

# A Game Against Delusion\*

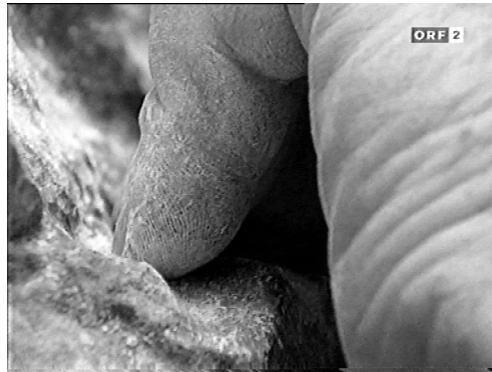


Fig. 1

## *- Imprint*

After short hesitation the right foot reaches a distant hold. With this overlong step the body is put into an oblique position. Thus the tension and the necessity to yield to it increases. The right hand is removed from the wall, shaken out for relaxation and then reaches out for a finger hole in a high arc over the body. This change in posture twice demanded a shift in weight and led to the entire loss of contact of the left foot with the rock. This loss of resistance is at the same time a loss of reality and reduces friction. Low friction increases the pressure on the right foot as well as on both hands. While this pressure pulls down the stretched right arm, the left arm resists this downward pull and moves up slowly. Due to the countermovement the angle between the palm and the left-hand fingers is neutralised, the tension within breaks down and the pressure on the fingertips is accordingly increased to an unbearable degree. However, the diversion and concentration of pressure on the outermost contact points relieved the tension in the head, the torso and who knows what, and thus new strength could be gathered. This strength is constructive; it takes advantage of the loss of friction, merging and converging conflicting forces, and it moves like lightning into the fingertips, transmitting a punctiform impulse. The imprint is made. The body swings deliberately in a limited space and for a moment safety depends on the swinging of the suspended body.

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The imprint is ultimate. It directs and encourages people to move on; it musters knowledge of moving borders and holds the mystery of elementary forces: What is the relationship between illusion and gravity? How does power enter into both? What is expressed in the precise game of these conflicting forces? The mystery remains unsolved; soul, animal and gift leave three traces, so the following contributes to a story and structure of the individual who lives and values extremes.<sup>1</sup>

- *Idyll, 5.13d*<sup>2</sup>

Friday, September 17, 1999. Two camera crews are dragging equipment to the entrance of a forty-meter wall. *You are in the middle of a wood, in a serene spot in Switzerland not far from Feldkirch in Vorarlberg,*<sup>3</sup> says the film's narrator, talking about the Voralpsee, a lake above Grabs in the Canton of St Gallen. The protagonist enters the frame: aged 41, long red hair, naked torso, concentration. He closes his eyes, sinking for a last time into the wall. After fifteen minutes at the latest this *dance without a rope* has to come to a close, as strength is failing. "Mordillo" is the name given to this route, which has been graded 5.13d and is being climbed free solo for the first time.<sup>4</sup> The viewers witness a premiere and the possibility of a fall, which would, in all likelihood, be fatal. *A caricature of madness* continues; the climber begins his ascent. The ease with which he moves is catching, the viewers themselves become restless in their chairs. Then the music changes; it becomes more sedate and follows the beating of his pulse. The suspense increases; more than half of the wall lies beneath us; the camera angle changes. *Beat Kammerlander has reached the key point. It is a dead end; his feet have hardly any contact points. The fear is tangible. If he cannot move on, if he loses his nerve or strength, he will fall.* Kammerlander extends his hand but pulls back his arm, putting his hand into a little chalk bag, which is attached to the back of his waist with a cord. He pulls out his hand again, blows away the rest of the chalk from his fingers, seeks to grip the old hold again and finally moves up. Difficulties increase; the key moment continues. *There is no return. Kammerlander has to rest, to reduce muscle acidification, to gather his wits and regain his mental balance.* After the short film clip leave the world of pictures and move into the world of language, which continues the movement in thought.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Helga Peskoller, *BergDenken* (Vienna: Eichbauer, 1998). Print.

<sup>2</sup> 5.13d (USA) = X- (UIAA)

<sup>3</sup> Original passages from the film are italicised.

<sup>4</sup> Theoretically, it is an open-end scale for climbing grades; at the moment 5.14d (USA) has been reached. However, without the help of artificial mobility and security devices grade 5.13d has not yet been managed in this length.



