

## The Body Represented

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### El cuerpo representado

### O Corpo Representado

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**Abstract:** This research proposes the body as a privileged stage for creating possible worlds and the school as a metaphor for its territory. The guiding question is: How do students represent their bodies and the relationships that stem from them? In this way, the study explores the body in the classroom as a site of interaction with the lifeworld, aiming to uncover the invisible learning experiences of students as objects of communication research.

The work attempts to understand the body as indivisible between its parts and the environment, as a contemporary axis of the notion of humanity, rooted in the core of social and

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human sciences. The body is seen as substance and action, the metaphor of all metaphors, cutting across various fields of knowledge.

Currently, the body seems to be reduced to social capital, an object open to commodification. It's a body dedicated to consumption, improvement, fitness, shaving, and stretching, while time contracts it—an advertising subject, a form of advertisement in itself.

The study seeks answers regarding young people's conceptions and interactions with their bodies by understanding the questions that arise from and about the body and the variations and processes of self-awareness that many young people undergo. This research is pursued through fieldwork on two continents, aiming to understand how these relationships can vary according to the cultural context.

Based on this background, a questionnaire is constructed. Its primary purpose is to comprehend how students perceive their relationships with their bodies, associating them with feelings, shapes, emotions, beauty, words, and other elements. Additionally, the study attempts to grasp the order in which the body is conceived: as a whole, composed of parts, or as parts? The questionnaire proposes the idea of the multidimensionality of the body, suggesting that the body is more than just its physical form—it traverses, travels, and transforms across different dimensions.

The questionnaire was administered to university students majoring in communication-related fields. A group of 200 students participated, with 100 from Universidad Sergio Arboleda in Bogotá, Colombia, and 100 from Universidad Complutense de Madrid in Spain. These universities were chosen to diversify the study's participants, encompassing private and public education, ensuring a broader spectrum of responses.

Studying the body as an object leads to cognition, communication, and information insights. Within its totality and in each of its parts, there is a complex web of cognitive processes intertwined with practices of self-organization, self-affirmation, reproduction, and complexity.

I have argued that cognitive science is beginning to realize that perception is not about recovering a pre-established world, but rather it is perceptually guided action in a world inseparable from our sensorimotor abilities, and that higher cognitive structures also arise from recurrent patterns of perceptually guided action. Therefore, cognition is not about representations but embodied action. (Varela, 1996, p. 9)

This exercise encourages students to reflect on bodily experiences, exploring their imaginations and ways of representing the body using focus group methodology. It aims to consider experiences in the educational setting as performances and recognize their potential to transform students' communication skills.

**Keywords:**

Body, learning, representation, communication

**Resumen:** Esta investigación propone al cuerpo como escenario privilegiado para crear mundos posibles y a la escuela como metáfora de su territorio.

La pregunta que nos acompaña es: ¿cómo lo/as estudiantes representan su cuerpo y las relaciones que de él emanan? de esta manera se indaga por el cuerpo en el salón de clases como lugar de interacción con el mundo de vida y se quieren explorar aprendizajes invisibles de lo-as estudiantes como objeto de estudio de la comunicación.

El trabajo intenta comprender el cuerpo como indivisible entre sus partes y del ambiente y como un eje contemporáneo de la noción de humanidad, anclado en la base misma de las ciencias sociales y humanas, como sustancia y acción de la metáfora de todas las metáforas, como una lanza transversal a los saberes.

En la actualidad pareciera que el cuerpo no es más que un capital social, un objeto permitido para la mercantilización, un cuerpo dedicado a comprar, a mejorar, a estar en forma, a afeitarse, a estirarse mientras que el tiempo lo contrae, un objeto para la publicidad, una forma misma de publicidad.

Entendiendo las preguntas que nacen del cuerpo y por el cuerpo, además de las variaciones y procesos de autoconocimiento que tantos jóvenes tienen acerca de si mismos, se intenta tener una respuesta sobre de las concepciones e interacciones propias de los jóvenes acerca de sus relaciones con el cuerpo, esto mediante un trabajo de campo en dos continentes distintos donde se buscó además entender cómo estas relaciones pueden llegar a variar de acuerdo al contexto cultural en el que nos encontramos.

