

115 - THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY OF EXTREME ADVENTURERS: THE SEARCH FOR VERTIGO

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These new practices and talks about the risk may be show by some implicit feelings that need to be revealed, the search of sense of life in the emotions and in the adrenaline. These senses of risk as practice continue the search of breaking the human limits, besides that whole life presents us an investigative field of provocation .

Thus, we adopted a study with qualitative research approach. As an instrument for data collection, a semi-structured interview applied to 11 Brazilian participants of extreme risk sports was adopted. The method for the speech analysis was the one proposed by Orlandi (2001). The aim of this study is identifying the senses and meanings that are shown in extreme risk sports practicers speeches.

The different adventure and extreme risk practices have taken place in the worldwide and Brazilian sport sceneries and are not new for the contemporary society. They can be lived by many people in different parts of this globalized world. More and more athletes are seen challenging time and space, increasing their own limits. These athletes show ultra-efficiency, characterizing an excellence culture typical of post-modernity. The practicers of these sports have their behaviors intoxicated by the current culture, ephemeral, frivolity, hedonism. The dive of these athletes into the Waters of extreme risk sports "river", which is mostly muddy and violent, is to test their limits.

For Costa ((1999, p.26))

The calculated risk explodes in the fascination for vertigo, which sides with a kind of intoxication and a domination of one of its effects. The seek for vertigo, elaborated imaginary and really in the risk, through voluptuous panic, is a symbolic confrontment with death which reinforces and personally values the pleasure of life: the height, the speed, the free fall, the pleasure of intense sensations. This organized way of vertigo is a playful relation in which the actor imaginarily or really dives into danger, bringing on some unbalance.

For the researcher, there is a game established by practicers with their own existence, trying to lengthen it; this way, the individual reinforces his/her identity feeling. The, Costa expresses agreement with the ideas of Le Breton (1991, 2009), for whom the fascination for vertigo in high risk activities is a game with existence and death.

It is realized that one of the conducting clues of the adventure and risk practices is the seek for vertigo. Vertigo is the false sensation that the body is moving in space, or even moving in relation to the body. Opening into two sides, vertigo can have somatic or psych origins (Quinodoz, 1995). In her studies, this psychoanalyst pointed some forms of vertigo, in which there are the vertigo for the attraction for the emptiness, the vertigo for expansion and the vertigo for competition, in which the aim of our study is identified and placed.

From the point of view of Quinodoz (1995), these different forms of vertigo can be consisted of pleasure. This way the author opens ways for us to understand what makes an athlete feel attracted for more and more difficult things, such as, the Death Valley run, in a desert in California, or a decaironman, physical tests that require the maximum mental and physical abilities from the practicer. This attraction is because of the needs and wills generated inside the own practicers, who search for filling in the emptiness in their insides in these inhospitable tests, expand their ego unlimitedly, overcome the opponent and overcome themselves, finding their way of existing and feeling alive. Quinodoz comments the way of pleasure for expansion expressed by adventure and risk sports athletes:

I think that this will to maximum spread their limits, until feeling the unbreakable limit, which is here the expansion is over, corresponds to all the sport tries of the conquerors of the impossible. In a sport, they have an inner pleasure to enlarge their limits, until where it is possible, and feel when the narcissist extravasations (1995, p.113).

Then, the extreme athletes will play with vertigo according to the risks the object offers, even getting to death, looking for anchorage in Freud, when he postulates the duality between life and death pulses. For the author, it is above all the question of linking and disconnecting life and death pulses that affects closely the eventual challenge to death (p.142).

When the individuals do not operate this link between life and death pulses, and particularly, isolate or refuse their death pulse, the vital processes get in danger. The death pulse, isolatedly, without the combination with life pulsion, can take an individual to a self-destruction process, once it works silently. Observing an athlete obstinate for his/her conquest, for a goal which needs to be reached, blindness in front of danger is observed; it well illustrates the silent character of death pulse work: you speak with the person and he/she does not listen, his/her feet bleed, his/her toes freeze, his/her movements are not coordinate, he/she cannot realize he/she is doing something destructive.

But Quinodoz (1995) reinforces an important question: the athletes who know the risks they are taking and try to face them, play a vertigo game which is less dangerous than the individuals who take risks without having conscience of auto and hetero-destructivity; for these people, what matters is not death, but all related to limits. However, the author leaves between lines that some cases of vertigo games dissimulate a badly disguised trend to suicide.

