137 - THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY WORLD OF EXTREME ADVENTURERS: A STUDY OF ANNAPURNA

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INTRODUCTION

When I encountered the book *Annapurna*, I thought of how hard it would be to hike its trails, access its crests, overcome its walls of "*seracs*", find the best path to the top and, in this way, learn the grandness of nature with my own two legs. Each page I read came to affirm that which we are verifying: the fascination of modern (or post-modern) man for uncertainty, emptiness and the unexpected. This situation is placing man face-to-face with a paradox, for wasn't it modern society that valued and cultivated the obligation of residence, safety and enclosure in modern man's mind in the first place? This change in behavior, or perhaps, transition, has been introducing a new social order that many authors have been calling post-modernity, whose greatest value is the "desire of freedom", resulting in a world lived as uncertain, uncontrollable and frightening.

In this new order, sports practices involving adventure and risk, also known as radical or adventure sports, have found an adequate space for their divulging and propagation and, in this way, we see the growth of its practice all over the world.

In this study, we sought various paths to understanding this new relationship that man has come to establish with his body and with the world. And it was in philosophy and in sports that we found the security to develop our investigations, which were based on the studies by Costa (2001, 1999) and Durand (1997).

Contemporary Cultural Paradigm: between modernity and post-modernity

In this beginning of the 21st century, many people argue that we are on the threshold of a new era. A variety of terms have been suggested for this moment, some of which refer to "consumer society" (Guy Debord), "post-modernism" (Jameson), "hypermodern times" (Lipovetsky), "post-modern" (Giddens) and "post-modernity" (Lyotard, Bauman), the latter being the most used and which we will make use of in the present study. Extreme sport modes, which we will be analyzing throughout this study, present themselves precisely at this moment of transition; they have come to gain force and a greater number of enthusiasts with each passing year, and we believe they suffer serious influences of this new social, political, cultural, sportive and technological order called post-modernity.

In order for us to better understand this new interpretation of our contemporary times, it is necessary to present and relate the concepts of modernity and post-modernity, how this quarrel comes about in culture and the repercussions suffered by sports, since they have an esteemed cultural value.

Modernity is an all-embracing designation for a series of material, social, intellectual and political changes. Its starting point was at the end of the 17th century in Europe with the birth and spread of Illuminism and it established itself throughout the 19th century, ending up mixing itself with the industrial revolution and the changes brought by capitalism. Modernity constructed an ambitious and revolutionary cultural project that sought to transform the face of the earth through faith in science, in the techniques applied to productive forces, in liberal market relations as being capable of implementing a just and prosperous state, in the positivity of progress and in constant renovation and transcendence. The idea of progress, founded in science and reason, lulled human aspirations proceeding from it and fueled, in a lasting way, the ideology of a social dynamic based on permanent innovation and an "*obsessive march forward*", as Bauman (1999) emphasizes.

To Alain Touraine (1995), modernity will be composed of different, politico-philosophical elements, such as: enlightened man's revolt against tradition, the sacralization of society and the submission to the natural law of reason. To the author, the idea of modernity, in its most ambitious form, was the affirmation that the human being is a representation of that which he does. As such, the occidental ideology of modernity, which Touraine calls modernism, will generate new thought that substitutes, for society, the idea of subject and of God. The individual, also a modern concept, came to be understood as subjected to natural laws and to the State. The author adds that the occidental ideology of modernity affirmed that the progress of rationality and technique had not only the critical effect of liquidating past beliefs, customs and privileges, but also created new cultural content and, for this reason, a complementarity between reason and pleasure.

In light of that which was exposed, we pose the question: How are the individual and identity conceptualized in modern thought (or in modernity)? According to Hall (2003), throughout modernity one can distinguish three very different conceptions of identity, which he named: the conceptions of identity of the Illuminist individual, of the sociological individual and of the post-modern individual. The author was able to observe the move from a centered and unified individual to an uncentered and fragmented one, in this way shaking up the reference frames which used to give individuals a stable anchoring in the social world. We can understand that the Illuminist individual, seen as having a fixed, stable identity, was uncentered by a series of changes which took place in social theory and in human sciences, resulting in the open, contradictory, unfinished, and fragmented identities of the so-called post-modern individual.