Es por lo que a partir de estos antecedentes se construye un formulario donde se plantea como principal propósito entender de qué manera conciben los estudiantes sus relaciones con el cuerpo, asociándolo con sentimientos, formas, emociones, belleza, palabras, entre otros

elementos. Además del intento por comprender el orden en el que se concibe el cuerpo, ¿Como un todo, como un todo formado de partes, como partes? El ejercicio del formulario plantea la idea de la multidimensionalidad del cuerpo, donde quiere proponer que el cuerpo es más que solo su físico y transcurre, viaja y se transforma en distintas dimensiones.

La aplicación del formulario en presencia fue hecha con estudiantes universitarios que cursan carreras afines a la comunicación. Este formulario fue aplicado a un total de 200 estudiantes, 100 en la Universidad Sergio Arboleda en Bogotá, Colombia y 100 en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid en España, siendo universidades de carácter privado y público respectivamente, esto con el fin de ampliar el espectro de nuestro público de estudio hacia otros contenidos de manera que, los resultados puedan contener huellas de la diversidad de sus públicos.

El cuerpo como objeto de estudio nos habla de un lugar de cognición, comunicación e información, en él como totalidad y en cada una de sus partes hay una compleja trama de procesos cognitivos que se entrecruzan con prácticas de autoorganización, autoafirmación, reproducción y complejización.

He argumentado que la ciencia cognitiva comienza a cobrar conciencia del hecho que la percepción no consiste en recuperar un mundo preestablecido, sino que consiste más bien en una acción perceptualmente guiada en un mundo que es inseparable de nuestras capacidades sensorimotrices, y que las estructuras cognitivas *más elevadas* también surgen de pautas recurrentes de acción perceptualmente guiada. Por lo tanto, la cognición no consiste en representaciones, sino en acción encarnada. (Varela, 1996, p. 9)

El ejercicio invita a lo-as estudiantes a reflexionar sobre las corporeidades e indaga por sus imaginarios y sus formas de representar el cuerpo utilizando la metodología de grupos focales. Se busca pensar las vivencias en el escenario educativo a manera de performance y retomar su potencial en la transformación de las habilidades comunicativas de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:**

Cuerpo, aprendizaje, representación, comunicación

**Resumo:** Esta pesquisa propõe o corpo como cenário privilegiado para a criação de mundos possíveis e a escola como metáfora do seu território.

A questão que nos acompanha é: como os alunos representam o seu corpo e as relações que dele emanam? Dessa forma, investiga-se o corpo na sala de aula como lugar de interação com o mundo da vida e explora-se a aprendizagem invisível dos alunos como objeto de estudo da comunicação.

O trabalho procura compreender o corpo como indivisível entre suas partes e o meio ambiente e como eixo contemporâneo da noção de humanidade, ancorado nas próprias bases das ciências sociais e humanas, como substância e ação da metáfora de todas as metáforas, como lança transversal ao conhecimento.

Hoje em dia parece que o corpo nada mais é do que capital social, um objecto passível de mercantilização, um corpo dedicado a comprar, a melhorar, a estar em forma, a barbear-se, a alongar-se enquanto o tempo o contrai, um objecto de publicidade, uma forma de publicidade em si.

Compreendendo as questões que surgem do corpo e através do corpo, além das variações e processos de autoconhecimento que tantos jovens têm sobre si mesmos, procuramos ter uma resposta sobre as concepções e interações dos jovens sobre as suas relações. com o corpo.corpo, isto através de trabalho de campo em dois continentes diferentes onde também procuramos compreender como essas relações podem variar de acordo com o contexto cultural em que nos encontramos.

É por isso que, com base neste contexto, é construído um formulário cujo objetivo principal é compreender como os alunos concebem as suas relações com o corpo, associando-o a sentimentos, formas, emoções, beleza, palavras, entre outros elementos. Além da tentativa de compreender a ordem em que o corpo é concebido, como um todo, como um todo feito de partes, como partes? O exercício da forma levanta a ideia da multidimensionalidade do corpo, onde quer propor que o corpo é mais do que apenas a sua aparência física e passa, viaja e se transforma em diferentes dimensões.

