

*FREI
RAUM*

*AN ODE
TO THE
BRIDGE*

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Sometimes I walk over the Lorraine bridge,
halfway over I pause and take a matchbox out of my jacket.
One by one I flick the matchsticks with my middle finger
and watch them spin down into the river.

THEORETICAL STATEMENT

This magazine is a summary of my observations and experiences in the city of Bern during the past three months. Like every magazine and every summary it corresponds to a certain moment and is set to evolve. In the end, it is no more than part of the reflection on the city and on me being a future architect within our society, serving the public.



Un grand merci to Hugo for his open ears and sharp comments, to Phillip for his photographic skills, to Quentin and Emile for their support, and to Gabi and Ludo, the ones without whom I wouldn't be.

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This work follows my observation that the public has changed its expectations towards the architectural object and towards the city. There is no longer a common quest towards a national or international style¹.

„Outre le travail, c'est la consommation qui aliène les hommes. Au lieu de vivre nos désirs, nous adoptons inconsciemment ceux que nous impose la société de consommation, par le biais de la publicité.“²

The population, alienated by consumerism in our neoliberal world, rather asks for individual fulfillment of desires within diverse communities³, asks for freedom⁴. I believe people are much more concerned by the alterations within their familiar environment than by those guided by the global capitalist market logic. We are concerned with finding our *Freiraum* in the city.

Freiraum is a term often used in politics to talk about open public space in the city - it refers to the inbetween, the *void* which suggests an opportunity for programmatic activation. The notion of *Freiraum* though directly refers to the *common*. The private garden of a house owner may be considered as a *Freiraum* by him as an individual, but not by anyone else. Affirming the diversity of *Freiraum*, it exclusively responds to the plural and rejects private enclosures. *Freiräume* are what we could call “porous thresholds” open to everyone, including newcomers⁵. Undeveloped areas, friches or just open space to some, autonomous centers, occupied houses and Wagenburgs to others, *Freiräume* are the anti-spaces of the consumerism blazed centers. *Freiräume* are political. A parallel can be established between *Freiraum* and Foucault's *heterotopia*⁶.

Freiräume are the essence for people to exercise the common quest to actively participate in the design of our cities, to be given the right to inhabit⁷ the city in order to co-create the oeuvre⁸. If the urban fabric should mirror its inhabitants, rather than external interveners, the inhabitants themselves have to obtain the tools to create the first-mentioned. The most important tool before all is the common ownership of ground. *Territorial democracy*, as we may call it, is at the heart of this work.

The backbone of this work is a particularly common type of construction: the bridge. Bridges connect different societies or just the two sides of a river. Bridges unite the separateness, unite different rhythms. Bridges are thresholds in the city.

Across five essays on the bridge I explore the reality of Bern and seek for opportunities from within it. This text is about finding a local strategy, about finding a logic of appropriation inherent to the locus. The starting point is an argument on the city of *Bern's* identity defined by its topography and bridges. The second essay situates the bridge in the *property*

1. I refer to the modern idea of a universal charta and to the competition between cities at a global scale.

2. Guy Debord, 1992, *La société du spectacle*, p. 67

3. Félix Parpoil, 2018, *Anarchitectes*, p. 2

4. Surely the population always demands to be free, but there where it concerns the architect and the politics is when this desire of freedom is confronted to the physical setting of the city, of the where and how, of the spontaneous and the planned.

5. Stavros Stavrides, 2016, *Common Space: The City as Commons*

6. Heterotopia is a concept first used in 1967 by Michel Foucault to describe places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic condition.

7. Henri Lefebvre, 1968, *Le droit à la ville*

8. *ibidem*, the oeuvre of the city

drama, in the question of who owns the city. It is followed by *Schützenmatte*, the description of a place defined by a bridge, where private property is rejected and a new political dimension is given to the bridge. The fourth essay is dedicated to *under the bridge*: a zoom on the social dimension of the river Aare, the element beneath Bern's bridges. Finally, *finding freedom* will conclude this theoretical statement with a set of tools - found and appropriated through the study on Bern - in order to conceive a *bridge* for the city.

I consider the bridge in the city as an *architectural* - highlighting the spatial qualities -, a *territorial* - in regard to infrastructure and nature - and a *social* - through its capacity to unite the people - device. Analogies, sometimes closeby, sometimes taken from afar are formulated in regard of the bridge's significance for Bern. This various fragments constitute a whole, a portrait of a city with a specific spirit thanks to *Freiraum*.

The bridge serves as a metaphorical figure and as a prototype of space: it is used in order to illustrate the notion of *Freiraum* and transpose it into built form. Or as it is: how to transpose the motif of the bridge, enriched with the concept of *Freiraum*, into an autonomous building?







In times when city centers look the same all over the occidental world, when the programs become as uniform as the market logic behind them, it is more than ever relevant to put an eye on the speculation with our cities. They are homogenised and uniformised, turned into organisms with absolute guarantees, rejecting hazard, spontaneity and the open confrontation¹. They become cities serving the capital yet forming an apolitical society. When everything is guaranteed, nothing is subject to discussion anymore. The *Freiräume* - where people *inhabit*² the city - become rare.

My regard is focussed on the city of Bern. It is not considered as one of the three economic centers of the country, called “metropolitan regions” by the Federal Office for Spatial Development. Rather named “capital region”, the city suits well for this work. Capital of Switzerland, capital of the Canton, Municipality - in short terms, Bern is the administrative center within the Swiss Federalism.

Often heard and probably true, the city runs by its own rhythm³. Due to a smaller financial pressure than in comparable swiss cities and a broad understanding of *le politique*⁴, construction projects take their time to evolve. These factors are an opportunity for *Freiräume* to emerge. An opportunity for the ownership of the land to be questioned by the common appropriation of it.

To grasp the notion of *Freiraum* in Bern, it is essential to understand the territory on which this city has been built. The main landscape-forming element is the Aare⁵. Fueled by the glacier water of the Alps this river carved a meandering valley through the porous sandstone and molasse of the region. Arriving from the southeast into the area, the widespread Aare valley narrows drastically and forms a river loop surrounding a steeply-flanked peninsula. This hilly headland presented itself as an ideal location to found a settlement.

Due to this specific topographical situation the city did not expand in a concentric manner, but in a linear way further uphill on the headland. Three times the city wall has been shifted westwards until the limit which today is represented by the train station.

The steep savage slope in the south and the north of the peninsula stayed nearly untouched by buildings. The southern slope was domesticated by terraced gardens where possible, and is divided by monumental retaining walls supporting platforms of buildings of public interest⁶. On the northern slope nature always dominated, and still today forest and field form an unexploited strip in the midst of the city. A set of stairs connect the lower Aare valley and the upper city platform all around the peninsula, noble in the south, rather rustic in the north.

BERN, founded in 1191, the city is since 1848 the Bundesstadt (capital) of Switzerland.

1. *Ville garantie* is a concept established by the sociologue Marc Breviglieri. It describes the contemporary city as a place of absolute guarantees. Everything is normalized and reglemented, nothing occurs through spontaneity.

