

A vision : for a Switzerland which takes risks

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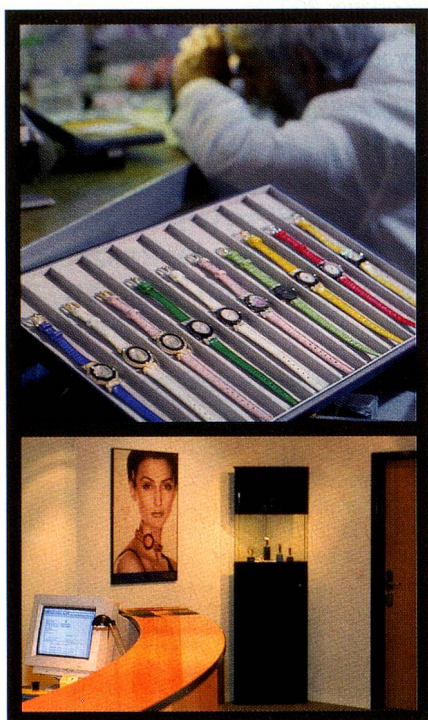
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A vision: For a Switzerland



Imagine that for more than half a century Switzerland's main problem had been its incapability of imagining death, of accepting it as inexorably painted on the horizon of every human being. The fact is that the people of our

Bernard Comment*

country – perhaps because they have been spared by the great wars of the modern era – have rejected most profoundly the concept of sacrificing life. They have taken refuge in an exaggeration of insurance in all its aspects, starting with the National Redoubt of the Second World War, the concept of withdrawal into oneself, the hedgehog complex. This was then systematised following the war, right up to the 1990s. It was embodied in the civil defence

system and the famous 1971 concept whose aim was to ensure that every citizen would have a "protected place".

All this led to a situation in which it seemed more important to survive than to live in this Switzerland, in which fear of the microbe and of infection has resulted in an antiseptic society, worried about everything conceivable, eyes glued to the passing of best-by dates on consumer goods.

Start living again

This collective repression has contributed in large measure to blocking out the imaginary, of setting a brake on the desire for anything new. And at all events it has led to a loss of the heroic quality which other countries attribute to their history. In one swoop old mythologies have been reawakened (William Tell, Winkelried) to incorporate a single concern, that of prudence.

*Bernard Comment was born at Porrentruy in 1960. He is a writer by profession and at present lives in Paris.

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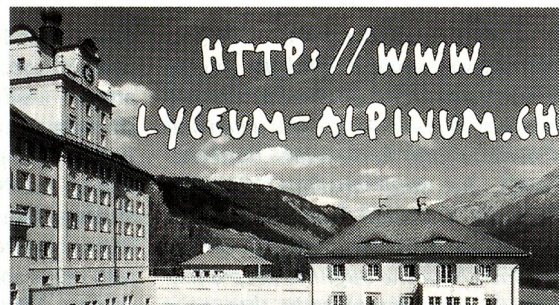
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and which takes risks

We might dream of a future Switzerland which had learned again to integrate the idea of death into its thought processes and so to start living again – no longer by wishing to remain a cosy exception but by turning itself into a dynamic crossroads and model of contemporary society by avoiding the develop-

freedom struggle, promptly surrounded by hostile empires brutally repressing all revolutionary or liberating demonstrations. That was a state which kept its head high and maintained its courage, insisting for example on its right and its duty to welcome political refugees in spite of strong pressure not to do so and a number of spectacular retaliatory measures. It is this courage and this pride in our dignity which have gradually frayed in the course of the last 150 years.

Back to the “little music of the days”

Because of consensus (the Federal Council’s ‘magic formula’, democracy by agreement) Switzerland has gradually become suffocated by confabulations and commissions, giving undue importance to administrative bodies and lobbies to the detriment of decision-making which is genuinely political. But the time has perhaps come in Switzerland for a ‘paradigm shift’.

