

REGENERATION

**Edited by Clare Coatman & Guy Shrubsole
with Ben Little and Shiv Malik**

Regeneration focuses on the question of intergenerational justice. Defining the world's young people as those born after 1979 – a hugely symbolic moment in the history of globalisation – it reflects on the massive growth in generational protest across the globe thirty years later. At its heart is an analysis of politics through the prism of generation.

The incapacity of the major political parties in Britain to think beyond their short-term electoral interests is, by definition, particularly harmful for those at the beginning of their lives. It has led to a failure to act on climate change, savage cutbacks in education and training, an acute shortage of housing, big cuts in youth services, and, for many, the prospect of an old age without pensions. Things have deteriorated to the point where many young people are finding it impossible to find the wherewithal to settle down and have families – the classic marks of adulthood.

But, as Shiv Malik argues in his preface, a diagnosis of the problem does not absolve the young from taking responsibility for developing solutions. We need more than 'a whinge of epic proportions'. And, as he also points out, the young are well placed to develop alternatives: 'we are the most well-educated, innovative, dynamic and open generation in human history'. This means that this book also has plenty of ideas for changing the future.

Contributors: Patrick Ainley, Guy Aitchison, Christo Albor, Martin Allen, Jamie Audsley, Craig Berry, Guppi Bola, Matthew Cheeseman, Clare Coatman, Chris Coltrane, Ray Filar, David Floyd, George Gabriel, Tim Gee, Richard George, Paolo Gerbaudo, Jeremy Gilbert, Deborah Grayson, Noel Hatch, Tim Holmes, Rina Kuusipalo, Ben Little, Becky Luff, Shiv Malik, Peter McColl, John Miers, Jim O'Connell, Adam Ramsay, Kirsty Schneeberger, Guy Shrubsole, Charlie Young.

Series Editor: Ben Little
Assistant Editor: Shiv Malik

Part of the *Radical Future* series.

ISBN 9781907103490

Cover design: Yoav Segal

Cover photographs: Lindsay Mackenzie, Yoav Segal, Jacob Perlmutter
and www.morguefile.co.uk

Typesetting: e-type

Collection as a whole © Lawrence Wishart 2012

Individual articles © the authors 2012

Published by Lawrence & Wishart

**Supported by the Intergenerational Foundation and the
Lipman-Miliband Trust**

The Intergenerational Foundation (if.org.uk) is delighted to be involved in the publication of *Regeneration*. Our work in promoting the rights of younger and future generations means that we support new thinking, encourage debate and galvanise action in the hope that younger generations will demand more from our political leaders. We hope the pieces here will challenge you to take action as they have challenged us to do.

Angus Hanton, Co-founder, IF



Contents

Foreword Shiv Malik	6
Introduction: Bliss it was to be alive Guy Shrubsole and Clare Coatman	12
1. New thinking	
Adam Ramsay & Peter McColl Rebuilding society from the bottom up	23
Noel Hatch Learning to be poorer yet more powerful	31
Matthew Cheeseman In the dead of the night	38
Ben Little Forget markets: it's ownership that really matters	45
Charlie Young & Rina Kuusipalo The case for a new economics	54
Richard George Environmentalism as if climate change didn't matter	63
Ray Filar The feminist evolution: queer feminism for the next generation	70
Becky Luff Democracy beyond Westminster	78
2. New ways of organising	
A dialogue between Guy Aitchison & Jeremy Gilbert Reflecting on the student movement	86
George Gabriel Organising with others, not for them	102
Tim Gee The children of the children of the revolution	109
Paolo Gerbaudo <i>A botellon sin alcohol: the indignados and the reinvention of public sociability</i>	116
Chris Coltrane UK Uncut: a case study in activism	123
John Miers Comic – The secret origin of UK Uncut!	130
3. New policies	
Craig Berry A contract between generations: pensions and saving	139

Martin Allen & Patrick Ainley 'Overqualified and underemployed': young people, education and the economy	147
Jamie Audsley & Jim O'Connell Radical learning and learning to be a bit radical	156
David Floyd Don't tell me the sky's the limit: social enterprise and the not-for-profit economy	163
Christo Albor & Guppi Bola Beyond saving the NHS: the future of our health	170
Tim Holmes All the news that's fit to sell: reforming the media for the next generation	179
Kirsty Schneeberger Those yet to be born: representing the rights of future generations	188
Deborah Grayson Conclusion: Why should we care?	197
David Floyd Poem: Protest	205

Foreword

Where's your shame? You've left us up to our necks in it!

