

Ritos e Risco na Prática do Vôo Livre.
Rites and risk in the hang-gliding practice

*Giuliano Gomes de Assis Pimentel**

Resumo: Vôo livre é uma atividade de aventura na natureza com forte influência da tecnologia aeroespacial e conhecimentos meteorológicos. Este artigo apresenta compreensões sobre o risco no vôo livre e a presença de rituais nessa prática corporal. Para tanto, numa apropriação da pesquisa etnográfica, foi realizado estudo de campo por meio de observação participante, entrevistas e registros de imagens no noroeste do Paraná. Foram identificados três momentos rituais, correspondentes às fases de: decolagem, vôo e pouso. Conclui-se que os praticantes transitam entre duas polaridades (segurança e risco), necessitando estabelecer ritos para marcação dessa passagem.

Palavras-chave: Risco. Cultura. Vôo livre. Natureza.

1 INTRODUCTION

The emergency and development of air sports are related to the human ancestral longing for the ability to fly. This dream dates back to myths Icarus and Daedalus, when both attempt to escape from prison by skillfully using wax wings. Scientists such as Leonardo da Vinci, in 1486, had already tried to fly using a combination of human power and nature (JULI, 2005).

Although the airplane has meant a progress in this sense, only in the 1970s, with the hang-glider, flight became free from engine or fuel and was quickly assimilated as a leisure sport practice. Today, there are 2000 hang-glider and 3000 paraglider pilots registered at the ABVL - *Associação Brasileira de Vôo Livre* (Brazilian Gliding Association), and the “sport” is one of the few where men and women compete together (KOFF, RAAD FILHO, 2005).

Most gliding pilots, who are ordinary people, practice it as a leisure option, which is an instigating fact, since, in a society driven by the idea of physical activity as health promoter, this practice is marked by life risks. In this sense, the question of risk is essential for the understanding of this corporal practice. According to Ramos (2003), as an adventurous activity in nature, gliding is related to uncertainties, interface with the wild environment, tendency of risk and challenge, freedom enabled by adventure and rigorous safety preparation before and during habitual actions.

* Doctor in Physical Education at Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Professor at Universidade Estadual de Maringá of the graduation and Associated Postgraduate Program in Physical Education. UEM/UEL, Maringá, PR, Brazil. E-mail: ggapimentel@uem.br

These characteristics are found in different contemporaneous corporal practices, which represent a need for new forms of sociability and rationality, searching for emotions related to discovery, particularly in the natural environment. Corporal practices included in this tendency are referred to by Betrán (2003) as Adventure Physical Activities in Nature (APANs). In these activities, the search for emotions is recurrent among the pilots, with broader aspects when involving risk.

However, this risk does not refer to the same risk present when the first pilots, in very reduced number, defied the nature by enduring different threats, such as infectious and contagious diseases, accidents and hunger. Today, the risk may be produced eminently with leisure purposes. And, although the common sense regards these adventurous practices as instable and dangerous, a rationalization of risks (controlled risk) is present through safety techniques and equipment. In gliding, for instance, the pilot-equipment-weather triad is recurrently checked. No takeoff occurs if any of these parameters is not reliable.

On the other hand, understanding the risk is a result of modernity itself, whose current development phase experiences, according to Giddens (2005, p. 71), new inputs. The globalization process has made risks of “[...] innumerable origins and indeterminate consequences [...]”, changing from individual to collective focus. In this sense, although a search for control is present, the globalized society changes fast, imposing uncertainties and making decisions of all levels risky. It is in this scenario that the APANs multiply.

This study, despite its rationalist and homogenizing nature, is based on the premise that globalized modernity has provoked local, non-rational reactions (such as mysticism, sensibility and intuition). In this sense, through a sociocultural look on APANs, a contradictory conciliation of rational and non-rational elements occurs when performing these corporal practices.

Traditional human societies, when submitted to external risks, performed preparatory rites to threats from the nature. Even with technology providing more objective elements to manage risks produced by the human intervention in the natural environment, gliding presents rites of transition between the ‘safe’ environment of everyday life and the field of adventures, where deliberately facing risks is a leisure option. At the interface with theoretical postures related to the question of adventure, this study is focused on describing the occurrence of this phenomenon in a particular context and understanding meanings attributed to it.

