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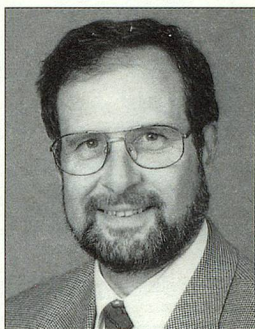
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If we could only build bridges...

It is now fifty years since Switzerland last embarked on a major project: the construction of the country's motorway network, which is still not completed. Now it has launched a bold new mammoth project to construct base tunnels for a railway route through the alpine massif.

These new construction projects will increase mobility, enhance the competitiveness of rail transport, relieve our environment of thousands of tonnes of emissions, cut traffic on transit routes, and bring the North and South of Switzerland as well as the continent closer together.

In a recently broadcast report on the role of leading-edge technology in resolving current and future problems, Austrian TV singled out Swiss transport policy and its objectives, i.e. to shift goods



Pierre-André Tschanz

Who keeps an image of the Mont-Blanc tunnel?

traffic from road to rail and to construct a rail tunnel below the Lötschberg and Gotthard passes.

This gigantic dual construction site is highly beneficial to the psychological wellbeing of the Swiss. However, bridge-building would be an even more effective ego-booster since, unlike tunnels, bridges do not tend to have negative associations.

Schiller might have written "Through this black tunnel he must come" when describing unavoidable and demoralising tasks. It is this psychological hurdle which is the greatest enemy of a much more innovative and ambitious plan than the alpine tunnel: the Swissmetro project for a magnetic underground tube railway in a partial-vacuum.

Derived from the Latin *tonna*, meaning "cylindrical vault", the word "tunnel" means "an underground passageway". However, in the metaphorical sense it denotes a difficult phase of life filled with problems or suffering, and people often talk of the light at the end of the tunnel when describing a positive development following a period of disappointment. This may also explain why, even shortly after entering the 17 kilometer-long Gotthard Tunnel, one begins to long for the tunnel exit, which seems so far away in this airless world of sinister darkness. Basically the only time one looks forward to a tunnel is at its opening.

The psychological wellbeing of the Swiss would therefore be better served by building bridges. Bridges are often regarded as works of art. One admires their silhouettes, harmony and the formal beauty of their arches in the same way as one would admire a nude by Renoir or Modigliani. One pauses, admires and photographs them. Most of us have seen the Golden Gate Bridge of San Francisco, the bridge over the Firth of Forth in Scotland or the Pont du Gard in France, even if only in pictures. But who would keep an image of the Mont-Blanc or St. Bernard tunnels?

Pierre-André Tschanz



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No other country has as dense network of motorways as Switzerland: 83 km² of roads, roughly equivalent to the surface area of Lake Zurich. The Oftringen (AG) intersection is one of the busiest axes for long-distance traffic.
(Cover: MARKUS SENN)

SWISS REVIEW

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