Lisa (Gramsci's fellow prisoner) recalls in his memoir, Gramsci «never posed for himself abstract problems, which had no place in people's lives or had no connection to them» (LISA A. 1973: 77). But this capacity to institute in one's own political and intellectual action a unitary, critical, dialectical relationship between theory and praxis is, on the one hand, diametrically opposed to the idealist approach which separates the will from historical subjects, while on the other hand it is far removed from empiricism, from pragmatism, from a mechanical view of materialism which reduces social and cultural life to the question of productive relationships. The interpretation of Gramsci's work has often been translated into the imposition of external grids that have sometimes forced Gramsci's suggestions into a classical anthropological framework that was foreign to him. Gramscian anthropology and classical anthropology do not coincide. Gramsci's extraordinary interweaving of thought and life, his continuous striving to elaborate a living theory, constantly draws its strength from an unceasing dedication to study, but also from knowledge produced in working class struggles and the bodily experience of his personal vicissitudes and the physical suffering that accompanied him throughout his life. With respect to this last point, some scholars have even tried to psychologize and medicalize the figure of Gramsci and, incredible as it may seem, an Italian psychiatrist (RUDAS N. 1999) has recently written an essay proposing a sort of *Sardinian culture-bound syndrome* to explain the interrelationship of genius and suffering in Gramsci! What we have tried to do in our seminar, instead, is to "understand and feel" (as Gramsci conceives the duty of the intellectuals) the "living" quality that pervades his works. We have interpreted his "living philology" as an eminently anthropological imperative to place concepts at the point most intimately connected to the "experience" of flesh and blood historical subjects. Consider this example. In one of his letters from prison, Gramsci reflects on his isolation and expresses with great clarity the tension which to us appears to be human, political, and ethnographic all at the same time.

«I have lost much of the pleasure in reading. Books and magazines only offer general ideas, sketches (more or less successful) of general currents, in the world's life, but they cannot give the immediate, direct, vivid impres-

sion of the lives of Peter, Paul and John, of single, real individuals, and unless one understands them one cannot understand what is being universalized and generalized». (GRAMSCI A. 1996)

In contrast to many masters of contemporary critical thought, Gramsci is not interested in the foundation of a new theory of social reality which can then provide the instruments for taking action in praxis. He is interested in elaborating a living theory which reflects from its very constitution the concrete experience of real life and which gives rise to practical activity, an initiative of will, a dialogue of transformation.

It is the emotion I have felt in the direct reading of Gramsci that moves me to communicate to you the urgency of a return to his works. I will do this by following the points indicated in the subtitle of my paper: hegemony, agency, and the question of transformation.

Hegemony: The State as a Body Factory

Hegemony has been the most fortunate Gramscian concept but also the most misunderstood. Sometimes it is interpreted solely as the function of domination of consciousness exercised in the framework of the opposition between dominant and subjugated classes. This dichotomy constitutes one of the most misleading interpretations of what Gramsci wrote. Those who read Gramsci directly will never find in his thought a separation between hegemonic culture and subjugated culture, but an underlining of the minimal, intimate dimensions of the hegemonic dialectic observed above all in its contradictions. Gramsci's thought is constantly denaturalising and anti-essentialist. It is no coincidence that he makes use of sarcasm and irony as strong dialogical and critical instruments. His one is a dynamic way of thinking that insists on not viewing as eternal realities provisional power structures reflected in the concepts themselves. The dominant/subaltern opposition is a misunderstanding that has also been reproduced in American medical anthropologies that have often proposed a mechanical image of criticism of biomedical hegemony, neglecting forms of resistance and transforming creativity exercised by subaltern agents. Hegemony is not only State power exercising its authority in coercive action and in the organization of a consensus naturalized by its subjects as "spontaneous." Hegemony is also the politics of transformation exercised through the critical capacity to denaturalize, starting with one's own body, the modeling action of the State, thus bringing to light the dialectical interaction

