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Youth scenes yesterday and today

Achieve things and don't consume so much

Two grammar school girls went to see the exhibition 'A Walk on the Wild Side' to take a look at the youth scenes of their parents and grandparents. This is how they felt about them.

We were surprised how many youth scenes Switzerland has been through since the 1930s. Unfortunately the various groups were not described in very great detail. We would have liked to know more about the hippie scene, because this was what our parents lived through. But we thoroughly enjoyed wandering through the various youth movements, from the wild rebellious 50s and 60s through the freaked-out 70s and 80s right into the 90s – our own youth scene.

We were impressed by the sense of moral commitment of the youth of those days, and we got worried about the passive attitude to life of today's young people. Nowadays, that passionate desire to change things has fallen victim to the consumer society. We are confronted with performance requirements and other material pressures very early on, and there isn't much time left for moral commitment. The exhibition also showed very effectively how great the sense of community and belonging together was for those earlier youth



Black as the night: the Gothics.
(Photo: zvg)

movements. In those days forming cliques (as we would call them today) was very important in life; young people found a second family there. That left a big impression on us, because we live in a time when relationships between people count for less and less, when people think only about their own problems and desires.

We would be very glad if we could experience for a short time the ideology of one of the big youth movements, like the hippies, the rockers, the Gothics or the punks. In fact we would really like to move something, and not simply be regarded by older people as doing nothing young people intent only on consuming.

Young people today are identified by aggressiveness, drug dependence and the sound of techno-music, and not the idea of achieving something together.

The exhibition made us realise what a short time our youth scene will last. Even music which is 'in' today will probably be 'out' tomorrow. The trends which affect our lives are being renewed all the time. The things that earlier generations felt were important get put on the back burner very quickly.

No wonder we, today's youth and tomorrow's adults, feel uninterested and don't want to participate. It is no longer worth striving for anything, we've already got everything. This exhibition made us think about the position that we young people actually have in society.

Our youth movements do have their effect on society – no longer because of the things they want to achieve, but because of their consumer mania, wanting to have the newest, the best and the most expensive. When we look around us, we do still see glamorous, freaked-out and very colourful youth movements like in the old days. And there is no way that they are any less original than their predecessors. That's the basic thing that all youth movements look for – originality. Today's young people do not form cliques because they want to achieve something together, but because they want to consume together. They want to make a bad impression on the rest of the world together. In the old days the various youth movements tried to stand out too, but they knew why they wanted to draw themselves to the attention of society. Today's young people don't particularly want to achieve anything when they rub people up the wrong way, they just want to be noticed and show they are different. They don't want to submit to the values of the rest of society. Perhaps we should think about how it's all going to go on. . . At any rate we can certainly recommend the exhibition. It is interesting to see how much the youth movements of the past differed from each other and yet had the same basic ideology, which was simply to prove they were different.

Patrizia Schnurr and Deborah Lottenbach, Class H4a, Alpenquai Cantonal Grammar School, Lucerne.

'A Walk on the Wild Side'

The exhibition 'A Walk on the Wild Side': Youth Scenes in Switzerland from the 1930s up to the Present' has been arranged by Stapferhaus Lenzburg. It identifies and illustrates the youth movements of the past 60 years from the 'Swings' right up to today's 'Techno'. It may be visited from September 12 until December 7 at the Berne Historical Museum. The 336-page, richly illustrated catalogue (available in German only) may be ordered for Sfr. 48.– (plus postage) from:

**Stapferhaus, Lenzburg Castle
CH-5600 Lenzburg**