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Pierre-Henry Frangne

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What are you doing here?

-Théophile Gautier,

Les Vacances du lundi. Tableaux de montagnes\*

- 1 At the beginning of the 1860s, Théophile Gautier – a former painter, a romantic writer and follower of Victor Hugo, a friend of Charles Baudelaire, an art critic, the ‘impeccable poet,’ and a frequent traveler to Spain, Russia, and Egypt – published an account of his excursions in the mountains of the Vosges and the Swiss and French Alps in several installments in *Le Moniteur Universel*. He later collected these into a single volume entitled *Les Vacances du Lundi* and subtitled *Tableaux de Montagnes*, which was published in 1869. It is surprising in view of this subtitle, which points to the primacy of painting as a model, to find that the chapters on the Alps are preceded by a now famous text<sup>1</sup> in which Gautier records and discusses his impressions of the photographic plates of the brothers Bisson.<sup>2</sup> His reaction to the images of the Matterhorn in the locality of Riegl (1862) and of the ascents of Mont Blanc in 1861 and 1862 were so powerful and even so violent that they inspired Gautier to go to see and describe for himself what the photographs had shown him.
- 2 Mountain photography functioned as a point of departure, inciting movement and action. First of all, this action takes the form of travel to what the Englishman Leslie Stephen – the father of Virginia Woolf and a friend of the painter Gabriel Loppé – called ‘the playground of Europe’<sup>3</sup> at a time when the wildness and otherness of the mountains appeared to have been almost completely charted and assimilated within the space – mental and physical, visible and legible, symbolic and cultural – of sports (mountaineering), tourism, maps, calculations, narratives, and images that even today arouse spontaneous admiration for what they depict. But Gautier’s response to these ‘views of Savoy and Switzerland by the brothers Bisson’ is also, and above all, a literary reaction, which consists in taking back from photography what is his. For Gautier, who described himself as a ‘literary daguerreotype (or daguerreotypist),’<sup>4</sup> the mountain

photographs of the brothers Bisson represent a model – that writing and painting must equal – in a movement that is all the more spectacular for being initially conceived of as impossible. With this, the Bissons offer Gautier ‘a singular challenge.’<sup>5</sup> By accepting it, the writer responds to what might be termed the call of photography. This call is that of exteriority: on the one hand, the exteriority of the world, which one must travel, see, and explore, and on the other, the exteriority of literature and painting, which must confront the danger that photography poses to their centrality within the arts.

- 3 ‘No poetic description, not even Lord Byron’s lyricism in his *Manfred*, could possibly convey an idea of this prodigious spectacle, which restores the earth’s astral beauty, which has been despoiled by man. If a painter climbed that high, his paints would freeze on his palette. Well, what neither the writer nor the artist is able to do has just been done by photography ... Until now, the mountains seem to have defied art’s attempts to portray them. Is it possible to capture them within the frame of a painting? We doubt it, even after having seen the canvases of a Calame ... Here is a fragment, a wave of the frozen sea, with its jagged outlines, its crystallizations, its billions of clashing prisms, an enormous effort undertaken by nature to combine minute detail with a vast and chaotic whole. The peaks of Charmoz, broken by cloudbanks, complete this strange tableau. Despite all the obstacles that it has piled up around itself, Mont Blanc has not escaped the stubborn efforts of science. We’ve got it, wild and solitary, imprisoned in the narrow frame of a photographic plate. The snow, which no longer has any vegetation to rest on – not even moss, that intrepid pioneer – slides down the bare rock and lodges with difficulty in the now infrequent crevices, as if the giant had grown tired of struggling against the pressure of the void and collapsed into itself; finally, at the summit of Mont Blanc, the surface stretches out and flattens.’<sup>6</sup>
- 4 As Gautier contemplates these panoramic views, which the Bissons began to take around 1853 at the urging of the geologist and orographer Daniel Dollfus-Ausset – these large and astonishingly clear images depicting the Glacier du Géant, the Aiguilles de Chamonix, and the summit of Mont Blanc with remarkable accuracy and precision – the challenge in question appears to him as a set of three closely related problems, all of which are clearly discernible in this just quoted passage.
- 5 The first is the confrontation, within art itself, of art and science in the age of aesthetics, expression, and taste – that is, the era in which the bond that had united beauty and truth ever since the classical age was finally severed. The second is the heterogeneous relationship now arising not only between artistic and scientific images but also between the different types of artistic imagery: literary images, the images of painting, and the modern and mechanical images of photography. Finally, this very heterogeneity also seems to be the primary characteristic or internal principle of the photographic image itself, a principle that a painting by Calame or a narrative or description by Lord Byron cannot easily make their own. As Roland Recht writes in his extended commentary on Alexander von Humboldt’s letter of February 5, 1839, in which the German scientist recounts his impressions of the first daguerreotype of the moon: ‘Photography will be defined by the fact that it presents both the finite as well as the infinite, both what is interesting and what is not, both what I see and what I do not see. The photographic image preserves heterogeneous elements within the boundaries of its field, and it is this heterogeneity that will henceforth be regarded as productive of meaning and that lends this art form its specifically modern character.’<sup>7</sup>

