

I was sitting on a bench by the lake reading a book when someone sat next to me. I looked up briefly and looked into the face of a man who obviously wanted something from me. In English, the man said, "May I..."

As a city dweller, I knew I had to react quickly. Every other half-sentence that was given to the other threatened to involve you in a conversation that you didn't want to get involved in. No, I don't want to buy anything, no, I don't want to talk about Jesus, no change, sorry. As I started to clamp the man down, politely but firmly enough to make him realize that there was nothing to get and that any attempt to change my mind or wrap my finger was a waste of time, so while I was waiting for a good moment, I tried to file my seat neighbor. Because as a city dweller, you do this as usual when a potentially annoying, perhaps even dangerous encounter is imminent.

The suspicion I had just cherished was now petty to me.

The man was dark-skinned and wore clothes so worn, colourless and joyless that he could have been considered a homeless man. Also his face was - despite the dark skin - somehow colourless and joyless. The man's gaze had something dull and unsteady, which made me additionally on my guard.

"...may I have a word with you?" the man finished his sentence.

I wasn't prepared for that. And so I answered yes, although I had wanted to say no.

Probably feeling my reluctance, the man pushed: "I don't often have the opportunity to talk to someone."

At that moment, my cover collapsed. I was ashamed. For me and for my city, where it seems so outrageous to talk to a stranger that you need sophisticated preliminaries before you can talk to each other.

So we talked.

The suspicion I had just cherished was now petty to me. But that didn't change the fact that I continued to feel a little uncomfortable, self-conscious. How long would our conversation last, where would it lead to if the man wanted something from me after all?

It turned out that he was Eritrean, lived in a transit centre (desolate place, I googled the shelter later) and had two siblings in Belgium. Why the man, although he suffered from loneliness, stayed in Switzerland instead of near his siblings, he could not really explain. Maybe it was his English that wasn't too good. He was in his late thirties, childless, seemed to have trained as an electrician, but was worthless here. The prospects of finding a wife and starting a family in Switzerland, at his age and under these circumstances, he considers to be bad. He didn't say that whiny, but soberly resigned.

Like almost half of the Eritrean population, he was a Christian. He asked me, "Do you believe in God?" I made an approximate head movement. Fortunately, he did not insist, but continued: "Your churches are empty, yet you are a Christian country." A good point, I thought, especially since those who want to keep people like him off their backs like to appear as defenders of Christian values.

He raved about how great Switzerland was and how good the people here were.

He asked about me - job, family and so on. I gave information, truthful, but not too detailed. I couldn't have said exactly why I was laying low. It had to do with an uneasiness. A discomfort that wasn't primarily about him as a person, but about the situation. But what "situation" exactly?

He raved about how great Switzerland was and how good the people here were. Probably to spare him, I said something stupid, at least naïve. Because I assumed that someone like him would never have it as good as the locals who shaped his image of Switzerland - no pillar 3a, no high-speed Internet, no Minergie house, no Pilates, no Naturabeef, no Patagonia jacket, no GA, no SUV, no semi-private supplementary hospital cost insurance, no parents-in-law, school friends or regulars, no home.

So I said something like: In Switzerland, not everything that glitters is gold. Life isn't always easy here either.

"But why?" he just asked. For the first time there was a little power in his voice, which otherwise had something depressive.

What's the matter with you? Well - because ... because ... for example because ...

With his simple question he had checkmated me. I couldn't think of any reason why life in Switzerland shouldn't always be easy. It had just seemed obvious to me that this was the case. I stared embarrassed at the lake, my head empty like that of a student who blacked out during an oral examination.

I found it inappropriate that I had come to the Eritrean with my complaining of prosperity.

Without conviction I finally mumbled something about "fear of losing one's job" and "pressure to perform". That wasn't wrong - a young Venezuelan from a poor district of Caracas, who now lives in Zurich, put it very nicely in a nutshell when he told this magazine: "In a country like Switzerland you can only fail because of yourself, that's why this is the worst. And the fear of it is suffocating."