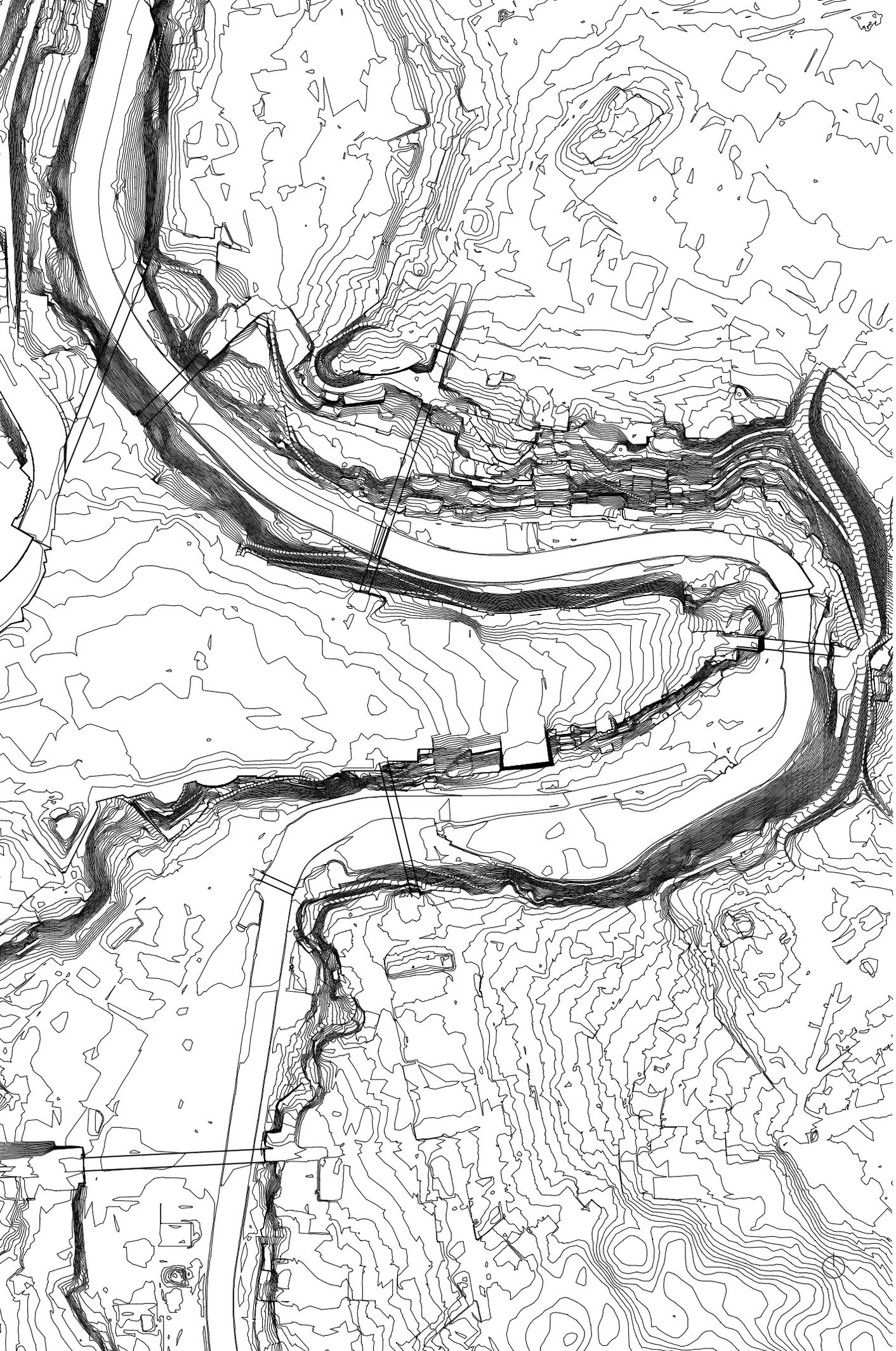
2. to *inhabit* the city does not mean to dwell the city. It means to actively participate, create and contribute to the city life.

3. A common saying in Switzerland is that in Bern everything functions at a slower speed. The inhabitants of the region are known to be slow speakers.

4. *Le politique* is a concept by the philosopher Jacques Rancière. *Le politique* is „this place of meeting“, this point of confluence where two heterogeneous processes meet: the process that we could call “governmental”: *la police*, and the process of emancipation: *la politique*.

5. The Aare is the longest river that both rises and ends entirely within Switzerland. Its total length from its source to its junction with the Rhine comprises about 295 kilometres, during which distance it descends 1,565 m, draining an area of 17,779 km², almost entirely within Switzerland, and accounting for close to half the area of the country, including all of Central Switzerland. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aare, consulted the 4.12.2018

6. Münsterplattform accommodates the garden of the cathedral. The Bundesterrasse is the publicly accessible terrace of the Bundeshaus (Federal Palace). Today, both platforms are well frequented parks.



The stabilised peace situation around the 1800's changed the necessity of defence. The increasing population and the industrial revolution in the 19th century asked for a simplification of flows and an expansion of the city. This resulted in the destruction of the city's bastions and the outgrowth of the cities natural boundaries.

For the first time bridges were built - not only to cross the river - but to cross the entire Aare valley to reach the surrounding plateaus. A considerable elevation difference exists between these plateaus and the old town in the center. This unfavourable circumstances demanded constructions close to the limit of the possible⁷. The first *high bridge* (Hochbrücke) to be completed was the Nydeggbücke in 1844. Privately financed, the revenue for the company was guaranteed by the bridge toll. Being the first of six high bridges to be built in the inner city throughout a period of 100 years, the Nydeggbücke is a sandstone clad freestone structure consisting of three arches over the Aare. With a span of 46 meters the central arch was until the 1890s the largest of that kind in Europe.

Today, a total of 18 bridges span the river Aare on the communal territory of Bern. Due to technical innovations and financial limitations, the bridges clearly differentiate from the rest of the buildings in the old town. Their appearance tells us a story about different architectural styles and their materiality demonstrates the potentialities and limitations of the construction of their time. The construction of the grand bridges was a continuous topic of political controversy - and still is⁸. The disputes about the location and the construction materials of the bridges - stone or iron - reflected the rivalry between the city's conservative and liberal factions⁹. The bridges thus became representative architectures and the bridgeheads public buildings of particular interest: monuments in their own right.

The second high bridge to be completed was the *Red Bridge*¹⁰ for trains, chariots and pedestrians in 1858. It fits in a period which marked the beginning of the railway construction boom¹¹ - and in a larger sense the beginning of the cohesion of Switzerland as a confederation. The densest railway and *autobahn* (highway) network of the world which has ever since been constructed opens up the "nation"¹². This mobility infrastructure acts as an additional layer, spanning like a web across the landscape of the *swiss central plateau*. Culturally diverse and split up in different language regions the population is interconnected by the innumerable bridges and tunnels which act as a unifier of a scattered society.



Kornhausbrücke in 1898

7. Stefan von Bergen, 1998, Brückenschläge in die Zukunft - die Schlüsselrolle der Hochbrücken in Berns Urbanisierung

8. A new bicycle bridge is planned across the Aare in the north of the city to connect the Länggasse and the Breitenrain suburbs. The construction and the design of this bridge are controversially discussed subjects. stadtgesprach.derbund.ch, consulted the 11.1.19

9. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Listof_Aare_bridges_in_Bern, consulted the 12.12.18

10. *Rote Brücke* - vernacular vor iron bridge

11. The first railway built exclusively on Swiss soil was opened in 1847 between Zurich and Baden. A real railway construction boom began only with the passing of the railway law in 1852. The nationalization of the different railway companies in the period between 1901 and 1909, when the five major private railways were transferred to the Swiss Federal Railways SBB. de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geschichte_der_Schweizer_Eisenbahn, 03.01.2019)

12. The autobahn network is called *Nationalstrassennetz*. According to the federalism in place there are national, cantonal and communal roads.

< 1/9000: bridges and topography of Bern

When put in place, a bridge guarantees a passage. It often replaced a ferry, which depended on the current of a stream, to establish a permanent connection between two banks. Built in wood or stone¹³ the bridge is the support to traverse a natural obstacle while preserving it. Speaking of the bridge though means speaking of nature itself. Whether fallen trees that offered a path over a stream or a canyon, natural stone bridges created by erosion, or jungle plants whose long lianas hung between the trees: the first bridge builders always took the ideas for their constructions from nature. Not only are bridges often based on the static principles of their natural predecessors, but in the hilly topography of Bern they integrate in a landscape as “given” environment. They become part of the natural terrain. Certainly though, the bridge is not nature as such, but rather domesticates it.

The bridge is architecture and structure, materiality usually acting as a critical binder of these two aspects either blends in with the environment or stands in contrast to it. This dichotomy is visible on the two last built bridges leading to the old town peninsula. The *Lorrainebrücke* was built after the plans of Robert Maillart¹⁴ from 1928 to 1930 in reinforced concrete mixed with different aggregates in order to obtain a greenish color similar to that of Bernese sandstone to fit in with the old town. In addition, the arch of the bridge remind of the *Nydeggbrücke*. Ten years later the *Lorraine railway viaduct* was built right beside to replace the *Red Bridge*. This time no decorative elements were added, nor was there a hiding of the structural concept. At that time the Lorraine railway viaduct was one of the only constructions made of apparent reinforced concrete in the city center. Whether it was due to the arrival of modern paradigms or for purely economical reasons, we won't be able to answer.

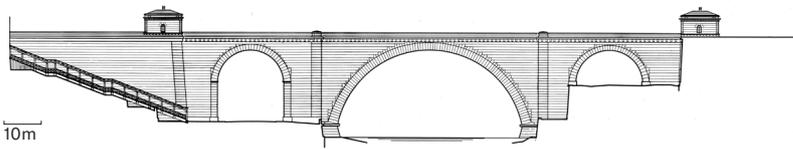
But the reason for building a bridge was always economic. People wanted to save time. Bridges were able to avoid long and potentially dangerous detours through valleys and gorges. The transport of goods was much faster and easier to handle. In addition, the scope of action of many settlers expanded by bridges. Contact and trade with other settlements have been greatly facilitated by the established transport routes and the tolls were subject to revenue for the bridge holding companies. A situation which changed with the foundation of the *Confederatio Helvetica* in 1848. A portion of the new Swiss Federal Constitution came into effect in 1853 and removed all internal tolls on travel and trade. Not only did this render obsolete the tollhouses on bridges, but it also relieved the bridge from entrepreneurial interests. Bridges - like the *Nydeggbrücke* in 1853 - were turned over to the state and became common good. A new era of free mobility was about to start.