between the State and the intimate life of individuals. The State functions as a “body factory”, an “anthropological workshop” (BURGIO A. 2003: 101). It takes on the task of elaborating, as Gramsci writes, “a new human type” (Q22§2), transforming the body and producing the idea itself of individual subjectivity. The State acts, therefore, in the intimacy of subjects. In 1934 Gramsci wrote in *Notebook 22*, dedicated to the analysis of Americanism and Fordism, «“State” means especially conscious direction of the great national multitudes; thus a sentimental and ideological ‘contact’ with such multitudes is necessary». In *Americanismo e fordismo* the attention for the State as a body factory is grounded in the centrality of workers’ bodies, of their exposure to transformation in the process of production. But the hegemonic relationship is still dialectical because it is also active on the side of the critical and antagonistic capacity of the subjects acted upon by the State. For this reason the understanding of hegemonic relationships depends on the concrete and situated analysis of relations of force that act, not on the already constructed subject but on subjectivity in construction. This scientific analysis of relations of force has no value for Gramsci unless it is connected to the motivated action of the embodied subject. This is why, though starting from the centrality of the working body, Gramsci reviews, in *Americanismo e fordismo*, various fields of bodily experience acted upon by the “permanent cultural activity” of State hegemony, and he identifies them in the “sexual obsession”, in the construction of the female body and personality and the family. These are strategic fields in which one is acted upon, and at the same time where one can also act with a view toward transformation. It is in this part of the notebooks that he elaborates a theory of psychological afflictions (that is neurosis), that rejects the naturalism of Freudian explanations and that considers mental illness as a process of embodying historical contradictions determined by relations of force.

Agency: The Will of the “trained gorilla”

In the elaboration of his cultural and social criticism Gramsci breaks down the abstract concepts of culture and society into more concrete elements such as the individual, the person, the self, the subject, and embodiment. But then even these concepts are exploded, unveiled as constructions to be denaturalized; constantly changing historical products, in the grip of relations of force that define them and orient them. The radical conceptual

renewal offered by Gramsci is current precisely because his breaking down of the criticized concepts (culture, for example) does not produce concepts that are equally rigid (the “body,” the “individual,” the “person,” the “self,” as it happens with some contemporary medical anthropologies) but reflects on the material dialectic internal to the very formation of the concepts, thus bringing to light the political dimension of the theory. The theory reflects the relations of force and the power structure and only if it chooses to declare and not conceal its involvement in real contradictions, placing itself inside the concrete flow of real experience, can it be joined to transforming praxis.

His constant attention to processes of subjectivization produced in the hegemonic dialectic leads Gramsci to a pioneering criticism of Freudian psychoanalysis. Gramsci strongly criticizes with sarcasm and irony the invention of the unconscious and the construction of the psychological self⁽⁵⁾. The question of psychological suffering, according to Gramsci, is the result of a process of embodiment of the conflicts acting in the relations of force that regulate social experience. The outlines of this critique are scattered throughout the letters and the notebooks. In the letters the primary motivation of the critique regards the fact that his wife, Giulia Schucht, prey to nervous disorders, had decided to undergo psychoanalysis⁽⁶⁾. The Gramscian critical perspective on psychoanalysis is of great interest despite its synthetic and intuitive nature. Neuroses, in Gramsci’s view, are to be traced directly to that “fabrication” of a new human type brought into play by Fordist capitalism.

After having demonstrated how Fordist capitalism aims at the construction of a “new human type,” through the physical transformation of workers, he also emphasizes how this process is deconstructible. Taylor’s cynical expression labeling the factory worker as a “trained gorilla” is ironically deconstructed by Gramsci to show how it can be completely overturned by the agency of the worker who not only can resist but can also orient the physical transformation to which he is subjected toward non-conformist actions. The “trained gorilla” has a will. And also the “animality” of the worker’s body cannot be easily domesticated:

«“Animality” and Industrialism. The history of industrialism has always been a continuing struggle (which today takes an even more marked and vigorous form) against the element of “animality” in man. [...] A two-fold situation can then create itself in which there is an inherent conflict between the “verbal” ideology which recognises the new necessities and the real “animal” practice which prevents physical bodies from effectively acquiring the new attitudes» (Q22§10).