Nevertheless, I found it inappropriate that I had come to the Eritrean with my complaining about prosperity, which only increased my discomfort with the "situation". To top it all off, he also began to talk about his psychological problems and the many medications he had to swallow. What was the man's name? I forgot to ask him.

Soon he came back to Switzerland. I noticed something that is actually obvious, almost banal, considering the circumstances in which asylum seekers live here (no money and no task). The man talked like an onlooker about the land he was in. Like someone commenting on the opulent window display of a luxury store. He comes by every day, studies the assortment, knows the prices of the goods offered for sale. At the same time, he knows What lies behind the burglar-proof glass remains unattainable for him. Entry forbidden, no entry for the unbirged, dogs and beggars please stay outside.



What lies behind the glass remains unattainable for some. Symbol image: Keystone
Almost half an hour had passed since the man had spoken to me. I gradually became restless again - the situation. While I said yes to his question at the beginning of our meeting, although I had wanted to answer with no, now the opposite happened to me. I still had some time and considered to invite the man for coffee. That would certainly please him; such an overpriced lake promenade macchiato - in view of nineteen francs "bag money" per day - would appear to him to be a very special luxury. Instead I got up quite abruptly, said goodbye and made my way home. He thanked me very much for talking to him, and let me go without resistance, without asking for my telephone number, asking for money, or promising to see me again soon.

Why did I leave? My younger self would certainly have had a coffee with him without thinking much about it. But I thought of all the complications that an invitation could entail. That an invitation might awaken expectations in him that I could not fulfill. That I'd disappoint him and make him even sadder.

So a little altruism may have played a part in my decision. But most of all, it was about me. The man had in a way exposed me. Not only had he shown me what I am: an extremely privileged being with a tendency to dissatisfaction and to overestimate his everyday concerns. He had also shown me something I was aware of, of course, but which I don't normally have to deal with: How vast the distance is between a man like him and a man like me. How unfulfilled life is for someone like him and how rich in possibilities and promises it is for someone like me. And how little this difference, this inequality occupies me. How invisible a man like that is to a man like me.

Of course there were also a few raging people who still can't tell the difference between weather and climate.

By sitting next to me and starting a conversation with me, he pushed himself into my picture. He came close to me for a short time. And with him, the misfortune of the world. That was the situation. And I couldn't stand that situation. I literally ran away from her. Probably not an unusual reaction, but human, as they say. And maybe that's why so many people are going so completely crazy today. They can't take it. All the horror messages, disaster warnings and ominous signs - they do not bear what they see, feel, suspect, fear, doubt, deny. The strategies to counter this feeling of intolerance vary according to milieu, political conviction and degree of self-reflection. But the goal is always the same: distract, pretend deafness, sedate yourself.

The first time I noticed this was when this paper published a compendium on the crucial topic of our time: [75 ideas on how to stop climate change](#). The special edition met with an extraordinarily high level of interest, and the reactions indicated that a large number of readers were very serious about the practical yet depressing content.

Of course there were also a few raging people who still can't distinguish between weather and climate, who consider global warming either an invention of Jörg Kachelmann, a gigantic conspiracy of the "mainstream media", a collective misdiagnosis of borderline scientists or simply harmless, even digestible. That was to be expected, that didn't surprise anyone. The reactions of a not so small minority of so called progressive people were astonishing, because on the same day advertisements for cars and cruises appeared in the main newspaper. Scandal! Bigotry!

Of course, one should think about the contradictions of modern life (although perhaps a little more about one's own than those of others). And also about how a newspaper that wants to present the public with a comprehensive guide to practical climate protection should earn the money necessary to finance the great work behind such a project.

But that these people, who understood themselves to be progressive (this came out of their professions, their social media habitus and their jargon), only wanted to talk about the bad advertisements instead of dealing with the content of the contribution, which they, referring to the unfair circumstances, immediately declared to be worthless - why was that? It seemed to me as if they were just waiting to find a pretext that would allow them to distract from the real issue and instead scold the spineless, dishonest, degenerate media. The actual topic was: How damned much we have to change in order to perhaps turn things around for the better, how damn big the break in our all comfortable lives would be and how damned little we are willing to do.



