

Interviú for the spanish magazine Mia

1. Cómo nació tu interés por la interrelación cuerpo-mente? ¿conociste a alguien que 'te marcó? ¿algo en la universidad???
2. Como profesional de la medicina que va 'más allá' de los límites ortodoxos ¿te has encontrado con muchas dificultades para trabajar en esta línea de lo psicosomático?
3. ¿Recuerdas algún caso -de un enfermo- por sorprendente mejoría.... ?
4. En tu experiencia ¿es igual de eficaz la medicina psicosomática con los niños que con los adultos? A este respecto en tu libro 'Pensar con el cuerpo', dices 'la mayor parte de los eczemas infantiles y neonatales desaparecen simplemente con el contacto físico o bien acariciando el punto donde, inconscientemente, el niño atiende (y por lo tanto lleva sangre y energía)'. Nos puedes desarrollar un poco más esta idea, por favor
5. Desde tu experiencia ¿una auténtica curación pasa siempre por un cambio en el estilo de vida?
6. ¿Qué te lleva a pensar que acumular durante demasiada información sin transformarla en acción puede enfermarnos?
7. Afirmas que un tratamiento médico clásico (antióticos, operación quirúrgica...) puede tener un 'efecto secundario' que es: disminuir la vitalidad de un individuo. ¿Qué te hace llegar a esa conclusión?
8. ¿Qué son exactamente las 'coreografías del sistema nervioso'?
9. Dices 'cuanto más se acerca uno al centro del propio ser físico, más fuerte se presenta la dimensión -que por convención es definida espiritual- con la que se identifica el sentido de pertenencia, la trascendencia del espacio y del tiempo, el contacto con el universo'. ¿Cuánto influye la espiritualidad en el bienestar? ¿Suelen estar mejor de salud las personas espirituales?
10. En tu libro, afirmas que 'el abordaje al pensamiento corporal es aún un proceso abierto en el que no es posible escribir un tratado exhaustivo'. ¿Cuánto tiempo o qué tiene que pasar para que tengamos un tratado exhaustivo y concluyente sobre la interrelación cuerpo-mente en la salud? ¿Más inversión de dinero, un cambio en la filosofía de los laboratorios farmacéuticos....?

11. Los 3 secretos' de la salud y la felicidad son...

12. Por último... ¿por qué tenemos que creer que 'el guía -cuerpo- no está loco'?

"The Pueblo indians once said to me that all the americans are crazy. Naturally I was surprised and I asked why. They answered: <Well, they say they are thinking with the head. No healthy man would ever think with the head."

C. G. Jung

1) When I was a medical student I did my internship in the Surgery Department of a Milan private hospital. Some of my work there consisted in "collecting" the story of the persons entering the hospital. Often when asked "when has your disturb began?", the person, if not stopped right away, answered something like: "Well, let me think...I remember it was the same year when..." and here the person mentioned the happening of a major emotional event like the loss of someone, or the end of a relationship, a change in town or job. Wasn't it quite bizarre that the major emotional events and the major emotional diseases happened both by chance at the same time of one's life?

What drove me toward the body-mind exploration it had not been a person but the fact that nobody there considered this relationship. Relationship absolutely obvious if one just stopped "filtering" the information coming from the patient.

2) When the San Raffaele hospital in Milan opened the first Psychosomatic Medicine Department in Italy, in the late seventies, I went to work there. At the time this department and all those working in it were considered as sort of "strange", with very little communication and cooperation with the other hospital Departments. The general attitude was kind of either/or rather than that of integration and support. Consequently the entire staff of the department decided to bypass the institutions and co-found a private institute in which to organise four years courses for medical doctors and print a magazine to capitalize the experience in the Department and make it available to the greatest number of people and health professionals. The magazine started in 1980 and soon became quite popular. When some years later, while I was travelling in the subway, I heard a woman saying to a friend: "My doctor told me its psychosomatic" I realized what a big cultural shift had been made in just a few years. Not many years before it would have been absolutely impossible to hear someone saying anything like that. It meant that the idea that what you think and feel, and how your body is, are not separated, had stopped being an avant-garde idea and had finally been integrated becoming part of the main stream.

3) I don't usually pay particular attention to them, they are sort of obvious. What I'm interested in and I record is when this doesn't happen. One of the most misleading cultural and medical idea is that things have to be changed always. That what the body is doing, for example a fever or an inflammation, is "wrong". Telling stories about "mejorias" gratifies the therapist narcissism, his sense of power over things, but also suggests that what the body was doing was necessarily wrong.

For this reason I prefer telling stories about why things are ok as they are. I think what is needed is an ecological approach that looks at what is going on as the result of an equilibrium. Before willing to change something one needs to understand how this something works.