13. Untertorbrücke was the first Bridge of the city. In 1256 it replaced a ferry. First the bridge was built in wood. After having been destroyed during a flooding it was transformed into a stone bridge in 1489.

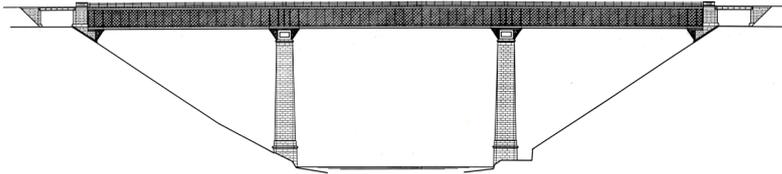
14. Robert Maillart (1872 - 1940) was a Swiss civil engineer who revolutionized the use of structural reinforced concrete with such designs as the three-hinged arch and the deck-stiffened arch for bridges, and the beamless floor slab and mushroom ceiling for industrial buildings. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Maillart, 10.1.2019)

> Bridges spanning from the old town to the surrounding plateaus built from 1844 until 1941.

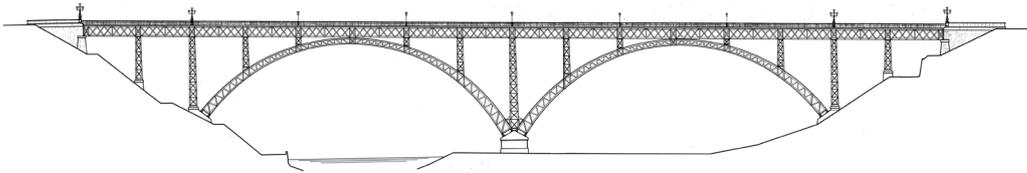
Nydeggbrücke, 1844



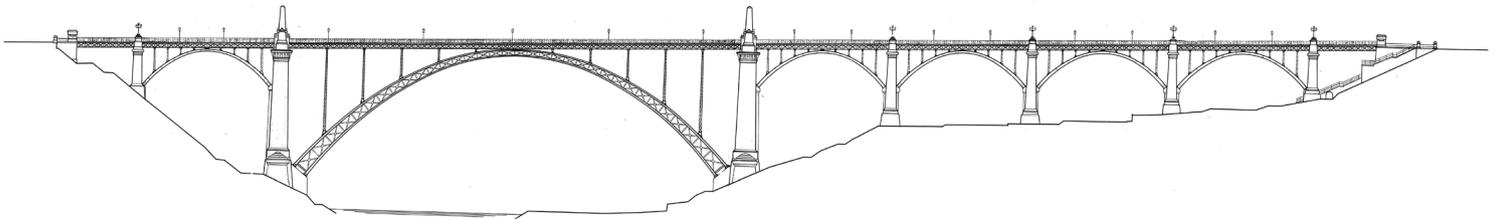
Red Bridge, 1858



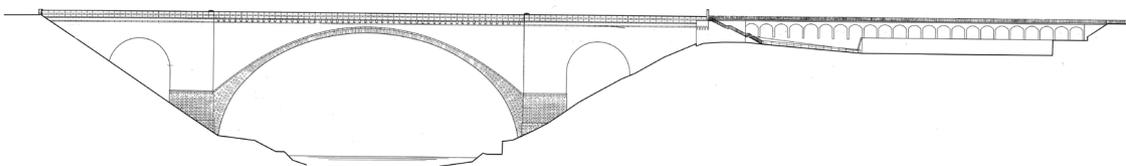
Kirchenfeldbrücke, 1883



Kornhausbrücke, 1898



Lorrainebrücke, 1930



Lorraine railway viaduct, 1941









-  Bourgeoisie Community
-  Entrepise
-  Private Owner
-  Investors
-  Associations
-  Commonly Owned
-  Church

„We dini vier Nachbare e Zuun boue,
bisch o du ihzüünt“¹

Freiraum rejects the idea of enclosures, of enclaves² in the city. Enclosures exist due to the abstract lines they materialize; the lines which separate privately owned pieces of land from commonly owned and shared land.

Liberalism, next to having offered the individual a new independence, has also made the right to private property one of the most protected in our contemporary societies. It is important to highlight the two notions inherent to the word property which illustrate the problem. Firstly, property stands for *something that is owned, for the exclusive right of possessing, enjoying and disposing of a thing*.³ Secondly it refers to *a piece of real estate, such as a parcel of land*.⁴

Turning *commonly owned*⁵ into privately owned land or giving it a function of purely private interest is called the privatisation of land. Still today many cities continue to sell their properties. Not only do they harm the *Freiraum*, but they also lose control of the development of the city itself, they give the most important tool of planning away. If all land is being sold, where are we going to build the bridges of the future? Or as Hans Bernoulli wrote in 1946 in “Die Stadt und ihr Boden” quoting Werner Taesler:

„Nicht wer die Wohnung baut,
Nicht wer das Haus besitzt,
Sondern der, dem Grund und Boden gehört,
Der bestimmt den Aufbau unserer Städte.“⁶

This statement couldn't be more precise even today. Following the economic crisis in the banking sector that started in 2008, the capital has been invested even more in the stable real estate market. Higher profit rates on property speculation induced this development and made the ownership of land less accessible. Nowadays, a limited number of landlords defines the architecture of the city.

At the same time it would be naive to believe that the *property drama* is solved when all the land of the city is commonly owned⁷. The owner, in this case the state which represents the public, also has to manage the land in the interest of the *common*.

Looking at the case of the SBB, (Swiss Federal Railway Company) for once at a national level, the question becomes evident⁸. The subsidiary company SBB Immobilien - by a majority still state-owned - operates and builds as a private operator neglecting the interest of the common. The so-called public spaces are privatised⁹. The architecture is built in order to maximize profit. Public space mutates into a controlled alibi¹⁰. The liberty of appropriation is severely limited. These places are turned into enclaves, not accessible to all the public anymore.

THE PROPERTY DRAMA is a film of 2017 by Arno Brandhuber and Christopher Roth about “Who owns the land on which we build?”. The film shows how cities have lost control of urban planning due to a sell out of formerly state owned land.

1. When your four neighbours build a fence, also you are fenced, verse in song “La di nid la frässä” from the hip hop group Migo&Buzz, 2018

2. Stavros Stavrides, 2016, Common Space: The City as Commons

3. en.wiktionary.org/wiki/property, consulted the 28.12.2018

4. en.wiktionary.org/wiki/property, consulted the 28.12.2018

5. When I speak of commonly owned land, I speak of land owned by the state.

6. Hans Bernoulli, 1946, Die Stadt und ihr Boden,
Not the one who builds the dwelling,
Not the one who owns the house,
But the one who owns property and land,
he defines the development of our cities.

7. Basel: 26.02.2016, 67% say yes to the Neue Bodeninitiative which foresees building leases and forbids to sell communal land, Bern: 2018, the community proposes to buy your property.

8. Niklaus Scherr, 2018, Die gigantischen Gewinne der SBB

9. The hall of the Zurich main station is rented out during 225 days of the year. nzz.ch/zuerich/serienverbrechen-an-einem-raumwunder

10. At the Lausanne station buskers are only allowed to perform on a indicated area of 1m².

< A brief overview of the different land owners in the city center of Bern.

The *bridge* as a figure has a particular relation to property and its boundaries. In a way the bridge is the duplication of a potentially developable piece of land, which opposes the notion of conventional land ownership, where the imprint on the cadastral plan theoretically represents the intersection of an extrusion from the centre of the earth towards infinity with the surface of the globe¹¹.

“The cadastral plan is the most rigid and at the same time flexible element of the city: the idea of property which is at its basis endured world wars and major fires. But its abstract lines are actually only linked to the physical reality by a few brass bolts. The force of this lines is enormous and cannot be overestimated. They define significantly the physical form of the city, since they build the framework and the starting point of every architectural project. At the same time these lines leave very direct traces in the form of barriers, hedges and colour changes on facades.”¹²

The cadastral plan has a tremendous impact on the form of the city. Buildings are built forms whose outlines fit into the extrusion of a land plot. Not only do the buildings not intersect with the plot line extrusion, but (swiss) building law implements a step back from it: *Grenzabstand*¹³. The bridge is the building which in terms of its form and of its functioning disrespects the limits imposed by the cadastral plan. Its construction as such intersects the extrusion of neighbouring plots. In disrespect of the adjacent plot lines it unites separated parcels. It is a threshold in the city rejecting the idea of singular ownership.