Faced with a panorama of uninterrupted transformations, the question of modernity, its past development and its present institutional forms reappears, with the arrival of the 21st century, as a fundamental, sociological problem. To Guiddens (2002), modern institutions differ from earlier forms of social organization in their dynamism, in their interference with traditional habits and customs and in their global impact. According to the author, *modernity radically alters the nature of day-to-day social life and affects the most personal aspects of our existence* (2002:09).

Modernity is now criticized for its fundamental pillars, such as its belief in truth, attainable through reason, and its historical linearity toward progress. In order to substitute these dogmas, new values, less closed and categorizing, are proposed, deflagrating the emergence of a new order denominated post-modernity and making new styles, life customs and forms of social organization bloom.

Post-modernity is a socio-cultural, aesthetic condition of post-industrial capitalism, which is contemporary. Theoreticians and academics have different conceptions of the term. To the critical Marxist, Fredric Jameson (1999), post-modernity is the ""cultural logic of late capitalism". According to Jürgen Habermas (2002), post-modernity would be related to neo-conservative, political and cultural tendencies determined to combat the ideals of the Illuminists and the left-wingers. Yet the Frenchman François Lyotard (2002) honors post-modernity as a true breaking away from the old, absolute truths, such as Marxism and liberalism, and represents it as a displacement of the faith in humanly planned progress and of the attempts to found a new, epistemological reference frame, capable of responding to the new conditions of knowledge imposed by the social transformations. It is not possible to establish a precise starting point for post-modernity; it may be said that it began with the passage from industrial production relations to post-industrial ones based on services and on the trading of symbolic or abstract possessions, such as information.

To Maffesoli (2001), modernity, so well administered by graduate technocrats, was about to die from tediousness. Nevertheless, it is possible to perceive that a somewhat disorderly "circulation" begins. Nothing can dam its flow. The

effervescence is in all human thought for some, half asleep, and for others, in ebullition; it is necessary to break the paradigms left behind by modernity. It is important to emphasize that this movement is not conscious. To the author, this effervescent movement consists of a return to ancient ways of living, such as Dionysian, tribal and nomadic ways. They emerge from an "ego-centered" conception of the world, characteristic of modernity, and move toward a different, "*locus*-centered" conception, characteristic of nascent post-modernity; according to this conception, groups, or "neo-tribes", are what come into play.

In the conception of Maffesoli (2003), one of the marks of post-modernity is the return to errancy, which can be seen as a form of making operational the unknown and multifaceted soul that inhabits the human being as well as society. "*Errancy is the expression of a new relationship with others and with the world, which is less offensive, more caressing, a bit ludic and surely tragic, resting upon an intuition of the impermanence of things, beings and their relationships a tragic sentiment of life that, since then, will apply itself to enjoying, in the present, that which is given to be seen, and that which is given to be lived in everyday life, and which will find its meaning in a succession of instants which are precious by their own fugacity"* (Maffesoli, 2001:28). This tragic consciousness is emphasized by the author and can go as far as suicide. However, excesses even favor heroism, whereby all people are in search of totally new things, difficult battles and dragon slaying. Post-modernity "*engenders heroes, new knights of post-modernity, able to risk their lives for a cause and be, all at once, idealists and perfectly frivolous. The risk can be phantasmagoric, as is the case of simulations, or it can have very cruel and perfectly real consequences. But, in all cases, we can comprehend it as an affirmation of life, yet sufficiently multiform as to include death".* (Maffesoli, 2003:26)

In light of this canvas, which is being painted by the hands of post-modern society, we believe that the search for radical sports of adventure and risk, among others, seem to associate themselves with the values that emerge in this forming society, where one desires to participate in sports practices that produce well-being and pleasure, that awakens to the new, the untried and the ludic, even if this requires putting life at risk.

