85 - ANGUISH AND PLEASURE, SENSATIONS ALWAYS PRESENT IN MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

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Introduction

At the beginning of our civilization, mountains were seen as the dwelling place of the gods, making people feel attracted to exploring this little-known territory. During the first climbs on the "walls" of this new space, reaching a certain height, explorers felt a certain discomfort due to the lack of oxygen characteristic of high altitudes, a fact that used to be attributed to the presence of gods in this territory. These gods were unwilling to permit the presence of a mortal in this place, which seemed to be reserved only to the gods, thus off-limits to simple mortals. Such a belief led to a conception of the mountains as dangerous and perilous, occupying a space considered to be sacred in the human imagination, representing a strong significance in the social imagination and evidencing a threshold that separates two spaces - a connecting doorway between the profane world and the sacred world (Eliade, 1991).

This door would open in order to allow the passage of the immortals so they could fulfill their obligations on the earth and be given entry as soon as they returned.

Mountains had a mighty significance in ancient Greece; their peaks and cliffs were imaginarily inhabited, not only by gods, but also by monsters, or by facts that occurred and that were considered important within human conception.

In their books, Bulfinch (2002), Gandon (200) and Vernant (1990) make reference to the peak of Mount Olympus as the abode of the gods.

The mountain clothes itself with sacred worth, since Christ climbed the mountain various times, always to say His prayers and receive His instructions from God. In the same way, the same procedure is found in relation to the mountain in other religions.

To be on top of the mountain is to be closer to Heaven; reaching its summit is like establishing a connection between the profane world and the sacred world. As Bernard Jeu (1983) stated, "the mountain belongs to Earth, yet it is already in Heaven" (p. 50). The mountain builds a natural union between Heaven and Earth, being a sign of absolute hierogamy. When climbing a mountain, the adventuring man achieves a divine "marriage" in which he can imagine himself as eternal and blessed by that which allowed him to arrive at the highest point, approaching the gods' world. Perhaps it is for all these reasons that mountains have strong symbolic value in human images, sensitizing man to climb them, to overtake the physical sense of his acts and to transcend them in his own self-encounter.

Nature as an environment for mountain climbs

A few years back, man began to increasingly value the environment; the appreciation of this space made him have a more implicit contact with nature.

Some people seek to unravel nature's mysteries and sweep the meanders of its entrails through sports that, due to the risks involved, are called adventure sports.

The practice of sports linked to nature, in itself, is a motivating factor for enthusiasts, who seek to value a different way of living; life's meanings begin to emerge from this natural activity and shift to the day-to-day world; through this shifting of meanings, climbers begin to put new meaning into their lives. The places of this practice are known by enthusiasts as places of therapy and communion. Therapy is the rediscovery of oneself. It is the reconstitution of energies. Practicing an activity in which there is an energy exchange between the enthusiast and nature makes it possible for him to reflect upon his own life's meanings. This is also made possible by the communion and solidarity existent among enthusiasts sharing the enchantment of their achievement.

Every nature-sport enthusiast displays great preoccupation with the environment. This is his place of pleasure, where he finds the joy of practicing his sport, a place that becomes sacred to him. He seeks to preserve it. He does not allow it to be devastated, attacked or profaned by anyone. The majority of enthusiasts fight for the conservation of this "sanctuary" so that they can make it their place of habitual "pilgrimage".

Natural activities offer unforeseeable experiences. On each adventure, the enthusiast seeks to discover different ways of living intensely, impelled by the desire to try something new in a constant search for emotions that bring him more pleasure all the time.

Nature's novelties represent unexpected factors and the necessity for increasingly reaffirming the desire for adventure that engenders a search for climbs with greater degrees of difficulty, an ascendant motivation, which serves to overcome new challenges, as affirmed by Agustín in Jesus (2003).

In the new modalities, the search for adventure, dizziness and personal achievement overcomes the need for competition and exhibition to large audiences. Therefore, they prescind the places of their achievements; on the contrary, the notion of adventure presupposes risk and novelties. The excitement inherent in sports activities creates the need to challenge new situations. In this sense, natural virgin places undoubtedly offer great potential for adventure (p. 80).

Mountain climbing is one of the calculated-risk sports most sought by adventurers, for it offers what they need: the pleasure of experiencing the creation and dominion of that which is new, where each previously unclimbed path is climbed. It is represented by the degree of difficulty offered by each path, by the quantity of handholds and footholds, as well as by the distance between bolts, which demonstrates how much difficulty they will have to face during the climb up the mountain.