Transforming Persons: Molecular Processes and Body Politics

Those who have read Gramsci might have been struck by a new word that he uses quite often both in his letters, with reference to himself, and in his analysis of political and cultural criticism. I'm referring to the adjective "molecular." The frequent presence of this term in the *Prison Notebooks* is not coincidental. This term is evidence of the experimental nature of Gramsci's writings, his constant effort to seek out new expressions that elude the deceptions of language. Personally engaged in working class struggles and searching for new expressive forms linked to this transformative experience, Gramsci uses the term "molecular" for the possibility it offers of referring to the minimum unit of life experience, to the immediate detail, drawn from daily life. Gramsci's frequent use of the term shows how intent he is on capturing processes of transformation by positioning himself as close as possible to lived experience, to the point of identifying them in his own body and his own person. The notion of "molecular," in fact, is used by Gramsci to observe the processes of molecular transformation both of society and the person⁽⁷⁾. So many passages from his letters are really phenomenological considerations drawn from Gramsci's own bodily experience and at the same time capital in his understanding of social processes. His embodied reflections and his accounts of his own illness interweave lived experience and socio-cultural criticism, in a continuous process of self-objectification. His body is objectified as a physical space in which processes of transformation act. I quote in sequence a part of a letter and a passage from the notebooks written in the same days of March 1933. In both texts the analysis of molecular transformations of the person becomes particularly dramatic because they are inspired by deterioration of Gramsci's illness, Pott's disease, and from his perception of being in a «phase of my life that without exaggeration I can define as catastrophic». It is a particularly hard moment. Gramsci has had crises of hemoptysis, he has been spitting blood, he's undone. It's March 6 1933, four years before his death. To describe his situation Gramsci evokes the apologue of the shipwreck survivor recounted by Edgar Allan Poe in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. In conditions of extreme hardship following a shipwreck some men who would have sworn they would kill themselves first, end up turning to cannibalism. But are they really the same persons? Gramsci asks. No. Because in the meantime they have undergone a process of molecular transformation by the effect of which the persons of before are not the persons of after. Here I quote a passage from the *Letters* and a passage from the *Notebooks*.

Here is the passage from the letter:

«Dearest Tania,

I still have a vivid memory (which no longer happens to me in recent times) of a comparison that I presented to you during our Sunday visit to explain what is taking place inside me. I want to go back to it, to draw from it certain practical conclusions that interest me. What I said to you was approximately this: imagine a shipwreck and that a certain number of persons take refuge in a large boat to save themselves without knowing where, when, and after what vicissitudes they will actually be saved. Before the shipwreck, as is quite natural, not one of the future victims thought he would become... the victim of a shipwreck and therefore imagined even less that he would be driven to commit the acts that victims of shipwreck under certain conditions may commit, for example, the act of becoming... anthropophagous. Each one of them, if questioned point-blank about what he would do faced by the alternative of dying or becoming cannibalistic, would have answered in the utmost good faith that, given the alternative, he would certainly choose to die. The shipwreck occurs, the rush to the lifeboat etc. A few days later, when the food has given out, the idea of cannibalism presents itself in a different light until at a certain point, a certain number of those particular people become cannibalistic. But are they in reality the same people? Between the two moments, that which in the alternative presented itself as a pure theoretical hypothesis and that in which the alternative presents itself with all the force of immediate necessity, there has been a process of "molecular" transformation, rapid though it may have been, due to which the people before no longer are the people of afterward, and one can no longer say except from the point of view of the state records office and the law [...] that they are the same people. Well, as I have told, a similar change is taking place in me (cannibalism apart). The most serious thing is that in these cases there is a split in the personality; one part of it observes the process, the other suffers it, but the observing part (as long as this part exists there is self-control and the possibility of recovery) senses the precariousness of its position, that is, foresees that it will reach a point at which its function will disappear, that is, there will no longer be any self-control and the entire personality will be swallowed by the new "individual" who has impulses, initiatives, ways of thinking different from the previous ones. Well, I am in this situation, I don't know what of me (will?) remain after the end of this process of change that I sense is in the course of development [...].»(GRAMSCI A. 1996)

Here is the passage from the *Notebooks*

«**Autobiographical Notes.** How I began to use greater indulgence in judging the catastrophes afflicting character. Through experience of the process by which such catastrophes come about. [...]. Now the most dangerous movement is that at the 'molecular' level since, while it demonstrates the subject's will to resist, it allows one (whoever reflects on such things) 'to glimpse' a progressive change in moral personality which at a certain point stops being quantitative and becomes qualitative; in other words one is no longer really dealing with the same person but with two people. [...] The

truth is that the person of the fifth year is not the same as in the fourth, the third, the second, the first and so on; one has a new personality, completely new, in which the years that have passed have in fact demolished one's moral braking system, the resistute forces that characterised the person during the first year. [...]. This fact, relating to the individual, may be considered collective [...]. This fact is to be studied in its current manifestations. Not that the fact has not occurred in the past, but it is certain that in the present it has taken on a special and a voluntary form. That is to say that today one counts on this happening and – something which did not happen in the past – the event is systematically prepared (where systematically means however 'en masse', without of course excluding 'particular' attention paid to individuals). Without doubt an element has crept in today, an element that used not to exist in the past, a 'terroristic' element, an element of material and even moral terrorism, which cannot simply be disregarded. This makes yet more serious the responsibility of those who, although perfectly able, have not – because of inexperience, negligence or even their own perverse will – put a stop to certain matters» (GRAMSCI A. 1975: Q15§9).