David Bowie, *Changes*, 1971

Hello, welcome and thank you for picking up or downloading *Regeneration*. I was asked to commend this book to you. That's easy, as it's damn fantastic. But to start I want to try something harder. To try and suggest to you that viewing more of the world through a generational lens, the theme that this book is wrapped around, could change your life and those around you forever. And for the better.

In the simplest sense all change happens generationally – a group of people at a certain time opt to make a difference in some rule, law or governing structure, which sets them apart from those that are older – dead or alive – than themselves.

But this statement is also pretty bland. Given this is always the case, what does the claim add to our understanding of how things are changed? In terms of our comprehension of events, isn't what matters the agency behind the change? For conservative historians, it is hierarchies and the individuals in charge which need to be studied and cross-examined to understand the process of change. For those on the left, materialism and stratospheres of class are at the root of making sense of the great shifts in society. Then there are those who hone in on nation states or bureaucracies or gender or race – all distinct prisms to help us understand how change occurs. But what about generations themselves? What role does time and the groups of people born decades apart – both in years, but also in social attitudes, technological influence and economic development – play in making change happen? And because of increasing life expectancy, in a world where more

generations are to be found living cheek by jowl than ever before, aren't generations playing a greater role in the dynamic of change than at any other moment in history?

I remember putting the question to Avner Offer, Chichele professor of economic history at All Souls College, Oxford, in early 2010, whilst co-authoring the book *Filted Generation: how Britain has bankrupted its youth*. An expert on the effect of time on economics and history, not only did Professor Offer scoff at the book's title, he replied bluntly that there is no such thing as a generational change agent in historical terms.

It seemed a bizarre response even then, as the precursor to this book, *Radical Future*, made its way on to our (digital) shelves in April 2010. It seems an even more bizarre response now, after all the recent generational tumult. Whether the August riots, the student movement of late 2010, the encampments on Tahrir square, the violent unrest in Greece, or the occupations of public spaces around the globe – these are movements that have been primarily characterised by the presence and/or the collective leadership of the world's young people – defined in this book as those born after 1979, a choice date for pinpointing the start of globalisation, but also, coincidentally, the beginning of a demographic mini-boom in most countries, popularly known in the USA as the baby-boom echo.

More than thirty years after being fostered by the environmental movement, intergenerational justice – the main trunk of generational enquiry – is still viewed with suspicion by those on the traditional left. For a start, it apparently holds all the wrong antagonistic qualities when compared to class warfare – why fight the vested interests of your parents when you should be fighting those of the upper classes? Or to put it another way, how does fighting the baby boomers stop the fat cats from making off with society's plunder? Secondly, there ain't much on generational analysis to be found in the writings and traditions of the left, which again is mainly steeped in class. This makes for a harder integration into left politics. Thirdly,

In the dead of the night

Matthew Cheeseman

When my aunt and uncle visited Cheltenham in the late 1980s, they stepped out on Saturday night to see the town. They found a few pubs and nothing much beyond a cold welcome. The place, as my aunt said, was dead. Twenty-five years later and Cheltenham is drawing 20,000 weekend punters from the region between Bristol and Birmingham. People go on their stag and hen nights to Cheltenham, joining a lively student night-life catering for the University of Gloucestershire, which also developed in this period. There are around 125 restaurants, 87 bars and pubs and 14 night clubs in the centre.¹ It is by no means Babylon, but this growth is indicative of the changes that many British towns experienced in the development of what is now known as their ‘night-time economy’. Certainly, when my aunt and uncle’s children choose to visit Cheltenham as young adults, they do so because it is decidedly not dead.

Wandering through its pedestrianised zone in the early hours of Sunday morning can be a thrilling and visceral trip. The bray of banter competes with the chants of celebration, echoing off the ubiquitous hunched riot vans. An early anthropologist would detect elements of a rite of passage, and indeed it is hard to resist sensing something natural and vital about these urban binges. Many of us can attest to the life-affirming potential and the possibilities for friendship that the night-time economy opens up. Going out is empowering, a claiming of space via the irresistible, joyous thrills of getting out of your head. And yet other forces are roused when high spirits are engaged. All of us have witnessed the danger of the night, when gas bubbles from the churning muck of booze, suddenly

bursting into eruptions of assault, abuse, addiction. This bodily violence is inexcusable and raises important questions through which to think about Britain at night: why do we behave like this when we are supposedly relaxing from work? Many of us implicitly understand the attraction of such behaviour, especially when it is mediated through CCTV cameras into programmes which disguise their entertainment value as lurid social reportage. My grandmother never misses these weekly displays. Neither do my younger cousins. TV makes Victorian anthropologists of us all, horrified and yet fascinated, secretly recognising something of ourselves on the murky screen, in stories of our own construction.