- 6 According to this view, photography is modern because it is dangerous and because its danger lies in four characteristics that shatter the classical conception of the arts by introducing into art a *negativity* that turns it into an astonishing object, in the philosophical sense of an object that is fantastic and disturbing because of the aporias it evokes. These are four highly problematic characteristics: art's descent into the regions of pure physicality and pure sight without any imagination or suggestion; the subjection of works of art to the logic of the trace, of the indexical sign, and hence of tautology; an idea of the work as less an object than an event, whose fleeting occurrence the work of art captures and preserves; and finally, the paradoxical creation of the work through movements of disconnection, collage, montage, friction, and separation. It is this consciousness of a *dehiscence* of the world and its photographic image that is noted and developed by Théophile Gautier. It is this crease, or rather this fissure, that he seeks to show and invoke in his own text.
- 7 'Here is the little group leaving Les Grands Mulets to make its photographed ascent of Mont Blanc. We have definitely left the human realm behind. All vegetation has vanished; there are no further signs of life. Nothing but the snow, which is strangely bumpy, with its white shroud pierced here and there by a few dark rocks, as if a scrawny backbone had worn holes in the coat that covers it. To compare the men of the caravan led by Auguste Balmat to a column of marching ants would surely be to exaggerate their apparent size. What solitude, what silence, what desolation! And above it all an opaque black void made of clouds that seem to creep instead of float. A little higher up, the collision of the glaciers of Bossons and Taconay has produced a horrible chaos. Imagine the currents of a polar debacle stopped by some invincible obstacle; the ice piles up, with formations forced up one above the other into blocks, prisms, polyhedrons, and crystals of every imaginable shape; the erosions, fissures, and partial thaws chip, divide, and deform the tumultuous heap, whose dehiscences seem to reveal the ossuary of primitive creations. Into this cleft, which is as wide and deep as an abyss, the intrepid explorers are lowering themselves. It is frightening to see, although it is almost imperceptible, for the immensity of the scene seems to swallow up the figures, as if the solitude of the mountain did not wish to be violated. This vast photograph, in which twenty figures go virtually unnoticed, is only a crease upon the surface of this motionless sea, more uneven and more turbulent than the ocean in all its fury. It continues on beyond the frame of the plate beneath its foamy crest of snow. The impression is quite similar to that of looking at the moon through a telescope, when the falling shadows of its mountains trace its crevices upon the silver background of its half-suggested disc.'<sup>8</sup>
- 8 In the battle that at one and the same time separates and connects man and the mountain, in this struggle that joins them together by means of opposition itself, the photographic gaze thus possesses the deep and fascinating quality of being incessantly and simultaneously a victory and a defeat, just like the confrontation of black and white of which it consists.
- 9 The victory of photography is, first of all, the capturing or mastering of the world, or to be more precise: it is the perfect enclosure of time and space within the limits of what Claudel has described as 'a permanent square, easy to carry, something henceforth and forever at our disposal, the captured moment, a piece of supporting evidence.'<sup>9</sup> The placing at our disposal of the photograph and of the world that it conveys to us are thus a true 'deposition,' the authentication and 'presentification' of the real itself, captured by a sense of sight that is all the more supreme and implacable for being the mechanical sight