A aplicação do formulário presencial foi feita com estudantes universitários cursando carreiras relacionadas à comunicação. Este formulário foi aplicado a um total de 200 alunos, 100 da Universidade Sergio Arboleda em Bogotá, Colômbia e 100 da Universidade Complutense de Madrid na Espanha, sendo universidades privadas e públicas respectivamente, a fim de ampliar o espectro do nosso público de estudo para outros conteúdos para que os resultados possam conter vestígios da diversidade de seus públicos.

O corpo como objeto de estudo nos fala de um lugar de cognição, comunicação e informação, nele como um todo e em cada uma de suas partes existe uma complexa teia de processos cognitivos que se cruzam com práticas de auto-organização, autoafirmação, reprodução e complexidade.

Argumentei que a ciência cognitiva está a começar a tomar consciência do facto de que a percepção não se trata de recuperar um mundo pré-estabelecido, mas sim de uma acção perceptivamente guiada num mundo que é inseparável das nossas capacidades sensório-motoras, e que as estruturas cognitivas de níveis superiores também surgem de padrões recorrentes de ação guiada pela percepção. Portanto, a cognição não consiste em representações, mas sim em ações corporificadas. (Varela, 1996, p. 9)

O exercício convida os alunos a refletirem sobre a corporeidade e investigam seus imaginários e suas formas de representar o corpo por meio da metodologia de grupo focal. O objetivo é pensar as experiências no cenário educacional como uma performance e retomar seu potencial na transformação das habilidades comunicativas dos alunos.

**Palavras chave:**

Corpo, aprendizagem, representação e comunicação

**1. Introduction**

If living is essentially a cognitive activity, it must be admitted that all learning is a process that occurs within the living organism. Learning is always a bodily activity. And since bodies know movement and expansions within finitude at all times and in every way, all knowledge bears the mark of the finite. Our utmost completion occurs within finitude. Dreaming of escaping it, or attaining a totality that surpasses it, is the desire for a beyond that never acknowledges the here and now. (Assmann, 2002, p. 74)

Is the body a limit? And what is the limit of the body? Is language the actual limit of the body? These are some of the questions accompanying this inquiry. The first is answered with the finality of death, and the second delves into the external, the surroundings, the energy emanating from the body as mass, and the interaction with the outside world. It's about the solid and the gaseous, the viscous condition of neither being above nor below, where the skin isn't a

membrane that separates but unites and the separation of the body from the environment is an optical illusion.

Various questions have been raised to understand the representation of the body in people's lives: the body as a medium, a message, a beginning, an end. Comprehending the concept of the body beyond mere cells has become a priority for millions, although some choose to ignore it, letting it flow without consciousness.

The process of introspection and analysis begins from birth, involving senses, touch, pain, sensations, and contact with other bodies. In adolescence, the stage before maturity, questions intensify. Hormonal changes eliminate the body's monotony, confirming it as a promoter of life and pleasure.

The importance of works, studies, and treatises on the body lies in the fact that they have initiated an archaeology, a history, an ethnography of daily life and have revealed how power imprints itself on the body—determining, constructing, manipulating, using, and ultimately subjecting it to various socio-cultural forces. The intersection of disciplines, the emergence of new paradigms, and methods of approaching the body all contribute to this exploration.

In this context, the inquiry delves into the imaginary aspects related to gender roles. Reflections such as:

The existence of an imaginary in which the feminine is defined by elements indicating its high degree of immateriality, idealism, and lack of materiality, does not mean that no real woman lives her life according to that experience. However, these ideals significantly influence women's general attitudes toward their bodies. In many cases, these ideals can harm people's lives. (Bernárdez, 2009, p. 282)

Similarly, the study aimed to deepen the relationship between media and gender in terms of stereotypes:

Women and media are deeply intertwined in the core of cultural productions. We face a universe of meaning centered on the external image in a multidimensional and profound way, in a culture that is there, from the skin outward. (Núñez y Díaz, 2012, p. 222)

Mediatized women's bodies become the "other" in corporeality, proposing new work horizons in the context of a body that is an "other." Exploring corporeality in the educational context leads us to think of ourselves as collaborative beings with common goals, engaged in

collective work, creating desires and social goals that continue to liberate us from the oppression of power.

