

Familiar and Foreign

It was from the flow of the Limmat river in Zurich that I began to know the city.

To walk from my home to the river I had to cross one or several traffic lights, the roads were all downwards, one road would pass several bus stops, the 46 and the 32, and cross two traffic lights. The other road would only require one traffic light.

The two paths will converge under a bridge above the river.

One is stairs circling down, lead by hidden between the bridge pillars and the circling stairs, going down to a playground for skateboarders, connected to a sand beach volleyball playground and a terraced makeshift bar. The bar is no longer there because of the epidemic.

The bare open space and the facilities in the open space, all the way down to the river bank and the platform over the water, which can be crowded in good weather. In previous summers there was hardly any space, and the crowds occupied the sunny parts of the riverbank. Those who were on the bank would inadvertently burrow into the river, swim against the current, then float downstream to a place where they could come up, drag their wet bodies, walk back to where they had been resting before with water dripping off, lie down and enjoy the sunshine. Then repeat this a few more times.

The other side, a staircase going straight up and down, leads past a church of modern architecture, a bus bar, toward the other end of the river, with the river on the left and the small bridge over the power station on the right. Under the big bridge or by the small bridge, besides the party people, there are dogs, swans, lovebirds, ducks and lake gulls. The water can be seen to the bottom, and sometimes fish can be clearly seen swimming under the river surface. As lazy as the people are, the birds and animals here are also laid back.

This was the beginning of my time in Zurich, experiencing the river surging through my body, in control or out of control. The river, the birds, the animals, the summer sun and the people jumping off the bridge make for a familiar and strange scene. Follow the river up to experience the difference, and then to Lake Zurich for a boat ride. The hills and scattered buildings on both banks are also familiar and foreign.

Is this my home? A new place, some new people, something new, the world in the landscape is similar to me, as are the emotions, the demeanour and the destiny of the people!

I will walk a long way, past many places and people, past buildings and weather, past emotions and history. Sometimes I would stop, because of the people, because of the graffiti, because the birds were circling, because the river was flowing.

Around 2010, I began to understand the state of being a guest, a traveller, a nomad, and I also called myself a Mongolian, and in turn made the journey a home.

At the time of writing these words, we had not yet met; Catherine Gfeller lived in France, was born in Switzerland, and her friend Michele Sandoz was also a friend of mine. During the epidemic we could only communicate via the internet, and looking at her online portfolio was like looking at my own career as a guest in Zurich, as if I were on a journey, from the landscape to the people, constantly meeting and parting. As during the epidemic, people and events, are dissipating from the picture of the world, the familiar and the alienation, the historical and the present, the images and information that remain in the digital world as the epidemic leaves or adds to it.

This is the time and people I see in Catherine Gfeller's work, from the gaze on the landscape in her early earthy photographic MATTER OF LANDSCAPE series, the march of the female body in LES FRAYEUSES, to the women and events in VILLES, also familiar and foreign.

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