124 - THE EXPERIENCES OF FLIGHT AND THE RISK IN THE SPEECHES OF PRACTIONERS OF FREE FLIGHT.

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Introduction

The free flight is a sports practice which appeared in the Coast of California in the 1960s, as a risky joke of a group of adventurers who, impregnated by a recreational spirit and a power of improvisation that marked this period, accomplished small flights taking off from dunes or towed by boats in a show of boldness and courage, remarkable features in today's risky sports (AZEVEDO, 2007). The development of this sport only happens actually from the 1980s, era that is marked by the proliferation of extreme sports, the term used to identify sports related to risk and adventure (COSTA, 2000).

Currently the free flight can be done with different goals and in different ways. As for the taste of the practitioner he may choose to fly a delta wing, a paragliding and, in some cases, to opt for the two forms of flight. Depending on his experience and his technical level he can fly in equipment that enables high, medium or low performance. The way he will accomplish his flight will be directly linked to the level of the experience, the ability and the type of equipment which, in this case, should always be in line with the desired goal (AZEVEDO, 2007). Thus, if the goal of the practitioner is to compete in championships, beat records or even his own limits, the technical level should be good and equipment must be suitable for the high-flying performance. On the other hand, if the practitioner is a beginner, the equipment for flights of low performance becomes mandatory to preserve the threatening in acceptable levels. There are also those practitioners who, even with experience with equipment that allows flights of high-performance, choose the most appropriate equipment for flights with low or average performance. In this case, the practitioner opens hand of evolution offered by modern equipment, rather than a safer sports practice with equipment that gives him better conditions of control.

Given this variability offered by the flight, the uncertainty afforded by the unpredictability of the aerial environment, the daring to challenge the space flying as birds, we sought to investigate with this study, the senses of risk as a generator of communion among the practitioners of free flight.

In order to get nearer the reality of the universe of practitioners of this sport, we conducted an exploratory research, with a qualitative approach, in which issues related to the risk-adventure of flying were approached as the main theme. We analyzed the risk and the influence of sensations deriving from this risk in the process of cohesion of different communities. We analyzed the testimonies of a mail list from Internet published in the book Paragliding Brazil (2002) and interviews published in the magazines Air and Air Time Adventure, specialized in free flight. The interpretation of these speeches was made by the method of content analysis used by Bardin (2004).

The speeches of flyers

The technological development occurred in recent decades has brought benefits to many areas of the social context, even for the sports environment of risk. Advanced technologies have helped so that the materials used in these sports could become increasingly efficient and safe. More resistant and more aerodynamic equipment, built based on carbon fiber, glass, Kevlar among others, were responsible for making the free flight a sports practice in which the situations of risk could be calculated.

The World Wide Web (Internet) has been a tool of extreme importance for the practitioners of free flight. The blogs, Web sites and mailing lists accessed in this environment enables access to information on equipment, championships, accidents, besides the possibility to share images, text, videos, information about competitions, records, equipment and above all the emotions experienced in daily life of their practices.

"My life as a pilot of paragliding began on July 1996 when I had the first lesson in Morrinho. In the same week I was already searching the Internet to learn more about this sport that was so new to me. I just found several sites with information about the free flight, but most foreign ones. I looked a bit more and just came into a mailing list, already extinct, which spoke of free flight in general, mixing paragliding, delta wing and even gliders [...] I thought we could have a list only for the staff of paragliding [...] In a few days I created the list [...] From five participants on the first day, we jumped to over 600 five years later. In those years I saw everything: from Homeric fights and fantastic reports [...] to descriptions that made me fly on several ramps of Brazil - and also from various places in the world [...]" (LOPES, 2002, p. 15).

"[...] The Internet is one of the greatest revolutions of the man. It allowed people to communicate instantly on a global scale. Today, we know how the pilots are flying in the Brazilian championship on the same day. We can see the routes that each pilot has done and their tactics used, without leaving home [...]" (LOPES, 2002, p. 95)

Despite the differences between the delta wing and paragliding, supporters of these modalities of flight share the same thermals, the same takeoff ramps and, in some cases, the same anding. When comparing the two devices, the paragliding proves to be much more practical. esides allowing a much easier landing, the paragliding has no metal structure, which makes it much lighter than the delta wing, providing greater efficiency in assembling, disassembling and mainly in transport.