Images of the effects of the climate crisis can overtax people: Great drought in Switzerland in autumn 2018. Photo: Keystone

The over-the-hills blusterers couldn't stand it - the heat, the storms, the disappearing glaciers, crumbling mountains, burning forests, melting polar caps, dying animal species, collapsing ecosystems, the helplessness and powerlessness that the individual feels, while at the same time it is clear as daylight that as a wealthy citizen one is jointly responsible for what is happening and that one must act urgently.

They can't take it, they can't take it, they can't take it. Running away, ignoring fogpots, are glad that they have something to scold and criticize, because this prevents them from dealing with reality and from facing their discomfort, their fear.

First the politics, then all the others and at the very end maybe even me.

A rant subgroup wrote mails and Twitter messages of content: all well and good, but so naive, so pointless, so "neoliberal" (one really wrote that), to think about what each individual can do. It's politics, isn't it? As long as politics doesn't! What's the matter with politics? Didn't you simpletons notice that politics?

Yes, it's obvious that it takes more than a few single masks that fly around the world only five times a year instead of eight, do without US premium beef on Wednesdays, stop shopping for new clothes every two weeks and only exchange their mobile phones for a new one after nine months. Progress sometimes needs laws, generally binding rules, international treaties, coercion - politics.

But apart from the fact that many earth-shattering things have already taken place largely without the intervention of parties, government decisions and commission recommendations - for example the French Revolution, the Summer of Love, the Migration of Nations from 375 A.D., Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, the invention of the PC or the birth of Jesus - apart from the fact that "politics" is not everything and is not capable of everything: Do I not dagger my neighbours only because it is forbidden by law? Since when has it been honorable to take responsibility for one's own life and actions? Why play one

against the other? Or as one journalist of "Die Zeit" put it: "Climate protection can only happen out of a fundamental motivation such as respect for creation, one's own children or simply the idea of not being an unscrupulous asshole".

First the politics, then all the others, and at the very end perhaps even me; the main thing is that the supply of fog petards does not run out. We can't stand the heat, the storms, the disappearing ice, the forecasts, the disasters of the others, which are getting closer and closer and closer.

My wife, who has to listen to my rabble, is a historian and is currently dealing with the Cold War. One evening she pushed a note over my dining table and said, "Go to the social archives and watch this show."

The note said:

Television DRS,

broadcast 29. 4. 1985Zeitgeist

- Menschen, Normen, Konsequenzen

"Angst vor dem Ende - Waldsterben, Atomkrieg, Apokalypse" (

Zeitgeist

- People, Norms, Consequences)

If the terms "dying forests" and "nuclear war" are replaced by "climate change", then this actually sounds like 2019 and not like a 34-year-old broadcast. So the next day I got on my bike, went to the social archive and sat in front of a screen. I called up the video database "Faro" from SRF and immediately found what I was looking for. In keeping with my time travel into the TV past, the transmission technology also seemed to originate from the pre-Highspeed era. The line collapsed several times, and if you jumped back a little to watch a sequence again, it took endless seconds to rebuild the picture.



The former fears are the same as today's: Demonstration against the forest dying in Geneva in 1983. Photo: Keystone

What I finally saw was highly exciting. Sure, the setting and the clothing style seemed dusty - not cool like the sixties, but taste-lost like the eighties. The people in the studio did not look as TV-optimized as they do today. Although the guests - the psychologist Ingrid Riedel and the physician and environmental activist Martin Vosseler - were two eloquent professionals used to performing, from today's point of view they seemed somewhat stiff, clumsy. As they spoke, they made strange head movements, leafing through federal files or staring into a studio corner, assuming that a speedster or Giorgio Bellini was about to run through the picture from there.