## **2. Objectives**

**2.1 General Objective:** Investigate university students' representations, uses, and appropriations regarding the body and the associations that stem from it.

### **2.2 Specific Objectives:**

- Reflect on the conception of the body as a learning territory, mediation, and communication scenario.
- Characterize the imaginaries, uses, and appropriations of the body as a starting point for developing communicative competencies among university students.
- Promote the recognition of bodily intelligence and practices highlighting the body's potential as a learning platform.

## **3. Method**

This qualitative study utilizes semiotics as a discipline within social sciences that considers the written conditions offered by all environments and the opportunity to interpret them as written texts simply by exploring the code. The topic of the body has served as an amalgam, allowing the exploration of various authors who have shaped the epistemology of complexity, pedagogy, and discourses that support the body as evidence of diversity.

The chosen methodology is focus groups involving activities with questions on reading comprehension: literal, inferential, and propositional. This report primarily highlights responses to the third type of questions, considering the valuable contributions made by students in these inquiries. The focus group also emphasizes collective and bodily interaction, transforming the interaction space into a laboratory of ideas, relationships, and expressions and utilizing the participants' knowledge, expectations, and interests. The focus group experience is embodied.

Over ten years, exercises around the theme of the body have been conducted with students. They were invited to read "Little Reflections on the Body: Paul Valéry's Four Bodies" and Margarita Baz's "The Instituted Body."

Each body thus becomes the product of the micropowers that have acted upon it, of the institutions that made control strategies viable, of normalization and socialization, of the

group links in which it played, of its social place, of its resistance capacity. (Baz, 1996, p. 9)

Subsequently, students were asked to draw the body and their ideas about it on a timeline and represent its multidimensional nature in images.

It involves understanding the human body in its multidimensionality; it aspires to achieve knowledge that is not fragmented, not divided, not reductionist (neither biology nor culture) and that simultaneously demonstrates the importance of knowing the body not as a totality or completeness but from its complexity. (Muñiz, 2010, p. 19)

A questionnaire was designed and administered online, covering various aspects of the students' perceptions of corporeality. It included open-ended, multiple-choice, relational, and voting questions, always leaving room for comments to receive participants' perceptions generated by the questions. The topics of inquiry included:

- Fragments (Associations of body parts with texture, tones, temperature, location, and position).
- Organs (Associations with emotions as a form of bodily communication).
- Typologies (Ranking the most familiar body types).
- Dimensions (Ranking: biological, social, spiritual).
- Environment (Associating natural phenomena with an emotion and a color, highlighting the optical effect of the body's separation from the environment).
- Stereotypes (Ranking bodies and reflecting on beauty as a form of nonverbal communication).
- Technology (Ranking values: infinity, multitemporal, overcoming environmental diseases, having no gender limitations).
- Biopolitics (Ranking a list of disruptive social and bodily actions).
- Representation (Drawing the multidimensionality of the body).

We are advancing in the design of an online form that we share with other universities. It includes questions such as those presented below that aim to account for the imaginary that young people have about corporeality.

Here we present an example of a question: With the development of technology, the dream of some human beings has been to create a computer body that does not have the

limitations of the biological body. Which of these characteristics do you think are most important?

- Who learns infinitely
- That can combat diseases in its environment
- Which is eternal
- That has no limits of intellect or emotion
- Which is multi-temporal
- That has no limitations with gender
- That can create new worlds

#### **4. Preliminary Results**

A preliminary analysis of the results reveals that reflecting on the body with students is an opportunity to understand their subjectivity, how they conceive their expression, and their forms of representation. The issue of gender identity as a limit has been present throughout the reflection. Students understand the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation. They have experienced the feeling of being men in women's bodies or women in men's bodies and have realized that gender, sexuality, and ways of loving cannot be limits for their bodies but rather arenas for liberation, questioning, sensations, without gender, without limits, without boundaries, as psychoanalysis has convincingly stated: desire has no gender; it is a part that joins with a piece, without identity, without uniqueness, without labels.

