



HAL
open science

Towards experimental mountaineering? Perspective on two tours of Alpine borders (Lionel Daudet / John Harlin, 2011-12)

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary

► To cite this version:

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary. Towards experimental mountaineering? Perspective on two tours of Alpine borders (Lionel Daudet / John Harlin, 2011-12). *Revue de Géographie Alpine / Journal of Alpine Research*, 2013, 101 (2), <http://rga.revues.org/2131> English version / French version : <http://rga.revues.org/2125>. 10.4000/rga.2131 . halshs-00924446

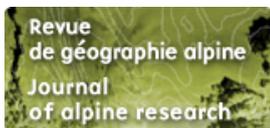
HAL Id: halshs-00924446

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00924446>

Submitted on 6 Jan 2014

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

101-2 (2013)

Frontières mobiles : déclinaisons alpines

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary

Towards experimental mountaineering?

Perspective on two tours of Alpine borders (Lionel
Daudet / John Harlin, 2011-12)

Avertissement

Le contenu de ce site relève de la législation française sur la propriété intellectuelle et est la propriété exclusive de l'éditeur.

Les œuvres figurant sur ce site peuvent être consultées et reproduites sur un support papier ou numérique sous réserve qu'elles soient strictement réservées à un usage soit personnel, soit scientifique ou pédagogique excluant toute exploitation commerciale. La reproduction devra obligatoirement mentionner l'éditeur, le nom de la revue, l'auteur et la référence du document.

Toute autre reproduction est interdite sauf accord préalable de l'éditeur, en dehors des cas prévus par la législation en vigueur en France.

revues.org

Revues.org est un portail de revues en sciences humaines et sociales développé par le Cléo, Centre pour l'édition électronique ouverte (CNRS, EHESS, UP, UAPV).

Référence électronique

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, « **Towards experimental mountaineering?** », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [En ligne], 101-2 | 2013, mis en ligne le 06 janvier 2014, consulté le 23 avril 2015. URL : <http://rga.revues.org/2131> ; DOI : 10.4000/rga.2131

Éditeur : Association pour la diffusion de la recherche alpine

<http://rga.revues.org>

<http://www.revues.org>

Document accessible en ligne sur :

<http://rga.revues.org/2131>

Document généré automatiquement le 23 avril 2015.

© Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary

Towards experimental mountaineering?

Perspective on two tours of Alpine borders (*Lionel Daudet / John Harlin, 2011-12*)

- 1 Two recent sporting exploits have provided us with the opportunity for fresh theoretical reflection on the relationship between borders and mountains. In 2011 and 2012, two mountain climbers, Lionel Daudet and John Harlin, undertook a tour of an alpine country under the initial pretext that its limits were provided by mountains. Paradoxically, the itinerary marked out by political borders provided them with the possibility of a totally new adventure, in that each individual, in his own way, put himself in the situation of experiencing a route originally conceived in an abstract manner. Indeed, international borders are above all legal conventions and those who formalised their current layout were little concerned with the possibility of their materialisation on the terrain. The placement of boundary markers that accompanied the lines drawn on maps were for a long time sufficient for defining the reality of these spaces of political control. The materialisation of borders has become an essential element in the way they function (Amilhat Szary, 2012b), transformed by the combination of securitization policies and the evolution of geolocation techniques such as the GPS, an essential tool for mountaineers in search of a border and for guaranteeing that they respect the line.
- 2 The tour of the French borders by Lionel Daudet and that of the Swiss borders by John Harlin were not conducted entirely in mountainous areas, even for the landlocked state of the Swiss Confederation. What was important for these two men was to experience, in the face-to-face contact with the imaginary line, the limits of their body in response to a sustained and lengthy challenge. Although the two routes the climbers followed were quite distinct, their considerable length meant that both men were required to spend several months in the field, justified by a common aim of not resorting to motorised means of transport, to link up the different mountainous sections for example. Placing their bodies at the national limits thus involved each climber in certain risks, an element of the project that was assumed, if not proclaimed, to be of fundamental importance. Both these sporting endeavours involved the experience of “touching” or coming into contact with the border, in a paradoxical relationship with sensations provoked by this contact, sensations from both the pleasure of discovery or achievement and the pain associated with effort (Classen, 2005; Paterson & Dodge, 2012). The interrogation of this coincidence in sports headlines allows for the present article to show the tour to be an emerging form of mountaineering (Belden, 1994)
- 3 We now come back to the tour of France made on a single trip by Lionel Daudet between August 2011 and November 2012¹ (465 days) and the tour of Switzerland undertaken by John Harlin in three stages, between June 2010 and 2011² (109 days). The timely concomitance of these two projects is, at least at first glance, a chance happening since neither of the mountaineers had planned their trips in conjunction with the other. But what struck me, and provided a basis for my observations, is that both tours raised questions concerning the evolution of outdoor sports activities and the relationship with national borders. The article is based on two semi-directive interviews conducted with the two mountaineers at the beginning of 2013, as well as on documentation collected by them, part of which they put on line. The media coverage desired by these two men contributes to their overall achievement and will also be examined here. Qualitative material collected was interpreted according to an analytical grid that was above all non-representational (Thrift, 2008), which made it possible to complete a more traditional discourse analysis. This method is not without contradictions however: firstly, I asked the two climbers in the interview to express how their bodies experienced the border, but language appears as a necessary medium for that description. Then, analysis of the visual documents produced during the border experience completed this body of research material so that it was also possible to envisage the construction of the relationship with the other in a more complex spatio-sensoriality.