Fig. 2

### - Soul

The protagonist is equally aware of the precarious situation. When he returns to the entrance without a fall or injury and more alive than before, he states,

*I noticed during the ascent: concentration is like an inner clock that comes and goes. The feeling of fear is a very intense feeling, which is not easy to control. So I have to find the right timing, that is, the rhythm. You rest and the fear may come. But when I am climbing, I have to focus. So it is a getting to know yourself and sometimes you have the opportunity to look deep into your soul; because there are no lies there, there is only truth.*

The formula goes like this: concentration against fear divided by time is truth. Truth instead of lies to oppose delusion; truth not as a result of thinking but of feeling. Let us return to the beginning again: first, all strength must be gathered; a high degree of tension develops and a condition of short distances. Thoughts are instantly directed from the head into the legs, and what the hands feel is at once passed on to the shoulders and the neck. The latter connects body and mind; it is a passage and thus an image of the soul. The soul is porous; it opens to the inside and the outside; as we have known since antiquity, the soul is at the beginning of every movement. The one who feels lives. The soul and feelings are inextricably linked and depend on the atmosphere of space. What feelings might relate to this wall? How strong do they have to be in order to implicate a human being in its barren life? The affection for one another, the way the wall is linked to the human is gentle, somewhat erotic and smooth like water. Water is receptive, spreads in the body, and flows to and is touched by its vis-à-vis. This double sense of being touched is not ecstatic, but rather a surreptitious, tender pleasure. Everything is inclined and able to perceive. Kammerlander begins his ascent, taking off calmly and knowing that it will work. About 25 meters later he has reached the key point: the soul is in place but empty, which leaves room for something else. ‘You rest and the fear may come,’ says the climber reflecting on safe ground. But what is it like up there? Nobody looks

forward to the moment when one feels the fear actually settling in; it is paralysing. According to Lacan, fear is the only thing that does not deceive, and Kammerlander talks about the intense feeling of fear which is so difficult to control. The fact that the loss of control is disappointing is hardly surprising; it is more irritating that control could merely be a delusion. But who is deceiving whom? Who is playing with what? What is part of the game and what is part of life?

*I have always associated knickerbockers and red chequered shirts with mountain climbing. That seemed completely dubious to me and I didn't like it at all. But then a friend of mine persuaded me to come along and it was such an experience! I was so afraid. And somewhere he said to me, 'You're robustly built, you surely have a lot of strength, you are definitely able to do this.' To deal with this fear, to feel and overcome it was such an extreme experience for me that I became addicted.*

Real experience against an image and with strength that was crucial. One relied on strength, one exercised and increased one's strength to an incredible degree. Amidst tiniest grips, however, trust in the strength of one's body begins to falter. The power of a single feeling plays with innumerable muscles, none of which is of any use any more. Now the fear deceives and confuses one's will and wits. Delusion deludes imagination, plans and goals for the reality of fear. This makes one alienate oneself, while one's surroundings become alien at the same time. The fear annihilates every measure as well as the frame, so that one changes into an amorphous mass, doubting whether one is still hanging at all. For example, the finger hole in which one's middle finger is jammed becomes much too narrow all of a sudden; the bottom left step feels brittle and might soon give way; the ledge that has always been too narrow for the left hand seems greasy and is strongly inclined outwards. It is not the climber any more but the wall that seems to move now. What has been in is now out of joint, height transforms into depth, and the upward move becomes a downward pull. Do not think; hold out against the pull, change direction, leave dismay and doubts behind, and move towards action again.

### *- Animal*

Loud clamorous sounds, irregular breath permeating me – how embarrassing. I suspect that there is not only something human but also something animalistic about him. Has this man doubled or been cut in half? Several times I rewind and fast forward the film and what is shown is simple: burdened souls and bodies normally retreat, which in this case would mean a fall. Thus the escape movement does not take place in the outside but the inner world and it is life-saving. A cold passion is followed by a warm one; human consciousness yields to the

instinct.<sup>5</sup> How often must the escape have been inaccessible until this inner movement is automatically successful? How frequently does one reach the point of no return until panic does not break loose but prudence and attention guide the way? How ardently must climbers love boundaries in order to develop to the full in them? How passionately does one search and seek to know in order to realise, at the end of rationality, the beginning of a different kind of truth?

