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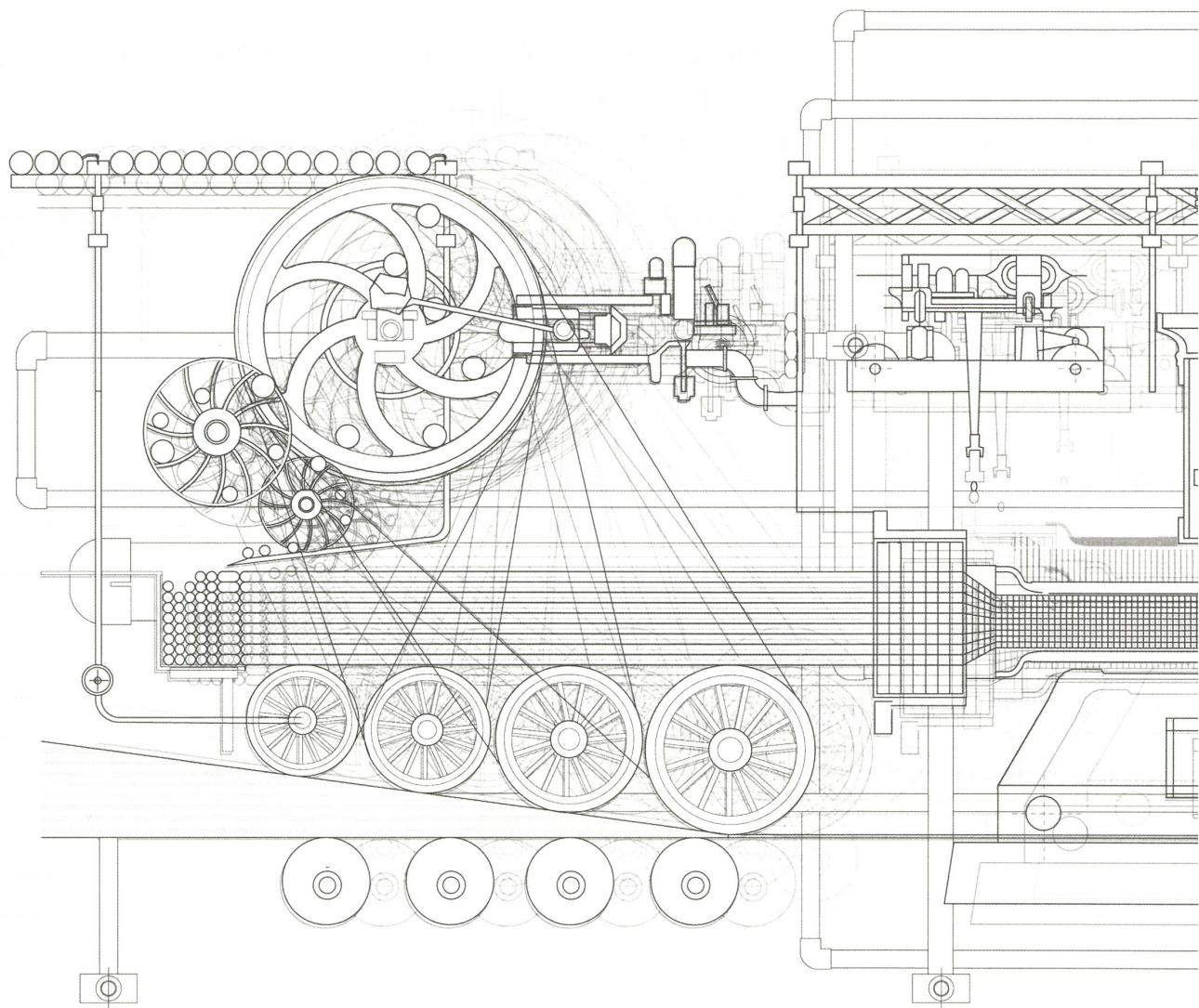
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HELVETIA, QUO VADIS?