During workshops, students were invited to propose a disruptive action using the body (performance) to defend a collective cause, such as environmental and social freedoms, to discuss the body as a liberation scenario in this learning process. Many proposals were repeated: a march of breastfeeding women to defend their right to do so in public was one of the most recurrent, followed by somewhere women appeared with underarm hair to oppose aesthetic standards or others where female soccer players shaved their heads and marched in protest against sexism in football. Some participants thought about marking the traces left by the body's movements in places with red ink.

Imagining these performative actions has been influential, allowed discussions about the body as a means of communication and a mediation device, and sparked theatrical ideas in students right from the classroom.

## 5. Discussion

This study aims to contribute to a pedagogy through mediation, in which we build poetic bodies and pedagogy from the depths of the feminine-masculine, creating wisdom, that is, knowledge for the affirmation of life.

Let us construct a new science, a new paradigm without genuflections to power and capital, a path to listen with our feet, a knowledge from the lower abdomen so that all microorganisms survive so that we all survive. Let's hypothesize dreams demonstrate that love and peace are possible so that living well stands out and resonates.

We will form a new paradigm based on feelings, dreams, emotions, mediation, living well, care, the feminine and the ecological, the inclusion of alternative knowledge, the exploration of other themes, transversality, interdisciplinarity, the dialectic of systems, and in general, all complexity. All this does not mean losing objectivity or discarding scientific postulates; on the contrary, the inclusion of the subject and their vital and sensual passion—knowing that we cannot have a total view of the object of study, its components, its epistemology without the subject being immersed, without the subject mediating and being mediated, without their hormones, their vital cycles, their subjectivities—makes the subject and object in the process, as the object is already different insofar as it is not objectified; it is a construct, a system of systems, an interwoven and interconnected method in which nothing is alone in the universe; everything is interconnected.

The old paradigm has always divided us, fragmented us, torn us from ourselves, giving our materiality (the body) the character of disposable, secondary, which houses higher instances such as the soul, the psyche, reason, spirit, and intelligence. Therefore, it is merely a complement, a brick-load of the highest values, barely deserving punishment, control, discipline, obedience, and submission.

The search for this coveted unity has always been among abstract entities such as the self, subjectivity, reason, or intelligence. Of course, this unity was never achieved; it was never complete or accurate; there was always an edge, an end, a limit, something on the other side, a ghost, a mystery, something veiled! Thus, the only place where everything converges is the body, not the abstract body, not an idealized or individualized body; such a body does not exist. The lived body is socialized socializing because our body coexists, occurs, and is produced in a society of bodies, giving it its true character.

We have a split unity, so it is necessary to assemble it, search for it, find it, and reconstruct it in the body as a social body. This body is, therefore, historical in all its singular and social historical being. This is where we need to restart the search for our unity, our reason for being united with everything, with everyone.

However, knowing that is an act of consciousness, of being and doing, is a state of meaning in the very ontology of the body's being. But our sense-making and consciousness are the most limited things we have because our body sings in all the universal spheres and makes us one and disperses, unites, and fragments us, so our unity is divided.

## **6. Conclusions**

During this research, corporeality operated as a connection between self-weavers who interwove their relationship with biopedagogy and biopolitics from the sciences of complexity. In the field application, it was evident that human representation and self-constitution processes are inherent to learning and the formation of students' subjectivities. Spanish students demonstrated a more remarkable ability to make abstract connections. All participants represented perceptions of body parts, organs, and senses as interconnected entities.

The work in focus groups allowed for reflection and representation of the theme of the body, both through performance, the act of learning with the body, and through the virtuality of language concerning corporeality. If the body is language, these exercises speak to students in their code and invite transformations from within.