But how can we understand the surprising attitudes of post-modern individuals that worry little, or almost nothing, about the consequences of their acts? Could there be a form of carelessness which does not propitiate worrying about tomorrow and desires to intensely live the present instead? Or even a lack of obligation to existence, leading a life that is audacious, intrepid and traversed by the freshness of that which is temporary, precarious and more intense of the moment? Many are the questions and few are the answers. A lot of courage is needed! We need to run, climb, walk through chasms and face heat and cold, in search of clues that lead us to phantasmagoria, to the dreams, fears and desires of extreme athletes. It is necessary to subject the body to the limits of near-exhaustion to achieve an untried feat.

The body: territory to be revealed, conquered and controlled.

We realize that compiling a history of the body is a very extensive, arduous job, for various forms of approach exist to know and understand it, as well as to wonder at it. Nonetheless, that which incites us to think through the relations that the body established in history is to seek comprehension of the relations that man has established with his body in contemporary, (corporeal) sports practices, specifically those which refer to extreme sports.

Being both biological and symbolic territory, the body well may be the most beautiful feature of life's memory. A living archive, it is an inexhaustible source of pleasure, pain and happiness; a person's body can reveal diverse facets of one's subjectivity and physiology, while simultaneously hiding them. In a game of collisions and harmonization between the interior and the exterior, the body experiences, and is identified by, existential marks which now expose themselves, now occult themselves. Upon researching the body's secrets, it is possible to perceive that it is useless to separate the biological from the cultural (Soares, 2001), for beings form themselves throughout their existence.

Among the various, uncountable paths and forms of approach for man to study the human body, we opted for researching by way of philosophy and sports.

During classic antiquity, it was nature that conditioned human health. When the human body was considered to be a microcosm living in the heart of the macrocosm, it had no autonomy before the laws of nature and it was made of water, fire, earth and air, elements, which also form the natural world. Nature used to be a reference for knowing and caring for the body. Control of the body demanded much more effort to maintain it harmoniously related to the environment and to the cosmos than to liberate it in relation to nature's forces. At that time, myths explained the establishing order in an irrational way, using sorcery, symbols and rites.

This primacy of the gods' justice was unable to escape the philosophical criticism of two important philosophers, Plato and Aristotle; the former contemplated the existence of an immortal soul in relation to a mortal body; the latter went on to establish the most complete and typical formulation of this instrumentality. To Aristotle, the body is "a certain natural instrument" of the soul. These two thinkers would go on to modify the strong relationship between the body and the cosmos.

To Abbagnano (2001), the doctrine of the instrumentality of the body dominated all of medieval philosophy; nevertheless, the abandoning of this doctrine concurred with Cartesian dualism, which established a separation between the soul and the body as two different substances. To Descartes, "all the heat and movement that exist within us only belong to the body, since they absolutely do not depend on thought" (apud Abbagnano, p.212). From this new viewpoint, the body was seen as a machine that moves by itself. But, Cartesian dualism created a paradox, which is: how can one explain the relation of the soul to the body, which, despite being independent, combine themselves to form man?

In an attempt to unravel this paradox, modern, contemporary philosophy elaborated some solutions. The first consists of negating the diversity of substances and reducing corporeal substance to spiritual substance. The second solution, quite near to the first, considers the body as a sign of the soul. The third solution consists of negating the difference of substances, but not the difference between the soul and the body. The fourth solution sees the body as a kind of experiment or mode of living. This way, the body is considered to be a living experiment linked to determined human possibilities, i.e., to contemporary philosophy, the body is reduced to behavior or to mode of living.

Through this brief summary, one can observe that, throughout history, the philosophers, in their respective epochs, defined the body in many ways in order to consequently come to know it, whether for personal or collective interests. For, beyond defining it, it was necessary to govern and organize it to keep it under control.