of an aptly named *objectif*, or lens. Although it is entirely conceived, selected, controlled, and carried out by the photographer, the photograph is based on what might be called pure visibility, a visibility that does not involve any vision or any eye but is optically implemented by the lens. As it was conceived of by Gautier (but also by Talbot, Arago, and Nadar), the photographic gaze – this gaze without a gaze in a certain sense – frees us from the fragility of the interpretation of the world, its idealization and lyrical transformation. It liberates us from the symbolic, from the imaginary, the mythological, the dreamlike, and the fictional, all of which are reduced to the status of arbitrary or deceptive devices. It is the world itself, not in any way signified but literally revealed – it is, above all, its inescapable materiality – that is deposited directly onto the almost imperceptibly grainy surface of the image, where humanity can then preserve its presence, experience, and trace.

- 10 These photographs expose reality – in the strict sense of putting it directly in front of us – and it is a *real* reality, simply consisting of space and time: space that is bent into bodies that collide and rebound, and time that is folded into fleeting instants or long exposures. By a process of subtraction, unveiling, or reduction, the Bissons' photographs thus embody an objective and abstract (in the sense of separated) vision that presents the world as alien and distant because the thoughts, symbols, and feelings that human beings project onto the earth in order to live there have disappeared. Thus the photographed earth and the human beings that perch on it (who are animalized, turned into ants) are seen as if through a telescope. The latter is a device for looking at other worlds. But when it is pointed at our own, it causes us to see it as an alien place, uninhabited and uninhabitable.
- 11 And so photography achieves a critical decentering, like that of the Copernican Revolution and the fantastic chiasmus that opens the *Voyage dans la Lune* of Cyrano de Bergerac, for whom 'the moon is a world for which our own world serves as moon.' In this sense 'every photograph is a photograph of the moon'<sup>10</sup> – an image that transforms even the most familiar and most ordinary world into an unexplored country that, as Gautier writes, is 'harsh, untamed, and inaccessible,' a region that is barren, wild, shattered, ravaged, crystalline, and primitive, like that of the mountains. This region is made up, as it were, of 'pure' objects. It is composed of objects 'without man,'<sup>11</sup> creating a subject that is not the concrete, living, vibrant subject of human consciousness with its emotional and psychological dimensions, but rather the universal and anonymous subject of a *cogito* conceived as the residue left (in the chemical sense) by an operation that purges human consciousness of all its emotional and psychological content.<sup>12</sup> And so this region, composed of pure objects and available as a subject to those who can tame it, constitutes in the strictest sense 'another country.'
- 12 This country [*contrée*] – that is to say, this land 'over there' that stands against [*contre*] or opposite our own – is one that the Western tradition long refused to see,<sup>13</sup> because it represented what the interstellar night does for us: a black hole that does not return any gaze or that today can only be seen by the automated eye of the Hubble telescope's digital sensors. To photograph the mountains or the moon is therefore to demonstrate the essence of photography as a technical and telescopic object that enables us to take possession of the world scientifically, and allows us who are inside the world to see it as if we were outside it. But to see the world from the outside<sup>14</sup> is to see it as something outside of us, as a reality that has not been 'de-realized,' that is not contaminated by our

subjective, imaginary, and narcissistic projections. Such is the photographic victory that Gautier celebrates when he writes at the end of his text:

- 13 'In this quick overview, we have tried to convey the impression produced by the work of Messrs Bisson, which is worthy of illustrating Humboldt's *Cosmos* or a treatise of geology. In conclusion, we can only thank these brave photographers for having provided science and art with new elements and new images.'<sup>15</sup>
- 14 But this stripping bare of the world by an 'innocent eye' (John Ruskin)<sup>16</sup> and seeing it before all our representations and constructions and all of culture's illusory veils, this 'removing [of] the makeup' of reality, as Walter Benjamin writes of Atget's photographs,<sup>17</sup> also and in consequence has a dark and melancholy color, along with its solar or heliographic aspect.<sup>18</sup> For what rises to the surface of the image as a result of the burning of the photosensitive elements – or in the case of the Bissons of the wet collodion – is the proliferation of details the camera records, this swarm of moments, nuances, bodies, and tiny particles that we do not see in our usual interactions with the world. What reveals itself in a photograph – and even, as it were, receives merciless exposure – is this unconscious (or as Yves Bonnefoy writes, this 'infraconscience' or 'subconscious')<sup>19</sup> sense of sight, the Brownian movement of things that are only there by chance, piled up and frozen in time or in the moment the photograph was taken, and without having been selected and arranged by an intention of any kind: spots, cracks, creases, shimmering light, twigs, specks of dust, foam on waves,<sup>20</sup> crevices, rocks, peaks, ice formations, seracs, crevasses, clouds – the chaotic, intermittent, and meaningless ferment that creates the precarious and transitory forms of all that exists.
- 15 Every photograph thus contains something violent and inhuman, not just because it reduces existence to the surface expanse of a visible world that is completely exposed, not just because it tends to turn the creator of images into a technician, the image into a document, and the spectator into a cold eye that observes without interpreting, but because it operates even more fundamentally. It confronts the mastery of the world by gaping silently at its failure and its constant endless overflow. The 'vast photograph,' as Gautier writes of the Bissons' plates, is always open in two different senses at once: beyond its frame, its temporal and spatial cropping implies the existence off-camera of what is beside, before, or after it; and within its frame, the implacable precision and accuracy of the photograph, which is equally clear in all of its parts, suggests an infinite number of haphazard and even scattered details that proliferate endlessly before our eyes, as can clearly be seen in the Bissons' photographs of seracs from 1859 and 1862.
- 16 In classical painting and literature, there is always something reassuring that explains the paradoxical fact – which all of philosophy and art since Plato and Aristotle have sought to elucidate – that 'we enjoy contemplating the most precise images of things whose actual sight is painful to us.'<sup>21</sup> This pleasure is born of the reversal (which the Greeks called *anatrepsis*) that turns what is ugly into something beautiful and what is trivial into something admirable by means of organization or emplotment [*mise en intrigue*], which are the work of mimesis or representation. What is scattered becomes harmonious, what is contingent becomes essential, and what is pitiful and frightening becomes beautiful. Harmony and necessity turn the work into a microcosm that is 'perfect and complete in itself,'<sup>22</sup> as Karl Philipp Moritz writes, a totality that embraces all its parts and establishes a hierarchy among them, a closed system that turns in upon itself and its own rules, which endow it with its organic character and internal composition. Photography, by contrast, does not produce a reversal of this kind because it does not produce a

composition. Delacroix perfectly articulates what Gautier suggests through his chaotic prose with its disruptions, lists, and paratactic constructions:

- 17 'The most obstinate realist is still compelled, in his rendering of nature, to make use of certain conventions of composition or of execution. If the question is one of composition, he cannot take an isolated piece of painting or even a collection of them and make a picture from them. He must certainly circumscribe the idea in order that the mind of the spectator shall not float about in an ensemble that has, perforce, been cut to bits; otherwise art would not exist. When a photographer takes a view, all you ever see is a part cut off from a whole: the edge of the picture is as interesting as the center ... you see only a portion, apparently chosen by chance. The accessory is capital, as much as the principal; most often, it presents itself first and offends the sight ... In the presence of nature herself, it is our imagination that makes the picture: we see neither the blades of grass in a landscape nor the accidents of the skin in a pretty face.'<sup>23</sup>
- 18 In the mid-nineteenth century, the painting still embodies a *dianoia* or *cosa mentale*, since its *arché* is an idea. The photograph, by contrast, belongs to the order of the isolated excerpt or even the scrap or shred, that is, the fragment, and the product of tearing. The absence of logic is the principle of its extravagance, in the literal sense of something that operates on the outside. This extravagance is also its eccentricity, its idiocy, and its madness, all perfectly equivalent to the disorder of the landscape itself, which can only be looked at rather than read or interpreted because it has become impossible to paint it with words or brushes. In 1839, the year in which Daguerre's discovery was announced, Victor Hugo, having climbed to the summit of a modest mountain of 1800 meters, put it well:
- 19 'On mountain-tops, like the Rigi-Kulm, one may look, but it is not permissible to paint ... You no longer have a landscape before you, but monstrous aspects ... [T]he landscape is crazy. With this inexpressible spectacle before your eyes you begin to understand why Switzerland and Savoy swarm with stunted minds. The Alps make many idiots. It is not granted to all intelligences to cohabit with such marvels.'<sup>24</sup>
- 20 Faced with a chaos that is nothing but chaos, literary description and painterly composition can no longer lead 'non-sense' back to the artistic paths of signification, imagination, and thought. Their traditional function, the transfiguration of reality, has been permanently beaten into submission. Therefore they can no longer accommodate this 'non-sense,' except by assimilating its exteriority and violence, not in order to subjugate them, to transcend and ultimately abolish them as classical art did, but rather to establish the negative and destructive principle of the texts or images themselves demonstrating a kind of tachism or cloisonnism through which they fully embrace their gaps, their blanks, their zigzags,<sup>25</sup> their accumulations, their irreducible jagged edges and disjunctions, their weaknesses, and finally their irremediable imperfection.
- 21 'Their size surpasses every conceivable scale: a faint streak on the side of a slope is a valley; what looks like a patch of brown moss is a forest of two-hundred-foot-tall pine trees; this light fleck of mist is an enormous cloud. Moreover, the verticality of the planes changes all of the eye's accustomed notions of perspective. Instead of receding toward the horizon, the alpine landscape rears up before us, piling up its high jagged contours one behind the other.'<sup>26</sup>
- 22 Such is the call of photography, which Gautier most certainly heeds. It is the appeal of an objective gaze, which art can only experience as a split or rift within itself, as its own

internal contradiction. It cannot transcend this internal contradiction but can only seek to develop it while finding the strength to withstand it and to hold it within itself. The photographic gaze is an astonishing one in Hegel's sense of the word, as he used it in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*:<sup>27</sup> a gaze that dwells within the negative of itself like that of a lunatic, an animal, or a feral child like Kaspar Hauser or Victor de l'Aveyron. This gaze, which contains what negates it, remains at the level of mere transcription rather than representation, disconnection rather than relationship, the contingent materiality of what is, rather than the harmonized spirituality of what ought to be.

- 23 The photographic image thus seems to offer us the truth of modern man's condition: in a world without transcendence, a world that is purely material and has no 'afterworld' or other world behind it, there is no way that human meanings could possibly remain unaffected by the disorder, instability, meaninglessness, and imperfection of the things that surround us. On the contrary, meanings are intimately woven out of those very things and can only appear and be conceived of as fragile constellations, shifting, ephemeral, and always proliferating. For the human being who grasps them, beauty no longer resides in an elsewhere or in the eternity of an idea or an ideal; it remains ineluctably here, within the immanence or the brief span of our 'life, which it is impossible to go beyond,' as Mallarmé writes. Therefore, beauty is not the opposite of ugliness, because it contains it and because its traditional names – harmony, simplicity, expression, and pleasure – are teetering on their pedestals. It is not the opposite of ugliness because it does not transcend but merely displaces it. Subject to a different logic from that of painting and poetry, which withdraw into a spontaneous interiority, affectivity, and spirituality which are those of the painting or poem itself, photography is rooted in an 'insane' logic of extension, serialization, and proliferation; of the clipping, the sample, and the specimen; of overflow and heterogeneity, since everything in it is cut out, captured, or 'picked up,' without the *electio* that had always governed the image and was the basis of what might be called its softness or sweetness [*douceur*]. Henceforth, as Mallarmé writes in 1894:
- 24 'We know, held captive by an absolute formula that, doubtless, only what is, is.'<sup>28</sup>
- 25 And so modern man is condemned to make do with literal meaning alone and mere tautology. Metaphor, lyricism, imagination, mythology – everything that made up the depth and internal richness and complexity of a work of art and the ideas it conveys – is destined to be eliminated by the photographic image, which drains away the symbolic and presents a reality reduced to the ontological poverty of a set of surfaces. Behind these surfaces, there is nothing: nothing to reveal, nothing to make manifest, no onto-theological foundation, no metaphysical origin to be restored or rediscovered. It is bare existence (it should really be written 'ex-istence') that stands before us in its density, saturation, and indeed in the excess of its perception, and it is literally stupefying in the sense that it is stopped and immobilized.<sup>29</sup>
- 26 Photography may be seen as a complete inversion of Platonism, not just because it contradicts the scalar conception of reality; not just because the image becomes an instrument of truth, whereas, for the Socrates of the *Republic*, it was merely a simulacrum; not just because it abolishes the opposition of essence and appearance; but ultimately because it shows us, even more fundamentally, that light makes it possible to understand the world not by dispelling the darkness of matter and the images associated with it, but, on the contrary, by the burning and blackening it causes in the photosensitive coating of the photographic paper or metal plate. Of course, this burning and blackening are the