Climbs can be made on boulders or on high mountains. Their practice involves various stages, such as seeking the best path to the top, or, in many cases, the most difficult path to get to the highest spot.

A mountain is conquered when the alpinist seeks clues offered by the mountain in order to make the path to the top for the first time. Just as Theseus had Ariadne's thread to guide his exit from the labyrinth, the conqueror seeks his own thread to get to the summit. The way represents paths to be followed on the rock, individual paths which the climber composes and gradually reaches the heights, facing the risk of climbing a virgin space.

The risk inherent to adventure sports is cited by Machilis and Rosa (1990) as "activities or events that have uncertainties as to the results or consequences, where the uncertainties are essential and deliberate components of the behavior" (p. 162).

Various factors represent risk to whoever is climbing: on high mountains (altitude greater than 3,000 meters above sea level), the low air density requires the body to adapt; the intense cold, which can often reach forty degrees below, obliges climbers to protect themselves with appropriate hypothermal clothing.

Large holes hidden beneath thin layers of snow are also a constant danger. At any moment, they can surprise a less fortunate climber. These holes occur when a glacier shifts out of place and its surface breaks open, creating enormous fissures with several meters of depth. A thin layer of snow then forms over the fissure, making it unnoticeable - a true trap.

Before going up the mountain, the climber seeks to prepare himself against all future risks, choosing the best and most secure materials, organizing himself physically, and psychologically preparing himself for the most difficult moments in which anguish takes over his body.

Climbing a high mountain with all the risks under control does not guarantee that the climbers will not be caught off guard by nature's fury, such as avalanches, which can occur suddenly, taking with them everything that gets in the way.

These factors represent risks that, if not well administered, can lead climbers to death. But, it seems that confronting the unexpected is what excites the enthusiast. This way he constantly creates more challenges for himself.

During a climb, various dangerous stretches present themselves, and the body, through the psyche, prepares a scheme to face these moments with greater caution.

Freud (conference XXV, 1980) concludes that, during the body's preparation to face risks,

It manifests itself by an increase in sensory tension and motor tension. This state of expectant preparation undoubtedly can be recognized as an advantage; in truth, its absence can be responsible for grave consequences. Coming from it, on the one hand, is motor activity, and on the other, a state of anxiety.

Since the generation of anxiety is the ego's reaction to risk, this generation is intimately linked to the unconscious system, as Freud affirms (1980).

However, risk is one of the "fuels" that motivate climbers. Without risks, many would not practice this sport, as Delflon affirms (2001) in a personal statement.

I think it's the adventure, the risk; there's no denying that, no. I already said that if climbing were a non-risk sport, without adventure, I think I wouldn't practice it; I'd look for another sport. What I like in climbing is just that. If I spend a lot of time climbing paths without risks, - that is, where the fall is tranquil; where you don't hit the wall and there's no risk of hurting yourself, whatever - it gets a bit tedious. I think that what attracts me the most is going somewhere where the wall is really big, where the mountain is really big, where you have to spend a lot of hours to be able to do the climb. The climb isn't easy; you can get hurt; you can be surrounded by the weather, by the climate of the place. If I'm not going to places that have this kind of adventure, this risk, then climbing becomes tedious.

Adventure and risk go hand-in-hand. It is through the objective dizziness provoked by the risk that you experience the adventure of dreaming about the highest heights, the heroic adventure of beating the unexpected, of rapidly creating alternatives for dominating the dangers that can threaten you and rejoicing your dominion over the unexpected.

Dizziness as a source of pleasure

The term "vertigo" is used to express a bodily sensation of alarm.

Hausler in Quinodoz (1995) defines vertigo, or dizziness, as: "an erroneous sensation of movement of the body in space, or of space in relation to the body. It can be a sensation of reeling or of an imminent fall "(p. 6).

Three terms can also be distinguished: vertigo, malaise and unbalance. The term "vertigo" denotes a whirlwind, providing spinning sensations, as it applies to a disturbance of spatial perception with the illusion of movement.

Freud (1980), in clinical symptomatology of the neurosis of anguish, spoke about vertigo as being:

An eminent position in the group of symptoms of the neuroses of anguish is occupied by "vertigo", which in its mildest forms would be better qualified as "dizziness" and which, in a graver form, as "access to vertigo" with or without anguish, belongs to the most intense symptoms due to the neurosis.

