

The Labour of Class Discourse

Jo Spence and the Unmentionableness of Class

Frances Hatherley

Introduction

Class is an uncomfortable subject. Even among the left, class as lived experience rather than economic category, is often left unexplored. In the arts, discussions of class are avoided at all costs. It seems that white, middle-class scholars are more comfortable discussing people of a different race or sexuality to them than dealing with the issue of social class in which they themselves are enmeshed. The retreat from the topic of class of the 1980s has slackened during the past decade of increasingly brutal austerity, in which the poor have become poorer and middle-class kids will be less well-off than their parents for the first time in generations. So it is no wonder that class is creeping back into debates...but tentatively, in fraught discussions. It is, however, remarkable that class is still so unmentionable as a subject worthy of serious engagement. For example, during recent re-examinations of socialist projects from the 1970s in Britain around art and politics, collectives and networks, class—so central to discussions of labour rights, childcare, education and strikes—has been left out of the discussion in many art history spaces. Due to the specificity of social class in Britain, it is from this perspective that I situate my discussion of class.

For the photographer, educator, cultural worker and writer Jo Spence (1934–1992), class was of vital importance. She stated, “Given my belief that class is a dominant feature in our lives, that is where I choose to put the bulk of my work.”¹ She wrote prolifically about the fact that her working-class background and the class struggle, both political and personal, was a key area of exploration in her practice, and yet it has been the least theorised topic of her work. Discussions of class in her work have been systematically sidestepped by other writers. Spence herself was even asked to leave a photography collective for pressing the issue of class.²

This article takes up the topic of art and work in three interconnected ways. The first brings to bear my own experience of being a woman from a working-class background, to join Spence’s accounts of speaking and writing about class and art in hostile environments in which class was/is unmentionable. The second is to look at Spence’s articulation of this issue as itself a form of work, requiring time, effort and emotional labour. This work was repressed by some of her contemporaries, and later made invisible in art history narratives. The third thread pulls out the class discourse present in Spence’s work, particularly around the photographic representation of women, factory work, invisible labour and respectability. To speak publicly about class, shame and poverty in art

spaces is a struggle of urgency and vulnerability. When your presence in such spaces presents a contradiction to the dominant narratives that erase the importance of class—for example, that one’s working-class identity is washed clean into a new classless subject by being an artist or having a degree—then being told that class doesn’t matter, you are effectively being told that your experiences don’t count. Continually having to confront this erasure comes with a great emotional cost. By bringing together these three strands, this article articulates a personal and political analysis of the work of class discourse within the arts.

Art and Class—If Working-Class Artists Exist, Where Is Class in Art Writing?

During my PhD, once I crystallised the focus of my thesis as the representations of working-class women, specifically by working-class artists themselves, the first obstacle I encountered was the assumption that artists are middle-class. As if producing creative work transforms one’s class background and classed identity with the click of a camera shutter:—click—you’re *middle-class now!* How, then, to write about work that apparently does not exist? And if there are no working-class artists, there are of course no books about working-class artists. Other than a book by Emmanuelle Cooper called *The People’s Art*, and books on art by *Others* for example in folk art, art brut, arte povera etc., there is a striking absence of critical writing about working-class artists.³

Ellen Meiksins Wood writes about the turn away from class on the left in *The Retreat from Class: A New ‘True Socialism’* (1998), in which she analyses the tendency to drop class from political and theoretical discussions, considering factors such as “the lure of intellectual fashion, as ‘discourse’ becomes the style of the eighties; or perhaps even a certain fastidious middle-class distaste for—not to say fear of—the working-class, and an arrogant and indignant refusal of the discomforts occasioned by the withdrawal of service.”⁴ In the absence of a class politics centred on the working class, “the search for revolutionary surrogates has been the hallmark of contemporary socialism”,⁵ while “the decisive detachment of politics from class was achieved by making ideology and ‘discourse’—themselves conceived as autonomous from class—the principal historical determinants.”⁶