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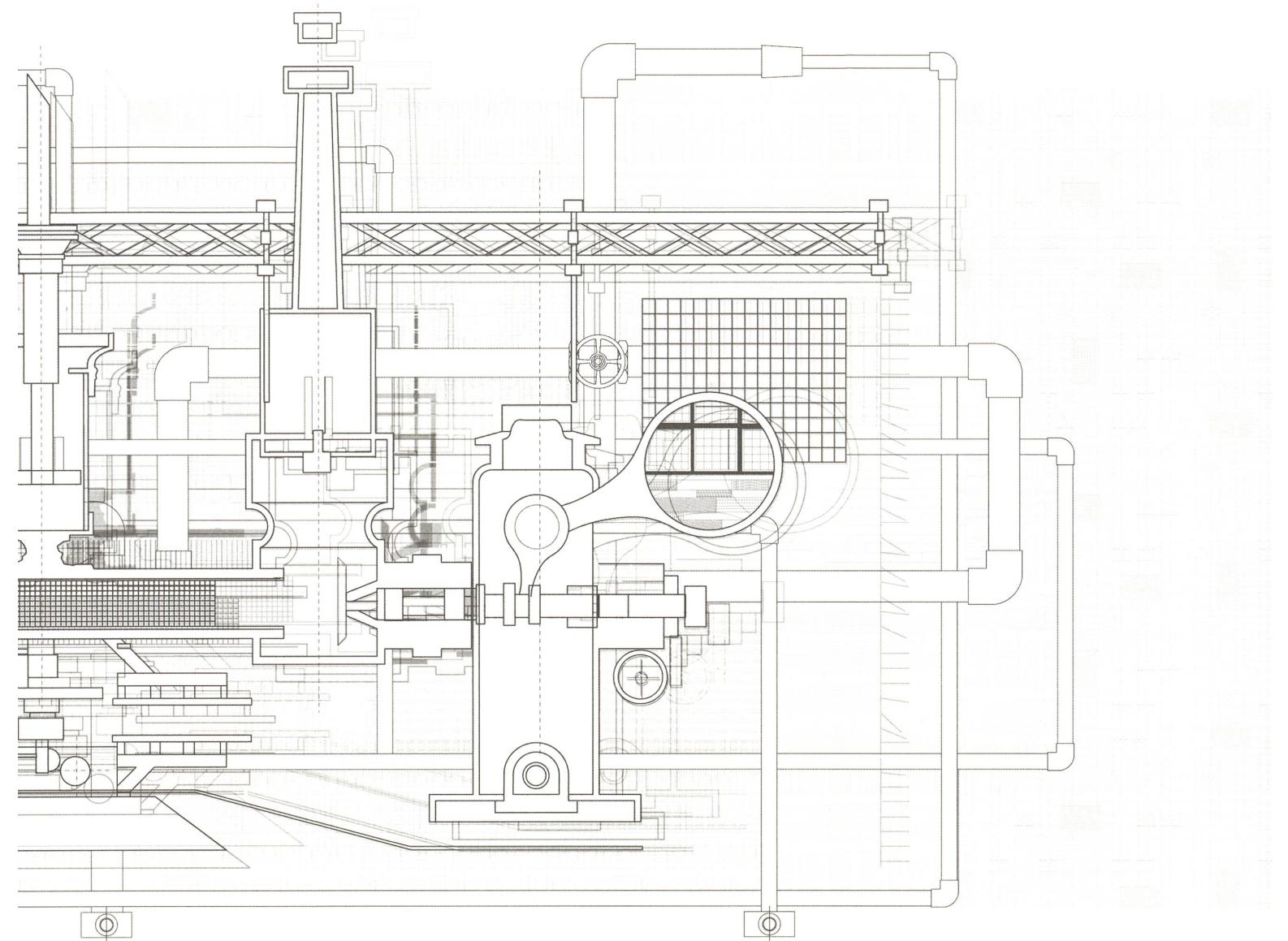
Ljubica Arsić
Daniel Fuchs



HELVETIA_01

Some time ago, Swiss society was struggling to choose a direction for the future. On one side, referendums and political initiatives on a federal level were introducing legal limits to protect the nation's landscape, traditions, ecology or even its economy. On the other side, the government was establishing a variety of agreements with different states to sustain Switzerland's economic competitiveness by opening its markets. It seemed that these two ways could work together, but they did not. No single vote or political movement expressively pushed for withdrawal from the world's economy, but the laws introduced on a national level were not complying to the agreements with other states and economic zones. These entities

dissolved their economic ties with Switzerland by gradually imposing duties on Swiss products. Consequently, the lack of international trade and cheap resources caused a national economic crisis. Global enterprises were the first to move their headquarters out of the country, leaving behind empty glass buildings. The unemployment rate increased drastically. Not surprisingly, Swiss people were shocked. In losing their seemingly unlimited economic independence, they had given up one of the foundations of their individual action. This loss was softened by the reassessment that new ideas of society could be induced by decisions taken at a national political level. Economic growth was unintentionally sacrificed for these morally justified choices, like protecting the country's landscape or saving the planet's ecosystem by adopting new lifestyles.

