84 - THE REDEFINITION OF PUBLIC SPACE BY YOUNG SPORTSPERSONS - THE SOCIAL NATURE OF THE IMAGINARY WORLD OF STREET SKATEBOARDING AND LE PARKOUR

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Introduction:

Presently, one observes a growing number of enthusiasts of calculated-risk sports, in which the uncommon is revealed according to the disposition of information manifested by the environment, whether in nature or in the urban environment.

The practice of adventure and risk sports, such as surfing, biking, skating, skateboarding and others, and recently in Brazil, *parkour*, originates from a spectacular revolution and from logical adaptation to an age of dizzying exchanges, which we watch today.

There is social construction of extreme risk among youths, materialized in games and sports that emphasize excellence of performance in urban sports, called "radical" sports, such as biking, inline skating and skateboarding, and, more recently in Brazil, in the leisurely practice of *Parkour*, a sport that grows by the day among young people.

Denominated by many authors as a social category, youth is considered to be a transitional phase, in which passing from a more withdrawn, dependent social condition to a broader condition occurs. It can be considered a period of preparation for entering adult social life (Abramo, 1994, in Sallas, 1999). In this way, these youths embrace the practice of adventure sports with the boldness necessary to an age of transition. With great courage, they appropriate city spaces (enchanted by them) that often seem to be forgotten on weekends and are rarely frequented by the working populous. With their maneuvers, pirouettes and acrobatics, the young adventurers give a personal touch to the public area in a demonstration of pleasure and vitality of the embraced sport.

Skating and *Parkour* are treated here as urban-adventure practices, in which these young enthusiasts, during their leisure hours, imprint their actions with truly challenging meanings, overcoming barriers and possible prejudices of the society imposed upon them.

In a study about street skateboarding entitled *Adventure and Risk in Street Skateboarding: a study of the social nature of the imaginary world of young skaters*, Costa (2004) introduces us to the people of the skater tribe, who present themselves as "new" urban architects, which, with their careless, fearless ways, emerge as architects of ideas. With their adventures, they engender paths, constructing obstacles and seeing the city as a lover ready to embrace them, showing them the curves and lines of this space full of uncertainties and mysteries. Seduced by new challenges, they encounter this lifestyle. These youths redefine public space, creating places, revitalizing modernity, developing other ways of seeing things and re-creating the city through experiencing the slips and slides of their adventures.

Le parkour, a present-day urban sport, newly introduced in Brazil (2004), has already seduced various adepts. Various groups are still being created in some states like São Paulo, Brasília and Rio de Janeiro, with the intention of showing the growth of the sport and of erecting the foundation of the new tribe. It is a so-called radical practice, in which youths jump over obstacles like walls and stairways, going up or down buildings, and showing acrobatic efficiency, strength and agility.

According to the site www.leparkourbrasil.com.br, there are divergences over the creation of *parkour*. Since primordial times, we have lived with freedom of movement. This rediscovery was experienced and the present characteristics were acquired in the 80's on the streets of Lisse, a suburb of Paris. Two young friends, who used to train this sport together, today dispute the authorship of *parkour*. They are David Belle (considered by the great majority to be the true creator) and Sébastian Foucan.

At fifteen, Belle decided to take his gymnasium experience in gymnastics and martial arts to the streets, sharing it with his childhood friends, and also with Foucan, the main person responsible for the creation of various techniques and the systemization of the sport - which would become known as *parkour* years later. They experienced the influences of lifesaving operations performed by elite firemen, through the natural method of training the body developed by George Herbert, and through escape techniques used in the Vietnam War. Fantasizing emergency situations, where they would need to perform lifesaving operations in hard-to-get-to places, they would train their minds and bodies to overcome any obstacle that they encountered on the way. That way, David acquired the movements and the training of the firemen, training his mind during his moments of fantasy in the Parisian suburb where he lived.

Because it was extremely malleable, daring and challenging, the Yamakasi group, formed by Belle and his friends in the early days, captivated new enthusiasts on its trips through Europe.

Street Skateboarding and *Le Parkour* are two, juvenile-style sports that redirect one's views of cities.