Who owns the city? Or rather, who owns the land? A more than relevant question, lacking too often presence in the architectural discourse.

A first response had been given in the old testament of the book of books¹⁴: land should not be sold forever. It suggests that the land belongs to nobody, meaning that it belongs to everybody - to the collective. In 1218 AD the *Stadtprivileg* von Bern: “*Stadtluft macht frei*” stated for the first time freedom in relation to the city, the citizen’s existence dissociated from ownership of land. It liberated the citizen from the manorial system.

The existence dissociated from ownership of land is relative though. In the 16th century the privatisation of land started with the enclosure of the commons in England. This led to a new dependence of the people on land ownership. This dependence of the citizen finally resulted in ideological and crisis-driven oppositions of the current property system in the twentieth century. The lack of accessibility to the city - no access to free cultural expression and diffusion, no access to dwelling in the city - has been fought for the past 50 years now¹⁵. In Bern, this fight for the right to the city is crystallised in one specific site. The *Reitschule* on the *Schützenmatte*, an veritable *urban artefact*¹⁶ in Rossi’s terms underlining the idea of the commons in the city.

11. Jaques Blumer from Atelier 5 during a talk in 2017. Atelier 5 built several Siedlungen where the limits of private property are questioned.

12. Jan Engelke, Lukas Fink, 2017, *Die Schönheit des Katasterplans*, translated by me

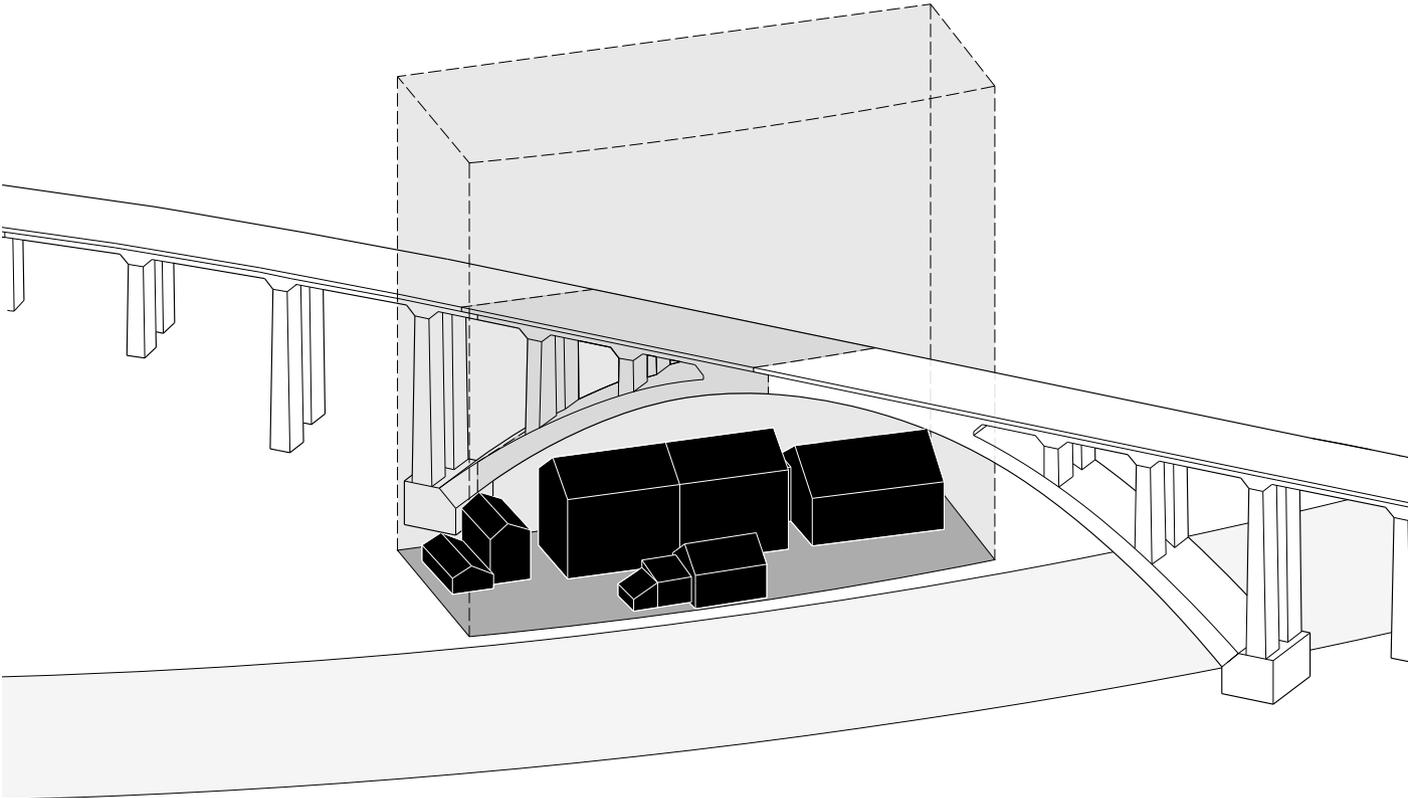
13. Construction law is imposed on a communal level, the *Grenzabstand* differs depending on the circumstances. The *Grenzabstand* and the *Nutzungsziffer* are two of the main reasons why the swiss agglomerations cannot be densified adequately. The *Grenzabstand* sometimes reveals the absurdity of the property limits.

14. Old testament. 3.Moses 25, Verse 23: „Grund und Boden darf nicht für immer verkauft werden, denn das Land ist mein und ihr seid Fremdlinge und Beisassen bei mir.“

15. 1968 is 50 years ago. The “Right to the city” from Henri lefebvre was written in 1968.

16. The urban artifact, as defined by Rossi, is not only a building, but a fragment of the city. The urban artifact should be understood as *fatto urbano* or *faite urbaine*, they are not just physical thing in the city, but all of its history, geography, structure and connection with the general life of the city as noted by Peter Eisenman.
<http://thecityasaproject.org/2011/08/type/> (28.12.2018)

> The extrusion of a plot that intersects with a bridge







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SCHÜTZENMATTE a common in the city

SCHÜTZENMATTE is the former shooting range of the city. After having been a parking for 50 years, it now is a surface for free appropriation. The autonomous cultural center Reitschule is on the Schützenmatte.

1. *Heisser Herbst*: various strafbars, squats and the violent dissolution of the free land of Zaffaraya. Demonstrations in the center which caused 10-20% less profit for many shops during the christmas sales.

2. "Dass sich die meisten Städte heute Partizipation auf die Fahne schreiben und die Bürgerinnen stärker an Entscheidungen beteiligen wollen, ist eine Errungenschaft der basisdemokratischen Auseinandersetzungen, die in autonomen Zentren stattgefunden hat."
Martina Nussbaumer, Historikerin Wien Museum, <https://squatopia.ch/category/text/> 4.1.2019

3. Participation processes and interim uses are used to prevent squats, prevent a bigger critique of the general system.

4. M15 in Madrid in Spain. Syntagma Square in Athens, Greece.

5. „Erich, warum bisch du nid ehrlich?“, Song by Müslüm against the closure of the Reitschule

6. Left executive powers in seven of the ten biggest cities of Switzerland, <https://www.srf.ch/news/schweiz/urbane-regierungen-so-stark-sind-die-schweizerstaedte-nach-links-gerueckt#/de>, consulted the 2.1.2019

7. According to the development map of the City (STEK).

8. Bern's marketing image is "culture capital". In order to strengthen this image a cultural mile is envisioned on the Hodlerstrasse.

> 1/3500: implantation of the Schützenmatte in the city fabric

After seven years of battling for an autonomous youth center, the Reitschule finally opened its doors in December 1987. It was the consequence of the so-called *hot autumn*¹ and the beginning of a new era of politics regarding Freiraum in Bern. The much more pragmatic approach of the youth movement of the 80ies did bear fruits. In comparison to the more ideological movement of 68, the straight-forward actions taken by the punks had a tremendous impact on city planning², if one considers the cooperative revival and the participative procedures we encounter today.

