



Why I train

by Pierre Amardeilh

This article, written by a top competition sportsman, analyses the drive which pushes a sportsman on. By his sincerity and mastery of his thoughts, the author reveals his athletic world, which is sometimes unexpected and surprising. Some of his ideas will be contradicted. We hope so.

Who is the author? Pierre Amardeilh is classed among the best of his country's swimmers. Member of the French team, he beat the French 4 x 200 m. record at the World Championships in Belgrade. His international renown was not resounding, but however, he did swim the 200 m. freestyle in less than 2 minutes. This article appeared in the last edition of his club's magazine, the Swimming Club of Marseille. We should add that Georges Garret, often mentioned in the following pages, is none other than his trainer.

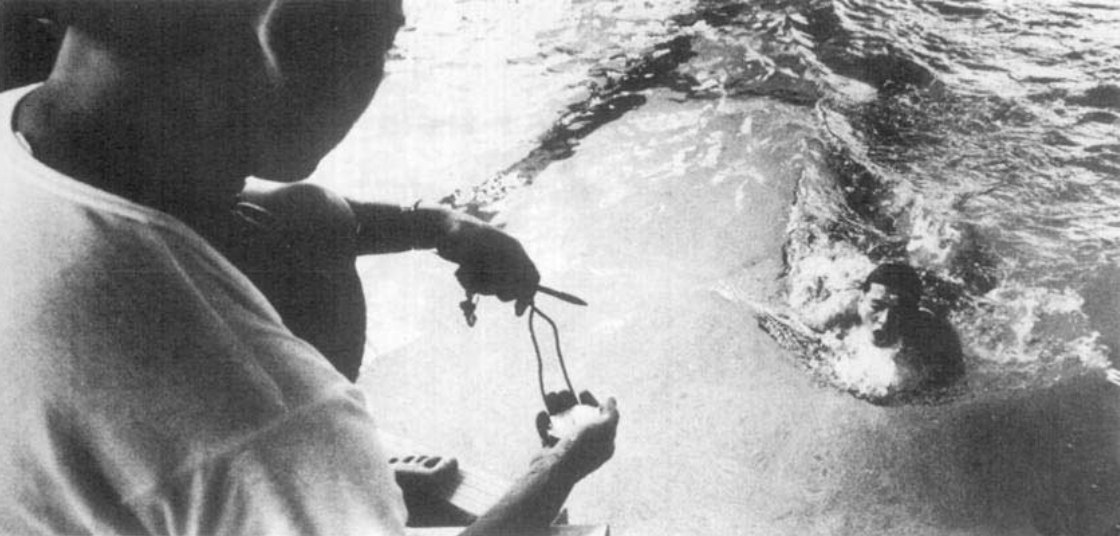
Van Gogh said: "In my life and in my painting, I can do very well without God, but I cannot, suffering, do without something which is greater than myself, which is my life: the power to create."

Two important words, two interlocking ideas: to suffer and create. All suffering is creative and to create has suffering as a corollary. Nothing is attained, nothing is made without effort, without sorrow; at the same time, all effort is creative. To swim a daily average of 7 kilometres requires efforts; to train is to suffer.

To suffer, why? For whom? And from what is my suffering creative?

I have been a member of the Cercle des Nageurs now for more than ten years and for more than ten years I have been defending the Cercle's colours in competitions. I know what I owe to this association. When, by chance, I climb the podium or when I am selected, I know that my success does not belong to me alone and that I owe a large part of it to my club. My sport's success, at my level, is something I would gladly share and even give up. On the other hand, one thing I refuse to share is my suffering; besides, nobody disputes that.

So, for the whole year, I suffer alone in training, alone every day. Every day this means that the next day I must start again and then, day after day, it will be



the same. I will be alone with my suffering. If during a competition (but that is very easy on such a day) I compete for the Cercle, the rest of the time I do not train, I do not suffer, for the Cercle.

I do not train for Mr. Georges Garret or for the team of friends of which I have been a member for many years. In spite of my respect and admiration for Mr. Garret and my friendship for the others, I do not swim 7 kilometers a day just to be friendly with them.