There isn’t the space here to go into further intricacies of how and why there was a move away from class discourse in Britain from the 1990s onwards, but three general tendencies are worth mentioning. The first would be the legitimate frustrations of 1980s feminists at dealing with Marxists who regularly misunderstood, at best, and at worst erased the role gender plays in structural oppression in their readings of inequality’s classed power relations.⁷ The second would be the appearance of English translations of French psychoanalytic theory, in particular Luce Irigaray’s *Speculum of the other Woman* (1985), and the growing popularity of psychoanalysis as an approach to understanding social relations, sexuality, fears and desires. The third would be the project of neo-liberalism, with its championing of the individual over collectives and promotion of the fallacy that social mobility, with supposedly endless opportunities for those who worked hard enough, could create a classless society.⁸

This “retreat from class” has led to the erasure of serious and thorough theoretical consideration of how class features in political and social life. This perhaps goes some way towards explaining why, even in texts that discuss feminism, race, gender and sexuality, consideration of class is so often absent.⁹

With this in mind, then, class has been an unfashionable topic for decades: only now, due to the catastrophic effects of eight years of austerity, have widening inequalities in Britain forced class out of the margins and back into our consciousness. But this is not to say that class is a comfortable subject now. For the last five years, my experience of being in academia and the arts, writing about class as a woman from a working-class background

has been fraught: not only in getting writing that discusses working-class artists and cultural workers published,¹⁰ but in trying to prove to middle-class gatekeepers that, yes, class difference and inequities in the UK *still do exist*—and that this does matter. In a time when our social media profiles act as adverts promoting ourselves and we are expected to labour at being (in Nina Power’s phrase) “walking CVs”, having a working-class background, and researching and writing about class puts your very identity into question.¹¹ If working-class artists don’t exist, if academia is solely the territory of the middle and upper classes, then a tremendous amount of the work you find yourself doing is the work of pushing back against this disavowal.

Working-Class Women, Art and Education

As a child, and later as a young woman, I was always hyper-aware of the descriptions, heard like a slap, used against women who stepped out of line, women who failed to behave properly feminine. If a girl or woman dressed up *too much* she was “trashy”; if she wore too few clothes she was “tarty” or a “slag”; if she spoke up and took up space she was “mouthy” or “unladylike”. All these descriptions speak of a woman without “class” and, as I discovered, a woman without class is not a woman at all. Much later on I found writers who wrote about this, such as Carole-Anne Tyler in *Female Impersonation* (2003), who links a Western cultural understanding of “womanhood” to correct presentations of lady-like femininity.¹² I began to understand more critically how femininity is a classed construction.¹³

These questions around how and where women were allowed to exist followed me from childhood through to art school, higher education and a PhD looking at the ways working-class women are constructed as grotesque for supposedly failing to produce sufficiently middle-class femininity. During my BA, I came across the collaborative practice of Jo Spence, and in her work found a presentation of a working-class woman who was not concerned with producing beautiful, classy femininity, but instead encouraged all marginalised people to take up space, pick up cameras and take control over their own representations. Spence wanted us to learn how to undo the damage of sexist, racist and classist stereotypes that keep people locked out of the arts, cultural life and educational spaces. In her own words:

Through this work-in-progress we are interested to better understand how, through visual and other forms of representation, our psychological or subjective view of selves, and others, are constructed and held across institutions of media and within the hierarchical relationships in which we are constantly encountering the various facets of capital and the state.¹⁴

Spence’s works provides a vital example of a working-class woman working as a cultural worker with the arts and education, questioning how women take up space institutionally.

Despite the fact that her work is often described as if she were a solo artist, Spence always worked collaboratively.¹⁵ In 1974 she met her long-time collaborator, photographer and radical social historian Terry Dennett, and together they founded the Photography Workshop Ltd, then working with Half Moon Gallery to form Half Moon Photography Workshop and later *Camera*work magazine. Spence and Dennett’s extensive projects integrated photography with politics, the personal and educational. Their commitment to photography was as a tool for socially and politically active and responsible cultural work and production. As socialists, their desire to work together within their communities, and organising workshops to reach many other people and groups, informed their praxis of photography as a means to political and social change through education.