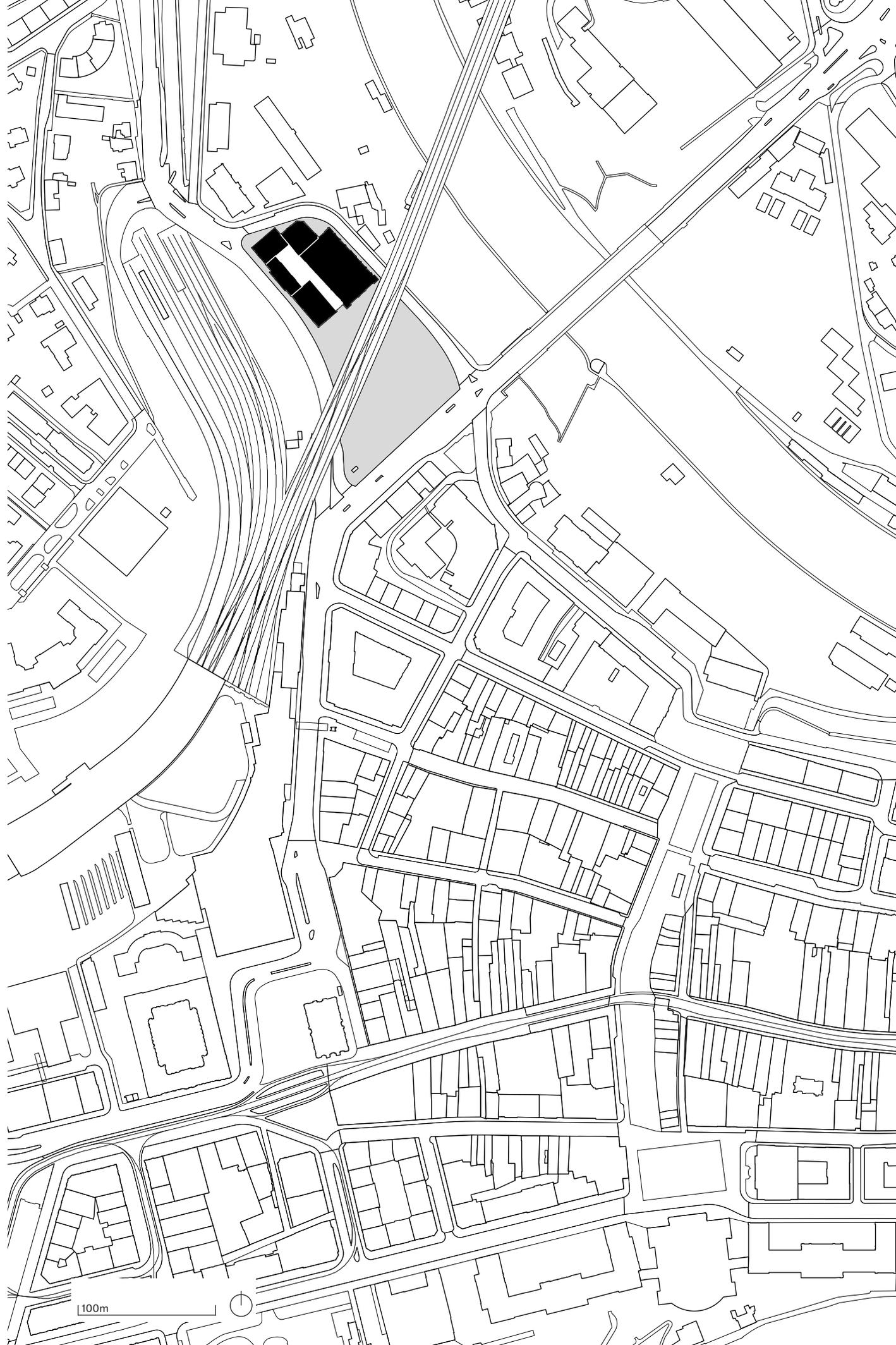
The Schützenmatte, almost 40 years after the first squatting of the Reitschule, today still is object to develop new planning tools for the city. The community around the Reitschule is subject when it comes to exert pressure on the communal authorities. Partly successful, a number of tools have been given to the public to participate, react upon and intervene in the city planning processes. But too often the public is considered as the fifth wheel of the car³.

In many cities across the globe the *fight for a common city* continues. The will of the public to form the city is demonstrated. Less crisis-driven than in the cities of the European South⁴, but as political in its roots, the claims in Bern are similar.

By welcoming a wider public in a squat, a certain legitimacy is established among the *public*. Over the last 20 years five votations on the Reitschule have been held. All of the initiatives aimed at closing down the cultural center, but they have been smashed down with notable results. The creativity and optimism of the campaigns against the closure spread an explicit message⁵. Bern's inhabitants are broadly supportive of the diversity of communities which form the city. This political climate⁶ is an opportunity for flourishing *Freiraum* policies.

The Schützenmatte is situated just outside of the northeastern corner of the old town of Bern (UNESCO World Heritage). As much a *pièce de résistance* as the *Altstadt*, it preaches the urban difference that it embodies. Like other historically important public buildings (theatre, casino, museum) the site is situated on the edge of the Aare peninsula right at the end of a bridge. The Schützenmatte is in a way the bridgehead of the Lorrainebrücke.

Thus it is part of the infrastructural network which connects Bern's concentrically arranged districts to the nucleus of the built fabric which is today the square of the train station⁷. In immediate proximity of the Kunstmuseum and the PRO-GR, which unite exhibition spaces, ateliers and live venues the Schützenmatte is part of the envisioned *cultural mile*⁸ different politicians are pushing for.



The potential of the site, if we allow to use this term, does not lie in the economic return of a so-called *development*⁹ of the property, but in the pioneering role the “plan for the Schützenmatte”¹⁰ may take up in the evolution of Bern. A scenario exclusively ensured since the site is a property of the city, of the *public*.

To project at the Schützenmatte is a direct confrontation with the history of the city. The spatial configuration of this seemingly “lost triangle”¹¹ is obviously the product of a complicated superposition of different projects which makes a historical analysis of the morphology of this place inevitable.

Although the site is right next to today’s city center, it has never been part of the *founding plan*¹² which consisted of a city originally conceived without squares, but where the street space would fulfill the function for public gatherings. Three parallel streets which climb up the peninsula from west to east are the backbone of the old town which experienced two major extensions according to the same scheme. The former trenches, filled up between the different extensions still are today the only places in the city with a public square character.

The third and last extension of the old town was the construction of a star-shaped bastion, only of military nature during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). At its north-western end was placed the Schützenmatte. But it is only until the beginning of the nineteenth century and the significant changes of the political and economical climate that Bern did undergo major transformations. The name giving shooting range is moved away, the ramparts are demolished and the trenches are filled up. This new morphology allows for the railway to be built.

It is the arrival of the train in the city center that presented the biggest impact on site: firstly it connected Bern with the rest of the country, and secondly it required for a high bridge to be built across the Aare. In 1858 the Red Bridge, a two level truss bridge started operating and turned the Schützenmatte into a gate (welcoming site) for the city of Bern.

Due to the higher opposite edge in the Lorraine, a leveling-up bank was built on the Schützenmatte. Thus separated from the city center, the terrain of the former shooting range remained without a defined program. Only in 1897 was the Reitschule built behind the embankments¹³. From the inauguration of the riding school to the construction of the new railway line in 1936, this building and the square in front of it were used in many different ways. From the very beginning, the Reitschule was not designed exclusively as a horse-sport facility: it was also planned as a venue for popular meetings, exhibitions or circus performances.

The city’s population celebrated there both May 1st¹⁴ and August 1st¹⁵. Socialists and patriots had found their place in the Reitschule. The riding school accommodated both serious sobriety and joyful frolic. It unified contradictions and opposites under one roof and in this way moved into the social center of Bern.

9. When we speak of real estate and digitalization, often the positively co-noted terms *development* and *progress* are applied to blur the clear view on the actual changes of a transformation.

10. Since the 60s the Schützenmatte is object to planning discussions. It is the bone of contention between the different political forces.