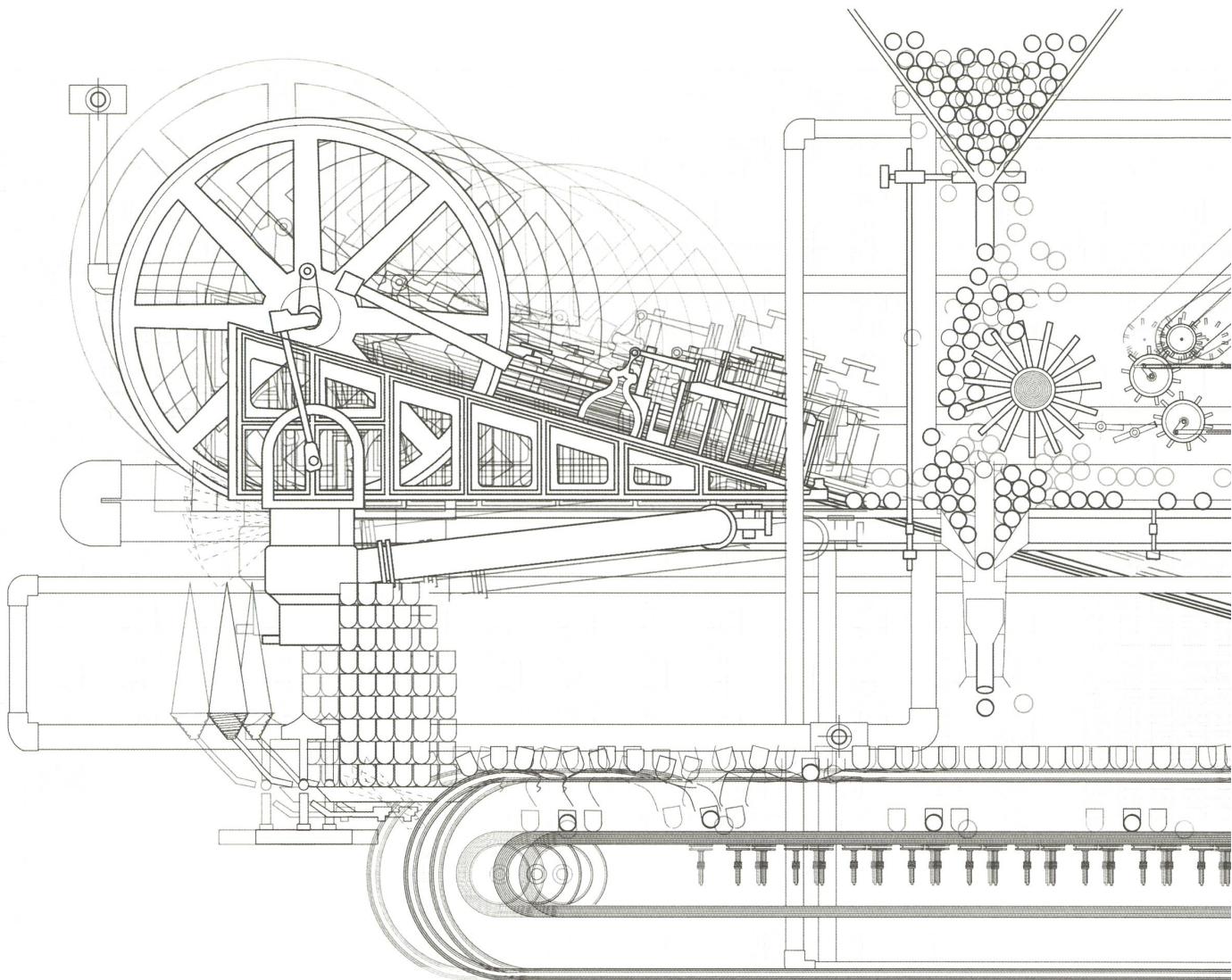


Swiss identity adapts to these new conditions. People are proud of being part of a nation that is trying to live differently, protecting its main uniting aspect: the landscape. The process of limiting expansion in a variety of fields is ongoing. Living in a Swiss urban agglomeration is barely affordable due to taxes imposed to offset the destruction of the landscape. Public infrastructure is concentrated to just connect the main cities. These measures are causing a massive migration to urban regions, leaving villages abandoned.