Gramsci gives this passage of the notebooks the ironic title «autobiographical notes», irony that evokes his aversion to autobiography, a genre that he believes is dense with pitiful rhetoric. What he gives us is a dramatic objectification of the processes running through him and that, just because they frighten and affect him, allow him to refine his analysis of the mechanisms through which persons are subjected to transformations of the person within specific relations of force. This is certainly one of the most moving passages on the relationship between body and power in all of Gramsci's works. There is an immediate correspondence in his letters and notebooks in this period between the experience of his illness and his political criticism of the concept of person. He demonstrates with his own body the urgency of reopening the concept of the person so that these mechanisms can be understood. At the same time he emphasizes the fluidity of the transformative process which unfolds in a manner that is totally embodied, intimate, and uncontrollable. But the sense of this transformation is not psychological; it is strictly political. The body is the terrain of a conflict between hegemonies.

Concluding remarks

In his *Microphysics of power* Michel Foucault criticized orthodox Marxism for having «terribly concealed» (FOUCAULT M. 1977 [1972]: 141) the importance of body in Marx's work. Gramsci's work had the merit of fully recovering this importance, even though it has suffered the same fate. A reading of the question of the body in Gramsci is fundamental, in my view,

for understanding the hegemonic dialectic and the system of relations of force that act on processes of health/illness. My stress on the urgency of this re-reading of Antonio Gramsci is born out of the conviction that the scarce attention for Gramsci's critique of body, self and of the person constitutes a lost opportunity. I would like to underline at least three general points on which that critique is important for contemporary medical anthropology.

First, it seems to me that the Gramscian critique and its attention for processes of transformation of the embodied subject which occur in a system of relations of force, must push medical anthropology to put into question, more than it has been done in the past, the health-illness dichotomy, in order to overcome any tautological residue and to conceive it instead as a dialectic, that is, as a socio-political process. In this way the dichotomy reveals itself to be a historical ideological construct, the genesis, development, and strategic objectives of which must be understood, on the one hand, in the political terms of social control and conservation of the status quo, and on the other hand, in terms of the transformation of and the struggle against the structural violence that produces inequality and suffering. In a certain sense it could be said that Gramsci's reflections push medical anthropology to observe how much "health" there is in "illness" and how much "illness" there is in "health," and at the same time they invite us to reflect on the interaction between physical well-being and political economy, so as to show how, in the world system, the health of some is made possible by the illness of others⁽⁸⁾.

Second, it seems to me that by taking account of the *political* variability of the categories of health and illness, and showing the strong ties between the current definitions of health and the powers of the State, it may be possible to clarify how the identification of health and normality tends even today to reduce illness to the concept of deviance, turning it into pure abnormality. By illuminating this mechanism, which acts in a concealed and naturalized manner, illness will then be able to reveal itself as an "embodiment of inequality." On this point I believe that medical anthropology, though it has produced archives of information and indispensable studies for understanding the *cultural* variability of the processes of health and illness, must reflect today on the by now explicit risk that insisting on cultural differences may conceal the production of social inequalities.

Third, it must be kept in mind that the political commitment of medical anthropology is not to be considered as the "application" of research results or as their "social use" in the public sphere. Instead, such a political

commitment resides in the awareness of our unavoidable involvement in social praxis. This requires a reinforcement of a critical, reflexive, self-objectifying methodology inside the scientific field itself, in the academy, in relations with institutions and with the State, in the politics of scientific research, in the academic elaboration of theory. Structural forces tending toward the production of a “molecular transformation” of persons (anthropologists included) and the commodification of life are at work in these fields too.

On this last point I would like to conclude with an example that shows the current value of Gramsci’s reflections. In a piece entitled *Merce* (“Commodity”) written in 1918, at the age of 27, Gramsci deals, incredibly enough, with the traffic in human body parts. That’s right. Almost ninety years prior to Nancy Scheper Hughes (SCHEPER-HUGHES N. 2001), when the idea of an organ transplant was little more than science fiction, Gramsci addresses the issue in a text whose sarcasm and irony indicate the dialogic function of his critique. I’d like to read just the last part.