chemical processes of photography, but they may also be seen as its emblem. Thanks to them, knowledge and beauty know that they must henceforth pass – necessarily and contradictorily – through the dark night of a camera obscura, the dark night of images that are chaotic and refractory to vision (and even more so to reading), while knowledge and beauty are wholly confined within the horizon of the visible. They know that they must undergo the painful and frightening ordeal of recognizing the mystery and confusion that are the essence of the world, a world whose exploration is a never-ending process.

- 27 This is the lesson of those vertical photographs of ‘La Crevasse sur le Chemin du Grand Plateau’ (1862), from which everything picturesque or poetic (in the true sense of these words) has disappeared. Around the dark fissures of a crevasse ‘as wide and deep as an abyss,’ off-center and oblique, the men, who look like shadows or anonymous shapes in dangerous positions, seem to be made of the same material as the chasms of the glacier onto which they are awkwardly and dangerously grafted: here there is no specific essence, no interiority giving rise to empathy, no suprasensuous purpose, no triumphant idea, and no participation in a divine order that does not exist. In these fissures and on this *clinamen*, men and their images are not ‘an empire within an empire,’ for they display the same precariousness as things and bodies, and their recorded traces, in a suspended moment of time that is itself absolutely fragile.
- 28 Gautier has the distinction of being one of the first to recognize the unprecedented or unheard-of – one should really say ‘unseen’ – character of these photographic images, which show the dehiscence of the ice and rocks by means of their own dehiscence, which is hollowed out to the point of saturation by the tremendous telescopic or microscopic precision of the details that teem on their surface. This teeming is something that no narration, no description, and no painting can possibly render; all narrative forms, whether written or painted, will quickly soften, blur, and, ultimately, annihilate it. Nevertheless, Gautier – too romantic, too cultured, too much a writer, too grandiloquent, too fond of the uncertainties of the literature of the fantastic,<sup>30</sup> too filled with all his memories of the visual arts – did not succeed in extending the initial moment of his discovery. Indeed, in many passages of *Vacances du Lundi*, mythological and literary references and references to painting – the presence of all this reassuring and endless cultural richness<sup>31</sup> – inevitably seems to fill in the blacks and whites, the voids and gaps that the photographs of Louis Auguste and Auguste Rosalie Bisson create and multiply over and over again in the reiterated fixedness of their plates.
- 29 While there is no doubt that he hears the call of photography, Gautier ultimately loses his way in the echoes of a literature that is expressive, cultured, sophisticated, suggestive, and imaginative; a literature buzzing with the presence of Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, Veronese, Turner, Rembrandt, and others; a literature against which Flaubert had to struggle while writing *Madame Bovary*, because, as he said, it ‘swarmed’ with similes and metaphors as if with lice.<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is only elsewhere or later on that the call of photography is fully heeded, that is, that it definitively replaces the swarming of metaphors with the swarming of ‘a multitude of minute details,’ as Fox Talbot himself had already said.<sup>33</sup> Elsewhere or later on: certainly, throughout its entire history, except for its pictorialist moment, photography – as well as all the art forms that call, as much as possible, for an art without distance<sup>34</sup> – remains an art that, because it chooses things over all allegorical impulses, ‘vigorously exclude[s] all meddling imagination’ and ‘all personal obtrusion,’<sup>35</sup> as Mallarmé writes of Manet’s impressionism.

