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Subtitle: *Looking for the American Dream*

Contributors: essay by David Giffels

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Description of the work:

During the past twenty years, there has emerged throughout America a new kind of urban vision that blends residential/suburban-type development with wide-scale commercial centers. Rolling farm lands that used to surround towns and cities were giving way to vast housing developments of nearly identical, hastily built mini-mansions with enormous garages and fancy yards. These were the new bedroom communities for middle-class Americans who commuted to cities where the jobs were, but, for the first time, these residential enclaves were linked to shopping. Traditional Main Streets of yore were eclipsed by big shopping malls known as “lifestyle centers” that were filled with national chains whose commercial architecture is a blend of multiple periods and styles that create a fanciful display but with no relation to the region. Behind this imagined past era of luxurious consumerism is a ubiquitous culture based on global marketing in which homogenization and conformity have won over the American dream and created a new kind of American heartland.

Andrew Borowiec is the first photographer since Bob Thall (*The New American Village*, 1999) to provide comprehensive visual proof of this new vision for the American landscape. Borowiec directs our attention toward how such development has evolved in his native state of Ohio, a longstanding bellwether state for American tastes and values that has voted for every winning candidate in a presidential election but one since 1944. In Ohio, Borowiec explores all aspects of these new residential and commercial enclaves and presents the new alternative to traditional suburban life that, until now, lacked the commercial link.

Eric Paddock, Curator of Photography at the Denver Art Museum, calls *The New Heartland* a “landmark book in the history of photography,” and he equates Borowiec’s book with such classics as Robert Adams’s *The New West* (1973), Walker Evans’s *American Photographs* (1938), and John Szarkowski’s four-volume *The Work of Atget* (1981–1985). That is high praise for this most important book, which also features an informative and insightful essay by David Giffels on how this new development operates. Here is the new heartland, representing a new American dream on the American landscape, and Andrew Borowiec opens our eyes with his amazing book so that we can take a look.

Longer version:

In so many ways, Ohio remains America's quintessential heartland state, for what happens in Ohio happens throughout the United States. Ohio has been a bellwether swing state for the winning candidate in every presidential election since 1944 except one. It's also the place where fast-food companies test-market new products and the place where chewing gum, Teflon, and the first cash register, vacuum cleaner, airplane, traffic signal, and gas-powered automobile were invented. Even the state's Division of Travel and Tourism has long relied on “Ohio, the Heart of It All” as its popular motto to attract visitors to the state.

Yet everything shifted after the 2004 presidential election, when political scientists and journalists looked more closely at the election results: Ohio was changing, just as America was changing. Big differences

were noted between voters who lived in the cities and those who lived around the cities yet aligned with voters in rural areas. Andrew Borowiec, an eminent photographer then based in Akron, took notice and headed out with his camera to take a closer look at the electoral map to be found on the ground.

And what he found was astonishing. The once rolling farmlands that used to surround cities and define Middle America were giving way to vast suburban housing developments of nearly identical, hastily built mini-mansions with enormous garages and fancy yards. These were the new bedroom communities for long-distance commuters to the cities where there were jobs. And the traditional Main Streets of yore were rapidly being eclipsed by "lifestyle centers": shopping malls filled with national chains whose commercial architecture is a cacophonous blend of multiple periods and styles that somehow blend into a fanciful display in which every detail is reproduced out of extruded foam, all of it designed to evoke an imagined past era of luxurious consumerism. Distinctive architectural and landscape styles of the region had given way to a ubiquitous culture of global marketing in which J. Crew was a more familiar name than James Joyce. Homogenization and conformity had won over the American dream in the new heartland.

Andrew Borowiec's work follows in the tradition of other legendary interpreters of American land and life—among them J. B. Jackson, Robert Frank, Walker Evans, Robert Adams, and the New Topographics photographers. He has used his keen eye and dedication to field work to give us a fresh, at times humorous, and ever razor-sharp view of what is going on in America today. There is a new heartland, a new American dream, and it can be found in the new residential and commercial landscapes of Ohio and the rest of America, if we choose to open our eyes and take a look.

Blurbs:

“Andrew Borowiec's photographs take stock of contemporary life in America's heartland and explore how the way people shape their surroundings expresses our prevailing social and environmental attitudes, perceptions, and values. The book is not simply a critique or an analysis of current American culture; the specificity of Borowiec's work reveals a sweet, simple, and irrefutable humanity that connects what we see with what we have experienced ourselves and insists that these pictures and the trends they describe belong, somehow, to all of us.