11. Lucius Burkhardt talking about spaces wedged-in by infrastructural constructions and left behind by planners, 1984



12. Bern in 1638

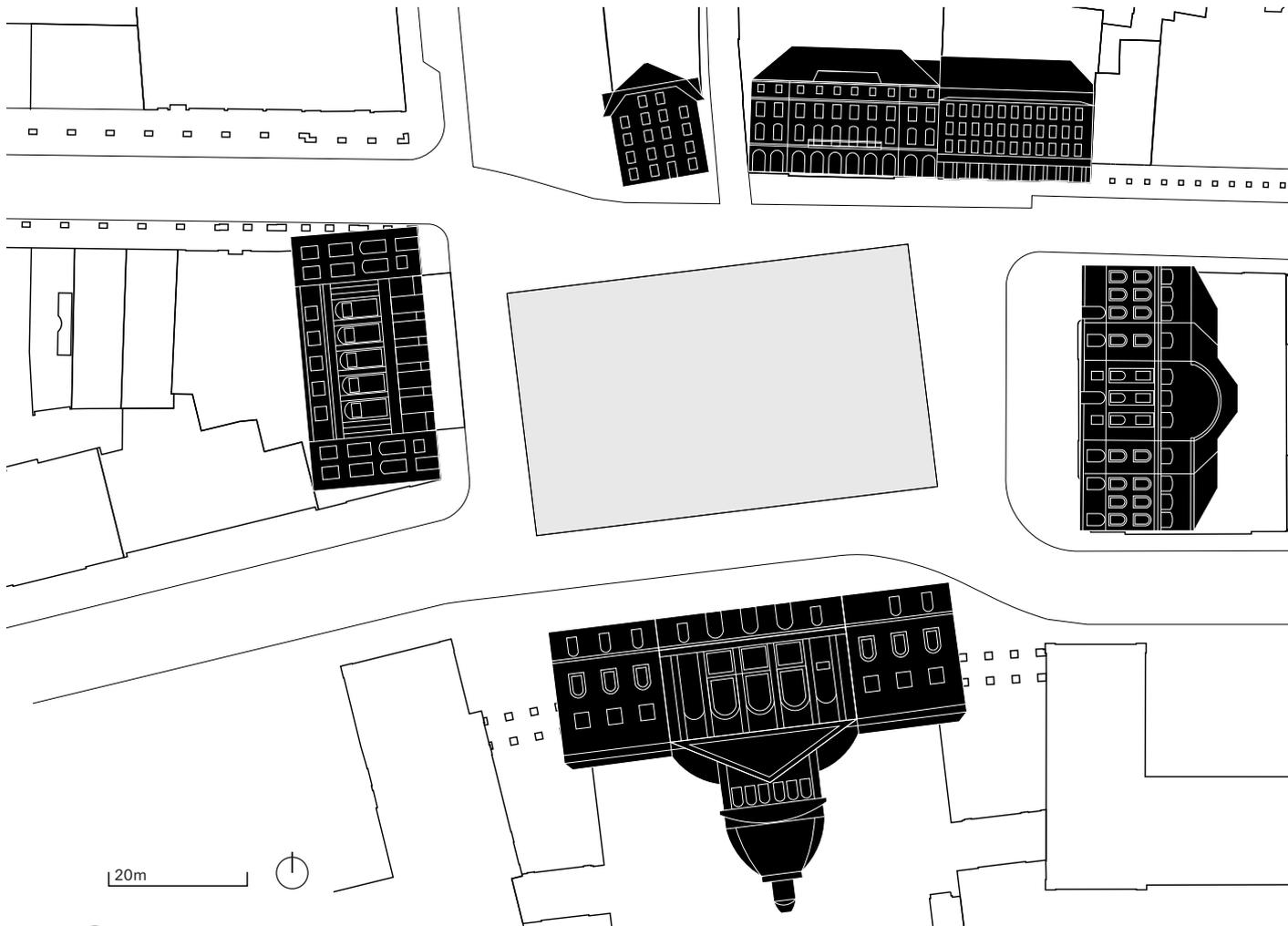
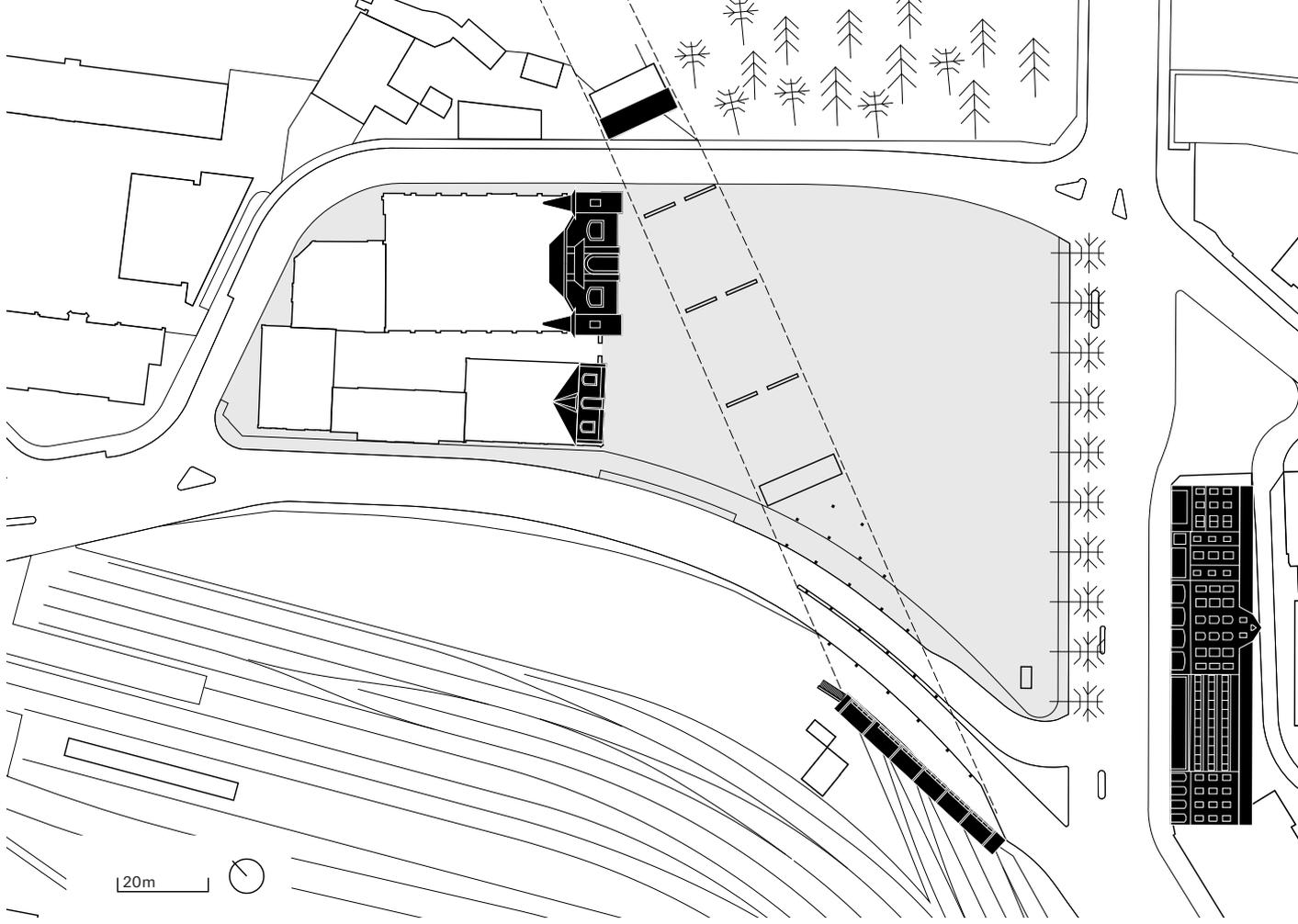


13. Schützenmatte with the embankment of the old railway line

14. 1st may: International Workers’ Day

15. 1st august: Swiss National Day

> top: The Schützenmatte
bottom: Bundesplatz



However, the construction of the new railway line - and with it a new viaduct - put an end to the original versatile use. Although the destruction of the old embankments and the design of this bridge ensured a certain permeability between the old town and the Reitschule, the newly created surface became no more than a parking.

From the 1960s onwards the building of the Reitschule was designated for demolition. For another 15 years some leftover horses made their dancing turns in the hall, until the 1980s when another much more powerful dance took over. It suggests the new railway viaduct having been a blessing in disguise. A bridge that triggered an opportunity for a counterculture to emerge and sustainably transform the political landscape of the capital.

Acknowledging the social, political and economical factors which have led to the resistance of the Schützenmatte within the built fabric of Bern, a closer look at the architecture of this - let's call it a *square* - is necessary. This won't be a claim for the square's not particularly good architecture, nor will it deny the qualities of its given spatial situation. It is a square which manifests an *urban difference* and is absolutely present in the city's life. Thus the qualities are to be found in the presence of the site.

The Schützenmatte square is an island in a sea of infrastructural elements. The Lorrainebrücke, which is the busiest bridge in the city center, the Lorraine railway viaduct and the access road to the autobahn encounter on site. At the same time the Schützenmatte would belong to the sea of "white on the Nolli plan". We may have to call it a very well connected and accessible island in the city fabric.

It is in many ways the antithesis of the other big white surface on the nolli plan - the *Bundesplatz* (federal square). While the void of the Schützenmatte was in a way the hazardous by-product of infrastructural interventions of greater importance, the federal square was planned as a square with a certain idea of power relations and their representation. It was built in 1902 with the construction of the new parliament building. In a city formerly without squares several buildings had to be demolished in order to clear the surface. And like the Schützenmatte the federal square has longtime been used as a parking lot: a mobile yet permanent program, which expropriates a square of its political dimension.

