69 - DYING ON THE MOUNTAIN AND BEING BORN FOR ETERNITY. A STUDY ABOUT THE IMAGINARY.

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The Social Imaginary

Human beings are different from other beings in their way to relate with the world through thinking processes. There is a symbolic dimension between humankind and the physical world, which intermediates that bond. This relationship is made through symbols that men attribute to things.

Images feature traces, colors and other elements, which turn out to become a whole unit and make up an image that can be interpreted through each observer's life story. Those units are then compared to the observer's internal conventions and end up by having an interpretation for him/her. Such representation becomes a reference potential. Whenever an individual fails to recognize the reference, there follows a fail that rejects what has been perceived. The denial of a non perceived image makes the observer delete the experience.

Neiva Jr (1994) states that “the perception of the visible world depends on a selective and rational process. The representation is made up in such a way that whenever I perceive something, I immediately represent it” (p.14). The image is on the dividing line between the subjective and the objective. Therefore, images do not appear as something concrete, but rather with the capacity to perceive things, attributing meaning to them. Those meanings express through former experiences, rendering their meanings reality. Potential to image allows humankind to structure the world; this imagination property is built with information experienced before; thus, it is subjective.

When Mira y Lopes (2003) writes about human beings' potential to imagine, he states that “*imagination* is the denomination of the psychic function that allows the association and combination of data and images of representative life, enabling building and idea-affective processes apart from direct stimulus (surroundings)” (p. 18).

Imagination is a chief element for the thought. The process that builds knowledge needs a brain and also requires the signaling properties which the brain uses to assemble neural standards and to make images. Such neural standards and images make up human consciousness, but for the existence of consciousness, there must be images that are representative for the organism, for the object and for the relationship between them.

Laplantine and Trindade (2003) understand that “the imagination became the possible path that allows us not only to reach the real, but also to envision things that may turn out to be reality” (p. 7).

Imagination it the way to cover concepts and convey meaning to the objects we observe around us as well as to twist the order we view.

Avens (1993) states that “besides its reproductive function, commonly accepted imagination has the mysterious power to view the inner part of thins and to assure that there is more than we can figure out in our experience in the world” (p. 34 - 35).

We can imagine events when we observe any object. At first we imagine and then we perceive them. Imagination underlies the perceptual and cognitive processes, and the images are the only reality we take hold of. The psychic images are the way we have to get to know everything, the way we have to have immediate knowledge of the things we observe or things we are told; knowledge is only built if a psychic image precedes it.

Damásio (2000) infers how our brain engenders the mental patterns necessary to understand the objects: the image designs a mental pattern in any sensory modality, as, for example, an acoustic image, a tactile image, the image of well being. These images communicate aspects of the physical characteristics of the object and they can also communicate the liking or not liking reaction that we have towards an object (p. 25).

Imagination always leads to the idea of freedom, for it allows the individual to face the new and the unexpected; imagination is a source of concepts, generating images that bloom in the inner consciousness. The imaginary is the way humankind has to interact with the world, enabling dreams and fantasies to become true, to “travel” through time and go back to Ancient Greece and share sacred moments with Gods; by using imagination, people reach long distances, “arrive” at remote lands and participate in events that are part of life those far countries' inhabitants lead, overcome obstacles that cannot be conquered in the real world.

Bachelard (2001) states that: The imagined world is placed just before the represented world; the universe is set exactly before the object. Poetic knowledge of the world precedes, as it is suitable, the rational knowledge of the objects. The world is beautiful before it is true. The world is admired before it is tested (p. 169).

The practice of a game is a fruitful moment for the imaginary; in several moments the sports practitioner can “fly” in thoughts. Climbing is also a game, which is not well understood by those who do not play it and do not realize the meaning of a match against the mountain, challenging the risks it offers. The game choice that best gratifies the individual, which brings him/her the most intense pleasure is always an option for satisfaction, as Modin (2003) guarantees: individuals will choose that or those games they know they master, those games that best suits one's own skills. This is the main reason why the game fascinates and captivates. The game is a permanent challenge against the others and against oneself. That is the reason why the competitors always seek victory in any game (p. 217).

Climbing practice is a competition that provides many opportunities to expand the imaginary. The game offers several situations that start at the beginning the adventure and go to the arrival at the top: the risk involved in the activity they are going to carry out commonly makes the climbers excited and enhances their imaginary. These experiences are representations that are stored in the social imaginary of the adventurers who consider the mountains as their sports' partners.

Stretching the space of life

The adventurers participate in the symbolism of transcendence when they climb a mountain. They always seek the highest and most difficult mountains in the planet to defy and seek new challenges that include the conquest, and involve a complete ritual. The rites start at the choice of the conquest location, when the climbers approach the mountain, touch the place for the first time to make it a sacred spot and follow to the last hit on the clamp that renders the path available to other climbers who, from then on, will be able to enjoy the space blessed for all of them. The climber who dares to conquer a path in the mountain is entitled to name his/her conquest, and that denomination will remain forever, making him/her the honorable “owner” of the

space. Only those who are brave enough to face all the dangers of such a triumph will be granted by the climbers' tribe the prestige to be the only one who can alter that "space of his/her own".

