

# Generations Temporality and Place Cluster Seminar

4.15pm-5.30pm, Thursday Nov 8,  
2018, Linkway, John Medley  
Building, University of Melbourne

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Coming of Age Stories then and  
now: Shifting grammars of  
generational formation and  
identity in the transition to post-  
industrial society



## ABSTRACT

The emergence of 1960's urban youth cultures signaled the fact that fixed positions of gender and generation which had hitherto signposted key stages of growing up as a boy or a girl, were becoming much more fluid and negotiable, though with a very different impact on either side of the class tracks. New idioms of masculinity and femininity were becoming available to middle class adolescents en route to university, articulated through ethno-biographic grids of vocation and career; in contrast their working class peers found themselves trapped in ever more extended transitions from school to work at a time when customary codes of apprenticeship and inheritance were becoming increasingly dysfunctional as de-industrialisation gathered pace and the culture of manual labourism went into decline.

This lecture will argue that to grasp what is at stake in these shifts and how they are expressed in the narrative grammar of coming of age stories we need to recognise that life-historical conjunctures occur in specific places as well as times; they map out a distinctive psycho-social geography of memoryscapes and are articulated through distinctive ethno-biographic codes which shape perceptions of the future. The paper will draw on my research in East London since the 1970's and discuss some of the issues, conceptual and methodological, raised by my ongoing inter-generational study of coming of age stories in East London.

## BIOGRAPHY



Phil Cohen is Emeritus Professor at the Centre for Cultural Studies Research University of East London and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies, University College London. He is the co-founder of Living Maps, a network of academics, artists and activists concerned to develop a creative and critical approach to the social mapping of the city and editor-in-chief of its online journal Livingmaps review.

Since the 1980's Phil has been carrying out a programme of ethnographic research on issues of class, race, and urban regeneration, working with young people and communities in East London to trace the impact of structural and demographic change on their livelihoods, life styles and life stories. As part of this he carried out a widely acclaimed study into the local impact of the Olympics; *On the Wrong Track: East London and the Post Olympics* was published in 2013 by Lawrence & Wishart and he recently co-edited a follow up *London 2012 and the Post Olympic City* (Palgrave 2017).

Amongst many other books, Phil is the author of *Knuckle Sandwich: Growing up in the working class city* (with Dave Robins 1978), *Re-thinking the Youth Question: Education, Labour and Cultural Studies* (1998); *Reading Room Only: memoir of a radical bibliophile* (2013) and *Graphologies*, a collection of his poetry and fiction was published by Mica Press in 2014. His most recent book is *Archive that, Comrade: Left Legacies and the counter culture of remembrance* (PM Press 2018) A collection of his recent academic work, *Material Dreams: studies in the un/making of modernity* is to be published next year. Website and blog: [www.philcohenworks.com](http://www.philcohenworks.com). Correspondence: [pcohen763@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:pcohen763@hotmail.co.uk)