4 Each climber proposes, in his own way, a political geography of touch, a unique experience of the mobile border (Amilhat Szary, 2012a; Giraut, 2011). The movement that our climbers started around the alpine limits thus appears as an original response to their representation of the dematerialisation of borders in the national imagination. It questions the evolution of the identity relationship in a world of flows. This calls for a rethink of the link, which is far from self-evident, between materiality and permanence, opening up new hypotheses for conceptualising the border. These two epic journeys thus provide me with the opportunity to come back to the idea of border, questioning both the materiality and the mobility of this kind of political lines. The position adopted by Lionel Daudet and John Harlin enables me, however, to go beyond the now classical analysis of the opening/closing process (“debordering / rebordering”) with a view to understanding how the body makes the place, and to what extent, in a border interface situation, the gesture and language that accompany it have a performative value.

Why borders? Two spatial figures: the straight line and the circle

5 If these two tours of all the borders of a country appear surprising, it is undoubtedly because of their context that aims to construct them as sporting exploits. As such, they refer to a somewhat classical figure of the construction of national identities. As P. Nora reminds us in the section of *Lieux de mémoire* dealing with territory (Nora, 1984-1992), “nation means awareness of limits”³. In some ways, the two climbers who set out to conquer the summits of a country – which is not necessarily their own – are reminiscent of the little André and his brother who, in order to return to France, have to flee Germany by clandestinely crossing the border (Bruno, 1877)? In the *Tour de France de deux enfants*, the border is defined by the line it traces on the map, so that “André’s biggest fear at the moment of crossing it was that of getting lost in the mist. After a few moments, he took the paper on which he had marked out his route and, following with his eyes the line that should show him his path, he asked himself: ‘is it really this line that I’m following?’ (translation)” (ibid, chap.6-9). L. Daudet and J. Harlin reject the identity reference as a catalyst for the cohesion of the national group. Although both climbers referred to how the borders made them think about identity, it was to allude to the fact that for them, they represented a kind of support for accessing the world. What interests them is being able to have the unique experience of the place where the individual meets the collective. They position themselves in this place, however, in an exceptional manner, since both of them claim the primacy of a route.

6 For the climbers, like for G. Bruno’s children, the border is indeed understood as a linear convention based on a cartographical definition. Its spatiality is limited in appearance only, because it is mobilised here firstly, and above all else, as a condition for the movement in which the body of the athlete is participating. Undoubtedly, what is the most striking in the justification of the choice of a direction of movement for the two climbers are the words to describe their epic account based on the use of two geometrical figures. Thus, both L. Daudet and J. Harlin draw heavily on the potential for imagination presented by the line and the circle. In this respect, L. Daudet adopts a more traditional interpretation, that of the line placed on the landscape, the straightness of which fascinates him in the same way as the beauty of a climbing path: “the mountaineer (...), is someone who likes to trace lines, (...) on rock walls (translation)”. (L. Daudet, interview on 13/12/2012).

7 J. Harlin’s point of view is slightly different on account of how he sees his type of activity. He defines himself not as a mountaineer, but as a high-level hiker, one of those known in North America as back-packers who like to set off autonomously for several days in the wilderness⁴ and who especially appreciate circular routes: “one of the things that we really like to do as hikers is to not just go in one direction, one straight line or to go back and forth on the same trail, we like to do circles, loops that complete so you end up where you started but you’ve seen different things the whole distance” (J. Harlin, interview on 24/1/2013). He then goes on to explain how he envisaged expeditions along famous meridians, from the Arctic Circle to the Equator, the logistics of which appeared to him too heavy to implement, before he finally

decided on Switzerland for his project: “I don’t know exactly how it came to mind but, well, maybe circling around Switzerland would be just the right distance” (JH, *ibid*).

Figure 1. Meeting France and Italy at Agnel Pass



8 Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/dodtour/8043739287/in/photostream/> **Figure 2: John Harlin III poses with his paddle in Zurich**



Source: http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng//Specials/Border_Stories/The_Project/Harlin_explores_the_peopled_landscape.html?cid=28451078

Figures 1 and 2: The fun dimension of the border trips

9 Both athletes are aware of a game with the shape of the border, which goes beyond mere rhetoric. It is a game with conventions or symbols. L. Daudet thus based his project on Europe’s highest point, Mont Blanc, the ownership of which has been the subject of much discussion among bordering countries, while J. Harlin founded his adventure on the place where he grew up and where his father (mentor of his achievement as a mountaineer) set up a mountain school before meeting his death on the north face of the Eiger (John Harlin is in fact J. Harlin III).