4) Children, like animals, strongly express what's going on in the family, for example a lack of physical contact, as in the situation you have mentioned. So their diseases are like a symptom. It is therefore much more convenient to work on the strongest and powerful member of the family rather than on the most powerless like them. Their change can only reflect a change in the family, but of course, it is much easier to think that the problem is where it manifests itself.

5) Yes, although this can be more or less apparent. You cannot really heal something while remaining the same.

We are not what we think we are. We are much more complex and articulated. A symptom or a disease not only help us to fill the gap between the idea of we have of ourselves and what we really are, it also gives us a hint to discover who we are. If I get a stomach ache every time I overextend my self in the work or a headache every time I deny my feelings, or haemorrhoids by enduring a life of sacrifice, I can "erase" them through medicines or surgery, but I can't really "heal" what's under them unless I really change my entire approach to responsibilities, feelings and sacrifice, just to mention the three examples above. If I do a cosmetic on the symptoms, then they either come back or transform in a new ones.

6) The organism can tolerate a limited amount of awareness without action. If again and again one sees nature insulted by men, or becomes aware of people pain, one activates a sort of energy, in these cases, in the form of suffering; the more energy is activated the stronger is the need to find a way out of it. It is the action gasoline. But one can tolerate just a certain amount of this pain/energy/gasoline. Once the pain of the awareness reaches its physiological limits it retroflex in the form of either depression, disease or syndromes.

7) By working physically with people of different ages and from different areas of the world, you can experience with your hands the great differences in the vitality of the tissues and their aliveness.

Differently from what happened in other ages or cultures, the contemporary medicine measures and consider a lot of parameters. But these parameters never include the vitality of an individual such the spark in his eyes or the feeling one has just by touching him.

A flu is, for example, an important process of detoxification and regeneration of the human body connective tissue.

From high fever we usually get out sort of “reborn” like a phoenix from its flames.

Young children usually make their major change in personality after exantematic diseases.

The ability of the body to have an acute reaction is a sign of its vitality (that’s why it is stronger in children than in adults, and that is why in rural culture it is said that “people who never get flu die earlier”).

So if we stop this process with Aspirin or vaccines we inhibit the ability of our organism to react and to rejuvenate through this process.

8) I bypassed this question because it needed a lot of words to say something that makes sense. If you want you can take something from the book.

9) We keep thinking spirituality as a “disembodied” practice. But by studying anatomy and physiology from an experiential point of view (ndr this approach is called “Experiential Anatomy”), you can realize that every time you experience a spiritual attitude, your body changes in very specific ways. And every time you activate some specific change in the body you also perceive a heightened sense the spiritual aspect of life and of the unity of all things (religion comes from the Latin re-ligo: literally to tie things up). This condition is mediated by a strong release of serotonin (a neurotransmitter which is also activated by peyote or ecstasy). We know that depression and all its somatic equivalents such as cancer or auto-immune diseases are characterized by a lack of serotonin. When people overvalue the material aspects of life over the less tangible ones such as dignity, self-esteem or equity, they breathe less and what is worse less deeply. The inner part of their body is therefore tighter and produces less serotonin (95% of serotonin is produced in the intestines).

10) Actually I think, and hope, that this process of knowledge will never end.

I’m afraid when areas of knowledge get fixed or closed up again. The danger doesn’t come from not knowing enough but from stopping being an open system, a learning system. Like what was happening in the Surgery Department I mentioned at the beginning, where nobody wanted to know anything about the emotional life of the patients because nobody were questioning the assumption that 'health and emotional life have nothing to do with each other'.

11) Salud y felicidad are nice and popular ideas of course, but searching them can again be misleading a person's life.

I don't really think there is such a thing like "pathology".

Simply we call "pathology" what we do not understand, phenomenons whose function is elusive to our understanding.

If one morning I see some blisters on my hands and I don't know why, I call this

"pathology". If few minutes later I remember I played tennis for three hours the day before, I consider them normal. It is just the way we contextualize what is happening in our body that makes us say this is sick or this is healthy.

So I think that our concept of 'health' is pretty reductive, and that diseases are an extension of human possibilities to deal with life in a creative way.

The same is for the idea of "happiness": what do we really need? Laughing or to perceive life as meaningful and deep? If we choose the latter answer we have to consider, for example, sorrow, grief, melancholy as important ways to experience this 'personal growing' through life. So to answer to your question I would say "just stay open to what happens", even if doesn't seem to make sense. It has, we just don't get it.

12) The idea in medicine, education and so on that we have to control the body, because it is crazy and unreliable, is one of the most bizarre cultural ideas ever, but fortunately is limited just to the western area of the world and to a relatively short range of time.

Just consider the fact that you are here alive after tens of years, passing through all the possible dangers the world can offer, from viruses to driving: could you really think that this would be possible if your body would be crazy?

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