30 This art (it makes little difference from now on whether the reference for art is literary or visual) is not the work of ‘visionaries ... whose works are the semblance of worldly things seen by unworldly eyes,’<sup>36</sup> but rather of pure ‘seers’ who are capable of bringing the observer back to the immediate data of his or her experience of the world, of the mere and unadorned existence of objects, and finally of an ‘original and exact perception which distinguishes for itself the things it perceives with the steadfast gaze of a vision restored to its simplest perfection.’<sup>37</sup> For them, ‘what you see is what you see’:<sup>38</sup> in the faults and upheavals of the mountains and the world; in the fissures of the objects that populate them and the matter from which they are made; and finally, in the spatial and temporal caesura of the photographic image, which, in a world that is thoroughly disenchanté – this is its risk as well as its cost – always experiences and endures the ordeal of meaninglessness and disorder.

31 \* Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi. Tableaux de montagnes. (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, Collection Dix-Neuvième, 1994)*, 166.

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## NOTES

1. The text in question first appeared in issue no. 67 of *Le Moniteur Universel* on June 16, 1862. For other discussions of this text, see Bernd Stiegler, ‘La surface du monde: note sur Théophile Gautier,’ *Romantisme*, no. 105 (1999): 91–95; and Marta Caraion, *Pour fixer la trace. Photographie, littérature et voyage au milieu du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva: Droz, 2003 [Histoire des idées et critique littéraire]), 163ff.
2. See Milan Chlumsky, ‘Une victoire des Bisson: la conquête du mont Blanc,’ in *Les Frères Bisson photographes, de flèche en cime. 1840–1870*, ed. Bernard Marbot, 157–81 (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France/Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1999).
3. Leslie Stephen, *The Playground of Europe* (London: Longmans, Green, 1871). Published by the author in 1871, this book contains writings produced by him since 1858.
4. Théophile Gautier, *A Romantic in Spain*, trans. Catherine Alison Phillips (Oxford: Signal Books, 2001 [1926]).
5. This expression was used by Mallarmé to describe the challenge that Wagnerian opera presented to his poetry. See Stéphane Mallarmé, ‘Richard Wagner: The Reverie of a French Poet,’ in *Divagations*, trans. Barbara Johnson, 108 [translation modified] (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
6. Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 47 and 51.
7. Roland Recht, *La Lettre de Humboldt. Du jardin paysager au daguerréotype* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1989), 150.
8. Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 49–50.
9. Paul Claudel, ‘The Psalms and Photography,’ in *The Eye Listens*, trans. Elsie Pell, 231 (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969 [1950]).
10. I am indebted to Jérôme Thélot for this excellent formulation.
11. Charles Baudelaire, ‘Salon of 1859,’ in *Art in Paris, 1845–1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions Reviewed by Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Jonathan Mayne, 162 (London: Phaidon, 1965).
12. This is the reduction performed by Descartes in his first two *Metaphysical Meditations*.
13. That is until it appears in Albrecht von Haller and his poem ‘Die Alpen’ (1732), Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the famous twenty-third letter of part one of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), and Horace Benedict de Saussure and his account of his ascent of Mont Blanc in August 1787.