2 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The reference of Maffesoli (2001) about adopting a theoretical sensitivity upon reality, which is always contradictory, was considered when describing this phenomenon. Therefore, the idea is not to simplify it by imposing the single truth or exhaust the life mystery with causal explanations, but participating in it, showing its problems, uncertainties and contradictions. Then, emphasis is given on describing and understanding life, with no rush for labeling it. For the author, it is necessary to be at an observing position, with empathy, as a possibility to better understand the subjects' representations.

For this purpose, a field study was conducted in an ethnographic perspective. As reminds Stigger (2002), ethnography involves a deep analysis, with no general views, but otherwise, it allows to pull down speeches based on generalization. A field book and interviews were utilized as main techniques of collection. Photographic and videotaped registrations supported some moments of the experience.

Considering the several types of participant observation that enable the production of a dense description, registered in the field book, the study opted for revealing the researcher presence to the studied actors, for instance during meals, accommodation, transport, rest, gatherings, information, equipment assembly, rescue and frugal moments of the activity.

The interviews constituted an important material for data crosschecking, enabling to access and understand, using the words of Minayo (1999, p. 134), "[...] the cultural values and the representations of a certain group's specific themes". All interviews were selected intentionally. Their selection was based on the following criteria: accept to participate in the study, be recreational pilots ¹ and fly (exclusively or not) on Terra Rica track, in northwestern Paraná. This selection also considered: (a) whether they had been identified since the beginning of the study; (b) recommendation from other informants; (c) experience time; (d) accessibility. Although the ethnographic description has invested in a higher number of people, interviews with sixteen pilots were recorded: nine hang-glider pilots and seven paraglider pilots. When data saturation was verified, as the answers were reiterated, the collection was concluded.

¹ A recreational or sports pilot is referred to, according to Semenoff (1998), as the pilot of over one-year gliding practice, who flies on weekends using hang-glider or paraglider level II, according to the classification of German Paragliding and Hang-gliding Federation for the intermediate type. These people were interesting for the study because they have assumed the practice of these APANs in their lifestyle without disqualifying this practice as an eminently leisure option. At the end, participants of levels I and III were included, as these classifications not always reflect the reality of the pilot.

The analysis crosschecked the transcribed interview and the field descriptions about each person or group. Later, based on pre-categories (risk, adventure, body, takeoff, flight, landing, health, among others), the individual representations were crosschecked in search for similarities and contradictions, in an attempt to find relations between representations and actions, avoiding taking the speech meanings as evident, and considering interpenetration between objectivity and subjectivity, and between speech and technical base. The participants signed a consent term, allowing the use and disclosure of their testimonials.²

3 ABOUT FLYING RITES

Gliding may be performed using a hang-glider or, more recently, an appropriate parachute named *parapente* (in French) or paraglider. Each of these types of “wing” involves proper learning, given their technical particularities. However, it is possible to identify common actions to both gliding forms, which are the first evidences of a chain of ambiguously objective and subjective gestures. The conscious effectiveness of minimum tasks (common to all pilots) requires training, which in general may last from four days to six months.

In short, a certified pilot, when arriving at the takeoff place, should observe the atmospheric conditions. If considered adequate, the pilot will prepare the material, checking its safety. Either in a supine (paraglider) or prone (hang-glider) position, the pilot will seek a wind direction that inflates its sail equally. With well stretched harness, symmetric takeoff, one or two steps back. The pilot will run until feeling the sail has taken off, when he/she will be fully controlling the equipment and make direction maneuvers. A beginner will fly straight to the landing field (first solo flight), while experienced pilots, according to their interaction with the wind and thermal conditions, may also fly along a hill (lift flight) or try to gain altitude through thermals. Landing occurs by visualizing the chosen place, with slowing-down approach movements (gradual brake) until the effective landing against the wind, when stall (full brake) is accomplished.