The study has two objectives: (a) to investigate the meaning of adventure, risk and vertigo in the urban environment - factors which appear in the conversations of street skaters and *parkour* enthusiasts - and (b) to place in evidence the symbolic elements that emerge in these conversations.

Methodological Strategies:

The procedure adopted for this study was the interpretive, qualitative, ethnographic approach and analysis of conversations transmitted in the sayings of street skating and *le parkour* enthusiasts. Those interviewed were street skaters and *traceurs de parkour*, present in the national scenario, who practice these sports as leisure and who stand out for their pirouettes in the urban environment. The representation of non-enthusiasts (young and old) over these enthusiasts is taken as a reference.

The Intervention of Sports in Urban Life:

When a group of young people begins to practice either street skating or *parkour* on urban streets, it sometimes causes estrangement in people. Observed by critical eyes, these youths are frequently considered to be vandals or childish adults playing games of daring maneuvers around obstacles on urban roadways, in the case of street skaters, or jumping walls and stairways and spinning themselves around on the walls of buildings, as in *parkour*. This way, this group of youths rapidly perceives that the practice of unconventional activities can cause aversions on the part of society that sees them practicing their leisure sport. Accustomed to the intense privatization of knowledge, of practices and of the environment they live in, these youths

also expect regulations of things in detriment to creativity.

Traceurs say that, when they began to frequent public plazas to train, they discover how little use these places get, many times abandoned or simply unexploited on sunny weekends, as opposed to private environments, such as shopping centers, academies and clubs, which are full of people during the same period. It is precisely the abandonment of or disinterest in public spaces that frequently leads political and executive authorities to abandon these localities.

Street skaters and also *parkour* enthusiasts turn transgression into creation. They do not fear facing an obstacle, preferring to get to know it rather than shun it. They learn to approach it with caution, yet without fearing it. Faced with insurmountable obstacles, they learn to know themselves and respect limits.

Youth and Adventure Sports

Youths, and those who adopt a youthful lifestyle, join themselves one to another and share their feelings about culture, sports, leisure and fashion, which are experiences of groupings in which some find themselves in others of the tribe. According to Pais (1992), threatened by the cultural industry's standardization of leisure, youths reject this routinization and everything related to the monotony of daily life. When they dare to re-create new practices, they begin to revitalize the day-to-day boredom, inscribing an ethic that establishes life as an adventure. Leisure thus presents itself as a weapon of insurrection against routinization and massification, and it begins to be experienced as a time of discoveries, new sensations and the uncommon. This young lifestyle expresses values that represent a differentiation, the boldness to assume the amusement that seems to identify the true preferences of young people, giving groups individuality and revealing their beliefs and ideologies.

This potentialization of adventure and calculated-risk sports is socially seen as a field rich in symbolism within the sports aspect of the present imaginary world.

According to Maffesoli (2001), living in groups brings forth collective emotion, something incarnate that is part of man and his rooting in the world. It is the search for being-together. This experience emerges from an in-tune relationship, a form of divine manifestation of a strongly present "us", even thought it is part of the intentions of individuals. This tuning always occurs, beginning with something sensitive, whether by contact, perception or looking. And it is this sensitivity, says Maffesoli, which constitutes itself in the substrate of the recognition and experience of the other.

Considered to be irreverent, irresponsible or unproductive by a large segment of older people, youth seems to suffer from discredit in the imaginary expectations of modern society. In turn, these biases cause dissatisfaction and intolerance on the part of youths, expressed by way of rebellious actions that make it hard to absorb the concept of citizenship. However, besides dilemmas, youth also brings with it dreams, challenges, uncertainties and anxieties as to the future, which are part of the transitional period to maturity.

Young people's irreverence makes itself present in their simple, carefree manner of using urban areas and in the way they dress. They form groups and seek the co-existence of their "crowd", independent of the social class to which they belong.