We can see throughout history, which accompanies the development of all species from birth to death, that the body is finite and subject to transformations which are not always desirable or foreseeable, for, throughout the years, it changes its form, weight, functioning and rhythms, causing a situation in which not everyone feels comfortable about their body in determined moments of their life. We can verify this fact by observing pathological cases linked to this dissatisfaction, among them, anorexia and bulimia, which frighteningly spread all over the world.

It was in the 20th century, more precisely in the last 50 years, that the body was to free itself from its antiquated religious, geographical, temporal, moral and cultural ties, among others. But, the need to know and control the body will continue to be present, for even with the advance of science and technology physical activity, diets, cosmetics, regimens, plastic surgery, prostheses, etc. man's movement to conquer greater health and eternal youth, promises which fascinated civilizations for ages, continues to be evident (Soares, 2001). To the author, that which will differentiate the 20th and 21st centuries from other eras is the media, which is spreading itself throughout people's homes, whether by television, magazines, newspapers, etc., convincing viewers that any transformation of their body is possible. An analysis can also be made from the perspective of Lipovetsky's personalism, in which these people go in search of something unique and original, a mark which sets them apart from the masses, in order to overcome their discontentment with their bodies. As Maffesoli says, the body with

its strategies is not only a vehicle of deceptive appearances, but also a place of fascination, of seduction and of the creation of alliances via aesthetic pacts that celebrate pleasure, creativity and humor.

The theoretical efforts of the researcher Sant'anna, to expose the relationship between the body, cultural diversity and society, reveal themselves to be precious to the present study. Sant'anna (2001), in her book *Passing Bodies*, states that "*the aversion to the inner body is ancient. But, during the last decades, new intolerances were added to it*" (p. 67).

Modernity raised some pillars that determined how we must behave in relation to our body, such as: the intolerance of fat, the right to eternal beauty and not idleness, eternal progress and the incessant search for happiness, among others. With the recent developments in biotechnology, it became possible to remove boundaries which, during centuries, constituted the biological singularities of each living being, including the human being. We then ran into some uncertainties, such as: When we eliminate (through biotechnologies) the borders between man and machine, man and woman, man and animal and the relationship of consanguinity, what will happen? For, if these are precisely the relationships that give man his notion of individuality, what relations will he establish with the world and everything that surrounds him? Sant'anna's discontentment with this situation presents itself in her words: *in our days, nothing is more desolating than verifying that man's fright of being disposable can give way to the construction of beings that want to last eternally* (2001a, p.97).

Many sports enthusiasts live experiences of this nature, in which they become the action. When this occurs, sometimes lasting only seconds, one gets the impression that it is no longer possible to separate the individual that thinks and questions from the individual that acts. It is as though present time were to expand, and the bodily achievement were to become eternal, as new experiences approach. *"A body turned passageway is, itself, dilated time and space. The present is substituted by the presence. The duration and the instant coexist. Each movement expressed by this body has little importance "in itself". What matters is what happens between the movements, what links one movement to the other and also one body to the other"* (Sant'anna, 2001a, p.105).

How can we understand these new relationships that man has been establishing with his body? If we were to refer to an expedition of Brazilians who are trying to reach Mount Everest without oxygen for the first time, we would ask ourselves: Why climb under these conditions? Few people doubt the risks they are running. What is their objective, to conquer the mountain? But, the mountain had already been conquered in 1995 by Waldemar Niclevicz with the aid of oxygen. But, that wasn't enough; this same athlete wants to commemorate his ten years of the conquest, returning to the mountain, but this time by the hardest and most expensive route, the south face of the mountain. The audacity of these athletes is not limited by dangers, which beforehand seemed to be calculated, for encountering the cadavers of companions who died in other expeditions does not scare the Brazilian climber, Helena, who is trying to conquer the mountain for the fifth time and consecrate herself as the first Brazilian woman to dominate Mount Everest. It is clear that everyone knows the dangers, but nothing can keep them away from their desire, a desire that many do not know how to explain and the world would like to know why. There is some mystery in relation to both the geographic space and one's body. In situations of this type, what can a body do? And what can the explored space do? These are frequent questions that lead to difficult answers.