Caillois, in the book *The games and men: mask and vertigo* (1990), when discussing the games and the way of playing, *paidia* and *ludus*, proposes a division for games in which the principal roles are competition (*agon*), bad or good luck (*alea*), *simulacrum* (mimicry) and *vertigo* (*ilinx*). We are going to bring vertigo into our discussion, which in the conception of the author consists of a try to destroy the stability of the perception and impose a voluptuous panic to lucid consciousness for a brief moment. There is a kind of spasm, vertigo, trance, fruition that makes reality strongly fade for a moment. Among the discussions that Caillois proposes about vertigo, we can mention the body excesses in doing tiring athletic tests, among them, ultra-resistance tests, in which the practicers have their bodies anaesthetized by dopamine, endorphin, among other substances, that disguise the physical tiredness; in other words instead of these competitors feeling pain or tired, they will have pleasant,

excitement, relief sensations and this way it is possible to spread their limits beyond what is humanly possible.

Durand relates vertigo with fall and its terrible aspect when it happened. For example, it is remembered that the first fall and fear experience can already be observed in birth, as well as it is reinforced when the child starts the first steps. Vertigo, for Durand, is an illness created by the distance between a stable and land foothold, is the inhibitory image of all ascension, a psych and moral block which is explained by violent psycho physiological phenomena (1997, p.113). The uneven and fast changes caused by fall will strengthen vertigo, once it will generate displeasure, followed by pleasure when there is an aim and it is reached (or conquered). In contrast to the catastrophic aspect of the fall, the ascending symbols orientated by elevation schéme, verticality and ascension show up.

Another author who treats vertigo question is the anthropologist Le Breton (1991, 1995, 1996). In his conception, the fascination for vertigo in high risk activities is a game with existence. Costa (1999) complements Le Breton stating that the preference for vertigo would be an extension game of existence, reinforcing the identity feeling of whom dares to challenge it. It is as if the actor could detain and dominated his existence (p.26).

This existence is seen expressed in many tries of high risk tests practicers when testing their limits, trying to do more and more difficult athletic performances, getting involved in long efforts which, as said beforehand, can take weeks and represent the will to know: What is my limit? What is the limit of the others? In other words, what is the limit of the human being for these inhospitable tests?

It is through this search for what is humanly possible to make it come true, crossing the African continent on foot, the Saara Desert, crossing the American continent by bicycle, or even doing an ironman a day, during den days, that these athletes see themselves involved with their aims and goals, traced and calculated in details, in a way to able to finish a competition, or even an exploit. It is necessary to confront oneself, challenge body and mind, test oneself, learn to know oneself on possible limits and prove oneself and to the world what can be done. In a recent study about high risk sports, the researcher Soulé (2007) indicates that such tests bring the approval of the resistance to suffering and the determination of the athlete (referring to Sables Marathon).

For Le Breton (1991), what these practicers want is

[...] to find a physical limit where symbolic ones are missing, trace a content on oneself to feel existence, in a temporary or lasting way. The limit is an anthropological necessity, it permits existing placing oneself actively in a sense of symbolic system that structures changes (p.17).

But, getting involved vertiginously in performances, these competitors do not realize that they are somehow confronting death. They are exposing themselves, abandoning their safety and comfort, to take a way that even calculated in details, will put him/her in front of a tenuous line between living and dying. If he/she lives escaping from the risk taken, his/her existence will have meaning and value for the conquest; if he/she dies, he/she will die trying to guarantee his/her existence. Every search for limits, in last analysis, requires death to guarantee one self's existence [...] death symbolically overcome let's keep living under a new legitimacy (Le Breton, 1991, p.18).

We observe that this search for limits is uninterrupted. It started timidly at the beginning of the 20th century, but has been intensified and disseminated since the 60's (Costa, 1999), when adventure and risk sports appear and spread all over the planet, new tests, new challenges, more and more absurd than the ones before and that have been created with a single purpose: to raise difficulties, to test, to expand the limit of competitors. There is a imaginary game established among these athletes who try, with their athletic skills, to expand what is humanly impossible to do.

The dissemination of these sports will happen concomitantly with what Le Breton (2006) calls a new body imaginary (p.9). A simulacrum, fragmented body, a human imagination support that has taken man to unimaginable places. The extreme adventurers use their bodies to get along with the world, with the others and with themselves, a portrait of a society marked by individualism, which searches for social and cultural references in the individual him/herself. That is the reason why body is the place and time of the limit.

Towards so many athletic performances, among the ones we appreciate the ultra-resistance tests, we see ourselves in front of some questions: Is there really a limit for these extreme adventurers? Until where will it be possible to get?

