

Tekst 6

‘Young people want to establish their own identity,’ opines David Hieatt of the trendy new ad agency, Anti-Corp, aimed at establishing brands bought by that vital section of the market – 15- to 24-year-olds. ‘They want to be seen as something different, because the one thing youth hates is to be pigeonholed. There is a group identity, but they want to be seen as having their own identity.’

I have news for Anti-Corp and their apparently clever insights into the way youth wants to 10. I feel exactly the same way. But today, something has happened which the current culture has persuaded me to try to avoid and which I have been attempting to feel stoical about for months. It is something which makes their fatuous, but typical, world view the butt of my wrath. Today I’m 50.

I feel just the same as I did yesterday. But in cultural, economic and social terms, I have crossed what is increasingly and maddeningly a Rubicon. Every culture has celebrated and admired youth. It is the future, after all. But very few have been so quick as ours to write off those whose capacity to understand their times is supposed to be at risk because of their date of birth. I know very well that my 11 is standing me in better and better stead, and that we baby-boomers are as willing to move on as our children. But this is something the Zeitgeist is unwilling to admit.

There is one possible let-out for our mistaken cultural stereotyping. We do live in revolutionary times, where the pace is so fast that old knowledge more quickly ossifies than ever. 12 is a new forcefield in which all of us are living.

The old landmarks of British life are palpably in the melting pot. There is a simultaneous search for new anchors along with a relentless pressure to discard the old. And it seems true that the young, with less redundant furniture cluttering up their heads and a natural willingness to experiment, are more likely to 13 than the middle-aged, an assumption that dominates our culture and which most completely expresses itself in the world of marketing and advertising.

But even this excuse for contemporary ageism is wrong. The young, contrary to the tired nostrums of Anti-Corp, are in no less a muddle than their seniors, indeed, they are more so. Aware that there is so much change, they find there is almost

The
state
I’m in
at 50

Will Hutton

nothing for them to trust.

And one of the welcome by-products of the advance of science, medicine and higher living standards is that growing older is no longer quite the calamity it used to be. New drugs, better diets and less backbreaking daily labour mean that the older are much better physical specimens than they were even a generation ago. The lifestyle, capability and attitudes of most fiftysomethings are 14 those of most thirtysomethings.

Yet this social reality is not reflected in our formal attitudes. Fifty has been turned into a life-defining event, and the principal architect of this 15 is the eccentric interaction of the rules governing pension fund practice and the relentless search by British companies to maximise their share price. To become 50 is to become eligible for early retirement, courtesy of well-funded occupational pension funds. Companies want to boost their share price by 16 their core expensive labour force and contracting out to workers who can be paid less and disposed of more cheaply if economic conditions worsen. The softest and cheapest option is to encourage – or compel – fiftysomethings to retire early and live off their pension. From the companies’ point of view it is a win/win means of lowering costs cheaply.

Fiftysomethings have been cruelly culled. The Carnegie UK Trust recently reported that if employment patterns were the same as 20 years ago, some 600,000 men and 200,000 women aged over 50 would now 17 and Gross Domestic Product would be 10 per cent higher. This is one cost, but the more subtle and pernicious cost is the way this practice is stigmatising what would otherwise be a rewarding time of life. Fiftysomethings may think and behave in the same way as their younger friends and colleagues, but the god of maximising 18 is out to get them, justified by a wrongheaded view that only the young are in touch with the times.

Our civilisation is now constructed around whatever business defines as its needs to lower its costs, a curious inversion of our priorities and the cause of needless and unchallenged hardship.

As for me, I’m looking forward to the next period of my life. It’s good to be 50. Really.

‘The Observer’

Eindexamen Engels vwo 2003-II

■ Tekst 6 The state I'm in at 50

Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p 10 ■

- A be distinct
- B break with the past
- C have buying power

1p 11 ■

- A boundless energy
- B optimism
- C social status
- D wide experience

1p 12 ■

- A Change
- B Commercialisation
- C Eternal youth

1p 13 ■

- A be at risk
- B be discontented
- C live long lives
- D prosper

1p 14 ■

- A far removed from
- B imitations of
- C lagging behind
- D remarkably similar to

1p 15 ■

- A careless cruelty
- B complex structure
- C daring innovation
- D happy coincidence

1p 16 ■

- A reducing
- B retraining
- C rewarding

1p 17 ■

- A be business partners
- B be in work
- C be laid off
- D enjoy their retirement

1p 18 ■

- A employment opportunity
- B private enterprise
- C shareholder value
- D the rate of change