What respect of conventions? Constraints and accommodations made along the way

- 10 As the two men asserted on numerous occasions, their border adventure offered them the possibility of interpreting a social convention in a very personal manner. The way in which they put their bodies on the border enabled them to almost test, if not incarnate, the national myth. “It is often from constraints that one imposes on oneself that freedom is born [...] even if one follows one’s own rules (translation)” (LD). Each climber thus set off with the firm intention of staying as close as possible to the limit traced in geographical space and represented by a line on the map that they had to follow. Confrontation with the terrain led them to make certain compromises depending on their objectives, which became clearer as their journey progressed. From the first days of his adventure, J. Harlin recounts how he progressed along the crest of a hill and came up against a 200-metre cliff: not having a climbing partner with him, he had to give up the idea of climbing the cliff and to find a way around it. He continued in this way for a few days and found himself on terrain where few had ventured, on unstable rock, where he eventually met with a serious accident. With numerous fractures to his feet and the project seriously compromised, he was forced to re-examine his motivations. This enabled him to clarify his ideas and to realise that he was inspired in fact by two arguments, initially conceived as complementary but which proved contradictory in the mountains: “one was the idea of a sort of adventure idea of sticking strictly to the border and the other concept became to understand why the border was there and how culture might be different on one side or the other, what effect the border might have or vice versa” (JH). He revised his approach, which in the field resulted in a binary organisation of his space-time: J. Harlin divided each of his days into two moments, which led him to keep close to the “exact border” for a part of his day, mostly looking for border stones to photograph, and to spend the other half walking “wherever made more logical sense.” He adds that what finally counts for him is a form of wandering, which is constrained in too brutal a manner if one tries to respect the border.
- 11 L. Daudet’s approach is far more radical: the commitment to following the borderline remained an absolute imperative throughout the 15 months of his journey: “finally, the border acted a little like a magnet for me (translation)” (LD). In reality, L. Daudet comes to appreciate the discrepancies between the map and the territory, discrepancies well known to geographers and related to the question of scale: “There is an enormous difficulty in following the border... To be more specific, if you like, it depends on how exact you want to be, I was in a delta of some 200 metres in relation to the border, sometimes a little more in relation to the coastline, when I passed behind a nuclear power plant, for example. (...) (translation)”. In his definition of the border, L. Daudet talks about his approach that involves subjectively positioning a “cursor in space” and adopting a “logic used in mountain, a little like what you do when climbing along a ridge (translation)” (LD). With clear-sightedness, he admits that although his project may seem relative, it is his body that, in the end, made the border: it was a question of “following the terrestrial borders and the shoreline of France as closely as possible (...) according to my physical capacities (translation)” (LD).
- 12 As his journey progresses, however, it is not the physical obstacles that proved to be the most complex for Daudet, particularly for the maritime part of his route. The very fact of distancing himself from the mountain ridges is something new for him from the point of view of sporting challenges in that along the maritime borders of the country he experienced zones that were forbidden in theory (military zones, nuclear power plants) and in practice (all the cases of non-compliance with the French Coastlines Act). From this experience he had the satisfaction of having contributed to a certain opening up of outdoor sports. This experience reminded him that certain standards apply in mountain areas: one cannot cross the Mercantour National Park on a mountain bike, or fly over Mont Blanc in a paraglider in summer, thus adding a seasonal component to the idea of the mobile border. But on the whole, the conclusion comes as somewhat of a surprise: the most “natural” borders are not those that one would have expected in that it is easier to follow the border in mountain areas than lowland areas. “Paradoxically, freedom of movement is much greater in mountain areas; here it is even absolute! Because

finally one is limited by one's technical level (...) freedom of action is not at all recuperated by human laws (translation)" (LD), he concludes.

The means used (map, GPS, web interface)

