

## **Horizonville**

Introduction by Pascal Beausse

Exploring by moped, Yann Gross slows down time to develop an ethnographic study of a group of people living out their dreams. Recreating a world of American culture in a Swiss valley only makes sense if it entails inventing a new cultural identity that forges a bond between people in that community. The social component of these practices goes way beyond leisure to create a new model of everyday life. It is the construction of a collective fantasy world in reality. As Slavoj Žižek puts it, "Welcome to the desert of the real!"

Here an artificial universe based on imaginary notions from film and television has been adapted to the everyday reality of a part of Switzerland very far removed from the Rocky Mountains of the Wild West, but also very far removed from any reality of life in America. The different events and gatherings that cement the bonds between all these people who gird themselves with symbols of the American Dream lend it the force of reality. It is certainly less about recreating a piece of America in part of the Rhône Valley than about creating a new culture, new practices and identities, fusing Swiss realities with the imaginary American Way of Life à la Hollywood.

Yann Gross does not attempt to explain this singular sociocultural phenomenon, much less judge or even mock it. He takes a highly empathetic, humanly intelligent approach. Like the character in David Lynch's film *The Straight Story* who travels across the vast spaces of America by mini tractor, he slows the pace of his perception in exploring the valley by moped, towing a trailer that allows him to camp wherever he sets up his tripod. This patient and genuinely curious approach means that he is accepted by the people who are the subject of his photographic investigation. The trust he elicits enables him to develop several different complementary modes of representation, from posed portraits to snapshots of the rites and festivals where the tribe assembles. Landscape photographs revealing the architectural impact of this dissemination of the American Dream along the roadside against the backdrop of the Alps reinforce the calm strangeness of this mingling of two worlds. Yann Gross's story is about people at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the wake of globalization, thanks to contact facilitated by high-tech communication between far-flung cultures, human communities are inventing new identities and practices that help create a cheerful patchwork of creolization.