14. At the beginning of his text, Gautier speaks of 'this Earth seen from Mars or Venus.' Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 45.
15. Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 52.
16. John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing* (1857), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 15, 27 (London: George Allen, 1904). Ruskin was one of the first to produce daguerreotypes of the Alps around 1845. See André Héliard, *John Ruskin et les cathédrales de la terre* (Chamonix: éditions Guérin, 2005).
17. Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography,' trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, ed. Michael Jennings et al., 518 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
18. Denis Roche, *Le Boîtier de mélancolie* (Paris: Hazan, 1999).
19. Yves Bonnefoy, 'Igitur and the Photographer,' trans. Mary Ann Caws, in *A Painter's Poet: Stéphane Mallarmé and His Impressionist Circle*, ed. Jane Mayo Roos, 20 (New York: The Bertha and Karl Leubsdorf Art Gallery, Hunter College of the City of New York, in conjunction with the Bibliothèque Littéraire Jacques Doucet, Paris, 1999).
20. At around the same time that the Bissons invented the photographic mountain landscape, Gustave Le Gray invented the photographic seascape.
21. Aristotle, *Poetics*, in Aristotle, 'Poetics.' Longinus, 'On the Sublime.' Demetrius, 'On Style,' ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell, Loeb Classical Library, 37 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
22. Karl Philipp Moritz, 'Über den Begriff des in sich Vollendeten' (1785), in *Werke*, ed. Horst Günther, vol. 2, 545 (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1981).
23. Eugène Delacroix, *The Journal of Eugène Delacroix*, trans. Walter Pach, 644–45 (New York: Covici, Friede, 1937).
24. Victor Hugo, *Victor Hugo's Letters to His Wife and Others (The Alps and the Pyrenees)*, trans. Nathan Haskell Dole (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1895), 36.
25. See Théophile Gautier's anthology of prose pieces *Caprices et Zigzags*, which was published in 1852.
26. Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 47.
27. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 18–19: 'The circle that remains self-enclosed and, like substance, holds its moments together ... has nothing astonishing about it. But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it ... should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom – this is the tremendous power of the negative.'
28. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Music and Letters,' in *Divagations* (note 5), 187.
29. See Jean-Christophe Bailly, *L'Instant et son ombre* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2008 [Fiction & Cie]), 78.
30. See Marta Caraion, *Pour fixer la trace. Photographie, littérature et voyage au milieu du XIXe siècle* (note 1), 171–72.
31. 'What charm a poetic and literary memory adds to the most beautiful places! In such cases, human thought mingles with nature and gives it a soul!' Théophile Gautier, *Les Vacances du lundi* (epigraph), 125.
32. Gustave Flaubert, letter to Louise Colet of December 27, 1852, in *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, vol. 1, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller, 178 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
33. William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York: Da Capo, 1969 [1846]), n.p. (commentary to plate X).
34. See Pierre-Henry Frangne (with Leszek Brogowski), 'Un art sans écart?,' in *Ce que vous voyez est ce que vous voyez* (Rennes: PUR, 2009), 21ff.
35. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet,' in *The New Painting: Impressionism 1874–1886*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles S. Moffett, 28 and 32 (Geneva: R. Burton/Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986).

36. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' (note 35), 33.

37. Stéphane Mallarmé, 'The Impressionists and Edouard Manet' (note 35), 34.

38. Is there any need to mention that this statement was made by the American painter Frank Stella in an interview in 1964? 'Questions to Stella and Judd,' interview by Bruce Glaser, ed. Lucy Lippard, *Art News*, September 1966: 58. The interview is also reprinted in Gregory Battcock, ed., *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995 [1968]), 158.

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## ABSTRACTS

Although his work was almost entirely focused on the model of painting and literary description, Théophile Gautier heard the call of photography quite clearly. This can be seen from his commentary on the mountain photographs of the brothers Bisson, which he published in the early 1860s in *Le Moniteur Universel* and then republished in 1869 in *Les Vacances du Lundi* as an introduction to his accounts of his travels in the French and Swiss Alps. In this text, Gautier describes the novelty, power, and even violence of images that usher in a new kind of vision and a new conception of humanity's relationship with the world. Through photography, we henceforth understand that the fissures and rents, chaos, and exteriority of material things, which these images display with a concreteness and precision that had never before been achieved, represent the ineluctable horizon of our existence. Far from the suggestive 'softness' and spirituality of paintings and descriptions, photography – and mountain photography in particular – turns disjunction and temporal and spatial caesuras into the contradictory and negative modes of all signification.

## AUTHORS

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