Engaging in a climbing adventure represents for the climber the experience of a hazardous encounter in a leisure moment, in a manifestation of complicity between the climbers and their own bodies, leading them to the improvement and expression of their full potentials.

Mountains have always been surrounded by mysteries and legends. Some people still believe that the top of great mountains is imaginarily inhabited not only by gods, but also by mysterious monsters. In spite of all the myths about the mountains, men have always been fascinated to arrive at the highest point, as stated by Ashcroft (2001) "people have always been attracted by the mountains, either for spiritual relief, for the promise to find a hidden secret, for the possibility of running away from oppressive regimes, for the emotion to explore a new territory (…) or simply, in George Malloy's remarkable expression about Mount Everest "because it is there" (p.25).

Being on the great mountains may mean death, but such a fact does not seem to worry those who engage in this adventure.

There are several factors that demonstrate the serenity of those who are very close to death in the mountain, making believe that death does not destroy the departed, although he/she disappears before the eyes of those who remain alive. Death will imaginarily carry the deceased to another world or to a sequence of other lives in other spiritual and material dimensions.

In May 1996, Rob Hall was the leader of the expedition Adventure Consultants. After arriving at the mountain top, he was surprised by a heavy snowstorm. Unable to move down, he was seized at a point in the mountain, and when he spoke on the radio via satellite with his wife at home, he demonstrated he was calm in spite of the proximity of death, and his last words to his wife were: "I love you. Sleep well, dear. And please, don't worry too much" (Krakauer. 2000. p. 222).

Those were Hall's last words ever heard by anyone. A few days later his body was found, with the upper part buried under a block of snow.

In February 1998, Brazilians Mozart Catão, Alexandre Oliveira and Othon Leonardos were on the south side of the Aconcagua ? in what is considered to be that mountain's hardest climbing ? when they died. They were five hundred meters away from the top when heavy avalanche interrupted their way.

Othon Leonardos was seriously wounded, but he managed to make contact with the base and reported that his leg was broken and that he was hanging from his rope down an abyss. He informed that his companion Alexandre Oliveira was a hundred meters away from him, tied to the rope, apparently not injured, and that Mozar Catão had been taken away by the snow slide down the "wall" and could not be seen.

During two and a half hours Othon Leonardos talked with his colleagues at the base, and knowing that it would be impossible for them to rescue him, he dealt with death courageously. In his conversation with the base, Othon never demonstrated to regret he was in that situation.

In May 2003, the American mountaineer Aron Ralston left home for Mount Blue John Canyon alone, but during his climbing his arm was stuck to a slit, caught by a 90-kg stone that had slid and fallen on it. As he was alone, he waited for help for five days. Nobody appeared. He realized that death was imminent, and decided to make a leveler with the arm seized in the stone, and with a penknife, he amputated his own arm and went down the mountain, looking for help. He was assisted by the people on a farm, who took him to the hospital. In the first interview he gave on television, he stated that he was eager to leave hospital to start climbing again.

In May 2006, Vitor Negrete - one of the most experienced Brazilian climbers -, dies as he is climbing Mount Everest up the north side, without the use of supplementary oxygen. He asks for help on the radio when he is about to arrive at the camping base three, 8,300 meters high. He is assisted by the Sherpa who was waiting for him and carries him still alive into the camping base. But the excessive effort made to climb alone without the supplementary oxygen had been too much, and he died.

Those facts demonstrate how close death is for climbers.

In the western imaginary, with the advent of Christianity, death has been depicted as the discovery of life and soul. The Individual has started to perceive him/herself as something beyond the body, and started struggling against the desire to escape death in order to conquer eternity, when the soul would live in a blessed state. That is the origin of individulas' heroic struggle against life's finitude.

However, on symbolic terms, the anguish related to time after death, which can arrive unexpectedly and interrupt life's continuity, is transformed, and small dimension deaths are followed by great rebirths.

Bodies that are born, grow up, get old, and die experience death and rebirth along time, in a continuous renewal movement. This is the way the process follows on. Death indicates ambivalent aspects of existence: its destructiveness and liberation, the finitude and the introduction to other kingdoms, ruled by the spirit.

In their adventures, great climbers do not win or destroy their fears; they learn to dominate them as their are experienced along their way up the mountain; they internalize those feelings and learn to make them co-exist with fear harmoniously, to interact with that sensation, which is, according to Muller (1997), "a healthy human reaction necessary to preserve live" (p.97). By realizing that one is close to the frontier to Hades' world, the prudent climber turns back; fear is one of his/her feelings. Identifying the appropriate moment to return is the hope one has to be able to return to this space, and then, with better preparation and more experience, they hope they will finally manage to conquer a victory. Victory corresponds to pushing further the line between the two worlds, having an opportunity to get to know this frontier zone, in an attempt to understand that unknown area better.