- 13 The challenge taken up by J. Harlin and L. Daudet is not, however, an entirely intimate affair. Each of them, in his own way, hopes to share it through the media. Real-time monitoring of their exploits on the web enables the public to interact with them well before the traditional publication of a book recounting their experiences. This electronic link breaks with certain sporting conventions, transforming codes and in some ways echoing the growing media coverage of major mountaineering exploits (Raspaud, 1998). The two men demonstrate, in several ways, that their achievement is founded on the intensive use of global positioning systems, which alone enabled them to really know if they were meeting their respective challenges of following the border. "You realise that the border has been modified by history, and is both tangible and immaterial in the sense that, in effect, it is marked on the maps, it is sometimes marked on the territory, but most of the time I would say that if you don't have instruments with you, you cannot know, in the end, if you are in France, Germany or Italy..." confided L. Daudet. This could lead to frequent hesitation, if not really tricky situations, when he puts "fractality"⁵ into action: "when you are in the mountains, it is fairly obvious because there's the ridge line and afterwards the IGN map is sufficient... .. knowing that, at the same time, you have to be careful: especially in the Mercantour massif, which for strategic reasons France took over with the treaty of 1947, the border ridge... Thus there were a few moments when for me it was, I would say, painful, or let's say I was reaching the limits of my adventure (...) because I was really acting like the mythical beast, the dahu, 50 metres below the ridge line (translation)" (LD).
- 14 One is clearly faced with a border whose mobility is defined in terms of the interaction between the body and the political convention, interaction with a milieu that is restrictive to a certain degree. The search for the absolute border is thus conducted via logistics on the ground backed up by technological support. L. Daudet indeed has an internet site⁶, which shows his itinerary and progress but which above all invites interaction with family, friends and sponsors, who will take turns in accompanying him in the field, assisting him on technical sections (rope partners) or easier sections (different supporters, including employees of the main sponsoring firm). What is essential for him is the fact that he was able to plan the details of the route beforehand, with a very small team (with his wife especially) so as to overcome as many obstacles as possible. In this way he obtained authorisations to cross zones with limited access and arranged portages by several young mountain dwellers who were mobilised to take up supplies all along the route, thereby allowing L. Daudet to travel as lightly as possible and thus more quickly.

Figure 3. On the main page of the Swissinfo.ch site, “High Adventure on Switzerland’s Borders”, an image promoting the coverage of the epic journey by J. Harlin on Google Maps

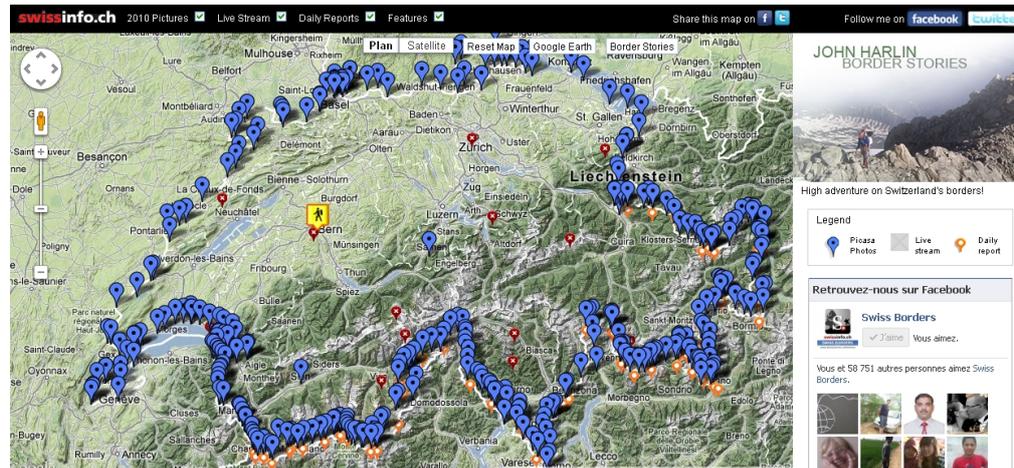
Figure 4. On the main page of the Swissinfo.ch site, “High Adventure on Switzerland’s Borders”, an image promoting the coverage of the epic journey by J. Harlin on Face Book



Source of photos 3 and 4: http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/culture/High_Adventure_on_Switzerlands_Borders.html?cid=34722298

- 15 For J. Harlin, the situation was quite different as his media experience was not at all the same. Thus he organised different journalistic projects, in particular an IMAX film about his recent climb of the Eiger. At a conference to present Harlin’s previous exploit, a journalist for an on-line media, *Swissinfo.ch*, found Harlin’s double objective involving cultural and sports aspects particularly interesting and proposed to support him by sending out live on-site reports during his journey. The climber was therefore asked whether he was ready to recount his story with the border as both a cultural and sporting adventure, in return for which he would receive technological support to allow his reports to be put on line immediately. Harlin thus found himself provided with modern transmission tools that were to have a tremendous impact on his achievement. However, this situation could have led to more risks being taken, either through a mistake in his itinerary when he was “texting and walking at the same time” (JH), or because the sportsman-reporter stayed up later at night to complete his report. His exploits were thus relayed very regularly by three media types: a page on *Swissinfo.ch*, an interactive map on Google Earth, and a page on FaceBook, all of which are accessible from J. Harlin’s personal site⁷. The most surprising result was an image of Switzerland sheltered behind the wall of signals transmitting the mountaineer’s reports. As J. Harlin himself points out: “Take a look at the map on the right: there’s now a wall around Switzerland built entirely of my photos and daily reports”⁸. The mobility of the everyday occurrence leaves a trace whose performative function is clear to any observer.