This course may be summarized in three levels of interaction with the risk: takeoff, flight and landing. Abdalad (2005), in a study on the meanings of gliding for women, subdivided her master's degree text according to the flight phases that, for her, would be four: (a) jump

² Registration 226/04, testimonial 019/05, in compliance with Resolution 196/96 of CNS/MS.

preparation; (b) jump; (c) sliding in air and (d) landing.³

Analogically, such stages may be related to the diachronic triad structure of the rite: the postulant is separated from the profane; is set apart from the secular life and lastly returns to normal life. In structural terms, i.e., regarding the social structure, terms such as “separation”, “margin” and “re-aggregation” suggest how rites may provide an alternative view of the social reality. This way, these terms may be respectively utilized when the social body is separated from the everyday life, lives a marginal life (indicating a peripheral but never excluded structure) and returns to the social structure. But when the rite is referred to in terms of spatial transitions, such as enter-remain in-return from the woods, sea, air or sacred soil, the terms “pre-liminal”, “liminal” e “post-liminal” are utilized (TURNER, 1974).

The revolutionary core of a passage rite is noticed to occur when entering this threshold or margin. As Abdalad (2005) adds, once inside, the perception of interior is related to the transcendence from the profane aspect into the sacred area, and a function of the rites would be follow the surpassing of this threshold. In the case of air sports, the author attributes the role of rituals that conduct and approach the pilot to the sky to small gestures (organize material, observe meteorological phenomena or position in relation to the wind), preparing the pilot to a jump in the empty space towards the clouds.

In the case of flying, the analogy with the rite of passage is very fertile, and may occur in the two directions suggested by Turner (1974). Regarding the separation-margin-re-aggregation triad, very analogous to the dynamic enrooting dynamics, the pilot is set free from his/her dwelling and social status, experiences another sociality intensely and then returns to the security of his/her everyday life. In the second aspect, more related to time and space, taking off means separating from terrestrial life, being inserted into another liminal dimension while sliding in the air, returning to the ground at landing.

About this aspect, one of the possibilities of understanding is suggested by Maluf (2005). For him, the rite allows a dual interface of contact: first between conscious thoughts and unconscious thoughts, contributing to overcoming apprehension, and second, between people of different statuses, from the repetition of the same gestures and sharing of the same experience.

³ The first two phases are joined here, considering that both refer to the same ritualistic stage (pre-liminal), related to the urgency of passage to another spatial dimension (from ground to air). The division of flight into moments is limited to provide an understanding of the phenomenon in its idiosyncrasy. Gliding is a totality because obviously there is no landing without flight, nor a flight without previous takeoff. But the native reading on flight stages enables a fertile analogy with the perception of predominant emotions within each ritual moment.

Given the influence of ritualization on the participants' attitudes, the author claims an intentional dimension of the rite.

For Maffesoli (1998), ritual is predominantly non-functional, being admissible only as a single function: "[...] restate the feeling that a certain group has regarding itself". The aspect that draws attention in today's ordinary ritualistic activities, besides the capability to place sensitive rationality and instrumental rationality closer, is its expression as a return to social links. "Through the multiplicity of routine or habitual gestures, the ritual reminds the community that it 'is a body'. With no need to verbalize it, the ritual acts as anamnesis to solidarity" (MAFFESOLI, 1998, p. 25).

Maffesoli (1985) considers the rituals are full of game aspects, being the first and the main signs of passage from nature to culture. The author also says that, although rituals aim at taming the strange, and as they are subject to conflicts, they end up allowing the integration of ordinary and extraordinary elements.

In very close dimensions, DaMatta (1983) adopts the rite as a dramatization in charge of fulfilling primary needs, converting them into social things. The ritual world would be relative to everyday life, with any action subject to ritualization. For this reason, trivial acts, for instance, watching a vulture in the sky or going up a hill, may be given a high significance and be arranged in a sequence, constituting a rite. This moment, made extraordinary, allows to emphasize, shift and recreate an aspect of reality.

Given these theoretical approaches, this study is based on understanding the ritual dimension of gliding, whose phases support facing the risk deliberately, an activity practiced as a leisure option.

4 INITIAL RITUAL: THE TAKEOFF

Every rite of passage is preceded by uncertainties, as it represents the passage from a known world to experiencing another reality (margin or threshold). In flying, the transition occurs between ground and air. About this phase, there are reports on personal fear facing and very familiar corporal reactions: increased heart beat; weak legs (shaking); pupil dilatation; sudoresis and dry mouth.