This world was brought about only relatively recently. Significant legislation was passed under Tony Blair's premiership which developed further the Major government's challenge to 1990s rave culture, the last mass moment of UK youth. The key piece was the Licensing Act of 2003, which gave local authorities the freedom to design 'scripted' geographic areas for alcohol retailers and other night-time businesses, ranging from theatres to takeaways. Alcohol is this new zone's chief intoxicant and ruling commodity. As such it has been marketed in ways which have profoundly changed its consumption patterns, amongst both men and women, but especially the latter. A wide-scale popularisation of shots, shooters, alcopops and cocktails has occurred in the last twenty years, accompanying the normalisation of fancy dress and other play routines, alongside such so-called 'traditional drinking events' such as 'St Guinness Day'. When we go out it may feel like this has always been the way, but it has not. A round of shots would have been a rare event fifteen years ago, a Jägerbomb conceptually impossible.²

These developments are not specific to any age group, yet they have affected this generation more than any other, especially in regards to what the General Household Survey calls 'Increased Sessional Drinking', what might otherwise be known as bingeing. The firm dichotomy between 'staying in' and 'going out', second

nature to many, solidified in this period. For many, 'going out' now implies a performance that begins in 'pre-drinking' at home, moves on to a 'pre-bar' before climaxing in a loss of reflexivity on the dance floor of a nightclub. It is something intimately tied to the notion of friendship, not to the way friends are made – despite its promises, the night-time economy rarely introduces people – but rather to the way friendship ties are performed: by going out. That is not to say, of course, that there is anything inherently wrong with these elements (alcohol consumption, music, dancing and being with friends); it is merely to comment that their current means of expression is a product of deregulation and absolutely infused with the cunning deductions of neoliberalism.

Pleasure is, of course, a perennial human concern, and this generation is no different in its desires from any other. However, as with many contemporary problems, the cultural rights decisively claimed in the 1960s (sexual, expressive, individual) have become progressively monetised by thirty-plus years of Thatcherism, to the point where they have begun to resemble not freedoms but prisons. The allure of William Burroughs' Interzone has been incorporated into the machine. At the heart of this transformation is a disillusionment with work – with what can be achieved – and a full embrace of hedonism, of living for the thrills and spills of the weekend. Work in deindustrialised Britain is, for many, temporary, transient and devoid of meaning or progression. Shitwork implies a beer, and as capital sloshes its shallow course, hedonism follows in a riptide that intensifies individuating and sexualising forces. We willingly court risk within this pull: it makes us feel vital and alive. The zone understands this all too well, and has developed to deliver it, at significant cost to public health and emergency services.³

Alcohol consumption has become a shadow metaphor for consumerism: the raised shot glass its official, totemic gesture. This serves to transform alienation into something more human and bearable – a pleasure well deserved and worked for – and yet one that is, at the same time, riven with compromise. For the night-time

economy is a complex entity, and nowhere is cultural and social stratification more tangible than within the scripted pleasure zones of our towns and cities. Everyone knows which places to avoid and which places to queue for, the places that cater for ‘people like them’. Processes of distinction abound: customers of one world glimpse customers of another over the bollards and *ad hoc* pissoirs that mark pedestrianised areas, only to meet each other in fast-food whirlpools.

Inside and outside these zones, in the off-license, semi-legal and illegal party scenes, the only factor that could be said to tie the entirety of this generation together is the desire to live for the moment, whether in a high street nightclub, a teknival or even in protest. We all carry a shard of rave UK, and reflect a vision of what could be: celebration, transcendence and communality. How to conceive of, serve and deliver this desire is an important question for our culture, and one that deserves careful consideration from anyone concerned about its evolution. For it is important to remember that the drugs *do* work, whether they are pints, pills, powder or just pure and simple performance. We need to lose a sense of ourselves and enter the gliding flow and the vacation from being this brings.

There is a coherent (and at times aptly incoherent) reading that a new society can emanate from such states, or at least be rejuvenated by them. It is an attractive idea, and an old one, which has developed significant criticisms. One of these is that, when the metaphorical ‘third-eye’ opens, it lets in two-way traffic. The market thus penetrates altered states through what is, essentially, a trapdoor for hegemony. This encourages the navel-gazing pursuit of personal pleasure in what amounts to a hedonistic treadmill compensating for meaningless, dehumanised work. To protect it from this perversion, group transcendence has been traditionally controlled and managed, often as a sacred rite. This is also the path that some contemporary counter-cultures have followed, with some success. Of course, in the night-time economy, the market holds the

controlling interest in the apparatus that resolves the desire for group transcendence. For the mainstream then, capital takes full custody of the social relations that surround the very performance of going out. If friendship is maintained and enacted in the night-time economy, then friendship is maintained and performed in the market. In a climate which encourages it to be volatile, competitive and aggressive, there's no wonder that it enacts these conditions so visibly on its customers.