Up to the present it has not been possible to find an answer, but we are absolutely sure that death is the end of this uninterrupted search for human limits overcome. For Le Breton (1991), fixing death and tracing the limits of its power reinforces the identity feeling of who dares to take the risk. According to the author, these adventurers keep ordeal rituals, and the ordeal has not been a social ritual anymore and became a passing individual ritual. These individuals are found away from society and their tender social and cultural connections, to be responsible only for what it is concerned, in an individualist attitude, typical of post-modernity (or risk society), but suitable to guarantee its existence.

The risks lived by new adventurers, physical activity practicers, are freely chosen as value. It is about adventure with a playful sense, once the attitude of the people who live adventure in sport is taken as a risk in which it is dare to play themselves with the trustworthy of dominating the technique more and more. They show audacity to be able to unleash this risk, authorized by the trusting idea of being able to throw themselves into space, into depth, into immersion, into the fight again nature obstacles, associated with the exciting and comfortable pleasure of having (vertigo) and having it done with great competence (Costa, 1999, p.102).

The ordeal and the risk usually make a non-separable couple. The ordeal will make its raw material from the risk; it represents the maximum of the risk, the individual feel obliged to reach the boundary of his/her possibilities or even to go far beyond it, fostering a greater closeness with death. We can say that there is a flirt with death, in domination, confront sense, to be able to deny it. And these athletes get to the point to treat pain with insignificance, as the pleasure is intensified:

"Pain is temporary. It can take a minute, an hour, a day, a week, a year [...] but at a moment it goes away [...] and if you give up, you will have to deal it the inconvenience of having left a battle behind and the loss sensation. But if you move on, you will conquer victory and be able to enjoy the only taste it has... victory is eternal. Pain and inconvenience are fleeting, but pride lasts forever"

*"The pain is temporary. The pride lasts forever."*²

*"It's the pain of the consequences that's all out of proportion."*³

Searching for explanations for the risk conducts of the individuals in post-modernity, Le Breton (1995, 1996, 1991) will propose four ordeal figures: the vertigo, the challenge, the survival and the blancheur (paleness, whiteness, weakness). The vertigo promotes a temporary disorder in the search for senses exaltation. The challenge is not only a competition, but also the determination of not giving up facing difficulties and provocations. Training is very important for these adventurers to know the possibilities and limits of their bodies, as well as the best way of found top up with these challenges and survive. The survival is another ordeal figure proposed, in which the adventurers try to fuse with nature, in a mixture of adventure and ecological conscience. The blancheur is a process opposite to the ordeal figures before, since during the search for sense in the risk, by the

individual, loses attraction and intensity, being taken by paleness/whiteness.

Maffesoli (2003) complements that excess, presenteeism, hedonismo, in other words, youth, has contaminated more and more the ways of being and thinking of the post-modern man. And our informers are not out of it, when dedicating their lives hard much beyond our actions, living without boundaries or limits. This lack of care makes these youth attitudes a life with urgency, without worrying about consequences of their actions and tomorrow, explaining the will to live the presenter.

CONCLUSION

We can conclude that the practicing the ultra-resistance extreme tests, our informers cultivate an uprising; power feeling, which will keep them throughout the athletic competitions. They engender an ascending effort in their performances, getting distant from the world of mortals, and follow to the top, ascend to the place of over-human, divine beings. This ascension, verticalization, elevation and luminosity will elicit power and self-control of extreme importance for athletes, as this ascension and power will be in opposite to the fall, to descending to darkness, to the exalted vertigo moment that lets meet exhaustion and tiredness of oniric powers, to meeting death, flirting with it, but needing to survive. This way, they develop their soul virtues: audacity, mettle, courage and self-control.

¹ Depoimento do ultramaratonista Marcio Villar ao site www.corrotododia.com.br

² Unknown author, in declaration to the website www.run100s.com. Access on May 3, 2010.

³ Declaration made by the ultramarathon athlete Kenny Moore to the website www.run100s.com. Access on May 3, 2010.

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE: The aim of this study is identifying the senses and meanings that are shown in extreme risk sports practitioners' speeches. **METHODOLOGY:** Study with qualitative research approach. As an instrument for data collection, a semi-structured interview applied to 11 Brazilian participants of extreme risk sports was adopted. The method for the speech analysis was the one proposed by Orlandi (2001). **RESULTS:** Among the imaginary marks that emerged from the speeches, we highlight ecstasy senses revealed by the search for vertigo. **CONCLUSION:** As ultra-resistance extreme practices are taken, our informers cultivate exaltation and power feelings, which will keep them throughout the athletic competitions. They engender a vertical effort in their performances, getting far from mortals. They search for the intoxicated vertigo moment which lets them meet exhaustion and the end of their oneiric strengths, meet death, flirt with it, but with the necessity of needing to survive. Good aspects of their souls are developed: audacity, impulse, courage and self-control.

