

The German-speaking Swiss writer, Ludwig Hohl (1904-1980), in his work *Ascension*¹, warns us: «Les bons alpinistes sont presque toujours des êtres laconiques.» (Good mountaineers are nearly always people of few words.) Everything in his story relates back to the necessarily minimalist relationship that man must maintain with mountains. The two heroes of the story, in setting off to conquer a glacier, heroically confront the harsh terrain, with tragic consequences. They perfectly exemplify this quasi-Nietzschean proverb: « Celui qui gravit les plus hautes montagnes, celui-là se rit de toutes les tragédies qu'elles soient réelles ou jouées. »² (He who climbs the highest mountains laughs at all tragedies, whether real or imagined.) Aurore Bagarry's work is completely at one with this line of thought, which makes representation of the mountain a kind of withdrawal, or what the Greek philosophers called *epoché*, the suspension of beliefs and assumptions. It can also be a suspension of the senses, a setting aside of human reason, which can never compare with the mighty grandeur of Nature.

Having set out to catalogue all the glaciers of the Mont Blanc valley in France, Italy and Switzerland, photographing them between June and September, after the snow has melted, Aurore Bagarry records the glacier with clinical objectivism as a presence, but also as a trace, something left behind. This naturally brings to mind some of the great romantic painters, but above all the work of photographers such as Léon Gimpel, Walker Evans or Bernd and Hilla Becher for their documentary objectivity. It is difficult for today's artists to work within the imaginary world of romanticism and its search for the sublime: the metaphysics of the highest peaks has given way to scientific rationality, with its batteries of instruments.

Aurore Bagarry's photographs are precisely within this movement to remove the sacred aura surrounding mountains. The concept of trace, the thing which survives the inexorable snow melt, puts a question mark over her decision to use photography as her medium. Is it possible for the photographer to capture the many variations in the shape of the glaciers? How does this compare with the definitive record of individual features encoded in the impressive network of data produced by scientific apparatus? It is this tension which fuels this project from Aurore Bagarry, here questioning what a certain melancholy meditation on the modern world can really mean.

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¹ Ludwig Hohl, *Ascension*, trad.fr. Luc de Goustine, Paris, Attila, 2007.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ainsi Parlait Zarathoustra*, trad.fr. G.A. Goldschmidt, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1972, p.56.