Figure 5. The wall of information forming J. Harlin's alpine border of Switzerland



Source: http://assets.xobix.ch/john_harlin/html/poc/fullscreen_map.html

- 16 If images are often understood as representations of the bodies, the power of mobile images and mobile bodies goes beyond a representational relation (Thrift, 2008). The map of points retracing the movement makes it possible to trace a link between the movement and its representation, giving a particularly strong impetus to the project of the body living the border. From a certain point of view, it is in constructing this cartographic representation of the border with his daily reports that the mountaineer crossed another barrier, this time electronic⁹.

Instigators and predecessors

- 17 This relationship with technology is closely linked with the current environment and in the end gives these projects a look that is distinct from those that preceded them in this field. Earlier projects of this type, however, have been few in number and it can certainly be suggested that the similarity between the two journeys of J. Harlin and L. Daudet indicates a change in outdoor recreational activities, with a new figure emerging in mountaineering, sitting alongside the now famous summit climbs and mountain crossings (Berhault, 2001; Berhelot & Corneloup, 2008; Jullien, 2001). This concerns the tour of a mountain massif or administrative entity, where the itinerary has its own traps that the hiker/climber must overcome to “meet” his or her challenge. The hikers that Harlin encountered during his journey, whether they were the couple doing a tour of the Graubunden, the most extensive of the Swiss cantons¹⁰, or the group calling themselves the “Borderliners” who had set out to complete a tour of their country over several years¹¹, are perhaps some other precursors of this change. At the end of the interview, L. Daudet confides: “what’s amusing is that you realise that you can duplicate it in a great many of the French *départements* [sub-regional administrative units], and I even have friends who have done what they call the *Route 66*, the tour of the Pyrénées orientales département. Then there are those who have done it on a single trip, others who have done in sections during their weekends... It’s quite bizarre to see all these different versions and to finally realise that we are re-opening other areas, other fields (translation)”.
- 18 A few other tours of imaginary lines have been undertaken in the past and are known to both our climbers to a greater or lesser extent. Apart from a hiking project that neither man cites (Treichler & Stark, 1987), it is important to mention first of all the tour carried out by Andrea Vogel around the Swiss borders in 1992 in 83 days, an exploit that merited him a place in the *Guinness Book of Records*. “The Tour of the Swiss borders is more difficult and more intelligent than climbing an eight-thousand peak” claimed the famous mountaineer, Reinhold Messner, at the time. Andrea Vogel belongs to that generation who attempted to reinvent mountaineering on his doorstep, participating in the first great “linkups”. His tour of Switzerland was completed without any motorised support, and through the practise of twelve complementary outdoor recreational activities¹². Without having really explained his relationship with the border, he nevertheless used it as a focal point in his journeys, to the extent that his nickname became *Grenzgänger* or the “border crosser”, a meritorious title acquired

after completing a difficult crossing of the Sahara, which he finished on his own (Gränicher, 2010).

Figure 6. Andrea Vogel's tour of Switzerland, 1992



Source : <http://www.andreavogel.ch/gallery/grenztour2/frameset.htm>

- 19 J. Harlin heard about Andrea's exploit when he was preparing for his own expedition. He contacted him and this resulted in Andrea joining Harlin on certain sections of his tour. Questioned about his innermost motivations, the American refers less to the sporting challenge than to his own imagination. He has in fact grown up in Switzerland where his father was a guide. The border was therefore part of his childhood memories, as he could see it spreading out in front of him from the windows of his house. This "border culture" helps explain the social dimension of his project, that of understanding how the border diverts the cultural trajectories of those that it separates. This is what distinguishes him, he believes, from those who stick close to the border.
- 20 L. Daudet's project is inspired more directly by other predecessors, who Harlin had heard of but was unable to cite their name from memory in our interview. The first alpine loop by L. Daudet, the tour of the Hautes Alpes in 2006, was inspired by a tour of their canton, the Valais, by two young Swiss mountaineers, Sébastien Gay and Claude-Alain Gaillard in 2002-2003 (330 summits – 18 of which were more than 4000 metres, 640 kilometres of borders, with one temporary interruption following an accident (cf. Blanc, 2003). Surprisingly, the epic paths of J. Harlin and L. Daudet crossed each other at the Eiger. Harlin in fact embarked on the tour of the Swiss borders after his successful climb of the mountain face that had "killed his father". Daudet had the idea for the tour after having abandoned, in 2006, another attempt to climb the Eiger, as part of his project to climb a series of major mountains, alone, in winter, known as the *Trilogie des Directissimes*¹³.
- 21 Both climbers were also inspired in their exploits by imaginary lines at another scale, the great circum-planetary circles, from the Equator to the Arctic Circle, which have in fact been used in recent years by other adventurers. The most famous of these is certainly Mike Horn, who successfully completed extraordinary round-the-world trips via the Equator in 2000-01 (Horn, 2001) and the Arctic Circle in 2004 (Blanc, 2005). These lines were the stuff of dreams for our two climbers. J. Harlin, seeking to complete the perfect loop, mentions these round-the-world circles but decides they are not for him given the difficulties relating to time and technical mobilisation required for such routes. L. Daudet appreciates the fact that Mike Horn respected his "delta" of 40 kilometres on either side of the Equator all along his route, but

differentiates himself from Horn in that he preferred to invent a more technical itinerary (less flat) that enabled him to make use of his mountaineering skills.