The two squares could not be more differentiated than they are. If the Bundesplatz is the embodiment of the institutional democracy, then the Schützenmatte is the materialization of the *civil society*¹⁶. And somehow they are linked like the two ends of a bridge if we consider that a bridge connects two points, two milieus as different as imaginable. A recent event purposefully illustrates the relation the two squares maintain: the march for equal pay and against discrimination of women on the 22nd of september 2018. Like for many other demonstrations in the past years¹⁷ the gathering and start of the march was on the Schützenmatte, and it ended at the Bundesplatz. We may extract from this phenomena that the

16. *Civil society* is the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens or individuals and organizations in a society which are independent of the government. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society, consulted the 7.1.2019)

17. Tanz dich frei, 30 Jahre sind nicht genug - Reitschule, Antifa

federal square, under complete surveillance and order may not serve as a *support of democracy*. It is rather a place like the Schützenmatte - liberated from the pompous rhetorics of solemn facades which express an idea of hierarchy and power - that acts as a social condenser. The bridge as the most basic shelter of all is the facade for egalitarianism. The Lorraine railway viaduct thus constitutes a facade of the most politicized square in town.

A layout which by many is criticised as a *Unort*¹⁸ is the support of the most inhabited square of the city. How can we, from an architectural point of view, speak of the non-functioning of this place? It is an expression of the quest for *Freiraum*. It is the liberation of monuments from the classical canon of rhetorical representations.

This quest for *Freiraum* and the will to create autonomously can be also situated in the numerous ephemeral structures on the Schützenmatte. The terrain has over the past 4 years become a *city laboratory*¹⁹. The ground was basically “given” for free use to the public in order to be activated. Led by an association and open to everyone, the appropriation of the vast surface occurs naturally and is subject to systematic negotiation. A democratic process is triggered.

The ephemeral only responds to the given spatial and material condition, it does not materialize the limits of property. In the end, this square which is not defined by the delimiting facades, but rather articulated around elements on a vast surface works well and responds to the idea of *Freiraum*.

Strangely, the square does not figure on the “official” map of *Freiraum* of the city of Bern²⁰. It shows that the plot is seen as a “developable” piece of land by the city authorities. This is why one has to remain critical when talking about *Freiraum*. Also because the handling of ephemeral structures and programs has recently become a business model for profit.

All but ephemeral is the building just behind the railway bridge. Nowadays protected as a *Monument of National Importance*, the Reitschule stands its ground. The romantic ensemble is squeezed in between two roads and the Lorraine bridge. Only the presence of the Reitschule as an autonomous center could engender such a development of the whole Schützenmatte site. It is a building and an organisation where democracy is intact, where *la politique* is lived. Still today, the cultural center Reitschule is governed by a *Basisdemokratie*²¹. This form of governing, while complicating fast decision taking, guarantees a steady reevaluation of the place. It offers people with the courage needed to develop a differentiated viewpoint. In regards of the *culture capital program*²² of the city authorities it sends out an important signal: culture does not exist without political discourse. It merely becomes obsolete.

18. *Unort*: a place without qualities and a negative reputation.

19. Since 2015 the Schützenmatte site was “given” to the public to test the site’s participative potential.

20. Stadt Bern, 2016, STEK: Siedlung und Freiraum

21. *Basisdemokratie* is a form of decision taking which empowers as much as possible the individual and demands for a consensus of the group. Only when everyone accepts a decision, it is put forward.

22. Bern’s marketing image is “culture capital”.

The Reitschule is an ensemble characterized by a forecourt, a grand hall, a few small volumes and a courtyard. Behind the sculptural facade which binds all these elements, a tremendous programmatic richness is hidden: a grand hall, an attic live venue (named Dachstock), a night club, a restaurant (named Sous le Pont), a bar, a cinema, a theatre, a workshop, a print shop, a women's room, a politics store, a newspaper redaction and a flat. Most of these various units are accessed by the passage and the courtyard. The courtyard as a heart of the complex and the spiry hipped roofs allude to a fortress, something which is confirmed when taking a look at the various on-site clashes with police involvement and their media coverage. The various spatial and "fictive" limits on site, define a very precise choreography between the antagonists to the established system and the forces of order. The dimension of the intervention is measured according to the trespassing of the different spatial limits by the police when approaching and entering the Reitschule (from the south-east).

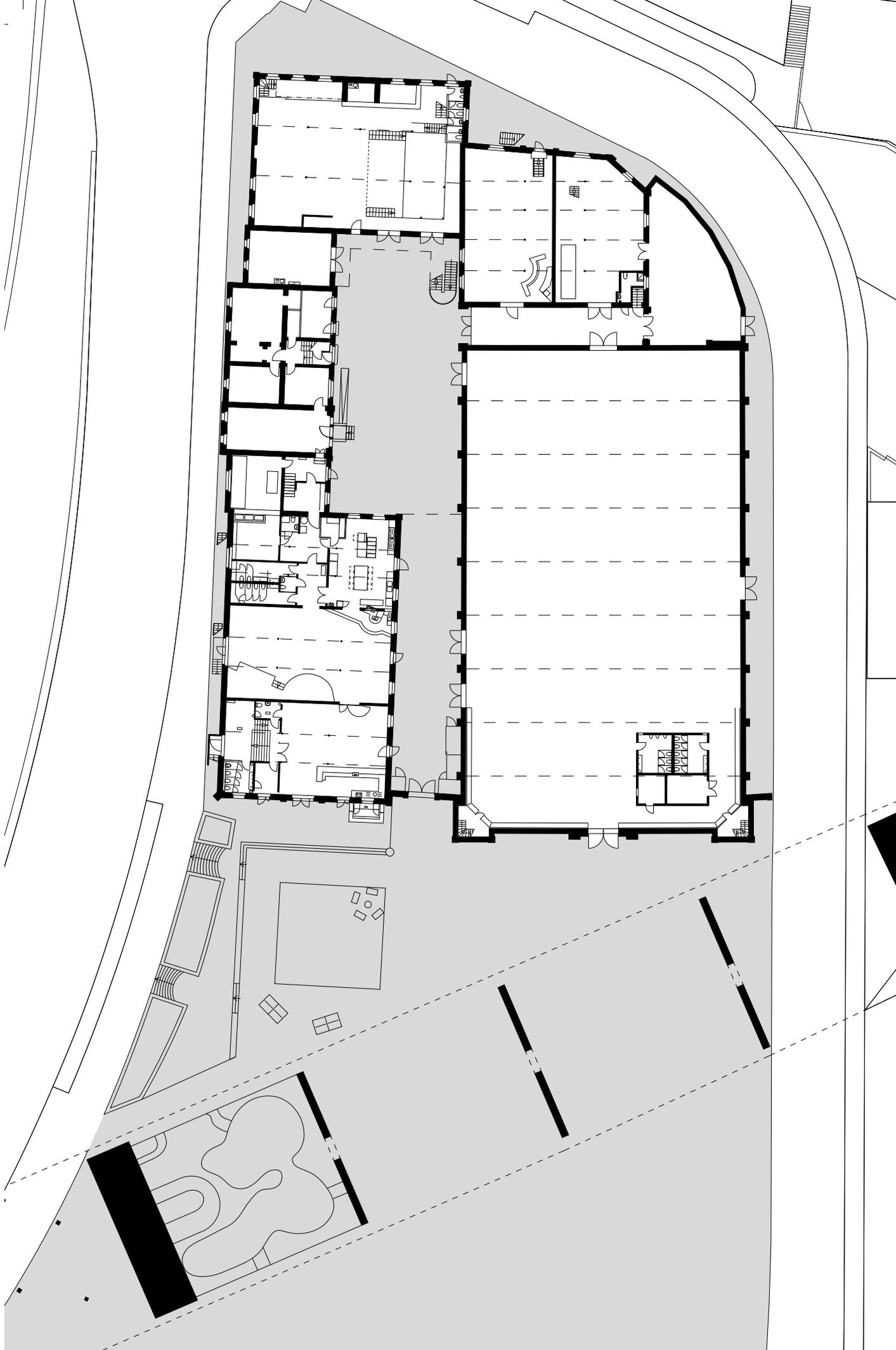
The bridge over the forecourt and the passage with the courtyard engender a, what we could call spatial thickness of the facade that offers the necessary discretion for a liberated appropriation of the place.

The ambiance at the Reitschule largely depends on the events²³ and the intensity found there. Different temporalities are united in this conglomerate of programs and different individuals. A silent piece of theatre happens next to an aggressive rap battle. Wet and cold mornings when the Reitschule stands there as a repelling monster oppose the warm summer nights with thousands of people celebrating life in what at that moment seems an almost vanished ensemble. But on cold nights the fire that burns on the forecourt of the Reitschule offers us continuity. A fire²⁴ that unites the community under the bridge.