The cities themselves have very limited legal possibility for planar expansion. Additionally, strong heritage protection laws impede the replacement of older building blocks and subsequently the densification process. To provide more living spaces,

laws reducing each citizen's individual living area to 36 m² are being introduced. Flat sharing is thus becoming an inevitable reality for everyone. The concentration of people is helping to use the government's small budget in an effective way. Public services still provide good education and health care, but only in urban areas.

Swiss people think that their way of living could be a model for other countries, but so far no one has attempted to follow them.

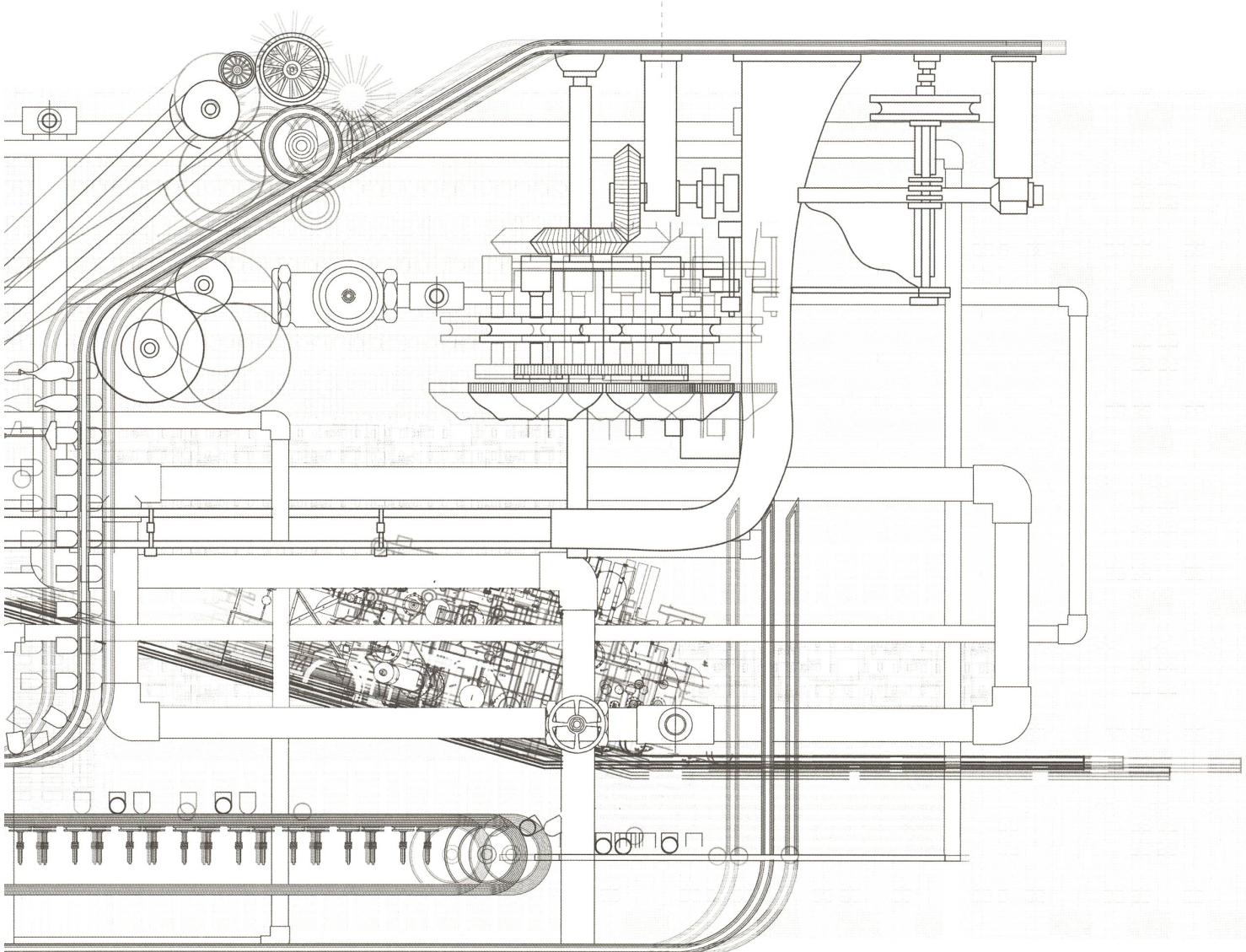


HELVETIA_02

Some time ago, Switzerland faced an economic crisis caused by the real estate sector. Low interest rates and the prospect of a growing population seemed to make real estate a very profitable asset. One observed construction sites all over the country, yet the economic predictions turned out to be wrong. Political decisions gradually undermined population growth by stopping the influx of foreigners into the country. There was no need for these newly built apartments; they remained empty and forced a lot of investors into bankruptcy.