Vertigo of heights, vertigo of the mountains and vertigo of precipices can also frequently be found in the neuroses of anguish (Freud, 1980).

Malaise is related to an acute phenomenon with the sensation of weakness, of an empty head, and of the loss of one's physical and psychological capacities, with the possibility of the sensation of fainting occurring.

Briman (2000) distinguishes bodily abandonment as the first consequence of malaise:

That takes on a tragic feature, marking that it would be by way of finiteness, of the unforeseeable, without any absolute guarantee to sustain itself. It is the emptiness and the abyss that are permanently beneath your feet, in a tempestuous vortex that can swallow you up at any moment, for death threatens you with its tenebrous and hideous face at every moment. In light of all of this, abandonment would be that which establishes malaise in modernity, represented by the character Medea, who slaughters and swallows her children (p. 43).

With unbalance, a certain disturbance of postural sensitivity occurs - instability able to make the climber fall.

These three sensations superimpose themselves when facing adverse situations; vertigo is commonly accompanied by malaise and capable of provoking an unbalance.

Quindoz (1995) deduces that:

The appearance of vertigo of a somatic origin is linked to the difficulty to integrate divergent information, furnished by different perceptive systems, and the appearance of vertigo of a psychic origin is linked to the difficulty to integrate equally divergent psychological movements (necessities, desires and affections). Also, in either case, it can be said that vertigo assumes the function of an alarm sign (p. 7).

When the body of a climber finds itself in a risk situation, receiving information from one of the sensory systems (optokinetic, proprioceptive and vestibular), it transmits information that does not correspond to the information furnished by the other two systems; that is where the risk of vertigo comes in.

As an example, we can cite the fact of a climber that is scaling a rock. The vestibular system informs this climber that he is in a stable position on the rock, although in the opposite direction to the action of gravity. The proprioceptive system indicates that the feet and hands are in contact with the rock and, therefore, in a stable position; however, upon looking down, the optokinetic system informs him by that there is no coherence between the information offered by the two previous systems. Two sources furnish data about the body's equilibrium in relation to the rock and the other source presents information discordant to the anterior ones - which makes the body enter into a state of alertness, leading the climber to feel dizziness.

Quinodoz (1995) understands that this relation of the body can be corrected.

Thanks to one's psychic activity, the information received by one of one's perceptual systems, effectuating a partial decoding, will permit one to reestablish the coherence. Experience and training then play an important role, and certain people subject to this type of dizziness can, if an affective cause is added, learn to overcome it. (…) even at the level of a non-pathological dizziness of somatic origin, a psychic component can intervene (p. 7).

Everything leads us to believe that it can be one of the motives for which climbers are always looking for new places for their adventures. They are always seeking a more difficult path or a higher mountain, since climbing in places that they already know well and dominate with ability and efficiency no longer evokes the sensation and the pleasure of risk. The constant use of a single climbing spot benefits the body with an adaptation to the challenges presented, not making him feel that which he seems to be seeking on a climb, the sensation of dizziness.

Vertigo occurs in all conscious activities that present risks: contact with emotions and sensations that lead the climber to moments of intense pleasure favors this taste. These activities are related to uncertainty, which means unknown probabilities, that is, something that can occur unexpectedly.

Normally, when the situation demands caution, a more exposed passage or a place with small handholds can be localities where vertigo can manifest itself and be intensely felt by the climber. It is a sensation that couples fear and pleasure, that excites and relaxes, that inebriates and envelopes the whole body.

Vertigo is an ingredient that appears to not be lacking in the practice of risk sports, as Costa (2000) relates to us.

Vertigo is essential to risk sports. It is an exciting bodily emotion that consists of the attempt to fade out reality for an instant, inflicting a sort of voluptuous panic. This emotion is provoked by heights (…). It is a kind of gratuitous drunkenness, a physical and mental stunning, accompanied by pleasure equal to or greater than the shock itself. The subject's whole body participates in the paleness, the

brief sensation of nausea, the fear coming from the bowels and the uncontrollable laughter of pleasure. It could be said that the subject likes to play with his own unpleasant state (p. 101).