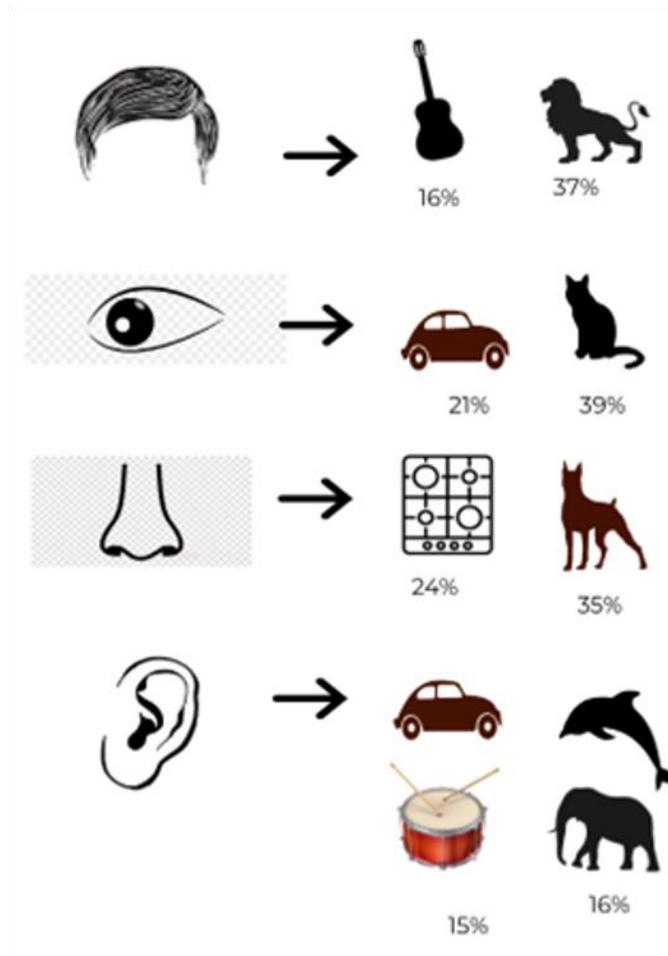
In the drawings created by the students, the notion of the body almost always appeared framed by a silhouette, which was sometimes constructed with letters or objects representing human activities such as soccer and music, highlighting the multidimensionality of the body. In these drawings, we confirmed that we are all stardust, viewing ourselves as fragments, elemental particles of the informed universe.



**Image 1.** The multidimensionality of the body. Source: Student A.

The responses varied regarding whether body parts are above or below, inside or outside, cold or hot, hard or soft. The speech acts in the comments revealed sensations and concerns about the question, which "stripped many participants of their clothing," as they expressed.

**6.1 Some speech acts from Colombian students:**



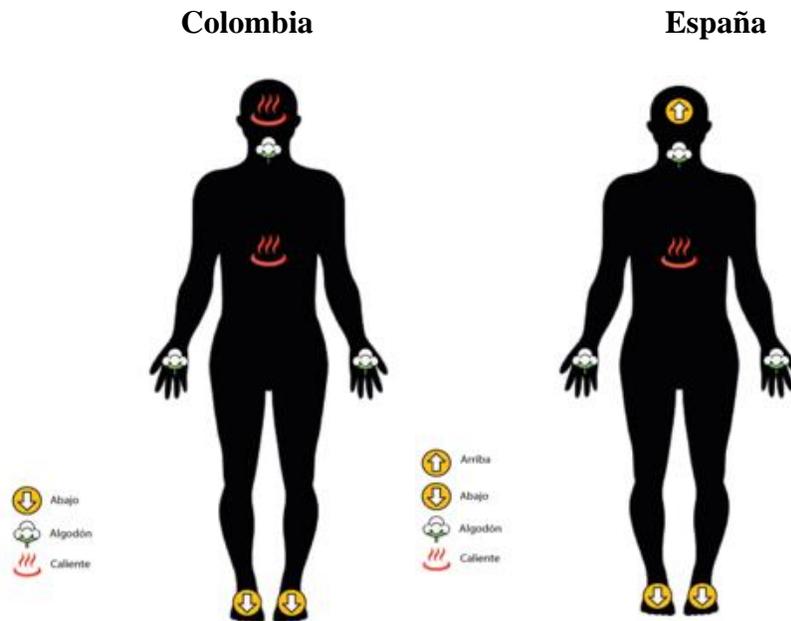
**Image 2.** Senses, things and animals. Source: Own elaboration.