In 1984, Spence and the photographer, educator and therapist Rosy Martin together pioneered phototherapy,

which was developed as a practice which enabled Spence and Martin to work through their experiences of oppression, memories of childhood inequalities, class conflict, sexuality, and loss. It was important that this practice would not reproduce unhelpful existing power structures. This meant that phototherapy would not be hierarchical, that the usual power binaries of photographer and sitter were disrupted to give creative and supportive agency to both parties.

Spence also wrote extensively on her own work, life and methods, and this writing was part of her praxis. Rather than risk others misinterpreting her work and speaking *for* her, Spence spoke for herself extensively—in person at conferences and in talks, and in writings from the 1970s onwards for such magazines and journals as *Spare Rib*, *Ten 8*, *Variant*, *Camerawork*, *Incite*; in the books she co-edited, *Photography/Politics: Vol 1* (1979), *Photography/Politics: Two* (1987), *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography* (1991), *What Can a Woman Do with a Camera?: Photography for Women* (1995); in her solo authored books *Putting Myself in the Picture* (1988) and *Cultural Sniping* (1995), as well as many chapters in books spanning from the 1970s up until her death in 1992; and in projects she worked on that were published after her death. In this writing, she clearly and boldly states her claims and intentions.

One of the most revealing aspects of the class bias I have found in researching existing work on Spence is the erasure of class discourse and analysis. It may seem to some that class background or class identification is an unnecessary focus for analysis, or is irrelevant—the work itself produced by the artist is what matters. But what if this work is informed by its producer's class position, background and politics, and explicitly takes these as its subject? A complex and inclusive reading of any artwork must always take into account the material and social conditions in which that work was produced. In the case of Spence's work this approach is key, as her history and the complex conditions of her life were so much a part of the work she made: it was not from a neutral place that the work sprang, nor can it be for any art.

Yet, what I have found most striking in the literature on Spence's career, in reviews, articles, books, book chapters etc., is that the strong concerns she articulates in her writing have not been recognised as part of the *narrative* of her work. From her very earliest writing, class is identified as one of the central concerns that shaped all the projects she, Dennett, Martin, and others worked on. Even Spence's work on illness and her treatment by the medical establishment, which she experienced as alienating and dehumanising, is discussed in terms of class disempowerment; but in critical writings *on* Spence by others, class is a taboo subject that is repeatedly avoided.

Although the two detailed examples representing this tendency I will shortly discuss are both from the 1990s, this erasure or sidestepping of class is also noticeable in recent publications: an example is the 2013 publication *The Final Project*, a collection of essays on the last project Spence worked on before her death.¹⁶ Although this book does make a good contribution to research on Spence's last output, it also exemplifies the fact that it continues to be more common for people writing about Spence's work to discuss illness and death—themes which affected only a portion of her work—than it is for them to discuss class, a topic that permeated all her projects.

The Erasure of Class Discourse—Working-Class Identities as “Unmentionable”

Critical writing on Spence can be broadly categorised according to its main emphasis into three somewhat overlapping groups. Firstly, there are writings discussing Spence's work as an example of feminist art,¹⁷ which discuss Spence in reference to other British photographers from the 1970s/1980s.¹⁸ Secondly, there are those

feminist writers who write on Spence's use of her own body,¹⁹ and/or symbolic codes from Freudian frameworks.²⁰ Thirdly, there is an extensive body of texts that may discuss the above subjects, but take illness and death as their focus.²¹ There are a few exceptions that *do* mention class, but these are often simplistic, simply listing class as a subject category among others, or stereotypical and quite problematic.