Walking on ice, running in adverse conditions, climbing mountains, walking in the forest, taming never-before-seen places, the body reveals some of its different possibilities with great clarity: being on a mountain with 30% of the normal oxygen, withstanding 60° C heat or even 60°-below-zero cold. In most of these cases, the athletes need to surpass their human condition in order to perceive and feel apprehension, fear and fatigue swallowing them up and, in this way feel the will to proceed. In studies developed by the Laboratory of the Imaginary and of Social Representations (LIRES-LEL), we can observe the behavior of athletes when they deal with the strengths and weaknesses of the human body, but it is necessary to experience them; that way, the desire to relate to rocks, ice, nature, water and vegetation expands itself to such a point, that continuing the climb, the run, the walk, etc. begins to no longer mean passing through a space and conquering it, but encountering it with each step. To Costa (1999), *the ecstasy that athletes experience through these adventures does not permit them to reflect upon it; they merely live it. Once achieving it, they enjoy this immense, orgiastic pleasure of an immense, personal surrender, which gives them the Experience of the sensation of primordial pleasure".* Many are the questions, and few are the answers to explain this phenomenon, which we aimed to examine in this study and, in a modest way, to contribute to the studies of physical education, sports and leisure. Searching for symbols, as well as images, that remit us to the imaginary world of extreme athletes is our reason for walking.

In a lecture, Daniele Rocha Pitta (2001) commented that the transition through which society is going alternates between representations of glory and climbing and those of falling and fragmentation where, in the first case, the impelling factors are the apollonian elements of a society that wanted to be perfect, positive, rational, complete and smooth, without roughness; in the second case, the incentives that reveal themselves are the "Dionysian" elements of a society that ardently desires imperfection, risk, frivolity and that which is ephemeral, free from customs and searching for excesses and pleasure.

Where will we be led to by this new imaginary world that freed us from irritating rationality and control, yet plunges us into an unstable, ephemeral world in constant change?

OBJECTIVE

The present study aims to understand the meanings that the adventure of climbing acquires in the imaginary universe of nine climbers on their first climb to a peak more than 8,000 meters high.

METHODOLOGY

The study has a qualitative nature and an interpretive character. The sampling was made up of the discourses of nine climbers, on their first expedition to the Annapurna peak in the Himalayas, which originated a book by the same name. This expedition occurred in the 1950's and it established a world-level mark in climbing, since climbing a mountain more than 8,000 meters high was accomplished for the first time.

The discourse analysis of Orlandi (2000, 2001) was used to interpret the depositions.

CONCLUSION

The linguistic marks that emerged from the discourses permitted an explanation of the meanings sacrifice, contemplation, anthropomorphosis of the mountains, body limitation, facing the adversary and ecstasy in their multiple senses.

To these climbers, the duration is the instant of attacking the mountain. Each movement expressed by their bodies has little importance "in itself", while attaining the goal of reaching the top is worth all the sacrifices and amputations. Their bodies with their strategies are not just vehicles of deceptive appearances, but, according to Maffesoli, a place of fascination, seduction and of the creation of alliances with oneself that celebrate self-knowledge, pleasure and creativity.

We conclude that living on the limit to which these few climbers subjected themselves would perhaps mean death to us "simple mortals", but to these ultra-human beings, such an abode is found in the extreme. The taste for risks and adventure, for the unforeseeable and the uncontrolled, goes hand in hand with athletes, exercising a fascination over them and creating an atmosphere of challenge. We can say that they "flirt" with death. They sought to enlist themselves in immortality. The imaginary world is heroic, solar (Durand, 1989).