KEYWORDS: social imaginary, adventure and risk sport, vertigo.

L'IMAGINAIRE SOCIAL DES AVENTURIERS DE L'EXTRÊME: LA RECHERCHE DU VERTIGE

RESUMÉ

OBJECTIF: L'étude a pour but d'identifier les sensations et l'importance que les adeptes de sports extrêmes à haut risque leur attribuent dans les entretiens. **MÉTHODOLOGIE:** Étude menée à travers une recherche qualitative. Les informations ont été recueillies par le biais d'un entretien semi directif avec 11 adeptes brésiliens de sports extrêmes à haut risque. La méthode d'analyse du discours a été celle proposée par Orlandi (2001). **RÉSULTATS:** En ce qui concerne l'aspect imaginaire observé dans les entretiens, nous pouvons distinguer des sensations telles que, l'extase révélée par une recherche du vertige. **CONCLUSION:** En défiant des épreuves d'extrême endurance, nos informateurs éprouvent une sensation d'élévation, de puissance, qui va les accompagner tout au long des compétitions d'athlétisme. Ils engendrent un effort qui les mène vers une ascension constante dans leurs performances, au fur et à mesure qu'ils s'éloignent du monde des mortels. Ils recherchent un moment de vertige enivrant qui permet d'aller défier l'exhaustion et l'épuisement de leurs forces oniriques, connaître la mort, flirter avec elle, tout en restant obligé de survivre. Ainsi ils développent des vertus de leurs âmes: l'audace, l'impétuosité, le courage et la maîtrise de soi.

MOTS-CLÉS: Imaginaire social, sport extrême à haute risque, vertige.

EL IMAGINARIO SOCIAL DE AVENTUREROS DEL EXTREMO: LA BÚSQUEDA DEL VÉRTIGO

RESUMEN

OBJETIVO: El estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los sentidos y significados que se presentan en los discursos de practicantes de deportes de riesgo extremo. **METODOLOGÍA:** Estudio con abordaje de investigación de calidad. Como instrumento para recogida de datos se adoptó una entrevista semiestructurada aplicada a 11 participantes brasileños de deportes de riesgo extremo. El método de análisis del discurso fue el propuesto por Orlandi (2001). **RESULTADOS:** Entre las

marcas imaginarias que surgieron de los discursos, resaltamos sentidos de éxtasis revelado por la búsqueda del vértigo. Conclusión: Al practicaren las pruebas extremas de ultra resistencia, nuestros informantes cultivan un sentimiento de elevación, de potencia, que va a mantenerles a lo largo de las disputas atléticas. Engendran un esfuerzo verticalizador en sus performances, alejándose del mundo de los mortales. Buscan el momento de vértigo inebriado que permite ir al encuentro de la exhaustividad y del agotamiento de sus fuerzas oníricas, conocer a la muerte, flirtear con ella, pero necesitando sobrevivir. Desarrollan así las virtudes de sus almas: audacia, impulso, coraje y autocontrol.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Imaginario social, deporte de aventura y riesgo, vértigo.

O IMAGINÁRIO SOCIAL DE AVENTUREIROS DO EXTREMO: A BUSCA DA VERTIGEM

RESUMO

OBJETIVO: O estudo tem como objetivo identificar os sentidos e significados que se apresentam nos discursos de praticantes de esportes de risco extremo. **METODOLOGIA:** Estudo com abordagem de pesquisa qualitativa. Como instrumento para coleta de dados adotou-se uma entrevista semi-estruturada aplicada a 11 participantes brasileiros de esportes de risco extremo. O método de análise do discurso foi o proposto por Orlandi (2001). **RESULTADOS:** Dentre as marcas imaginárias que emergiram dos discursos, destacamos sentidos de êxtase revelado pela busca da vertigem. **CONCLUSÃO:** Ao praticarem as provas extremas de ultra-resistência, nossos informantes cultivam um sentimento de elevação, de potência, que vai mantê-los ao longo das disputas atléticas. Engendram um esforço verticalizante em suas performances, distanciando-se do mundo dos mortais. Buscam o momento de vertigem embriagada que permite ir ao encontro da exaustão e do esgotamento das suas forças oníricas, conhecer a morte, flertar com ela, mas precisando sobreviver. Desenvolvem assim as virtudes de suas almas: audácia, ímpeto, coragem e autocontrole.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Imaginário social, esporte de aventura e risco, vertigem.