To Groppo (2000), youth "offers participating individuals a situation which is common in the historical social process and, therefore, the potential for a characteristic type of historically relevant action" (p.18). It is through the search for equals that they have relationships, broadening their ties of friendship, affection, understanding and even bad taste. That is how the socio-cultural structures are put together. In this co-existence with the group, young people learn to understand and analyze their rights, constructing their own identities. Through co-experiences, "tribes" (as Maffesoli [2000] calls them) are formed in which similarities of ideas and tastes are shared.

Represented by society as "crazies", "nuts" and "vagabonds", these youths subvert the routines of habitual leisure activities and allow the expansion of a creative condition of exploring their own bodies and their paths, skating or jumping through the city streets. These practices establish: new modes of sociability; the organization of groups that distinguish themselves by their personalized conversations, gestures and garments and the groups they hang out with; and what they like to do. These identities express demands for independence and autonomy, rejecting their inclusion in existing social structures.

Conducting studies together with groups of young participants in these radical practices facilitates understanding their modes of social insertion, desires, dreams, aspirations and conflicts.

Public Space and Urban Sports

The appropriation of public space by young groups seems to express ideas of citizenship; this means that we must develop projects that can instill, in these social groups, the values and limits necessary to human co-existence. Nowadays, it seems there is a negative image of youth as far as the use of these spaces goes. As such, youths faced with the challenge of killing their extra free time unite themselves in social groups, making a ritual out of the act of doing nothing as a form of youthful affirmation and sometimes using public property in an inadequate manner as a way of expressing their desires for society.

Young people seek to group themselves in pairs with schoolmates or neighbors. This co-existence is always territorial, reminding one of a kind of lair. The "clans" form themselves from this territorial co-existence. According to Prost (1992), the neighborhood space is the place of mutually knowing one another, and it favors the recognition of each individual for his particularities. As such, we can see groups of youths with sculpturally worked bodies and keen minds jumping around the city, performing daring acrobatics and concentrating themselves on millimetrically precise jumps or on a more carefree way of using public spaces in a different, joyful way, transgressive yet serious, precise, worried only about having fun.

According to Minavo et al (1999, p.18), "the group is a privileged place for the construction of identity for a youth". It is through the search for equals, or even for similar persons, that youths interrelate, broadening their chain of friendships, affection, understanding and even bad taste. This is how socio-cultural structures are put together. In this co-existence with the group, youths learn to understand and analyze their rights, constructing their identity. This union, by way of co-existence, forms what Maffesoli (2000) calls "tribes", in which the similarities of ideas and tastes are shared.

It is in the dynamics between public and private sectors that we see the emergence of urban sports adhered to by a group of youths that transgress existing laws for the use of space. *Parkour* and street skating are similar in the way they use and explore these localities, bringing to society a revitalization of the spaces domesticated by man. It is a new form of interacting with the urban environment that surrounds us. We can perceive youths overcoming obstacles, challenging them with their own fears. They bring the urban world a little bit of art sketched by them and edited by us.

Final Considerations

In a preliminary analysis, we can conclude that young skaters and *traceurs de parkour* weave new paths, sketch their own routes and infringe established order on city streets. To these youths, the city is not limited to specific forms of bourgeois spatial use; it evokes vibrant practices with a route plan idealized by the youths. As Certeau (1994) put it, the city presents itself to these sportive youngsters as a place that is incessantly subject to enrichment by new attributes, at the same time becoming the

machinery and the hero of modernity. For these young performers, the sensation of vertigo is felt in the acceleration of the inline movement imprinted upon the skateboard, by the speed or in combination with spinning, acrobatic movements in the case of *Parkour*, by which the body is subjected to giddiness and to bodily sensations that they experience. We can link these sensations to the *ilînx* element, vertigo, which, according to Caillois (1990), is a state of ecstasy leading to the loss, for a few instants, of perceptive stability, and inflicting voluptuous panic on the lucid consciousness.

The symbol encountered in the conversations of these young enthusiasts of street skating and *parkour* is "bird/flight". As such, we can say that the sense of flying is, for them, the way of freeing themselves from urban chaos, seeking freedom through their leisure activities. To them, flight means reaching the sky, where only your imagination can go, whether with your feet on a skateboard or on the walls of the buildings and low walls of viaducts, where only they, or rather, the flight of the winged bird, reaches celestial space.