Does the part-time army really still play an effective role as cement in the internal structure of the country? Have cantonal divisions still any point at a time when all manner of transfers take place in real time, or do they now constitute a hindrance? Should we not think in terms of creating large-scale regions in which work rhythms and budgets can

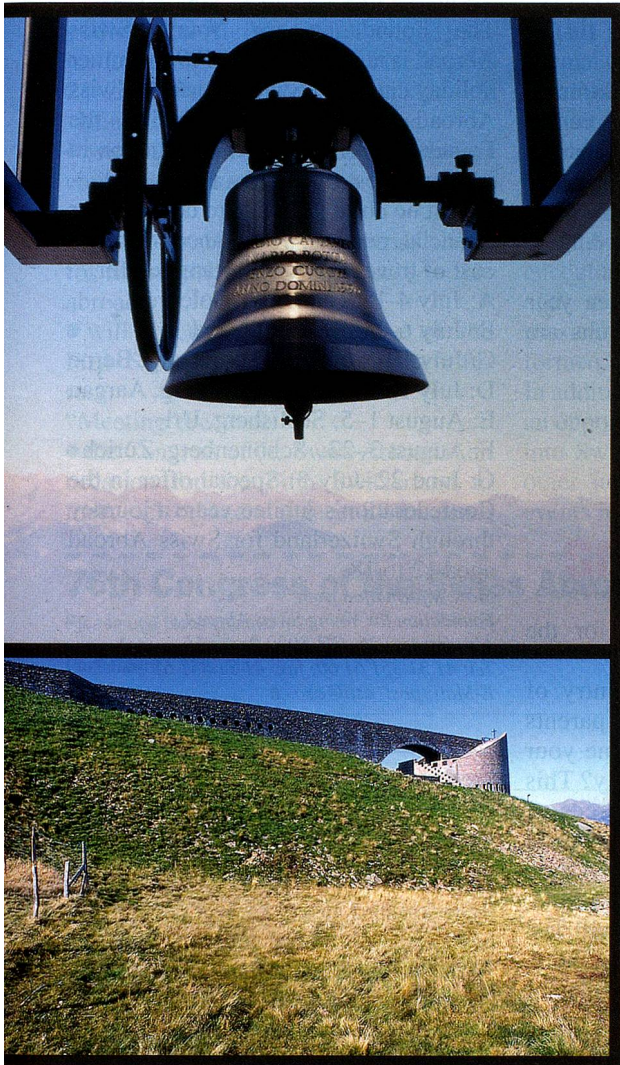
be harmonised? Should we not work in favour of a veritable cleavage in the institutional field, with the creation of an opposition and the alternative possibilities that this would bring in its train? Has the policy of the strong franc condemned Switzerland to be for ever a destination for the richest of tourists and a haven for the most wealthy? Is not over-regulation, particularly in hygiene, health and safety matters, preventing development for those of slender means because of the high cost of absolutely

everything? Should we not learn to be poorer, to abandon some of the luxury, some of the things that we do not really need, so that we can learn to appreciate again “the little music of the days”, as Proust described it?

There is really no possible future for an ‘off-shore’ Switzerland which draws egoistic profit from its exceptional status (in things legal, fiscal, banking and customs) and showing a spirit of meanness and withdrawal. But there is a future for a courageous Switzerland which, having accepted the challenge of facing up to its past, decides to play an active role in the world. In so doing, we can still affirm our own original ambitions, whether in the fields of culture or of peacekeeping or indeed denunciation when the democratic principles to which we subscribe are trampled under foot. And let us stop once and for all condemning people as traitors and accusing them of dirtying their own nest the moment they ask uncomfortable questions or call to mind dishonourable facts from the past.

What it claims to be and what it is

Such a Switzerland will see the light of day by strengthening what it claims to be and by abandoning what in fact it is too often in reality (in particular, a refuge for capital emanating from fraud



ment of metropolitan areas which are too big and making a network of fast urban transport its best functional argument. This would be a society able to maintain the sense of individual responsibility and respect for contract – which means for others as partners – at a very high level.

After a century of myths and illusions, Switzerland might in this way recover the ambitions that it had in 1848, when the triumph of liberalism made it a small state in the avant-garde of the

“ MY SWITZERLAND:
Unfortunately our population is very closed up against foreigners. And it makes no sense for Switzerland to save on training young people. I find it positive that our government supports poorer people, the unemployed and disabled for example.

FRANZISKA (17)

and tyranny). For democracy, even the oldest variety on earth, is never something that can be taken as given. It must be ceaselessly earned over and against the reflexes and regressions of individuals unwilling to look beyond their own immediate interests. And another thing: let us cease trying to play two tunes at the same time. On the one hand, we are a weak country without many resources. On the other hand, we are a special case, “there is no one quite like us”, we are just so much cleaner and more orderly, so efficient, so disciplined.

Would it really be completely mad to aspire to a Switzerland which is capable of taking risks? ■