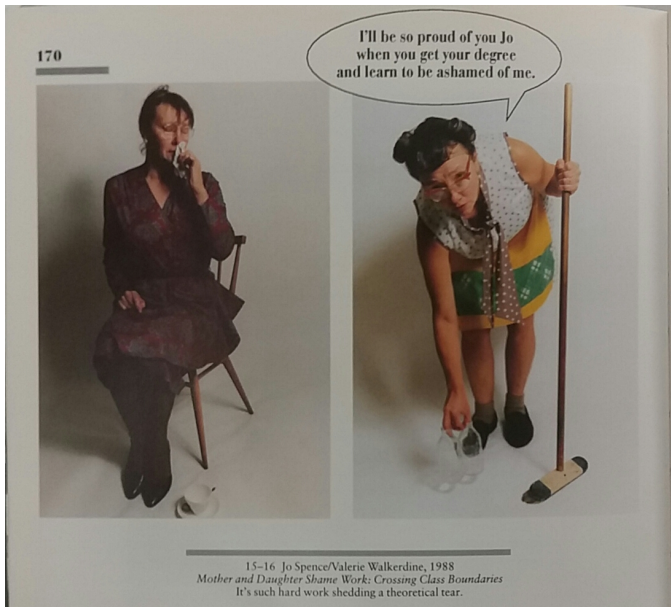
A large body of writing on Spence's work is focused on her projects on illness, and was published after her death. After surviving her battle with breast cancer, Spence subsequently fell ill with leukaemia, of which she tragically died in 1992. Although she tackled her illness in her work, making it a major topic of creative and therapeutic projects, it affected only the latter part of her life, whereas it is clear that class conflict was a *lifelong* concern.

From the 1990s Spence's work was written about most widely by feminist scholars of the second group, who mainly focused on her use of her own female body in photography, and on the politics of representation, aligning her with the canon of feminist artists of the 1980s. Many of these feminist scholars focused on psychoanalytic readings of Spence's "split-subjectivity" crisis (which she described as being torn between two *class* positions) and the personal traumas her work sought to work through. Their discounting of class as a topic worthy of examination in any serious depth is a striking exclusion. Although the majority of writing about Spence's work came after her death in 1992, a great deal of her writing from the 1970s onwards, the bulk of which was published in the 1980s, would have been available to scholars in the 1990s, so it is not the case that this aspect of the work could not have been known to scholars writing on Spence's work at this time: rather, their research enquiries reflected other areas of interest.

A classic example of this is Marsha Meskimmon's *The Art of Reflection: Women Artists' Self-Portraiture in the Twentieth Century* (1996). This book looks at gender identity and autobiographical models: Spence's political background is mentioned, but only in relation to gender politics and not her work on the lack of positive representation of working-class women. Writing about phototherapy, Meskimmon says, "In her phototherapy works from the 1980s, which explicitly concerned highly personal details of her own biography, Spence attempted to use photography as a therapeutic tool to help ease the emotional traumas brought on by her experience of breast cancer and the medical profession's treatment of her as a "patient'."²² However, the issue of cancer and illness is only *one* aspect in the therapeutic work: the traumas of class shame experienced throughout her life from school onwards are some of the strongest and most recurrent concerns in the phototherapy work, and are not mentioned here at all.

Statements such as Meskimmon's, listing cancer and illness (but *not* class) as Spence's focus in phototherapy, are common; also common are discussions of the work that mention class in a *list* of concerns, but neglect to discuss how it actually figures in her work.

Mother and Daughter Shame Work: Crossing Boundaries



In 1988, Spence teamed up with academic and writer Valerie Walkerdine, also from a working-class background, and through a phototherapy session they produced the work *Mother and Daughter Shame Work: Crossing Class Boundaries*. Again, Meskimmon's account of this piece displays a marked aversion to discussing class, which is mentioned very cursorily as an abstract category, in favour of a psychoanalytical reading of the gendered relationships between mothers and daughters:

Spence takes up the position of both mother and daughter in these images. One of the areas of greatest concern to women artists dealing with the psychic elements of mother-child relationship over the last few decades has been the separation of the child from the mother. In the case of female children, this separation is often more troubled and has fewer representational modes with which to figure it.²³