Despite of preferring the practice of flying with delta wing, Luiz Niemeyer instigated by Fernandes, comments on the practicality of paragliding.

"[...] The paragliding is an ease. We were on the ramp in Andradas and suddenly, Moacir appears to me on a motorcycle with the paragliding on his back. He took off, did his flight, then landed on the ramp and went away, happy with his life. It is an easiness which with a wing people do not have. The paragliding came much after the wing. Many people who wanted to learn to fly the wing went to paragliding for the easiness, for the practicality. Only those who were already on the wing know it is much better! [...]" (Luiz Niemeyer in: FERNANDES, 2006, p. 08)

The practicality was presented as an important factor in choosing this method, which contributed to pilots, until then flying delta wing, surrender to the charms of this new type of flight. That was what we observed, respectively, in the words of Luke Machado, John Pendry and Frank Brown, fans of the paragliding sport.

"[...] I used to fly delta wing because it was the easier and the simpler way to fly. It was enough to get to the top of the hill, mount and take off. After six years of flying a wing there appeared the first “paracas”. The performance was poor, but they won due to the question simplicity. One day, Rui Marra, who had won the title of Brazilian champion, appeared at Moeda, set up a class, began to give instruction and I graduated as a paragliding pilot. I tried to reconcile the wing and the “paraca” for another year, flying a wing in strong conditions and a “paraca” in calm ones. Along the time I was getting used to flying with the “paraca” in stronger conditions, until you reach the conclusion that you could fly well none of them if you do not devote yourself exclusively to one of them. [...]" (Luke Machado in: POPPE, 1999, p. 22)

"[...] I still have a delta wing, but never fly it. I think it's so much easier to pick up a paragliding and fly ... wing gives a lot of work, but somehow, some of my best experiences of flight were with a delta wing, and it encourages me to go back to it from time to time. [...]" (John Pendry in: FERNANDES, 1999, p. 30)

"[...] Easy. The paragliding came into my life ten years later. I was a little discouraged of the wing because I had no car. And I could not have my wing, could not travel. Then it appeared that backpack, I could go to any corner with that thing, it was easier to get a lift. But I still miss flying a wing. Last year I flew one after eight years and it was very nice. Rather weird, but everything was right [...] I miss the speed, the planning and the performance of the wing, to make longer flights. But in landing the paragliding, you sometimes go into places that you would never enter with a wing at that height. Landing anywhere, this is a big advantage. [...]" (Frank Brown in: FERNANDES, 2004, p.08)

The possibility of a better performance and more control of situations of risk during the flight have resulted that the delta wing, although not as practical as the paragliding, remains the preferred modality of some practitioners. Andrew Wolf and Charles Niemeyer, supporters of the delta wing, when asked about the possibility of flying a paragliding, said, respectively, that they do not practice it because they consider that the variables of risk offered by this method do not allow an effective control.

"[...] No, I have a tremendous fear of paragliding. I think the paragliders will not like to read it, but I find it totally unsteady, exactly for the lack of structure. The former paragliders began flights to be flown in calm, then they began to become more daring, they decided to fly anywhere. But in my opinion, a paragliding is not to fly anywhere, those of the kinds of Owens Valley or anywhere more turbulent. Even Brasília here in Brazil is not a condition for a paragliding, not really. They close, unfortunately we ego into a turbulence, we take a "beating", but the wing keeps on flying, a paragliding closes. All right, it reopens, there is a way to open it, yet I find it very insecure. I would not fly a paragliding, I would be very scared of flying a paragliding. [...]" (Andrew Wolf in: POPPE, 1998, p. 29)