Conclusions

- 22 Following these two journeys respectively around the borders of Switzerland and France, involving a strange combination of uselessness, from the point of view of sporting activity, and political illusion, with respect to the drawing of a border, it is undoubtedly easier to understand the meaning of ‘living the border’ and ‘making the border’. The two men, who planned and based their adventure on a pretext, claim to have found in their journey both freedom and utility. The constraint of the line followed by the border enabled them first of all to set themselves sporting and human challenges that they were able to meet. Media coverage of their exploits, in real-time on the internet and later by writing about them on their return, then opened up the possibility for them to share their experiences. Personal commitment, however, constitutes the basis for their epic journeys, including a face-to-face with themselves in a milieu that was not without risk, which provided a foundation for the feelings of joy they experienced on completing their challenges. The danger inherent in these tours of the borders, reflected in the serious accident to J. Harlin, and the fatigue resulting from their duration, made them veritable exploits.
- 23 Were the tours undertaken to boost a reborn nationalist pedagogy, even unknowingly? This would demonstrate the “ambivalence of [any] recreational rebellion (translation)” (Lebreton & Bourdeau, 2013)... However, due to the relatively weak social impact of outdoor recreational sports, the nature of their media coverage mainly concerned the physical aspects of their achievements, and left aside any political debate. The two men who undertook these sporting challenges, however, did learn about the borders in an original manner, which enabled them to go beyond their initial project of comparing map and territory and gain insights into what a mobile space is. This required them to call on their physical capacities, through an activity that, like dance, links performance to affect and the abstract (McCormack, 2008). But at the end of this article, it is essential to come back with the two mountaineers to what for them was unique in their relationship with the border: on the one hand coming into contact with a convention, through the irregularities and promises of the terrain, and, on the other, the time spent in a space normally perceived as a point in space and uninhabitable. We feel it important to insist on the relational nature of the border area: the two adventures are based on the construction of personalised space-time by athletes, in natural areas where they interact with political conventions. J. Harlin and L. Daudet each constructed a world at the border that they inhabit in their Heideggerian “being in the world” (Heidegger, 1955 [1958]). In experiencing the ontology of the limit, in their own way they have helped update a “haptic regime” (Volvey, Calberac, & Houssay-Holzschuch, 2012) within which entering into sensorial contact with the environment builds the conditions for knowledge: movement in this then constitutes a condition for the approach to all spatiality.
- 24 Literature on borders, from a Foucauldian inspired perspective (Foucault, 1963, 1975), tends to emphasize the way in which the institution crushes bodies in an attempt to control rather than free them (Van Houtum, 2010). From the moment that “there is no law that is not inscribed on a body” (De Certeau, 1980 [1990]) p.206, can it be claimed that at the border there is a special relationship with the human organism? The approach of our two climbers undoubtedly has something to do with the everyday creativity claimed by M. de Certeau... The question of physical performance clouds the interpretative framework here. His capacity to overcome dangers in mountain areas seems to give the climber the power to dominate the legal framework. But within Europe where the framework of the Schengen Agreement defines the possibilities of free movement, the mountain dweller does not flout the law, with the exception of the areas of limited access mentioned in the text. What then is the political significance of his act?
- 25 It is not so much the fact of putting their bodies at the border that transforms the climbers’ relationship with this place, but rather that of having imagined a way of not restricting movement in a type of space that was originally intended to limit it. The rapprochement

between an analysis of mountaineering practices and geopolitics makes it possible to go further in the problematization of the idea of the natural border. By choosing for his area of recreation a space invented by man, the adventurer is brought back to the artificiality of his act, an act that must accommodate nature. Does the body then constitute the ultimate natural border? By operating in a similar manner to the conceptual artists, who were the first to try to spatially express imaginary lines by following them, our two mountaineers touch, without having set out to do so, the ontological and ideological foundations of border delimitation.

26 The borderline appears, at different times, as an ideal, a game, and a code. Paradoxically, I would like to link these border tours with the urban "derive" invented by G. Debord: in what way can one say that the fact of linking border points would constitute a situationist approach? Added to the idea of personalised trajectory is the fact that J. Harlin and L. Daudet use the political constraint as a basis to construct their space of freedom. In choosing their route, for which they define the details of the terrain, and in deciding on the time to be spent hiking along it, it is their immersion in a spatial object that enables them to divert it. They divert the norm by being physically present on the imaginary line, where the usual practice is to cross it, not to follow it. In this respect, it could be said that, as with the proposals for experimental tourism founded on the invention of deliberate constraints (Antony & Henry, 2006), they undertook a type of experiential mountaineering which invites us to reformulate the notion of challenge and exploit.