"I find it curious to associate these three things, which in a way have nothing to do with each other, but in one's imagination, one creates that connection." (Student F). "I find it easier to associate colors; things seem senseless." (Student J). "I had never thought about this before." (Student A). "I associated the parts of the body I consider most important with colors and animals that I think are better and stronger. For example, I associated the eyes with yellow because it's a bright color that gives light, like sight. I associated it with the Eagle because it's an animal that spends most of its time at heights, seeing things differently. I related it to a stove because it produces a flame, which produces light-like sight in humans. I gave them more superficial connections for parts of the body like elbows, navels, and nails because I don't consider them important compared to the others." (Student C). "I chose red for the nose because I wanted to refer to when someone is cold, their nose turns red. A fish, for the shape of its mouth.

The ladder, the meaning I wanted to give it is that when you touch someone's mouth, and there's a connection, you start to feel like you're climbing steps, continuing to have sensational chemistry." (Student Q).

### 6.2 Some speech acts from Spanish students:

"I associate the color with whatever comes to mind first. The animal with what I find most relevant in comparison. And the thing, a bit randomly." (Student M). "I associated them with the natural color of body parts and animals." (Student G). "It made me think about assigning a color to parts of my body, something I had never done before, and it was interesting." (Student A). "Interesting, the images that come to your mind when associating each body part with previous knowledge that has some connection." (Student J). "Belly button, purple for origin, turtle for shape, and screw for folds." (Student D).



*Image 3.* Associations. Source: Own elaboration.

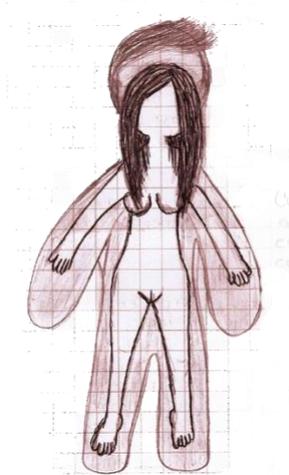
In the inquiry about body types, the participants proposed the social body, the body that is the body of bodies and, therefore, the conscious body of the other, of others, the body that is both me and the other, otherness, the body that forges a common will for life in and through all, the body that knows life is woven as a fabric, as an interweaving that connects us with the other that we consider more distant.



**Image 4.** Body types. Source: Own elaboration.

This response speaks of the overcoming of individualism, not of subjectivities, of the company of a self that teaches us to love our body, care for it, indulge it, and make it full of pleasure, of creativity, not just for oneself anymore.

Freedom in gender identity was a factor present in both countries, expressing ideas strongly in favor of respecting diversity and the testimony of belonging to an environment where this diversity is possible. There is a lot of naturalness in the relationship between the body and the environment and an interest in performing actions primarily to protect animals and ecosystems.



**Image 5.** No gender limits. Source: Student G.

Notably, in the association between the body and technology, being eternal was the least important option, which could be explained in the context of the ephemeral imagery



twins. Zac Efron is very hot." (Student E). "Variety of bodies and the most handsome have less clothing." (Student F).



*Image 7.* Spanish student stereotypes. Source: Own elaboration.

There were mighty speech acts in both countries: "We should not care about anything." In many speeches, the word was used to touch the body, showing that words dissolve the boundaries of corporeality.

Talking about the body with students, learning with it, representing it, and placing it at the center of the classroom is a way of mediating pedagogy, valuing it, and giving it meaning as the metaphor of all metaphors when we talk about learning.

The aim was to enrich the concept of self, liberate consciousness, urge the drive, and invoke the production of meaning of the other corporeality that always feels, communicates, and inserts itself in the socio-cultural space-time, in the unique immanence possible only in everyday life or in the pleasant aroma of a cup of coffee. It's about bringing the body to the classroom stage as an actor-actress and an object of study and pleasure.



**Image 8.** Body and continuity. Source: Student J.

Incorporating life into the body makes it tangible and complete; it animates us in the body, not in the air. It recognizes us in all our fragility despite our potency. The body is liberated in the autonomy of women, men, and non-binary individuals, enjoying it in everyday life, making it bread, dancing, and doings, thinking of it as territory and device of freedom.

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