First place, fight against fear, right?! Because fear is instinctive. Making human being remain alive. It is a mental fight against a voice in your mind saying: "What are you doing here? Are you crazy? This is very stressing. Are you

kidding with life?” Then, you have to overcome the fear. [...] At this moment, adrenalin is higher when you are about to take off. Saliva disappears from your mouth. My mouth gets dry. (Hang-glider and paraglider pilot, adult, lives in São Paulo-SP).

According to the participants’ testimonials, this fragment of time when the pilot “has to decide” summarizes all the technical knowledge accumulated, apprehensions, fears and expectations not only of the pilot taking off, but also of colleagues around. The term “adrena” is used by the pilots to refer to the acute stress at the moment before going into the air. The speeches are ambiguous regarding this feeling, as they would disturb decision making and would be also a necessary and desired stress.

For Le Breton (2006, p. 104), stress appears as an attempt to balance the adventurer’s capabilities and the ground over which he/she exerts his/her power: “[...] far from being always a situation from which one should run away, stress becomes here, under circumstances desired by the individual, a passionate desire that should offer an increasing taste to his/her existence.” In this sense, adrenalin, in the language of pilots, also according to the author, corresponds to what we call stress, but understood as something desired, a way to intensify the feeling of being alive.

The balance point would come when giving and controlling yourself complement each other. As one hang-glider pilot living in Curitiba-PR says:

You are in the hands of Mother Nature. As a leaf blown with the wind, but with a certain control and respect for making it at the right time and with good weather conditions, as the danger of gliding is when you take off in the wrong moment or with a lot or little wind. Then, there is a safety margin where you can play with no problem ...

With the imponderability that characterizes this practice, with nature as a chaotic element, the ritual aims at ratifying this ‘enhanced control’, transforming the chance into social data subject to absorption by dramatization. Elements such sky observation, equipment assembly in the same sequence, meditation –in a sitting or lying position – in contact with the ground and the movement of fitting the sail or inflating the glider until a level that pleases the pilot is achieved, show the presence of intuitive sensitivity in progress.

It should be noted that these mentioned gestures have a symbolic representation of the organization involving this microcosm interaction, which is between the pilot and the macrocosm. Everything has to be done ‘that way’, making some pilots restless and not ready to fly while any habitual gesture has not been fulfilled. This subjective perception may refer to

details, such as: the sail noise is different; a band of Senhor do Bonfim Saint should be tied to the equipment; troublesome control bar; not feeling the wind on the face and sail. The 'leader' of the studied group repeatedly emphasized that the pilot should feel the presence of the right wind, when the sail "wants to fly", as "forcing a situation" or acting inattentively during the flight preparation usually results in accidents.

Concluding, taking off is preceded by the characteristic stress of separating the individual from his/her habitual environment, which may start when the pilot leaves home. Actions such as having dinner, sleeping, waking up and opening the window to check the weather conditions do not occur as usual. In general, after overcoming the initial 'adrena', the reports (of individuals in the study and literature) point out other sensations associated with pleasure, tranquility, mystical ecstasy, peace, freedom, surprise, loneliness upon the immensity of empty spaces. The second ritual moment addresses this new combination of body and practice.

5 LIFTING RITUAL: THE FLIGHT

The threshold phase in gliding is characterized by takeoff effectiveness, when the pilot leaves the ground and gains altitude. For this phase forward, according to the typology of the ritual phases, the individual is prepared for rites of alliance or aggregation to the new world. For this purpose, liminality is the period for suppressing social differences and markers, which will be reallocated (in other terms) in the post-liminal period (GENNEP, 1977).

The contact with another dimension and the temporary suspension of the instituted reality is characteristic of the liminal phase. Then, the element that generates these perceptions is the state of suspension, considered here in two senses: (a) the body suspended in the air by the glider and (b) the temporary suspension of norms and concerns of everyday life.

As a complement, this is an intense moment in terms of perceptions, as the body captures many inputs from the environment and at the same time experiences some absorbing emotions. In short, the ritual elements promote a continuous body suspension and the predominance of cyclic time (ritual beginning, middle and end). Flying is the climax of the ritual.