The sensation of dizziness experienced by adventurers is a mixture of anguish and pleasure. Ferreira Santos (2000) infers that vertigo makes the adventurer, taken over by a pleasurable and frightening sensation, lose visual and postural control. This momentary panic is centered on the image of the climb, and is characteristic of the structure of heroic sensitivity that Durand (1989) speaks of.

Once the dizziness is faced and interiorized, the climber's consciousness is anesthetized by a kind of panic, clouded by the sight. The experience is re-created by the sense organs, taking on amplified proportions. Ferreira Santos (2000) calls it vertigo, which assumes the air of a whirlwind in a kind of storm that creates fear, yet fascinates. The sensation invades the climber, swallows him and takes him over. He sees himself united to the sensation that in the beginning was external, but now takes over his whole body. He now has little time to feel the intense pleasure of overcoming one more mountain challenge.

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ANGUISH AND PLEASURE, SENSATIONS ALWAYS PRESENT IN MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

Abstract

The art of mountain climbing goes back to primordial times; climbs were done to worship the gods; today, man climbs the highest mountains as a form of pleasure, seeking the enjoyment of beating the challenges that mountain climbing offers.

Imposing, beautiful, powerful, and somehow influencing the human lifestyle, mountains always brought great fascination to human beings. Today these adventurers climb the highest and most dangerous mountains in search of pleasure; however, this pleasure is preceded by uncertainties as to the results or consequences; transcending these uncertainties, a sensation of pleasure invades, swallows and overpowers the climber and he sees himself united to the sensation that, in the beginning, was external, but now takes over his entire body, leading him to ecstasy.

ANGOISSE ET PLAISIR, SENSATIONS TOUJOURS PRÉSENTES AUX ESCALADES

Résumé :

L'art d'escalader les montagnes existe depuis longtemps. Aux époques primitives, les escalades étaient faites en honneur aux dieux. Aujourd'hui l'homme escale les montagnes les plus hautes comme loisir, à la recherche du plaisir de vaincre les défis qu'offre l'escalada d'une montagne.

Les montagnes ont toujours produit une très grande fascination pour les êtres humains, parce qu'elles sont imposantes, belles, puissantes, en influençant la manière de vivre des êtres humains. Aujourd'hui ces aventuriers montent sur les montagnes les plus hautes et les plus dangereuses en quête du plaisir, mais ce plaisir est précédé d'incertitudes quant aux résultats ou conséquences. Vaincre ces incertitudes produit une sensation de plaisir qui envahit, dévore, s'empare de l'alpiniste et il se reconnait lié à la sensation qui au commencement était extérieure mais maintenant s'approprie de tout son corps jusqu'à l'extase.

ANGUSTIA Y GOZO, SENSACIONES SIEMPRE PRESENTES EN ESCALADAS

Resumen:

El arte de escalar montañas se remonta a tiempos pasados. En eras primitivas, las ascensiones se hacían para reverenciar a los dioses. Hoy el hombre sube a las más altas montañas por ocio, buscando el placer que uno siente superando a los retos que le ofrece la escalada de una montaña.

Las montañas ejercieron siempre gran fascinación sobre los seres humanos. Hoy estos aventureros escalan las más altas y peligrosas montañas buscando el placer, pero tal placer está precedido de incertidumbres cuanto a los resultados o consecuencias. Habiendo superado estas incertidumbres una sensación de placer irrumpe, devora y se apodera del escalador que se reconoce unido a la sensación que en principio era externa, pero después envuelve todo su cuerpo hasta el éxtasis.

ANGUSTIA E PRAZER, SENSAÇÕES SEMPRE PRESENTES NAS ESCALADAS.

Resumo

A arte de escalar montanhas remota de algum tempo, nos primórdios, as ascensões eram feitas para reverenciar os deuses, hoje o homem sobe as mais altas montanhas como forma de lazer, procurando o prazer de vencer os desafios que a ascensão a uma montanha oferece.

As montanhas sempre trouxeram um fascínio muito grande para os seres humanos, sendo imponentes, belas e poderosas, influenciando de certa forma na maneira de viver dos seres humanos. Hoje estes aventureiros sobem as mais altas e perigosas montanhas em busca do prazer, porém este prazer é precedido de incertezas quanto aos resultados ou conseqüências, ao vencer estas incertezas uma sensação de prazer invade, engole, apodera-se do escalador e ele se reconhece unido à sensação que a principio, era externa porém agora toma conta de todo o seu corpo levando-o ao estase.