This neatly segues into the true genius of the night-time economy, encoded in the products it sells, which are a form of medicine, of relief from the very pressures of work, competition and consumerism that it also feeds. Shitwork, remember, deserves a beer, and no one ever gets depressed in Bakhtin's banterous fantasy.⁴ With the rise of mental health problems in late capitalism, 'going out' can seem a form of self-medication, a sheep-dip in the anaesthetising alcohol of consumerism. No wonder the drugs are stronger in areas of economic deprivation. Class consciousness, meanwhile, is dampened by the altered states of consciousness of the pleasure factories, and their waste products of cold irony, cool distinction and self-satisfied banter. This feeds a collective amnesia of purpose which sees a future that cannot be grasped and can only be approached in repetitive bouts of education in an attempt to plateau out on a 'good job' and the lifestyle it affords.⁵ Never being able to reach this vaunted Utopia leaves a big white space rippling through our futures, like a giant flag of surrender.

Hypersensitive to the 'drudgery of pleasure seeking',⁶ I suffer from the paranoia of the researcher, and see it spreading everywhere, like a conspiracy of kicks. I was fascinated by the 2010 protests and the 2011 riots: was I too severe in recognising elements of the night-time economy in both? Indeed, 2010 seemed flush with flowing performance (*there was dancing in Parliament Square!*), whilst the riots were like a violent hangover from a never-ending, shit-faced night. Neither provided a coherent social vision beyond the thump of the bass and the flare of protest. Yet perhaps this is

unfair: all protests contain elements of the carnivalesque, and it is easy to be critical of action in the moment.⁷ I do wonder, however, whether the night-time economy does too good a job of satisfying, or at least sating, the desires of this generation. Cheltenham Spa is, after all, still thriving at night.

Indeed, in the first *Radical Future* book, Jeremy Gilbert commented – in reference to the defeat of socialism by neoliberalism – that ‘a key consequence of this defeat is the absence of enduring institutions’.⁸ It is my contention that new and pernicious institutions are evident in the night-time economy, plunging the long, cold fingers of consumerism into the performance of friendship, and making you thank it profusely for doing so. I am not proposing an age of personal austerity, nor attempting to devalue friendship. I am simply pressing awareness of the compromises that ‘having a good time’ often entails. For not only is the performance of friendship a means of cementing groups, it is also a way of imagining what those groups can be. By reclaiming this performance from the night-time economy, by wrestling ourselves from the communal compromises of transcendence and release, we take a step towards other possible futures. Only then will we be able to formulate new rituals capable of reanimating the dead.

Matthew Cheeseman is a contemporary folklorist based at the University of Sheffield. This chapter follows an article published in *Roundhouse Journal*, No. 2, April 2011, concerned with youth protest. He is currently preparing an ethnography of students at the University of Sheffield based on his doctoral research. In 2008/2009 he was selected to run an institutionally-funded research project by the University of Gloucestershire assessing alcohol intake amongst undergraduates. In 2008, he made two ethnographic films concerning youth pleasure, both of which were shown by SIEF in 2009.

Notes

1. Information on the Cheltenham night-time economy taken from the Cheltenham Community Safety Partnership 2008-2011 *Strategic Assessment*: www.cheltenhampartnership.org.uk.
2. For a good summary of these changes, see F. Measham, and K. Brain, “‘Binge’ Drinking, British Alcohol Policy and the New Culture of Intoxication”, *Crime Media Culture*, 1 (3), 2005.
3. See House of Commons, *Health Committee First Report on Alcohol*, 2009: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmhealth/151/15102.htm
4. For a positive reading (at times cosmically so) of the pleasures of the body and the marketplace, see M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, MIT Press 1968.
5. M. Allen, and P. Ainley, *Lost Generation? New Strategies for Youth and Education*, Continuum Publishing Corporation 2010.
6. S. Winlow, and S. Hall, *Violent Night: Urban Leisure and Contemporary Culture*, Berg 2006.
7. It is fascinating, however, to read of the self-imposed strictures of the Spanish *botellon sin alcohol* related by Paolo Gerbaudo elsewhere in this collection.
8. J. Gilbert, in B. Little (ed), *Radical Future – Politics for the Next Generation*, Lawrence & Wishart 2010, <http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ebooks/radicalfuture.html>, p121.