As already addressed by Abdalad (2005), the flying rite is associated with attempts to suppress everyday routine, the imagined establishment of more cooperative relations with the natural environment and appreciation of the current moment. However, the main aspect of a person's the rite of passage from the ground to the cloud, the "transforming oneiric element", is

the conquest of a “new dimension and feeling so free as being home, in a place where one may enjoy intimacy” (ABDALAD; 2005, p. 109).

It seems that this perception of freedom reported by different pilots from Terra Rica confirms the aspect of transition between extremes, when the sensations affect a body suspended in the air. The fact of being drifted and sliding, suspended in the space, involves, above all, a particular experience of corporeity.

In the speeches, the state of body suspension in the space (apparently unlimited) is linked with ‘freedom from’ institutional dispositions and habitual concerns and ‘freedom to’ incorporate certain mythological references, more specifically in terms of rite:

Being the Superman. Flying a hang glider is one of my dreams that has fulfilled everything: sensation of freedom, height and mainly the ability to be alone in the universe heights, observe everything from above and say: “I can do it! I’m a flyer. I’m an eagle.” Then, that’s it: being an eagle, but also a human being. (Hang glider pilot, black, of rural origin and today waged worker living in Curitiba-PR.)

Freedom to feel respect for the nature and have the ability to go wherever you want to. Almost like a bird, but the bird has to flap its wings, we do not have to. But you can be in tune with the nature, which I guess is very important. This is very nice and you are free flying; see what direction you want to go to. (Hang glider pilot, Japanese, ‘mid-sized business owner’ living in Maringá-PR)

The freedom mentioned almost by everyone seems to involve the individual, getting rid of – even temporarily – of labels imposed by society on how to think and use the body, as well as cathartic and compensatory aspect of ecstasy.

It’s in this aspect that the transition phase in the rite is guided by the idea of temporary suspension of the dominating social structure (either to confirm it or foresee its modification). According to Turner (1974), at the liminality, the mystical or deviating experiences common to a given group enable certain meanings to change and then a resignification may occur. However, there are no guarantees of interference in other life spheres because cognitively living in the new world paradoxically ends up highlighting the regularity of the everyday life (TURNER, 1974).

Although intense to everyone, the way this phase expresses itself is very specific and the individuals are not always sufficiently opened to status changes the rite of passage (flying)

potentially enables. Some consider the moment of suspension as the adrenalin peak, while a more experienced group associates it with spiritual issues.

The study of subtleties predominates in the liminal stage. The first difficulty in theoretically immersing in this phenomenon is the language inability to elaborate something that sometimes goes beyond the pilot's understanding. It is no wonder that the pilots often say it is "inexplicable", "you have to fly to know [...]". The signs in this phase are related to a logic not formalized through oral language, contributing to polysemy.

6 RITUAL OF THE RETURN TO NORMALITY: LANDING

The moment of landing is considered by many pilots as a new stressing moment, similar to that of takeoff. If, in order to leave the hill and getting into the air, the pilot experiences the apprehension of environment change, landing means the return to the ground, with different risks associated with landing on an inadequate place or in an unbalanced way, tumbling at landing.

Tumbling at landing is a reason for mockery among the pilots, but in fact this is a very complex procedure. Incorrect approach and unbalance are associated with a fault in the combination of body and equipment, at a moment of tiredness. Besides the wrong calculation of distance, the pilot may not properly level the wing sides, and it will fall forward or sideways. Thermals (current of warm air) rising from the soil are mentioned as another factor that makes landing a tense moment. When approaching the soil, the wing is inflated upwards, deviating the pilot from the most adequate place to land.

Overcoming challenges, for the pilots, results in a tension-distension continuum. After landing, many enjoy meditating, contemplating, integrating or simply experiencing a relief for having overcome the challenges. In some cases, the ecstasy excitation continues during landing and is added by the perception of well-being and relaxation. As a paraglider pilot from Santa Catarina says, landing ends a cycle: "The state of landing is another case. At this moment, you start returning to the ground, you start returning to the physical state".

As a synthesis moment, such phase of post-liminal re-aggregation (landing) provokes in the pilots associative attitudes towards sharing acquired knowledge and reminiscences of perceived emotions. Through observation, it was possible to notice that, after the glider was stopped, each experience was narrated to colleagues effusively and in details. Few hours later, either in interviews or talks at bars, the descriptions became 'uninteresting'.