*As a child I was always the one who was looking for adventure, embarking again and again on some wild mission. After some time you learn to live with danger.*

What does that mean, 'to live with danger'? Kammerlander does not elaborate on that in the film; his movements tell the story and they display positive awareness of danger. Countless repetitions function like a safety net to this awareness, and they transform and consolidate it to give it meaning. Meaning does not work like an analysis; it is more difficult and complex, demanding a different understanding of abstraction and developing in and through contexts; the abundance of sensory data is not succeeded by a self-defence of theory but a memory of threefold origin. The climber along the border is endangered by fear; to feel it means the end of intelligence. Intelligence is not enough to free oneself from paralysis. The perception feels its way; it roams and branches out, and it is concentrated in feeling; intuition begins. When Kammerlander senses the downward pull, he becomes wide awake, feels his way in his present place and also takes notice of time. Time is counted by the knots of confusion,<sup>6</sup> which arises from the merging of something mineral outside and organic inside. Two times are in conflict with one another and generate tension, which is used to prepare a new movement. In the preparation of a movement time is accumulated and with it a high intensity, which pervades space and which is relaxed only in action. The sense of movement – the origin of instinct – is master of time and measurement.<sup>7</sup> The route outside of the body has been exactly measured at the same time as the time which passes during a change of holds before the eyes, and with them the left hand, are again directed upwards. Kammerlander imagines himself, at least for a moment, to be safe again. Trained in perceiving, sensing, feeling and moving, he comes to places and beyond, which, without these preliminaries, would be inaccessible to understanding. 'The one who shuns danger,' I hear Dietmar Kamper say, 'perishes in it.' Nothing can be added to this sentence, after all that a vertical movement reminds one of, except perhaps for this: extremely close, within earshot of the animal, human beings become

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<sup>5</sup> Instinct as conceived as the will to live.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Michel Serres, *Die fünf Sinne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994) 199, esp. 226. Print.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Helga Peskoller, "1cm," *Paragrana - Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie* 9.1 (2000): 107-16. Print.

not only human; they recognise in their self-endangerment that they are not necessarily there, but that they are nothing more than a possibility.<sup>8</sup>

### - *Gift*

The climber has known for a long time that he is addicted, but that is beside the point.

*I can't pinpoint the origin of this motivation myself. But I know that it's buried somewhere deep inside me, and that I don't have to force myself. It's certainly not about prestige or anything like that, but it's much more deeply rooted.*

The driving force undermines the logic of economy. Kammerlander undertakes what is not his to take and what cannot be appropriated. The super-abundance of human nature that will go to extremes is confronted with a boundless wealth of the wall. Through the extremity of the situation one may have the experience that one owns neither nature nor oneself. Kammerlander does not climb with such confidence because he relies on the logic of self-preservation, but because he mistrusts this logic. He knows that his driving force remains incompatible with logic. It is deep inside of him, as he says; it is much more deeply rooted. What is deeper than prestige or any other reason is the absence of reason. As has been shown, this absence encourages unimaginable possibilities of exertion. Against every promise of fulfilment, climbing, in particular free soloing, is about incurable passion.<sup>9</sup> At the centre of this passion there is the ambivalent insight that only the one who is also capable of dying is able to live. In a disciplined way, the climber rehearses death and thus gains a new kind of life. It is an extremely thin line between self-waste and self-destruction; too deep in life may be too close to death. Indeed, the extreme climbers I know regularly hear the reproach that they risk their lives voluntarily and that they long for death. That is what they actually do, but not in order to die prematurely, nor, bursting with strength, to prove again and again that they do not have to die, but they seek death in order not to forget it. The implied escape into unconsciousness and from life is a bodily reminder that one has to die in order to be able to live and one day, somewhere and sometime, to die.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Andreas Steffens, *Die Möglichkeit Mensch, Paragrana - Internationale Zeitschrift für Historische Anthropologie* 6.1 (1997): 43-64. Print.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gerd Bergfleth, *Theorie der Verschwendung* (Munich: Matthes & Seitz, 1985) esp. 86. Print.

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## *Illustrations*

Fig. 1: Kammerlander, Beat, perf. "Imprint." *Grenzgänger in Fels und Eis*. Dir. Hans-Peter Stauber, 1999. Film still.

Fig. 2: ---. *Grenzgänger in Fels und Eis*. Dir. Hans-Peter Stauber, 1999. Film still.