But the minds and themes were remarkably modern. Thus Martin Vosseler - three and a half decades before the media battle for gender equality - spoke consistently of "doctors". He never spoke to his interlocutor, instead he took up her votes and inquired about her opinion. "I'd like to know how you feel about that, Mrs. Riedel." Mansplaining, my ass. The programme was mainly about the question of how to deal with one's fears - of a nuclear war or the destruction of nature: to repress or face fear? Astonishingly many statements sounded as if they were quotations from last week:

- "Cynicism is certainly also a way of dealing with the fear of the apocalypse." (The presenter Hans Vögeli; impeccable High German, clever questions, rhetorically strong, would have a difficult position today, since he would be under suspicion of being elitist, out of touch and not at all bi de Lüt.)

- "Everyone must begin by themselves: Which means of transport do I use, where do I go on holiday, how much electricity do I use, how much waste do I produce? What do I eat - fruit and meat that are flown with great energy from areas where primeval forests once stood?" (Martin Vosseler, physician, Research Fellow at Harvard Medical School, conscientious objector in the rank of captain, thought leader of the organization "Ärztinnen und Ärzte für Umweltschutz" founded in 1987; Bruno Manser co-activist)

- "We are confronted with a whole new dimension of fear: the idea that everything could break - even what comes after me." (Ingrid Riedel, theologian, social psychologist, psychotherapist, book author, lecturer at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, honorary professor for religious psychology at the University of Frankfurt)

On the way home, I thought about the show. For example, about how the unworried who feel so superior to the worried could triumph from today's point of view: "Look, everything's already been there and nothing's happening! The nuclear weapons: slumbering peacefully in their silos. The dying of the woods: Fake news. The demonstrations and the general alarm: hysteria incited by the media.

That wasn't all that wrong. Could it reassure me? Not really, 'cause I'm imagining it was all about choices back then. Press the red button: yes or no? Continue cutting down rainforests, pouring poison into the sea and exterminating animal species: yes or no? Today, on the other hand, we are in the middle of a process that has long since become unstoppable, let alone reversible. And as far as false reports are concerned, the findings of today, which are sometimes more, sometimes less catastrophic, are scientifically far more reliable than those of the past.

I also thought about why I liked the show so much and especially why I found Ingrid Riedel's performance so pleasant. It probably had something to do with the fact that the intention of the participants was different from what it is today. On television, but also in the newspapers and at podium events, today it is often a matter of accusing, sharpening and

personalizing (Saint Greta, diabolical Greta). The three ambassadors from the eighties on my screen, on the other hand, wanted to listen, explain, understand and console.

"As a therapist," she continued, "I would never say there is no more comfort."

They were not interested in winning or in looking good and superior. So Riedel said that in the face of damaged nature she would be "sore and ache". That she would still let her fear come to her, because this fear also awakens in her a "hot love" for life and nature, which she would otherwise not feel. "I want to do everything I can to make sure this doesn't get lost. And I believe that all actions that do not come from this love have opposite effects, fuel fears and paralyse us."

I wonder how Riedel's doing today. Does she still find comforting words, or have we arrived at our warmer and warmer planet beyond comfort? I decided to track her down and ask her.

After some back and forth I reached her on her mobile phone, she was just in the autumn holidays. She was "closer to 85 than 84," she laughed into the phone. But here and there she still treats patients in her practice, gives lectures and cooperates in the C. G. Jung Institute. "As a therapist," she continued, "I would never say there is no more comfort. And the theologian in me remembers an enchanting word from Luther: "If I knew that tomorrow the world would end, I would plant an apple tree today".

In this sense, there is comfort, she said, "If I do what I can, then I am not paralyzed in my self-efficacy. A dangerous situation can make me creative, bring me to action, to creative ideas." This requires, however, that one faces up to one's fear. And thus also shared responsibility. "And this is something that seems to overwhelm many. Especially the displacers are the ones with the greatest fear. Greta expresses this fear. This not only frightens her into a bourgeois attitude to life, but also calls her to responsibility. Those who will not accept this responsibility must hate it."

