

1. A selection of photographs from the Baugeschichtliches Archiv

Ad Astra Aero, 1930

Photographer unknown, 1932

Photographer unknown, 1942

Beringer & Pampaluchi, 1944

Photographer unknown, 1968

Photographer unknown, 1983

Hanspeter Dudli, 2006

Hanspeter Dudli, 2008

Laid out by city planners in 1883, Limmatplatz is renovated in 1898 to accommodate the Industriequartier tram line. By the early 1930s, the surrounding plots have been built up. Municipal architect Hermann Herter leads the construction of the first tram shelter in 1942, following his designs for the shelters at Paradeplatz (1928) and Bellevueplatz (1938). Herter's design remains in use until August 2006, when the city breaks ground on a new shelter. It enters operation in May 2007 and includes the first ATM in the Zurich transit system.

A press release from the city that August celebrates its reopening:

The bright, open plan significantly enhances [gentrifies] the neighborhood. This new development helps erase the dark, sordid period when Limmatplatz was part of the Letten drug scene, supporting the aims of the city's "Langstrasse Plus" initiative to give District 4 an identity beyond its associations with drugs and sex work. Limmatplatz today signals Zurich's vision for quality public transport and architecture.¹

Übertragung is inaugurated on November 2, 2007.

2. Harun Farocki

Übertragung (Transmission), 2007

Video, color, sound

43 minutes

Video installation made for art spaces or public spaces

Courtesy Antje Ehmman

¹ "Der helle, übersichtlich gestaltete Limmatplatz wertet das Quartier deutlich auf. Der Neubau lässt die traurigen und unrühmlichen Zeiten, als der Limmatplatz Teil der Drogenszene am Lettenareal war, vergessen. Gleichzeitig unterstützt die Neugestaltung die Ziele des städtischen Projektes «Langstrasse plus», dem Kreis 4 eine Identität jenseits des Drogen- und Rotlichtmilieus zu geben. Der heutige Limmatplatz setzt ein Zeichen für die Qualität des öffentlichen Verkehrs und der Architektur in der Stadt Zürich." Departement der Industriellen Betriebe der Stadt Zürich, "Glanzlichter am Limmatplatz," Stadt Zürich Medienmitteilung, August 16, 2007.

3. A selection of photographs by Gertrud Vogler from the Schweizerisches Sozialarchiv
Jugendbewegung (Youth Movement), July 12, 1980
Jugendbewegung, Informationsstand (Youth Movement Information Stand), July 26, 1980
“Alli gäge d’Brugg,” Limmatplatz (“Everyone Against the Bridge,” Limmatplatz), June 1982
Drogendemo (Drug demonstration), May 27, 1989
Kreis 5-Demo (District 5 Demonstration), April 3, 1992
Solidaritätsaktion mit den Junkies am Limmatplatz (Solidarity Action with the Junkies at Limmatplatz), August 27, 1993
Aktion Migrosboykott/Drogen Limmatplatz (Migros Boycott/Limmatplatz Drug Campaign), June 1994
Last Letten Demo (Last Letten [Affliction of Letten] Demonstration), February 13, 1995

The Züri brännt (Zurich is burning) youth movement begins on May 30, 1980 with a protest against the city’s reactionary cultural policies. After a month of organizing, the demand for an Autonomous Youth Center (AJZ) is realized on Limmatstrasse. In March 1982, the city demolishes the AJZ, dispersing the open drug scene; it reconstitutes at Platzspitz in 1986, where it is officially tolerated until the closure of the park as a Sperrzone (exclusion zone) on February 5, 1992. From there, it is pushed out to the disused Letten train station adjoining Limmatplatz. Sporadic enforcement efforts include the forcible transfer of addicts from Zurich to their home cantons under the fürsorgerische Freiheitsentziehung (FFE, protective custody) law. On February 14, 1995, Letten is cleared as a Sperrzone, too.

The clearing of Letten is presaged by the February 1 enactment of new coercive measures in the Swiss Aliens Law after a race-baiting media campaign targeting asylum seekers in particular as drug dealers and cartel members. The so-called “Lex Letten” creates the legal foundations of the modern Swiss deportation system. Under the pretext of punishing a few hundred drug dealers, the law authorizes police to question millions of criminally innocent foreigners, restrict their freedom of movement, and detain those who lack valid residence permits without trial.

The rhetorical evolution from drugs to immigration is mirrored in the evolution of extrajudicial mechanisms; the first warden of the Zurich airport deportation prison, Barbara Ludwig, is also a veteran administrator of the internal FFE “deportations.” Under her watch, the Lex Letten system murders Palestinian asylum seeker Khaled Abu Zarifeh. Bound, gagged, and sedated to prevent him from publicly protesting his deportation, Abu Zarifeh suffers a panic attack and suffocates to death on his own vomit in an elevator at the Zurich airport on March 3, 1999, aged 27. The police statement following his killing denounces him simply as a “convicted drug dealer.”