To Chevalier e Gheerbrant (2001), the bird opposes the serpent, symbolizing the celestial world against the terrestrial world. The bird, in Taoism, means that immortals adopt the form of birds for the lightening and liberation of earthly weight. Birds can symbolize spiritual states, angels, or even superior states of being. In the Koran, it is the language of the angels, the spiritual knowledge.

The search for self-transcendence appears in flight when the youth recognizes discipline, self-control and self-training, through the observation of others, reflecting upon his errors and successes, which perfect his performance. According to the *Dictionary of Symbols* (Chevalier e Gheerbrant, 2001), this image of flight signifies elevating oneself, having a narrow relation to values of superiority, power and strength. In myths and dreams, flight expresses a desire for sublimation, of searching for inner harmony and for overcoming conflicts. To Bachelard (2001), it is the symbol of spiritualization and fluidity.

These young street skaters and *traceurs* go beyond the threshold, break through the barrier of that which is common, encounter the protection of the guardian of the portal, making it over obstacles with spectacular bodily movements, enjoy the pleasure of doing it efficiently, transcending oneself. At every moment, they face challenges to their limitations and fears, overcoming them. They come to meet their potency, their great heroic force, returning to their daily lives restored in that which is basic to them: they themselves, special beings, capable of unimaginable things.

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THE REDEFINITION OF PUBLIC SPACE BY YOUNG SPORTSPERSONS - THE SOCIAL NATURE OF THE IMAGINARY WORLD OF STREET SKATEBOARDING AND LE PARKOUR

Abstract: The practice of adventure and risk sports, such as surfing, biking, skating, skateboarding and recently in Brazil *parkour*, originates from a spectacular revolution, from the logic of adaptation to an age of dizzying exchanges. Street skateboarding and *Parkour* are treated here as urban-adventure practices, where these young enthusiasts, during their leisure hours, imprint their acts with true, challenging meanings, overcoming barriers and possible prejudices of the society imposed upon them. The study has two objectives: (a) to investigate the meaning of adventure, risk and vertigo in the urban environment - factors which appear in the conversations of street skaters and parkour enthusiasts - and (b) to place in evidence the symbolic elements that emerge in these conversations. The procedure used was the interpretive, qualitative, ethnographic approach and analysis of the conversations transmitted in the sayings of street skating and *le parkour* enthusiasts. Street skaters and *traceurs de parkour* present in the urban setting were interviewed. The preliminary analyses indicate that these young street skaters and *traceurs de parkour* weave new paths, design their own routes and infringe the street ordinances established for cities. To these youths, the city is not limited to specific forms of bourgeois spatial use; it evokes vibrant practices with a route plan idealized by the youths.

Keywords: adventure, risk, vertigo, street skateboarding and *parkour*

RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO POR JOVENS ESPORTISTAS - O IMAGINÁRIO SOCIAL DO SKATEBOARD STREET E DO LE PARKOUR

Résumé:
La mise en pratique des sports d'aventure et de risque tels que le *surf, le bike, les patins, le skateboard* et plus récemment au Brésil le *parkour*, a leur origine dans une spectaculaire révolution, une logique d'adaptation à une époque de changements vertigineux . Le *Sketeboard street* et le *Parkour* vont être traités ici comme des pratiques urbaines d'aventure où les jeunes pratiquants à leurs heures de loisir imprimente à leurs actions de véritables sens de défie, dépassant, y compris, des barrières et les préjugés de la société. Cette étude a eu deux objectifs ; (a) Chercher les sens d'aventure, de risque et de vertige dans un milieu urbain, qui se présentent dans les discours des *skatistes streeters* et des pratiquants de *Parkour* ; e (b) Mettre en évidence les éléments symboliques qui émergent de ces discours. Le procédé sera l'abordage qualitative ethnographique interprétative aussi bien que l'analyse des discours des pratiquants de *skate street* et de *Parkour*. On a interviewé des *skatistes streeters* e des *traceurs de parkour* présents dans le décor urbain. Les analyses préliminaires nous montrent que ces jeunes *skatistes streeters* et *traceurs de parkour* tissent de nouvelles routes, esquissent leurs parcours, transgressent le règlement établi dans les rues de la ville. Pour ces jeunes gens, la ville ne renvoit pas a des formes spécifiques d'utilisation spaciale bourgeoise, elle suscite des pratiques vibrantes avec le tracé du parcours idéalisé par eux.