23. I refer to event as what would be Ereignis or Geschehnis in german.

24. In the forecourt of the Reithalle are placed several fire baskets. At night time, and especially in winter, there are always fires burning.

> 1/500: Ground floor of the Reitschule and the forecourt



WICHTIG! EURE STREITSCHULE BLEIBT AUTONOM





UNDER THE BRIDGE

we are all equal

UNDER THE BRIDGE is a German saying that refers to the last shelter when you have lost everything.

1. Martin Heidegger uses the example of a bridge to explain how a building can meet the needs of men without interfering with „the fourfold,“ or the earth, sky, divinities, and mortals. The bridge demonstrates how building does not mean simply to construct something, but it also means to cultivate, keep, preserve, or gather the fourfold. The bridge constructs a connection from one bank to another, but it also preserves the stream below. The bridge constructs and preserves, and it does these things at once. In this way, the bridge serves as a model of how humans should dwell in the city and for how they should learn to dwell before they build., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8toup6rYIk>, 10.1.2019)

2. Regular floods occur in the Matte suburb. A major fire destroyed 600 houses in the old town in 1405.

3. The stream is called violent
But the riverbed that narrows him
Noone calls violent
Bertold Brecht, Buch der Wendungen

4. Access to water cannot be private. According to Swiss law all shores have to be accessible to the public.

5. Court decision about a demonstration made with the consultation of illegally made CCTV footage.
<http://www.journal-b.ch/de/082013-politik/3177/Zerst%C3%B6rt-die-Videokameras!.htm>, consulted the 2.12.2018, and the collective punishment of the Basel18 demonstrators.
<https://barrikade.info/Weitere-Solidarit%C3%A4t-mit-den-Basel-18-1574>, consulted the 12.11.2018

Under the bridge is the preferred playground for sprayers or a handy shelter to park an old car. It is no man's land or a busy road. It is a river. It is home.

Living under the bridge can be referred to as the most basic form of dwelling. *Unter der Brücke leben* in the German language signifies that you have lost any type of conventional dwelling and you are going to live "without fixed home". The under the bridge is somehow considered as the "last livable" dwelling before nothing².

Two elements which render even the most basic architecture of all, the degree zero of architecture which the bridge is, obsolete, are fire and water. Whether it is the fire in front of the Reitschule or the water of the Aare river, both of them are what we could call anti-architectures. Firstly because they have always been the two biggest destroyers of buildings³ and secondly because fire and water are self-sufficient. They do not need architecture to bring people together. One is part of the community when sharing the experience of fire or water. Both elements unite us in a shared feeling of vulnerability.

There is nothing else which unites more than heating up around a fire and then running naked along the river before jumping off the Schönausteg into the Aare and let yourself drift further down. The Aare, the which stream Bern's bridges span over, characterises the local community. One does not appropriate the river when swimming in it, but one is appropriated by it. Vulnerable, we are automatically part of the *collective* in the water.

Water is part of a stream that runs at the rhythm of nature which is preserved by the construction of a bridge. By accelerating the connection between two points and bypassing a territory, the bridge enables the coexistence of different rhythms of life on the same spot. The smoothness of the traffic above stands in contrast to the roughness of the beneath. Either one is exposed on the bridge or curtailed the intimacy under the bridge.

„Der reissende Strom wird gewaltdätig genannt
Aber das Flussbett, das ihn einengt
Nennt keiner gewaltdätig“⁷

The quote of Bertold Brecht can be applied in two different manners to Bern. Taking it literally we may apply it to the river Aare and the banks, taking it the way he suggested it, we may apply it on society and the way it is restricted by the authorities. Definitely both of these analogies are relevant for the notion Freiraum. On the one hand the built fabric does not "narrow down" the Aare valley. A strip of nature and different squares and paths make the river and the banks a place accessible to everyone⁸. Contrary to the physical setting, the political authorities more and more cut the rights of the demonstrating mass⁹. That's why we strive to escape the control of a superior order.

Il y a également, et ceci dans toute culture, dans toute civilisation, des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l'on peut trouver à l'intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables. Ces lieux, parce qu'ils sont absolument autres que tous les emplacements qu'ils reflètent et dont ils parlent, je les appellerai, par opposition aux utopies, les hétérotopies.⁶

The heterotopia we are looking for is not the vessel⁷ of Foucault, but the city full of oppositions, full of unconstrained places *under the bridge* where the individual finds freedom in a community.

6. Michel Foucault, 1984, Dits et écrits

7. "Le navire, c'est l'hétérotopie par excellence. Dans les civilisations sans bateaux les rêves se tarissent, l'espionnage y remplace l'aventure, et la police, les corsaires."







In a way, the denial of private property and of the nuclear family as the ideal of community as well as the preaching of the common experience and appropriation, the sharing and making together demanded by the 68 movement are still on hold. We have even further approached a culture of individualists in a sea of virtual commons. Instead of sharing experiences, we share their pure representations.

Admitting that the property question isn't primarily an architectural issue but a political one, protagonists in architecture still have to deal with it. Since we often produce an Illusion of the political in order to see our projects realised the question is seldom explicitly tackled¹.

The bridge - the defining element of Bern - is a figure which explicitly confronts the property issue.

The bridge is the future (Brückenschlag in die Zukunft). The high bridges played a key role in Bern's expansion during the 19th and 20th century. They were the city's architecture destined to address a new era. Their heritage is Freiraum. Freiraum is intrinsically linked to common space which is necessary for a democratic society. Freiraum is the capital of the city of Bern. This fragment of the present reality is to be preserved and amplified.

Standards do only exist to be bypassed and outdated. It is first of all the movement of history which addresses it to us: each period forges its identity against the rules of those who preceded it. Standards, whether social, legal, constructive or aesthetic, are subject to a perpetual reassessment. The last set of norms has been about the neoliberal idea of "private" ownership, the new set of standards is about the common

The bridge is public property. Freedom in community requires the communalisation of the land for bridges to be built. In a city full of bridges the boundaries implemented by the lines of the cadastral plan are seriously challenged. The bridge stopped to be an exclusive good and became a support of free movement. Thus the bridge connects the territory, it epitomises full democracy.

The bridge is city. It is part of a city which is still defined by the density of social relations and the built fabric. Therefore the centrality of a locus is relevant. The Freiraum question is a different one within the city - compared to the countryside - where the political dimension of it is directly visible and in conflict with the established market logic. The city is not defined by the capital it generates, but by the common space that its inhabitants „produce“. Let us define the common space as a space that is produced by the people who use it and who build it to accommodate a „form of sharing“. The common is automatically in constant reassessment².

FINDING FREEDOM(S) was called the second year autumn semester 2018 at EPFL led by the office Bruther.

1. Luxemburg Biennale Venice, 2018, Arch+ Features 75

2. Stavros Stavrides, 2016, Common Space: The City as Commons

The bridge is a threshold. It is a basic shelter. It is a thick facade. It is a platform. The bridge unites exposed and protected spaces. It unites programs with different rhythms. The bridge is porous in terms of its physical permeability and of its social accessibility. It is open to newcomers. The bridge „indicates how humankind unifies the separatedness“³.

The bridge is a skeleton. It is an infrastructure that forms a framework to be inhabited. The bridge is architecture which guarantees a plurality of liberated appropriations, an architecture which ask for participative action. The bridge is the support of the unexpected to happen, it is willingly deteriorated by its function. A place which invites to be designed.

The bridge is part of nature. It is a building opposing the savageness of wilderness. Nature is tamed and at the same time ignored, before it bounces back and colonises the bridge. The bridge thus becomes natural environment itself.

The bridge is explicit. It communicates with its surroundings, with society like the graffitis that cover the facades of the city. The bridge does not advertise a product, but it represents the diversity of the community which inhabits it. The bridge is support for transmitting ideas of the common.

The bridge is a place that escapes from the panoptic eye of the superior established order. The bridge unites moments of collective blossoming. It is about bringing utopia into the here and now⁴. It is about letting indépendance wash out individualism. It's about fighting the exclusive good. The bridge is the archetype of the common in the city. *The bridge is freiraum.*

i stand on the edge
you hide in the piers
the ground leaves my feet
river

jeby, 11.1.19

3. Bridge and Door, 1994, Georg Simmel

4. „Utopie ins hier und jetzt holen“, banner during a pro Reitschule demonstration in Bern on the for the Reitschule, 30 Jahre sind nicht genug!, <https://revolutionär.ch/?p=3291>, consulted the 10.10.2018





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