«[...] According to a communication received by the Academy of Medicine in Paris, professor Laurent has succeeded in replacing the heart of Fox with that of Bob, and vice-versa, without the two innocent dogs enduring great suffering, without disturbing in the least the life of the delicate internal organ. From this moment the heart has become a commodity; it can be exchanged, it can be bought. Who wants to trade their worn out heart, afflicted by palpitations, with a mint vermilion heart, poor, but healthy, poor but that has always palpitated honestly? [...] A new commercial road now open to the exploratory activity of individual initiative [...] Life, all of life, not just the mechanical activity of the limbs, but the very physiological font of activity, thus detaches from the soul and becomes a good to be bartered; it is the destiny of Midas, he of the magic hands, the symbol of modern capitalism» (GRAMSCI A. 1918)

Notes

⁽¹⁾ See for example Marx and Gramsci’s references in BAER H. - SINGER M. eds. 1997, LINDENBAUM S. - LOCK M. eds. 1993, SINGER M. - BAER H. eds. 1995.

⁽²⁾ For the Italian anthropological debate on a Gramscian approach to “popular” culture starting from DE MARTINO E. 1949, see ANGELINI P. ed. 1977, CIRESE A. M. 1976, CLEMENTE P. - MEONI M. L. - SQUILLACCIOTTI M. eds. 1976, DI NOLA A. M. 1978, LOMBARDI-SATRIANI L. M. 1980, PASQUINELLI C. ed. 1977, RAUTY R. ed. 1976, SEPPILLI T. 1979.

⁽³⁾ Recent interesting political and philosophical re-reading of *Prison Notebooks* are BARATTA G. 2000, RAGAZZINI D. 2002, BURGIO A. 2003, FROSINI F. 2003, but these studies unfortunately do not dialogue with the anthropological Gramscian debate. For Latin America see AA.Vv. 1991.

⁽⁴⁾ See at least SEPPILLI T. 1959, 1979, 1996. For a direct re-reading of Marx and Gramsci and their importance for medical anthropology see SEPPILLI T. 1998, 2002.

⁽⁵⁾ «Freudianism is more a 'science' to be applied to the upper classes and it might be said, paraphrasing Bourget (or an epigram about him), that the 'sub-conscious' only begins at an income level of some tens of thousands of lire» (Q15§74).

⁽⁶⁾ See two important contributions on Gramsci's criticism of Freud: MESSA RUIZ E. 1998 and STONE J. 1984. Stone's article is a very interesting reconstruction of Gramsci's reaction to his wife's psychoanalysis, in the framework of an "Italian Freud". See also BUCI-GLUCKSMANN 1976: 109-115.

⁽⁷⁾ These two passages were not published in the first editions of *Letters* and *Notebooks* because they seemed too strange and embarrassing to Palmiro Togliatti who was the editor together with Felice Platone of Gramsci's writings. The first important comment on these passages is GERRATANA V. 1990. See also SZABO T. 1989, RAGAZZINI D. 2002 and CAVALLARO L. 2002 who discuss Gramsci's notion of person. Even if these articles are interesting they do not discuss the anthropological notion of person but only its western philosophical meaning. In my opinion in Gramscian passages we can find a critical approach to the notion of person, which is anthropologically relevant and which comes some years before Marcel Mauss' classic essays on body techniques and on person. Gramsci does not separate between body and person as Mauss did.

⁽⁸⁾ In a letter from prison written to reassure his sister-in-law about his health Gramsci begins with an ironic image that points directly to the false pairing of health and normality: «When I don't write anything about my health, it means that all is as normal as it can be in the prison environment». In an important passage from his posthumous work, Ernesto de Martino defined the couple health-illness as a «double falsehood, which brings to anthropology a series of misunderstandings, deformations, and mistaken interpretations» (DE MARTINO E. 1977: 18). De Martino had seen very clearly the risk of remaining trapped in the back and forth ping pong between definitions of health and illness. «What's involved is not 'explaining health with illness'; any such attempt would already be illnesses». The judgment of health or illness cannot be separated from consideration of the relationship between behavior and historical environment. To get around this *impasse*, de Martino suggested, one needs to assume as the criterion for distinguishing the healthy from the ill, not "reality," but "historical reality."

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