Now then, Greta. I don't read much about her and I haven't seen any of her appearances on TV. Still, of course, I get what she says and does. (Trump is like me, albeit for other reasons: I avoid him because I can't bear him - his face, his voice, his grimaces, the disgusting mockery.) As for Greta, I suppose I would agree with a lot of what she says and would consider a few other things questionable, pompous or presumptuous. But that can't get me going, young people are pompous and presumptuous when they are politically agitated. Everything else is not normal.

On press pictures Greta radiates a stoic charisma, she is certainly a role model. Still, she doesn't bother me. I don't need Greta to show me the way. And that's why I don't understand why the adult world seems to be dealing only with this girl.

Or maybe I can understand it: Let's talk about advertisements! Let's wait for politics! Let's argue about Greta! A girl as a means of distraction. A consumer product, a media event with a continuing character, a Netflix series that offers emotions that feel almost as real as real life, which is becoming more and more eerie for us.

The least I understand are the intellectuals among the Greta haters. And how many there are! In recent weeks, for example, the NZZ has invented a new essay genre: Renowned men (a woman was, as far as I can see, not one of them) make fun of the Climate Youth. Where "funny" still works. The partly highly decorated gentlemen - prize-winning writers, emeritus professors, internationally acclaimed historians - develop a veritable will to destroy the famous girl and her less famous comrades-in-arms.

Interesting side aspect: Often it is self-proclaimed defenders of Christian values who consistently use religious metaphor in a negative way.

That there are understandable reasons why children and adolescents can get on your nerves: given. But the furor and distance of these men has something ridiculous, unworthy. As if an adult stormed the playground, beat up a few eight-year-olds and then proudly left again: I showed them, didn't I?

The tendency is that hate is something for stupid people anyway. In fact, the hatred of these cultivated Greta-haters makes them fall below their own level.

Instead of dealing empathetically with the fears of their children and grandchildren, they dismiss authoritarian imprecations that recall the "Moscow simply" from the Cold War.

Where analytic sharpness was desired, crude caricatures are served up, for example by the writer Norbert Gstrein, who despises an alleged friend of his alleged daughter (NZZ of 18 September 2019).

Where one would expect a thinker to think, i.e. to arrive at an independent finding and to express it in his own words, one would always read the same phrases from the standing theorem of the anti-Greta propagandists: climate religion, climate religion, climate religion. Sect, sect, sect. Ecodictatorship, ecodictatorship, ecodictatorship, tatur, tata.

Interesting side aspect: Often it is self-proclaimed defenders of Christian values who consistently use religious metaphor in a negative way, thus belittling faith and religion. At the same time, they also randomly jump back and forth between the terms religion and sect, as if that were one and the same thing (which one can of course see in this way, but only if one does not consider oneself to be a chief Christian).

Worrying side aspect: Sometimes implicitly, now and then also quite clearly, the cipher "religion" serves to emphasize the irrational, unreasonable, stupid about climate anxiety, to unmask it in any case as a result of alarmist manipulation by left-liberal softies. This also discredits those 99.5 percent (perhaps only 97 percent) of the scientific community - including some of the brightest minds on the planet - who have proven climate change with thousands and thousands of data and studies and have presented its drastic consequences with the utmost plausibility.

That facts are degraded to opinions and opinions to facts is no longer new. What is new is that academics, who have been well nourished by the scientific world for years, are playing along with this game and are serving up their climate change appeal to the camp of anti-Enlightenment hostility to science.

Or you can do it like the star historian and Meta-Leitartikler Niall Ferguson, who deals with Greta's pigtails and their "psychological problems" (apparently concern for the future is something deeply unmanly, almost pussy-like) and records the contradictions in their behavior like an accountant, in order to warm up the oldest relief argument of all indifferent and bored: If you don't prove yourself to be flawless in your actions, then I don't need to worry about anything at all. Your 15 percent inconsistency gives me 100 percent absolution. The ads! Politics! Greta's carbon yacht! One's own fear as well as the fear of others - both do not seem to endure easily. Anyway, I've decided to be a little braver. And the next time an Eritrean approaches me at the lake, I'll invite him for coffee.

Created: 17.12.2019, 11:13 Uhr