“*The New Heartland* recalls other landmark books in the history of photography. Robert Adams's *The New West* (1973) leaps to mind, because Borowiec's title echoes that of the earlier book and because both books wrestle with dichotomies: myth and reality, beauty and ugliness, gross social trends and real needs of ordinary people. Together, these two books demonstrate that the issues they address, however specific and local they may seem in the pictures, are as universal as they are persistent.

“The other books that seem to lurk in the background of *The New Heartland* are Walker Evans's great *American Photographs* (1938) and the four-volume *The Work of Atget* (1981–1985) by John Szarkowski and Maria Morris Hambourg. The strong affinity I see among Borowiec, Evans, and Atget has mostly to do with their faith that simple facts about how things look, stated clearly and economically in photographs, possess a

unique poetic power. Borowiec contributes to this tradition of careful looking, with photographs of supreme intelligence and wit. *The New Heartland* gives us a fresh look at American culture that partakes in an important artistic tradition."

—Eric Paddock, Curator of Photography, Denver Art Museum, and author of *Belonging to the West*

About the Author (use the jacket and catalog version from the Author's Information form):

Andrew Borowiec was born in New York City in 1956 and grew up in Paris, Algiers, Tunisia, and Geneva. He received a B.A. in Russian from Haverford College in 1979 and his M.F.A. in Photography from Yale University in 1982. He has worked as a photojournalist, as the staff photographer for the International Center of Photography in New York City, as Assistant Director of Workshops for the Rencontres Internationales de la Photographie in Arles, France, and as Director of the University of Akron Press. He has taught at Parsons School of Design, The New School for Social Research, Oberlin College, and the University of Akron's Myers School of Art, where, in 2009, he was named Distinguished Professor of Art. He has received fellowships in photography from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, and Ohio Arts Council. In 2006, he was awarded the Cleveland Arts Prize. For more than three decades he has photographed America's changing social, industrial, and post-industrial landscapes. His photographs have been exhibited around the world and are in the permanent collections of the Chicago Art Institute, Cleveland Museum of Art, Library of Congress, Museum of Contemporary Photography, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Princeton University Art Museum, and Smithsonian Museum of American Art, among others. His other books of photography are *Along the Ohio* (John Hopkins University Press, in association with the Center for American Places, 2000), *Industrial Perspective: Photographs of the Gulf Coast* (Center for American Places, 2005), and *Cleveland: The Flats, the Mill, and the Hills* (Center for American Places at Columbia College Chicago, 2008). He lives in New York City and Akron, Ohio, with his wife, Andrea.

About the Contributor:

David Giffels was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1964 and raised there. He received his M.A. in English from the University of Akron. Currently, he is an assistant professor of English at the University of Akron, where he teaches creative nonfiction in the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts Program. Prior to his academic career, he was a longtime columnist for *The Akron Beacon Journal*, and he has also written for *Grantland*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *Redbook*, *Wall Street Journal*, among many other publications. He also was a writer for the MTV series *Beavis and Butt-Head*. His essays have appeared in *Rust Belt Chic* (RBC Publishing, 2012), *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia* (Indiana University Press, 2006), *The Appalachians: America's First and Last Frontier* (Random House, 2004), and *West Point Market Cookbook* (University of Akron Press, 2008).

Giffels is the co-author, with Jade Dellinger, of *Are We Not Men? We Are Devo!* (SAF Publishing, 2003), and, with Steve Love, *Wheels of Fortune: The Story of Rubber in Akron* (University of Akron Press, 1998). His other books include *Furnishing Eternity: A Father, a Son, a Coffin, and a Measure of Life* (Scribner, 2018), *The Hard Way on Purpose: Essays and Dispatches from the Rust Belt* (Scribner, 2014), and *All the Way Home: Building a Family in a Falling-Down House* (William Morrow/Harper Collins, 2008). Giffels has been interviewed and appeared on National Public Radio, *The Atlantic*, and WordPress, and his recent awards include the Cleveland Arts Prize for literature, the Ohioana Book Award, and the Associated Press's "Best News Writer in Ohio" award.