The crisis was more substantial than foreseen, and Swiss people were confronted with depopulation of previously thriving cities. In an attempt to save the

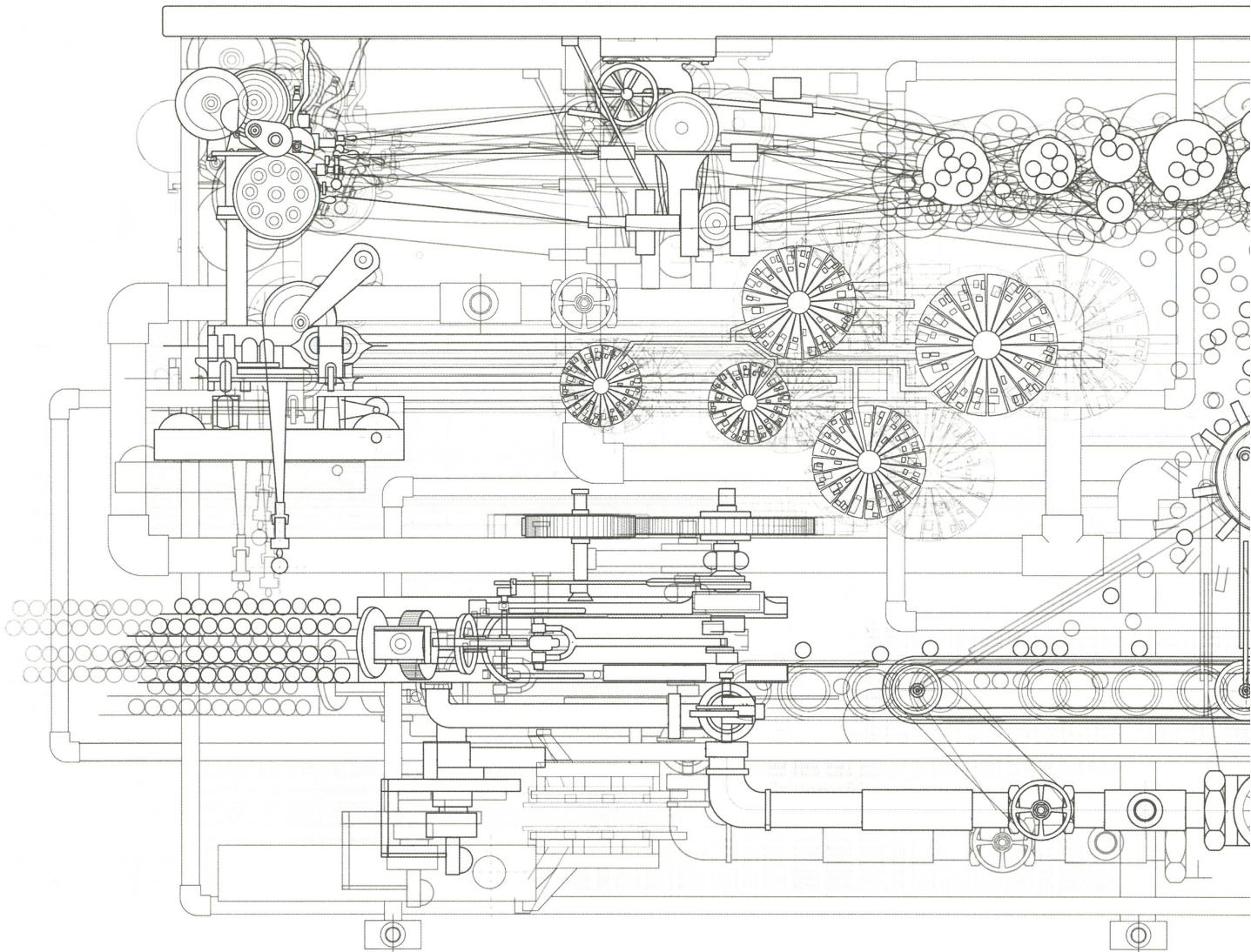
remaining economy, the political forces decided to simplify laws and give more individual freedom on different levels. To attract foreign investment, notions of landscape and heritage were sacrificed. State subsidised agricultural production was given up leaving empty open fields waiting for new ideas. The highly deregulated labour market forced people to change their way of living; the temporary became the constant condition of being. As a side effect the dissolution of communal ties was inescapable. A passive acceptance of the new condition gradually replaced hope in a future recovery of the economy. This led some intellectuals to praise the new situation as a model that replaced the nostalgic relics of identity in Switzerland, a model that is based on individual actions and decisions, without the load of everyone being responsible for the survival of the planet.