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THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY WORLD OF EXTREME ADVENTURERS: A STUDY OF ANNAPURNA

ABSTRACT
We see the growth of various sports practices involving adventure and risk, also known as radical or adventure sports, whose most common scenario is nature. The paradox is that this fascination for uncertainty, emptiness and the unexpected emerges among individuals of modern societies that value safety, enclosure and the obligations of residence. This post-modern change in behavior, whose supreme value is the “desire for liberty”, results in a world lived as uncertain, uncontrollable and frightening (Guiddens, 1991; Bauman, 1998; Lyotard, 2002; Maffesoli, 2003; Lipovetsky, 2004). The present study aims to comprehend the meanings that the adventure of climbing acquires in the imaginary universe of nine climbers on their first climb to a peak more than 8,000 meters high. The study has a qualitative nature and an interpretive character. The sampling was made up of the discourses of nine climbers, on their first expedition to the Annapurna peak in the Himalayas, which originated the book by the same name. The discourse analysis of Orlandi (2000, 2001) was used. The linguistic marks that emerged from the discourses permitted an explanation of the meanings sacrifice, contemplation, anthropomorphosis of the mountains, body limitation, facing the adversary and ecstasy in their multiple senses. We conclude that living on the limit to which these few brave souls subjected themselves would perhaps mean death, but to these ultra-human beings, an abode is found in that which is extreme. The unforeseeable and uncontrolled goes hand in hand with athletes, challenging them. They sought to enlist themselves in immortality. The imaginary world is heroic, solar (Durand, 1989).

Keywords: Social Imaginary, Body, Adventure Sports, Climbing.

L'IMAGINAIRE SOCIAL DES AVENTURIERS DE L'EXTRÊME : UNE LECTURE AUR L'ANNAPURNA

RÉSUMÉ
Nos assistons à la croissance de plusieurs pratiques sportives comprenant l?aventure et le risque et qui peuvent être appelées sports radicaux ou d?aventure, dont le décorle le plus employé est la nature. Il y a cependant un paradoxe : cette fascination par l?incertitude, par le vide, par l?inattendu surgit parmi les individus des sociétés modernes qui valorisent la sécurité, la clôture, le compromis de résidence. Ce changement de comportement de la postmodernité, dont la valeur suprême est « le désir de liberté », a pour résultat un monde d?incertitudes, incontrôlable et effrayant (Guidens, 1991 ; Bauman, 1998 ; Lyotard, 2002 ; Maffesoli, 2003 ; Lipovetsky, 2004). Cette étude a l?intention de comprendre les sens que l?aventure d?escalader pour la première fois un sommet de plus de 8.000 mètres a sur l?univers de l?imaginaire de neuf alpinistes. L?étude est de nature qualitative et de caractère interprétatif. L?échantillon a été constituée des discours de neuf alpinistes de la première expédition au Pic Annapurna, à l?Himalaya, qui a donné origine au livre du même nom. Pour cette analyse on s?est appuyé sur l?analyse du discours d?Orlandi (2000, 2001). Les marques linguistiques émergeantes dans les discours ont permis l?explicitation des sens : sacrifice, contemplation, anthropomorphisation de la montagne, limitation du corps, affrontement de l?adversaire et extase, dans leurs polysémies. On a conclu que vivre à la limite assumé par ces petit nombre de personnes signifie peut-être la mort, mais pour ces mêmes êtres ultra-humains, telle demeure se trouve à l?extrême. L?imprévisible et l?incontrôlable marchent à côté des atlhètes, en les défiant. Ils ont fait l?option de s?inscrire dans l?immortalité. L?imaginaire est héroïque, solaire (Durand, 1989)

Most-clés : Imaginaire Social, Corps, Sports radicaux, Escalade.