The landing environment, in this sense, is a privileged territory for the secrets of groups to be nurtured. At this place, an evaluation of takeoff, flight and landing is done, the glider is disassembled, moisturizing is performed, adjustments for the next flight or when it is not possible to fly again, they gather in small tribes for a more detailed exchange until rescue arrives or they feel encouraged to go away. Some pilots are often temporarily separated from the others, probably to reflect on relevant aspects of the flight or simply because they are exhausted.

To understand, in a less imposition view, the meaning of the entire flying process or what the flyer had gained or acquired when getting to the landing point, it is necessary to ask whether the pilot's objective is to get to the landing point. Unlike the Olympic swimmer who wants to cross the pool in the shortest possible time, most pilots wish to remain into the air as long as possible, just as a child playing in the pool for the pleasure of being in the water. Nobody flies exclusively to get to the landing point, although this post-liminal return is wanted.

In agreement with the exhortation of Sant'ana (2001) about the ethics of moment in nature sports, flying coincides with act and purpose. Flying is the end itself. Landing is a consequence of the impossibility or lack of desire to spend more time flying. And what is done and felt during landing is mainly linked with the emotions built in this practice. The perception of ritual elements in this game activity - the flight - highlights the aspects of game unproductiveness towards the system, something that is above all spent within itself, with no guarantees of projection onto other spheres of life.

Using 'something that is spent within itself' as a motto for these practices, a possible inference from such practices, even understanding in them the contradictions and inequalities of the capitalist society, related to the idle dimension (in the Greek sense of *scholé*, a creative non-making) of gliding. Maffesoli (1997) inverts the dominating logic and makes us think whether the useless things would not be the most significant in life. For him, when something has its value based on the criterion of productivity, it ends up obsolete, as everything without a little of superfluousness ends up perversely destined to becoming obsolete sooner or later.

7 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article discussed how the perception of flying is built in the sociocultural context and how the sensations in ritualistically well outlined "takeoff", "flight" and "landing" moments may favor or be the result of certain social representations. In relation to landing, issues appeared such

as fear, the meaning of being “adrenalized”, the stress in the moment of launching and how it is related to the habitual stress. Regarding the flight, emphasis was given to the idea of suspension when analyzing the ecstasy, dialog with the nature and emotions and sensations attributed to each type of flight. Aspects such as fear of falls, state of relaxation and need for being alone and with the others after the flight were considered in the analysis of the landing and equipment disassembly moment.

Although liminal transitions are subjective and intimate body experiences, they are not isolated into the individual. They are inserted into ethical and esthetical codes of a certain underground sociality that unchains itself and, from one cycle to another, provokes a temporary suspension of the institutional standards and everyday concerns. And, taking the relevance of this question into account, this text brings some general theoretical considerations that appeared as a result of the particularity presented by this study.

For Mafessoli (1998), one of the strong elements of these new communities is the development of ritual, which would not have an objective, but would only reassure the feelings at stake in the ritual, mainly regarding the sociality power. The ritual would express above all its cyclical, repetitive condition to return to itself. This rite characteristic in the contemporaneous sociality would enable a feeling of security, ends the author.

Such security – within the dynamic enrooting logic – in contrast with, and at the same time in a combination with, the search for freedom in adventure practices. For Maffesoli (2001, p. 120), nomad freedom is different from that preached by the bourgeoisie because it is based on the relation involving “[...] polytheism of values, habitual paganism and appreciation of the present moment, when all potentialities should be experienced”.

Maffesoli (1997) considers the superior effectiveness in modern societies contributed to the gradual reduction of collective feeling. This praxis emphasizes the future, as if everything would have an objective and the means would have to be encouraged. As a common point in his analyses, the author reminds that every projection onto the future enhances the obscurity of the present. The institutionalization and rationalization of the modern society led to the pasteurization of the habitual life. For him, this was one of the reasons for the society to become increasingly anomalous.