It is hard to find any Swiss citizen still holding a positive future outlook on their career. This instability is leading people to seek for other truths, for other realities, which can create, or at least simulate, a reason for life. Some people are trying to reuse the almost forgotten concepts of spirituality. Old Far Eastern philosophers are among the most read authors of these spiritually homesick individuals. Others use digital simulations to escape into worlds of simple truths. And lastly, there are people creating complete worlds based on their own imagination. These worlds are based on an accumulation of personal memories and hopes, which mainly manifest themselves in a variety of artworks.

A substantial transformation of the individual perception of the environment as a source of potential,

not as a fragile good, is activating people to build. They are living like nomads in their real life, but leave traces of their individualisation, imagination and wisdom on their paths. Their lifestyles are leading to an accumulation of brick houses scattered in fields. By contrast, large scale interventions also form part of the Swiss landscape. Foreign state funds (mainly Arabian) are buying enormous stretches of land to develop tourist resorts or to sustain their growing need for food. Unfortunately this is barely helping to stimulate the Swiss economy, since the resulting profit is taken back to the countries where the investment originates from. The politicians are still desperately trying to encourage economic growth with other recipes, but people are starting to find pleasure in this freedom from responsibility.



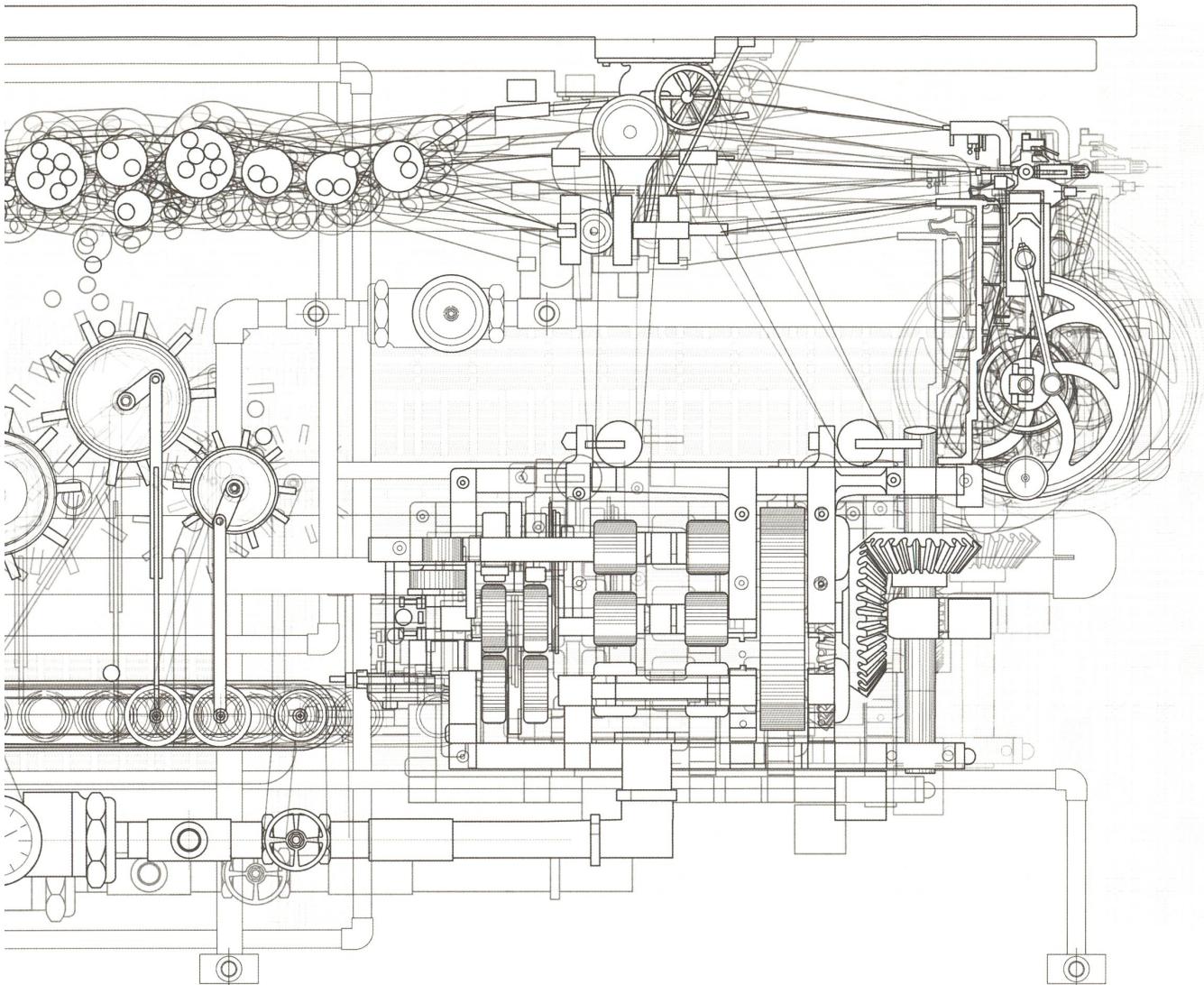
HELVETIA_03

Some time ago, Switzerland was one of the most economically advanced countries in the world. Thanks to state reinforced integration of almost all women in the job market, the high level of education given to them unfolded its full economic potential. Part-time work at the same time shifted the focus from bare work to leisure activities. People felt excited at the prospect of becoming an equal society where everyone works yet individually defines and enjoys their personal space offered by the abundance of free time.

On another level, state-subsidised social infrastructures, such as elderly houses and childcare centres, flourished. The constantly ageing population acceler-

ated this development. This led to a gradual increase of state taxes to cover rising expenses for social services. Studies had foreseen the negative economical effects of these higher taxes, and they proved to be right. The government was again forced to cut spending. Thus the all-encompassing process of outsourcing personal responsibilities to the state had to be changed on an individual level. What was gained in the economical boom, leisure time, was used as a potential to deal with the new condition.