EL IMAGINARIO SOCIAL DE AVENTUREROS DEL EXTREMO: UNA LECTURA SOBRE EL ANNAPURNA

RESUMEN:
Asistimos al crecimiento de varias prácticas deportivas abarcando aventura y riesgo y que pueden ser llamadas deportes radicales o de aventura, cuyo escenario más utilizado es la naturaleza. La paradoja es que tal fascinación por la incertidumbre, por el vacío, por el inesperado surge entre individuos de sociedades modernas que valorizan la seguridad, la clausura, el compromiso de residencia. Los cambios de comportamiento de la pos-modernidad, cuyo valor supremo es el ?deseo de libertad?, tiene como resultado un mundo de incertidumbres, incontrolable y que infunde miedo (Guidens, 1991; Bauman, 1998; Lyotard, 2002; Maffesolit, 2003; Lipovetsky, 2004). Este estudio tiene la intención de comprender los sentidos que la aventura de escalar por primera vez la cumbre de una montaña con más de 8.000 metros, asume en universo imaginario de nueve alpinistas. El estudio es de naturaleza cualitativa y de carácter interpretativo. La muestra fue constituida por los discursos de nueve alpinistas de la primera expedición a la cumbre Annapurna, en el Himalaya y que dio origen al libro

de mismo nombre. Nos servimos del análisis del discurso de Orlando (2000, 2001). Mas marcas lingüísticas que surgieron en los discursos han permitido la explicitación de los sentidos: sacrificio, contemplación antropomorfismo de la montaña, limitación del cuerpo, enfrentamiento del adversario y éxtasis, en sus polisemias. Llegamos a la conclusión que vivir en el límite como han vivido eses pocos hombres significaría quizá la muerte, pero para eses seres ultra-humanos, la residencia se encuentra en el extremo. El imprevisible y el incontrolado caminan junto a los atletas, retándolos. Ellos objetivaran se inscribir en la inmortalidad. El imaginario es heroico, solar. (Durand, 1989).

Palabras-llave: Imaginario Social, Cuerpo, Deportes radicales, Escalada.

O IMAGINÁRIO SOCIAL DE AVENTUREIROS DO EXTREMO: UMA LEITURA SOBRE O ANNAPURNA

RESUMO

Assistimos ao crescimento de várias práticas desportivas envolvendo a aventura e o risco e que podem ser denominadas de esporte radicais ou de aventura, cujo cenário mais utilizado é a natureza. O paradoxo é que esse fascínio pela incerteza, pelo vazio, pelo inesperado surge entre indivíduos das sociedades modernas que valorizam a segurança, o enclausuramento, o compromisso de residência. Essa mudança de comportamento da pós-modernidade, cujo valor supremo é a "vontade de liberdade", resulta num mundo vivido como incerto, incontrolável e assustador (Guiddens, 1991; Bauman, 1998; Lyotard, 2002; Maffesoli, 2003; Lipovetsky, 2004). O presente estudo visa compreender os sentidos que a aventura de escalar pela primeira vez um pico com mais de 8.000 mil metros, assume no universo imaginário de nove escaladores. Estudo é de natureza qualitativa e de caráter interpretativo. A amostra foi constituída dos discursos de 9 escaladores, da primeira expedição ao pico Annapurna, no Himalaia, que originou o Livro de mesmo nome. Foi utilizada a análise do discurso de Orlandi (2000, 2001). As marcas lingüísticas que emergiram dos discursos permitiram a explicitação dos sentidos: sacrifício, contemplação, antropomorfização da montanha, limitação do corpo, enfrentamento do adversário e êxtase, em suas polissemias. Concluímos que viver no limite a que esses poucos se submeteram significaria talvez a morte, mas para esses seres ultra-humanos, tal morada se encontra no extremo. O imprevisível e o incontrolado caminham junto aos atletas, desafiando-os. Objetivaram se inscrever na imortalidade. O imaginário é heróico, solar (Durand, 1989).

Palavras-chave: Imaginário Social, Corpo, Escalada, Esportes radicais.