I do not train for the 3000 members of the Cercle, whom I do not know, who do not know me and who mock sport in general and swimming and water-polo in particular. In this respect, it would be interesting to know the average number of spectators at the Cercle's pools, swimming competitions and water-polo matches, this being said without animosity, each having the right to do as he pleases, including the game of belote.

I do not train in order to go to Rio de Janeiro, Tahiti, the Olympic Games in Munich or the World Championships in Belgrade. It would not only be presumptuous but deceptive to train so much with the sole aim of travelling when

combatants are chosen by a few hundredths of a second, hundredths so difficult to win.

Do I train then to be the strongest, to win? I sincerely do not believe this. I will never be strong enough, am not and never will be in the same class as an Alain Mosconi or a Michel Rousseau. This does not mean that on the day of a competition I am not stimulated by the idea that I am fighting for my team, by the attraction of travel or by the desire to beat those who swim each side of me. But in the winter, long before the competition season, when I swim three hundred meters ten times, fifty meters fifty times or a hundred meters thirty times, I do not say to myself between each length "Go on! swim for Mr. Garret and for the Cercle! For the friends! To go to Australia!" No, I swim for myself and only myself. To come back to Van Gogh, what does my suffering create in training?
It creates me, me.

I must say that swimming training only interests young men in good health. So, while I can swim at least 7 kilometres a day, I know that I am young and in good health. For me, swimming is the clear

proof of my youth. Through it, I reach for a permanence to my state of being a young man. If I accept the suffering of training, if I even welcome it like a friend, it is certainly not because I am a masochist. But I want it since, although it is a trial, it is at the same time proof of my remaining youth. As long as I train, I have the impression of being young.

What frightens me when I reach the pool's edge is not the suffering I am going to endure, it is the fear that one day I will not be able to assume it. With each stroke of the arms, I create myself against time. Each meter in the water sees me born. For me, to swim is to be outside time, nearly immortal; it is making me a destiny, it is a way of conquering creation to some degree where I triumph temporarily over time, future and death. It is my way of being free or rather trying to be free. For to my mind the only freedom worth having is that which lets you escape from time.

Do not tell me that it is a question of conservation, of preservation rather than of creation. In fact, to create is to change, to transform reality. So reality wishes me to pass on, not to last. To preserve my being, to lengthen my youth, this is thus to create, this is thus to create myself.

Do not say either that I am fleeing reality. If I fight against reality, I only rob myself of it as much. Besides, no man can live while totally refusing reality. Every thought, even those without significance, signify something, as there is no activity completely founded without reason and the absurdity of life.

We can denounce injustice in the world and then demand a justice which we alone have created but we cannot assert the total ugliness of the world.

To create, one must thus at the same time refuse reality and exalt certain of its-aspects. What I exalt is my youth, my adolescence, which is already ending and what I refuse is the loss of unity, of form and of length, which it covers.

And for that I do not want any historic philosophy, marxist or existentialist; the historic philosophers teach "to be is to become" that "we are not but we must be". Thus would they condemn us to live only for history. I certainly do not deny history since it is through it that I try to assert myself, to assert my youth.

But I reject it without hiding myself from it, and I do not for a second make an absolute of history. If history is one of the limits of Man, and if one day I cease to swim and die, by swimming I try to place a limit on history myself. In fact, swimming consists of trying desperately not to penetrate historical development, for the injustice of my circumstances, the transient character of my youth, death, my death, manifests itself in history. I do not want to be just "un projet" as Sartre would say; I want to believe that values also exist in the present and that these values are not all at the beginning of history. If no value existed outside history, we would be condemned to a sad, joyless present. As far as I am concerned, I am happy to live, to swim, and what I regret is that even if by a miracle I could be young and swim all my life, it would only be a lifetime.

"I believe that one should live not to start to exist one day, but to function within this being that we already are."

I swim "not to produce the being that I am not, but to create that which I am."

P.A.