Mots-clés: aventure, risque, vertige,*sakteboard street* e *parkour.*

RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO POR JOVENS ESPORTISTAS - O IMAGINÁRIO SOCIAL DO SKATEBOARD STREET E DO LE PARKOUR

Resumen: La práctica de los deportes de aventura y riesgo tales que el *surf, bike, patíns, skateboard* y más recientemente en Brasil el *parkour*, tiene su origen en una revolución espectacular, en una lógica de adaptación a una época de cambios vertiginosos. El *Skateboard street* y el *Parkour* serán estudiados aquí como prácticas urbanas de aventura donde esos jóvenes practicantes en sus horas de ocio imprimen en sus acciones verdaderos sentidos desafiantes, superando, incluso, barreras y prejuicios que la sociedad les impone. El estudio tuvo dos objetivos : (a) Investigación de los sentidos de aventura, riesgo y vértigo en el espacio urbano, que se presentan en los discursos de los *skatistas streeters* y de los practicantes de *Parkour*, y (b): evidenciar los elementos simbólicos emergentes en sus discursos. El procedimiento será el abordaje cualitativo etnográfico interpretativo y el análisis de los discursos de los practicantes de *skate estreet* y *parkour*. Fueron entrevistados *skatista streeters* y *traceurs de parkour* presentes en el escenario urbano. El análisis preliminar nos presenta indicios de que los jóvenes *skatistas streeters* y *traceurs de parkour* hacen nuevas rutas, trazan sus caminos, dejan de cumplir las reglas establecidas en las calles de la ciudad. Para esos jóvenes, la ciudad no remite a formas específicas de utilización espacial burguesa, pero suscita prácticas vibrantes por un dibujo del trayecto idealizado por ellos.

Palabras-clave: aventura, riesgo, vértigo, skateboard street y parkour

RESSIGNIFICAÇÃO DO ESPAÇO PÚBLICO POR JOVENS ESPORTISTAS - O IMAGINÁRIO SOCIAL DO SKATEBOARD STREET E DO LE PARKOUR

Resumo: A prática dos esportes de aventura e risco tais como *surf*, *bike*, patins, *skateboard* e recentemente no Brasil o *parkour*, são originários de espetacular revolução, de uma lógica de adaptação a uma época de trocas vertiginosas. O *Skateboard street* e *Parkour* serão tratados aqui como práticas urbanas de aventura nas quais esses jovens praticantes em suas horas de lazer, imprimem aos seus atos verdadeiros sentidos desafiadores, superando, inclusive, barreiras e possíveis preconceitos da sociedade imposta sobre eles. O estudo teve dois objetivos: (a) Investigar os sentidos de aventura, risco e vertigem no meio urbano, que se apresentam nos discursos dos *skatistas streeters* e dos praticantes de *Parkour;* e (b) Evidenciar os elementos simbólicos que emergem desses discursos. O procedimento é a abordagem qualitativa etnográfica interpretativa e análise dos discursos veiculados nas falas de praticantes de *skate street e Le parkour.* Foram entrevistados *skatistas streeters e traceurs de parkour* presentes no cenário urbano. As análise preliminares nos dão indícios de que esses jovens *skatistas streeters* e *traceurs de parkour* tecem novas rotas, traçam seus percursos transgridem o ordenamento estabelecido nas ruas da cidade. Para esses jovens, a cidade não remete a formas específicas de utilização espacial burguesa, ela suscita práticas vibrantes com o traçado do percurso idealizado por eles.

Palavras chaves: aventura, risco, vertigem, *skateboard street* e *parkour.*