27 All along the routes taken by the two climbers, the border takes the form of a non-intersecting line; it neither crosses other lines nor itself. Its circularity keeps it from coming into contact with the networks and rhizomes that create the fabric of control like that of its circumvention. And along this line, bodies move: "Bodies move in more ways than one: yes, they move physically, but they also move affectively, kinaesthetically, imaginatively, collectively, aesthetically, socially, culturally and politically" (McCormack, 2008). Without rebelling, in a language that "makes" and "no longer only suggests" (De Certeau, *ibid.*), bodies reformulate the law at the same time as enacting it ... The way in which both J. Harlin and L. Daudet confronted the border demonstrates its vitality while at the same time preventing this place from becoming essentialised, reflecting the strength of its mobile component.

Bibliographie

AMILHAT SZARY, Anne-Laure, 2012a – "Murs et barrières de sécurité : pourquoi démarquer les frontières dans un monde dématérialisé ?". In Cynthia GHORRA GOBIN (dir.), *Dictionnaire des mondialisations* (2ème édition augmentée) (pp. 447-451), Colin, Paris: pp. 447-451.

AMILHAT SZARY, Anne-Laure, 2012b – "Que montrent les murs ? Des frontières contemporaines de plus en plus visibles". *Etudes Internationales*, vol.(1), pp. 67-87.

ANTONY, Rachael et HENRY, Joël, 2006 – *Le guide Lonely Planet du voyage expérimental*, Lonely Planet.

BELDEN, David, 1994 – *L'alpinisme : un jeu ? Les notions de jeu, de libre et de nature dans le discours de l'alpinisme*, L'Harmattan, Paris.

BERHAULT, Patrick, 2001 – *Encordé mais libre, La traversée des Alpes*, Glénat, Grenoble.

BERHELOT, Libera et CORNELOUP, Jean (dir.), 2008 – *Itinérance, du Tour aux détours*, Editions du Fournel, L'Argentière-La-Bessée.

BLANC, Raphaël (Writer). (2005). *Arktos: Le voyage intérieur de Mike Horn*. In Artemis Films PRODUCTIONS (Producer).

BRUNO, G., 1877 – *Le Tour de la France par deux enfants. Devoir et patrie*, E. Belin, Paris.

CLASSEN, Constance (dir.), 2005 – *The book of touch*, Berg, Oxford ; New York.

DE CERTEAU, Michel 1980 [1990] – *L'invention du quotidien*. 1, arts de faire. 2, habiter, cuisiner, Folio Essais, Paris.

FOUCAULT, Michel, 1963 – *Naissance de la clinique*, PUF, Paris.

FOUCAULT, Michel, 1975 – *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris.

GIRAUT, Frédéric. (2011, September 6-9th). The scientific challenge of BRIT XI: addressing the issue of mobile borders in border studies. Paper presented at the Mobile Borders. Les frontières Mobiles, Genève, Suisse/ Grenoble, France.

GRÄNICHER, Dieter (Writer). (2010). Grenzgänge mit Andrea Vogel. In Dieter GRÄNICHER, momenta film GMBH et Schweizer Radio und FERNSEHEN (Producer).

HEIDEGGER, Martin, 1955 [1958] – "Bâtir Habiter Penser (Bauen, Wohnen, Denken)" Essais et Conférences, NRF-Gallimard, Paris: pp.

HORN, Mike, 2001 – Latitude zéro, XO Editions, Paris.

JULLIEN, Frédéric, 2001 – La grande traversée des Pyrénées en solitaire, Editions du Fournel, L'Argentière la Bessée.

LEBRETON, Florian et BOURDEAU, Philippe, 2013 – "Les dissidences récréatives en nature : entre jeu et transgression. Exploration liminologique.". *EspacesTemps.net*, vol.(Travaux, 28.10.2013), pp. <http://www.espacestemp.net/articles/les-dissidences-recreatives-en-nature-entre-jeu-et-transgression/>

MCCORMACK, Derek, 2008 – "Geographies for Moving Bodies: Thinking, Dancing, Spaces". *Geography Compass*, vol.(6), pp. 1822-1836.

NASH, Roderick, 1967 – *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Yale University Press., New Haven and London.

NORA, Pierre, 1984-1992 – *Les lieux de mémoire*, Gallimard, Paris.

PATERSON, Mark et DODGE, Martin (dir.), 2012 – *Touching Place, Placing Touch*, Ashgate, Farnham.

RASPAUD, Michel, 1998 – "La mise en spectacle de l'alpinisme". *Communications*, vol.(67), pp. 165-178.

THRIFT, Nigel, 2008 – *Non-Representational Theory. Space, politics, affect*, Routledge, London / New York.