"[...] And then I would hurt me and stopped. Being in the air for me is normal [...] there is no more that adrenaline, only when you are sometimes in a situation that requires more attention, so you feel an adrenaline. But you take off without any adrenaline, lands without any adrenaline, all is normal flying. And the paragliding passed me a very great sense of security. One day I saw myself going up Gávea at the south wall with the southwestern wind, so close to it that I could rub my hand on the stone. "Caracas"! If such a thing closed there, I was dead! The free flight is an eternal competition, a highly competitive sport. You take off and you are competing with those who are in the air, not necessarily in a championship. If we take off, you and me, I have to be higher. If we are going to take, my wing has to produce better. If we are together, I want to stay on top, if we are going somewhere I want to get there first. And in paragliding I wanted to do the same thing, so I saw that I was going to hurt me if I passed near the hill. You begin to expose yourself to an unnecessary risk. You had neither knowledge nor practical, nor domination of the equipment. But as it is very easy, you start breaking, leaning back… Leaning back, leaning back, that thing gives you a false sense of security, you go very slowly. You cannot imagine that it may close, but it falls and closes with determination. Then I stopped. [...] Yes, if not, I would end up hurting me. I did not take any scare. [...] But there is no way! You see the arrival on a goal in the championship of paragliding, the guys coming here from far, it appears that you will never arrive. You come with a wing, it is race, man! It's 120km/h, even more ... [...]" (Carlos Niemeyer in: FERNANDES, 2006, P. 08)

The speeches so far presented emphasize the practicality, speed, security, as factors contributing to the choice of equipment used during the practice of free flight. Thus, those who opt for the flight of paragliding point out as advantages the ease in learning, in the landing and transport. Those who want to fly delta wing, the speed achieved in the displacement and the stability of flight in turbulent conditions are the biggest advantages. In the view of the traveling public of delta wing, the insecurity caused by the possibility of collapse of the paragliding in a turbulent flight and the lack of speed in the offsets are its main drawbacks.

Sensations of flight

The experiences lived in the practice of free flight show differences that may be important for understanding the level of cohesion that are submitted to the practitioners of this sport. Some of these differences relate to the sensations experienced by pilots during the flight, to identify these sensations is an important strategy to understand the motives that would lead to the formation of different communities in the practice of free flight.

The sensations experienced during the flight of a delta wing are quite different from those ones experienced during a flight of paragliding. Some of these feelings may be related to the position that the pilot holds during the flight. In the first case you fly lying in a sort of cocoon that is close to the equipment. The displacement of the body in line with this equipment is that will outline the direction and speed during the flight. In the second, you fly in a kind of chair situated away from the equipment, which in this case, to be directed, accelerated or broke, will depend much more on the manual setting in motion of a few lines than on the displacement of the body itself.

Another important point is related to the performance that each equipment offers. The aerodynamics of a delta wing beats in much the aerodynamics of a paragliding (AZEVEDO, 2007). The delta wing, in addition to developing a higher speed during flight, in turbulent conditions, behaves better than the paragliding. The excitements provided by a flight that can reach speeds above 100km/h, as it occurs with a high performance delta wing, are not offered by the same flight on a paragliding which, the most performing it may be, reaches speeds around 60km/h.

Betinho Schmitz, a delta wing flier, when asked if he still flew with a paragliding answered:

"[...] I still do my little flies as a recreation out there, in a lift or on a weak thermal day, but the crucial issue is just one: (in paragliding) you do not have full control in certain situations. You do not have full control in terms of command and response as on a wing. I have been through some big crashes and the sensation for those who fly the wing is very weird. Now, it is delicious to focus of a paragliding thermal, I tell you, I love more to run short in the thermal on a "parapa" than on a wing. And there is that "astral" (good mental perception) from the cross country - landed, coil everything in a bag and leave. In spite of this, on the wing everything is much nicer, it is more speed, more security ... the finalization of a landing wing is a beautiful thing! [...]" (Betinho Schmitz in: FERNANDES, 2000, p. 25)

In evaluating the main features presented by the delta wing and the paragliding, Luiz Niemeyer highlights the following:

"[...] You have to exploit its equipment within the capability that its limit allows. And within what the wing allows us to do, the paragliding not even from close is able to accompany, do you understand? Ah, but the paragliding allows the landing within this pool, on a wing I'll never land here. So is it a restriction of the wing? Yes, it is a restriction of the wing! What does not make it inferior because of this. I never flew on a paragliding, but I cannot imagine that it can provide me a better feeling than that of the wing. I think you notice this on the double flight. The demand for the double flight of a delta wing is much larger than the double one of the paragliding, isn't it? [...]" (Luiz Niemeyer, FERNANDES, 2006, p. 08)

Despite sharing the same physical space (the takeoff ramp, ascending chains, landing etc.). The practitioners of this sport are grouped into communities whose factor of cohesion is related to the similarity in the amount of risk that members of these communities want to take. In the case of free flight, the cohesion among individuals of a particular community is related to the sensations that these same individuals experiment facing situations of risk (AZEVEDO, 2008). It is from the similarity existing in sensory experiences lived by each flyer that communities will be formed.

Almeida (2008) says that the risk is an element generator of communion and collective solidarity, thus individuals who face the same risks together, come to see each other as people of similar value. In this context, the main function of risk is to accentuate the sense of social cohesion, at a level not experienced in other activities.

When factors such as equipment, practicality, performance and pleasure are taken into consideration in the practice of free flight, we noticed that the preferences are quite varied. There are people who fly on a paragliding and those who fly on a delta wing. There are still those who fly on a delta wing in radical conditions, and on a paragliding in more favorable conditions. Depending on the equipment, on the place they practice and on the interest of the pilot, the pleasure may be in a cross country flight or in a quiet flight of lift at the end of an afternoon. On the other hand, when the factor taken into consideration in this practice is the risk, three different communities can be highlighted.

The first one consists of flyers who identify themselves with the incessant search for records and tough disputes of championships. As a form of leisure, they focus on long-distance flights and the challenges of flying in places not yet explored. The individuals of this community are able to achieve a high technical level of piloting, which allows them a management of risks involved in the practice in question. Due to the large number of experiences lived and shared in different flight environments, individuals of this community, when compared with others, show greater possibilities of developing extraordinary abilities, words used by Almeida (2008) when referring to skills developed over and above daily life. Konrad, an experienced pilot of delta wing, believes the championships in which he takes part, is a school to improve the technical level of pilots. According to him, if the pilot wants to stay up to date in technology, equipment, and be up to date in free flight, he must participate in championships because it is there that things happen.

The second community is composed of individuals who understand the competitions and the incessant searches for records as situations full of rules and seriousness. According to what they say, these situations can manifest themselves as being contrary to the spirit of freedom that the flight provides by imposing obligations and reducing the recreational possibilities that could exist in the act of flying. Pierre Bouilloux, one of the supporters of this idea, believes in the importance of competition for the development of a more accurate technique, he says that the competitive environment is not the most appropriate, especially if the idea of the pilot is to contemplate the places of flight, to take profit until the last thermal of the day and fly in whatever condition he wants. Cites as an example the Bivouac Flying, a kind of tourism, where the pilot as a nomad, travels long distances using only the paragliding and his legs. He claims that this kind of flight is suitable for those who seek moments of pleasure, because competitive concerns or concerns with speed do not exist.

The third community is composed of individuals who opt for less risky experiments during their flights. Therefore, they use less performable equipment and look for the places where conditions have been calmer. The members of this community, unlike the others, find pleasure in common situations, such as going up to the peak of a thermal, or simply by the fact of having taken off, flown for a few minutes and landed safely.

Constituted most of the times by vendors, students, teachers, doctors, lawyers, engineers, pilots of aviation, among others, these communities do not impose barriers, allowing their members, during much of the time they remain together, to share the emotions and anguishes of being living, in a recreational way, an activity that is a privilege of few.