The crisis of this model provoked the resurgence of archaic elements that benefited from the technological innovations to nurture the non-institutional sociality. In this sense, another

perspective appears (although more frequently among young people), which survives the eternal present. The objective is not so important as the pleasure of the act or moment. For Maffesoli (1997, p. 174), this perspective of “[...] stopping the time to enjoy multiple small social or personal occasions or occurrences [...]” does not mean any narcissism, but a decision of someone who does not believe anymore in the promise of balance in the future society.

As a consequence, many societies are living based on the ‘right here, right now’ concept, “[...] to which they are adapted in a ‘contradictory’ manner, i.e., without ‘overcoming’ the various heterogeneous elements of the everyday life [...]”, making such groups “[...] accept the lucky and disgraceful days” as the best possible balance (MAFFESOLI, 1997, p. 175). The adventure ended up one of the contradictory forms to face these transformations in the society model and people’s identities. For many people, “[...] the existence continuity comprises multiple deviations, good particular moments, ephemeral happenings, the intimate mixture of danger and intensity” (MAFFESOLI, 1988, p. 116).

Such hedonist nomadism came with new forms of facing adventure and risk awareness, typical of a reflexive phase of modernity. In a society living with social capital disarrangement, “[...] new adventures enable a form of enrooting in a society marked by individualization and de-traditionalizing processes”. This search for the existence purpose may be “[...] the most important aspect to understand the relation between risk and adventure in the reflexive modernity” (SPINK, 2008, p. 07).

When observing gliding in the ambiguous field of adventure activities, it is therefore necessary to recognize this practice is emptied by the hybridization of rational and sensible aspects (another rationality). According to the experienced pilots, the pilot-condition-equipment triad is the reason of safety (or risk control) of this corporal practice. However, as there are elements out of control and planning, it is not possible to rationalize all actions upon risk occurrences (real and imagined ones) related to flying. As it is said only 1% of the accidents is attributed to equipment problems, the human element appears as imprecise as the nature with which one’s wishes to communicate into the air.

The human perception of risk in gliding makes pilots consider the imponderability and search for other regularities more than any provisions and techniques. In the past, the community cohesion or the notion of destination used to calm down the restlessness upon the unknown. However, in the reflexive modernity, which most evident sign would be the risk, support has

been given to technological competence and individuality, which is known to increase the restlessness feeling upon multiple possibilities intervening in each scenario.

In this study, the ritual, a cultural construct of strong symbolic effectiveness, is in theory placed as an effective mediation with fatality. However, a conciliation between extremes has not been achieved, but a complementary stress. It means denying any simplistic representation of balance between the rational dimension (meteorology, technical gestures, flight technology, safety instruments) and the sensitive dimension (spirituality, gregarious pulsion, rituals) by means of these practices in the nature. However, the polarity, reminding of the climax phase of the rite, finds its temporary suspension when life is deliberately placed at stake, considering that it is impossible to achieve this conditions without the totality manifestation in the human experience.

Abstract: Hang gliding is an adventure activity in nature whose feature is flying by using the aerospace technology and meteorological knowledge. The objective was to understand the meanings given to risk of hang gliding, and the presence of rituals in that corporal practice. For this purpose, in an adaptation of ethnographic research, a field study was performed by observing and interviewing the participants, and through image recorded in northwestern Paraná. The study analyzed the three phases of the ritual: takeoff, flight and landing. Concluding, those people transit between these two extremes (safety and risk) and need to establish rites to demarcate this transition.

Key words: Risk. Culture. Hang gliding. Nature.

Ritos y riesgo en la práctica del vuelo libre.

Resumen: El vuelo libre es una actividad de aventurera en naturaleza, usando la tecnología aerospacial y el conocimiento meteorológico. Este artículo muestra significados acerca de los riesgos en vuelo libre, y, también, la presencia de rituales en esa práctica corporal. A eso, en una aproximación con la etnografía, se ejecuto un estudio gravando imágenes, observando personas y entrevistándolas, en noroeste del Paraná. El estudio analizó las tres fases del ritual: el despegue, vuelo y desembarco. Concluyendo, las personas se alternan entre ámbitos (seguridad y riesgo), necesitando establecer aquellos ritos para demarcaren la transición entre polaridades.

Palabras- clave: Riesgo. Cultura. Vuelo libre. Naturaleza.

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