TREICHLER, Hans Peter et STARK, Georg, 1987 – 80 jours autour de la suisse (1+ 2) : Rencontres de part et d'autre de la frontière, Vevey [Suisse], Mondo.

TURNER, Frederick W., 1980 – *Beyond geography: the western spirit against the wilderness*, The Viking Press, New York.

VANHOUTUM, Henk, 2010 – "Mapping Transversal Borders: towards a Choreography of Space". In Bruno RICCIO et Chiara BRAMBILLA (dir.), *Transnational Migration, Cosmopolitanism and Dis-located Borders* (pp. 119-137), Guaraldi, Bergamo: pp. 119-137.

VOGEL, Andrea et BIELER, Charly, 1995 – *Grenze. Grenztour*, Bündner Monatsblatt Verlag/ Desertina, Chur, Switzerland.

VOLVEY, Anne, CALBERAC, Yann et HOUSSAY-HOLZSCUCH, Myriam, 2012 – "Introduction générale", in : , sept.-déc., p. 441-461". In Anne VOLVEY, Yann CALBERAC et Myriam HOUSSAY-HOLZSCUCH (dir.), *Terrains de Je*, *Annales de Géographies*, vol. 120, n° 687-688 (pp. 441-461): pp. 441-461.

Notes

1 From 10 August 2011 to 15 November 2012, that is 15 months.

2 1/22 June – 1st July 2010, from Leysin (near St Gingolph, in the canton of Valais) to the South, as far as the edge of Mont Dolent. Following a bad fall, J. Harlin was evacuated by helicopter from the Aiguilles Rouges of the Dolent massif and had to postpone his attempt;

3 « qui dit nation dit conscience des limites ».

4 That is to say the natural environment untouched by mankind, such as experienced in North America (Nash, 1967) (Turner, 1980).

5 His term.

6 <http://www.dodtour.com/>

7 His personal site: http://www.johnharlin.net/JohnHarlin.net/Swiss_Border_Stories.html

8 <http://www.johnharlin.net/JohnHarlin.net/Welcome.html>

9 "Crossing the digital divide", cf. http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/culture/Harlin_explores_the_peopled_landscape.html?cid=28451078

10 Cf. *Border Stories*, 11/7/2011, "Where eagles dare",

11 Cf. *Border Stories*, 21/8/2011, "Pride and Joy" (photo n°5 and its legend): group of elderly hikers from Schaffhausen (a place remarkable for the strangeness of its borderline, with the presence of a German

enclave), whose project was to hike along the entire Swiss border in stages, completing a different section during a few weeks each summer.

12 (Vogel & Bieler, 1995)

13 Cervin, Grandes Jorasses and Eiger: project initiated in 2000, taken up again in 2002, and which resulted in L. Daudet suffering from frostbite that caused him to lose several of his toes. It was taken up once again in 2006, <http://www.escalade-aventure.com/trilogie.php>

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, « **Towards experimental mountaineering?** », *Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine* [En ligne], 101-2 | 2013, mis en ligne le 06 janvier 2014, consulté le 23 avril 2015. URL : <http://rga.revues.org/2131> ; DOI : 10.4000/rga.2131

À propos de l'auteur

Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary

Professeure à l'Université Joseph Fourier / CNRS-PACTE / Institut Universitaire de France

Droits d'auteur

© Journal of Alpine Research | Revue de géographie alpine

Résumé

In 2011 and 2012, two mountain climbers, John Harlin and Lionel Daudet, undertook individual journeys to follow the entire political border of an alpine country, respectively Switzerland and France, each unaware of the approximate concomitance of their projects. Harlin and Daudet decided to use the imaginary line drawn on a map by political administrations as the pretext and backdrop for a totally new adventure. Their aim was to follow a border along its entire linear route, the abstract nature of which is generally only experienced when one crosses it from one country to another. The self-imposed constraints thus provided them with the basis for a new type of mountaineering, one which involved not only confronting the complex mountainous terrain followed by the borders in Switzerland and France but also practicing a variety of outdoor sporting activities: we suggest referring to this challenge as 'experimental mountaineering'. These projects undoubtedly mark an important change in the practice of mountain sports, where the mountain tour, or circular route, is in the process of earning its place alongside the more traditional summit climbs and mountain crossings. In putting their bodies to the test in following the border, these two men have shown how the idea of the "mobile" border is able to express itself in the form of a constantly renegotiated juxtaposition of spatial characteristics generated by the presence of a limit. The exploits of Harlin and Daudet encourage us not only to go further in our analyses of the affective and physical processes of the body that contribute to the complexity of our relationship with space, but also to refrain from making the body the last "natural border".

Entrées d'index

Keywords : mountaineering, mobile border, Alps, France, Switzerland, contemporary art

Notes de la rédaction

Translation: Brian Keogh

Notes de l'auteur

This paper owes a lot to F. Giraut's hints and to his attentive reading. It was made possible through the "MOBILE BORDERS" IUF project.