Final considerations

The speeches of flyers, present in this study, point to a constant preoccupation with issues related to risk, safety, adventure and pleasure. Issues which are also related to the choice of modality, with the level of performance that the practitioner wants to achieve and to the way by which the different communities are formed within the free flight. The risk in this context, emphasizes the sense of social cohesion, so that those who face the same risk feel similar. We can consider that the similarity in the experience of the risk is an element generator of communion among the actors in the practice of this sport, as Almeida noted (2008) in his studies. In free flight the actors are able to alter their daily routines, to explore their own limits and transmit sense to the action of flying.

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THE EXPERIENCES OF FLIGHT AND THE RISK IN THE SPEECHES OF PRACTIONERS OF FREE FLIGHT.

Summary

Given this variability offered by the flight, the uncertainty afforded by the unpredictability of the aerial environment, the daring to challenge the space as flying birds, we sought to investigate with this study the senses of risk as a generator of communion among the practitioners of free flight.

In order to get nearer the reality of the universe of practitioners of this sport, we conducted an exploratory research, with a qualitative approach, where issues related to the risk-adventure of flying were approached as the main theme. We analyzed the risk and the influence of sensations deriving from this risk in the process of cohesion of different communities. We analyzed yet the testimonies of a mailing list from Internet published in the book Parapente Brasil (2002) and interviews published in the magazines Air and Air Time Adventure, specialized in free flight. The interpretation of these speeches was made by the method of content analysis used by Bardin (2004).

The speeches of flyers, present in this study, point to a constant preoccupation with issues related to risk, safety, adventure and pleasure. Issues which are also related to the choice of modality with the level of performance that the practitioner wants to achieve and with the way by which the different communities are formed within the free flight. The risk in this context emphasizes the sense of social cohesion so that those who face the same risk feel similar. We can consider that the similarity in the experience of the risk is an element generator of communion among the actors in the practice of this sport, as noted Almeida (2008) in his studies. In free flight the actors are able to alter their daily routines, to explore their own limits and transmit sense to the action of flying.

Key words: free flight, risk.

LES EXPÉRIENCES DE VOL ET LE RISQUE DANS LES DISCOURS DES PRATIQUANTS DE VOL LIBRE

Résumé

Face à cette variabilité offerte par le vol, à l'incertitude provoquée par les imprévus de l'ambiance aérien, à la témérité de défier l'espace aérien en volant comme des oiseau, nous avons cherché par cette étude à investiguer les sens du risque en tant qu'élément générateur de communion entre les pratiquants de vol libre.

Afin de nous rapprocher de la réalité de l'univers des pratiquants de ce sport, nous avons réalisé une investigation exploratrice, avec abordage qualitatif, où les aspects relatifs au risque-aventure de voler ont été abordés comme thème principal. Nous avons analysé le risque et l'influence des sensations provenant de ce processus de cohésion des différentes communautés. Nous avons également analysé les témoignages d'une liste de discussion sur Internet publiés dans le livre Parapente Brasil (2002) et les entretiens publiés dans les revues Air et Air Time Adventure, spécialisées en vol libre. L'interprétation de ces discours a été donnée au travers de la méthode d'analyse de contenu utilisée par Bardin (2004).

Les discours des pratiquants de vol libre, présents dans cette étude, montrent une préoccupation constante quant aux problèmes relatifs au risque, à la sécurité, à l'aventure et au plaisir. Ces questions étant aussi relatives au choix de la modalité, au niveau de performance que le pratiquant prétend atteindre et la manière dont se constituent les différentes communautés qui se forment dans le vol libre. Le risque, dans ce contexte, accentue le sens de cohésion sociale, faisant en sorte que les individus qui affrontent le même risque se sentent semblables. Nous pouvons considérer que la similitude dans le vécu du risque est un élément générateur de communion entre les acteurs dans la pratique de ce sport, comme l'a observé Almeida (2008) dans ses études. Dans le vol libre, les acteurs trouvent la possibilité de modifier leurs routines quotidiennes, d'explorer leurs propres limites et d'imprimer un sens à l'action de voler.

Mots-clef : vol libre, risque.

LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE VUELO Y EL RIESGO, BASADO EN LOS DISCURSOS DE LOS PRATICANTES DE VUELO LIBRE

Resumen

Delante de estas variantes ofrecidas por el vuelo, desde la inseguridad proporcionada por lo imprevisible del ambiente aéreo, de la osadía de desafiar el espacio volando como pájaros; buscamos investigar con éste estudio, los sentidos del riesgo como un elemento generador de la comunión entre los practicantes de vuelo libre.

Para aproximarnos de la realidad del universo los practicantes de éste deporte, realizamos una investigación exploratoria, con abordaje cualitativa, donde aspectos relacionados al riesgo-aventura de volar fueron encarados como tema principal. Analizamos el riesgo y la influencia de las sensaciones provenientes de ese riesgo en el proceso de cohesión de las diferentes comunidades. Examinamos aún las declaraciones de una lista de discusión de Internet publicados en el libro Parapente Brasil (2002) y las entrevistas publicadas en las revistas Air y Air Time Adventure, especializadas en vuelo libre. La interpretación de estos discursos se dio a través del método de análisis de contenido utilizado por Bardin (2004).

Los discursos de los voladores, presentes en este estudio, apuntan para una constante preocupación con cuestiones relacionadas al riesgo, a la seguridad, a la aventura y al placer. Estas cuestiones que también se relacionan con la elección de la modalidad, con el nivel de actuación que el practicante pretende alcanzar y con la manera por la cual se constituyen las diferentes comunidades que se forman dentro del vuelo libre. El riesgo, en este contexto, acentúa el sentido de cohesión social haciendo con que los individuos que enfrentan el mismo riesgo se sientan parecidos. Podemos considerar que la semejanza en la experiencia de riesgo es un elemento generador de comunión entre los actores y la práctica de éste deporte, así como observó Almeida (2008) en sus estudios. En el vuelo libre los actores encuentran la posibilidad de modificar sus rutinas cotidianas, explorar sus propios límites e imprimir sentido a la acción de volar.

Palabras claves: vuelo libre, riesgo.

AS EXPERIÊNCIAS DE VÔO E O RISCO NOS DISCURSOS DOS PRATICANTES DE VÔO LIVRE

Resumo

Diante desta variabilidade oferecida pelo vôo, da incerteza proporcionada pelas imprevisibilidades do ambiente aéreo, da ousadia de desafiar o espaço voando como pássaros, buscamos investigar com este estudo, os sentidos do risco enquanto elemento gerador de comunhão entre os praticantes de vôo livre.

A fim de nos aproximarmos da realidade do universo praticantes deste esporte, realizamos uma investigação exploratória, com abordagem qualitativa, onde aspectos relacionados ao risco-aventura de voar foram abordados como tema principal. Analisamos o risco e a influência das sensações provenientes desse risco no processo de coesão das diferentes comunidades. Analisamos ainda os depoimentos de uma lista de discussão da Internet publicados no livro Parapente Brasil (2002) e as entrevistas publicadas nas revistas Air e Air Time Adventure, especializadas em vôo livre. A interpretação destes discursos se deu através do método de análise de conteúdo utilizado por Bardin (2004).

Os discursos dos voadores, presentes neste estudo, apontam para uma constante preocupação com questões relacionadas ao risco, à segurança, à aventura e ao prazer. Questões estas que também se relacionam com a escolha da modalidade, com o nível de performance que o praticante pretende alcançar e com a maneira pela qual se constituem as diferentes comunidades que se formam dentro do vôo livre. O risco, neste contexto, acentua o sentido de coesão social fazendo com que indivíduos que enfrentam o mesmo risco se sintam semelhantes. Podemos considerar que a semelhança na vivência do risco é um elemento gerador de comunhão entre os atores na prática deste esporte, tal como observou Almeida (2008) em seus estudos. No vôo livre os atores encontram a possibilidade de modificar suas rotinas cotidianas, de explorar seus próprios limites e imprimir sentido à ação de voar.

Palavras-chave: vôo livre, risco.