The decreased wealth of everyone forced people to organise themselves collectively, not for charity reasons, but for the pure need of assistance. Communities of part-time workers were formed that provided care for older people and children. Personal time was traded and spent, replacing the role of money.



Nowadays one can clearly see the effects of this transformation of society. Once the reason for cities' appeal, public services are disappearing and people with them. Some move to the countryside, to the places in which they were born, and regroup as small communities with old friends. Others stay in the city and use the newly gained space to introduce small-scale productions of agriculture and goods. What unites them is their part-time working/living structure. The irregular working hours of these people helps to relieve the pressure placed on public transport systems, even though their capacities have already been reduced.

The composition of the communities is changing as well. What started as pragmatic coalitions of people facing a lack of public support is becoming more

ideological. Be it traditionalists, spiritualists or ecologists, there is a diversity of motivations to form groups that are becoming hard to classify. Shifts in production methods help each of them to increase their independence. Thanks to technological advancements like 3D-printing, groups are planning to become self-sufficient, even though everyone is still depending on some commodities imported from foreign countries. Life without a strong connection to a community is becoming unaffordable. No one speaks about individualisation anymore.

EPILOGUE

If one tries to speculate on possible futures, several obstacles occur. Speculations tend to simplify the contemporary conditions. It is impossible to create a complete picture of the reality on which to base the speculation. It also has to be defined what is part of the speculation and what is not. By dividing entities that are connected on different levels, speculations can be highly exclusive and simplistic. Problems addressed on one level turn out to have the opposite effect on another. This leads to a nonexistence of ‹true› arguments and is followed by the question of whether any solution can be applied on a universal scale. It seems irresponsible to speculate in this state of nescience.

Why still speculate about anything? Because it helps to isolate ideas and test them for their resilience in a future imagined condition. Thus we are convinced that speculation can lead to an awareness of the now, exceeding the perceivable reality at the moment. In the most successful case, it can even cause action stimulated by the shift of perspective.

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