Wickwire and Bullitt (2000) reproduce the words spoken by the climber Redi to comment on this limit line between life and death. They say: "mountaneers climb because they love the mountains, but also because climbing prepares them ceaselessly and tenaciously to face death, taking them straightly to the edge of the other world, a world that I now identify as the world of the dead, a place where they can dance in mountain after mountain, year after year, so close to death as it takes one to dance, that is to say, a step away from it" (p.206, 261). Climbing heroes do not really want to die; they must understand themselves and their limits at every path upwards. In order to do so, they must dominate and interact with fear.They have a mandatory need to make life longer, enjoy the most the pleasures if can offer, pushing the line between life and death even further, and get acquainted with the enigmatic space in between.

CONCLUSION

Climbers' experiences are close to the imaginary line between life and the hereafter during their way up the mountains, familiarizing them with death, which becomes an intimate, close fact.

They accept death as part of their everyday routine in the mountains. We confirm that assumption by hearing the witnesses of some climbers who were about to cross that imaginary line, and as soon as they had recovered from their wounds,

they returned to the mountains, for they can only lead their lives if they engage in that “gambling” activity.

Having imaginay power over life and death fascinates climbers; conquering a mountain after facing all kinds of risks puts them into a trance. So, adventurers are always searching new places to climb, or new forms to arrive at the top, and that fact increases the probability of fatal accidents. In that sport, death turns out to be a constant “shadow” nexto to climbers. The more experienced the climber is, the harder are the places he or she will search for the sport.

Those who dare facing great mountain challenges and arrive at the “God's home” imaginarily die to be reborn in a superior life; otherwise, they die at a stage of imperfection and are reborn as victorious people, brave and courageous enough to have defied the mountain's threats.

But those who, for some reason, die in the mountain, are the ones chosen by the Gods to “live” on the mountain slopes forever, conquering great recogntion among those who have remained alive

So, the climbers attempt to live intensely every moment they are in the mountains and seek to value life as deeply as they can. But if they are to lose their lives in the adventure, they seem to feel conforted by the fact that their passage to death happens at a place that is considered sacred.

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DYING ON THE MOUNTAIN AND BEING BORN FOR ETERNITY. A STUDY ABOUT THE IMAGINARY.

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at identifying the imaginary meaning climbers attribute to the fact they can die while they are climbing the mountains. For that purpose, a bibliographical survey was carried out in books about climbing high mountains in Brazil and in interviews with climbers.

Although the adventurers can die on the mountain slopes, they are audacious enough to face those confrontations, trying to arrive at the top to register their names in an imaginary “book” with the names of those who were able to triumph over this challenge, in spite of the fact that they may have had to pay with their lives for their conquest.

That is the reason why they attempt to have intense experience in their adventures on the mountain side while they struggle bravely against risks, giving their lives the highest possible value.

MOURIR SUR LA MONTAGNE ET RENAÎTRE POUR L'ÉTERNITÉ : UNE ÉTUDE DANS L'IMAGINAIRE

RESUME

Le but de cet article est identifier dans l'imaginaire des alpinistes le sens qu'ils attribuent au fait de pouvoir mourir pendant les escalades des montagnes. Pour cela on a fait une étude bibliographique des derniers livres publiés au Brésil sur les escalades des hautes montagnes, aussi bien que des enterviews avec des alpinistes.

Même ayant la possibilité de mourir sur les pentes de la montagne, les aventuriers affrontent courageusement ces défis et essayent d'arriver au point culminant pour enregistrer leurs noms dans le « livre » imaginaire de ceux qui ont pu vaincre ce difficile défi, mais la victoire peut sûrement être relationnée à la rencontre avec la mort.

Ainsi, ils essayent de vivre intensément leurs aventures aux pentes des montagnes affrontant les risques avec courage, valorisant à tout prix la vie.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es identificaren el imaginario de los alpinistas el sentido que ellos mismos atribuyen a la posibilidad de morir durante las escaladas en las montañas. Por eso, se ha hecho un estudio bibliográfico de los últimos libros publicados en Brasil sobre la escalada en altas montañas y entrevistas con alpinistas.

Aunque sea posible morir en las vertientes de la montaña, los aventureros hacen frente a estos retos con coraje e intentan llegar a la cumbre para registrar sus nombres en el “libro” imaginario de los que logran vencer el difícil reto, pero la victoria puede estar relacionada al encuentro con la muerte.

Por eso ellos intentan vivir con intensidad sus aventuras en las vertientes de las montañas afrontando los riesgos con coraje, valorando a cualquier precio la vida.

MORRER NA MONTANHA E RENASCER PARA ETERNIDADE. UM ESTUDO NO IMAGINÁRIO.

RESUMO

O propósito deste artigo é identificar no imaginário dos escaladores o sentido dado por eles ao fato de poderem morrer durante as escaladas em montanhas. Por isso foi feito um estudo bibliográfico nos últimos livros lançados no Brasil sobre escalada em alta montanha e entrevistas com escaladores.

Apesar da possibilidade de morrer nas encostas da montanha os aventureiros enfrentam com coragem estes desafios, tentam chegar ao cume para registrar seus nomes no “livro” imaginário dos que conseguiram vencer essa difícil provocação, porém este vitória pode estar vinculada com o encontro com a morte.

Por isto eles tentam viver intensamente as suas aventuras nas encostas das montanhas enfrentando os riscos com coragem, valorizando a todo custo à vida.