The problem is not that this analysis is wrong per se, but that it misses or ignores the real subject of the work, which is even referred to in the title: "shame work". In "crossing class boundaries", away from your family, you lose the place where you used to fit; and in the change of position, the shame of being working-class is transferred to those you have partially left behind. In the photograph on the right, Spence (as her mother) is positioned as subservient, low in status and physicality—she is *beneath* her educated daughter, who now holds a higher status than herself. The educated Spence is dressed smartly, dabbing a tear with a tissue, but it is the image of the mother that most strongly expresses physical pain: her awkward lowering of herself while looking up looks a strain, and Spence's face is lined by the effort. Through this performance, Spence is able to get close to the pain of her mother's sacrifice of her own life for the betterment of her family, something Spence used to resent. She is now positioned as experiencing it, perhaps masochistically, but also in order to *understand* her mother's position, and recognise that the pain of crossing boundaries was felt by both women.

Spence wrote regularly about how she learned in school, and from television and films, that being working-class was something to be ashamed of, and this in turn meant that when she began to be more educated she became painfully aware of her parents' class position, in particular her mother's "shameful" relationship to her factory work. In the BBC documentary *Putting Ourselves in the Picture* (1987),²⁴ Spence described her mother as an "invisible worker" who, after coming back from work, would clean herself up and remove the evidence of her labour as a factory worker, as if her work clothes were a sign of a breach in femininity. Spence's mother would then "change into" the more "respectable" clothing and role of "wife and mother".²⁵ As Spence argues, "It is also important to remember that the images of 'wife' and 'mother'—usually decoded as natural roles—mediate the

crucial work of women in unpaid domestic labour and in reproducing the labour force.”²⁶ When playing her mother in the phototherapy works, Spence could start to work through this shame her mother felt at having to work, which is really shame about being poor.

By using props and costumes to represent her mother’s dual occupations as housewife and factory worker, Spence could begin to feel and express solidarity with her mother. Through later analysis of the session’s performances, Spence began to understand the larger political structures that frame women’s labour as something shameful, as if having to work makes women less feminine, while at the same time that work is devalued and made invisible. Spence wrote that “this visual representation of women as not having to work, as the glamorous property of men, harks back to the tradition of bourgeois painting. It effectively displaces the idea that women do work, and so inhibits their sense of themselves as workers.”²⁷ It is clear that, in addition to being about the painful class divide between Spence and her mother, this piece is also about the larger subject of the way in which working-class women are constructed aesthetically as deviant when presenting signs of their labour. It is also, finally, about class solidarity between women as workers whose labours, like their lives, are made invisible.

Gen Doy’s *Seeing and Consciousness: Women, Class and Representation* (1995) intends to bring gender and class to bear on visual arts analysis, discussing the representation of women in “visual images” of art from the 1700s to the mid-1990s. Her examples come from France, in particular from the French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. Doy’s analysis follows a Marxist framework: she is interested in the economic position, power and status of women during this period, as artists and as subjects in visual representations, paintings and photography. However, class *identity* is not discussed. Throughout the book the representations of middle- and upper-class women dominate: working-class women feature only in discussions of poverty and the rise of prostitution in France via photographs by middle- and upper-class men of working-class women involved in the Paris Commune.²⁸ In short, Doy does not offer an analysis of working-class women as producers of their own representation.

Towards the end of the chapter “The Postmodern, Gender and Race”, Doy briefly discusses work by two black British artists and photographers, Roshini Kempadoo and Samena Rana, which explores race, identity and disability—yet for most of this chapter, Doy chooses Cindy Sherman as her case study. There is a real missed opportunity here, as Sherman’s work does not explore class explicitly. Strangely, Doy does briefly mention Spence, but seems unsure of Spence’s gender:

Perhaps Jo Spence was one of the few practitioners of photographic work to combine an accessible integration of theory and practice in his/her work without diluting important theoretical problems or patronising her/his audience. Unfortunately, I have not the space here to further develop comments of Spence’s contribution to photographic practice and theory. However, I feel there is a particular interesting investigation to be made of Sherman as a Postmodernist who is really not interested in theory.²⁹

This is astonishing: to side-line the *one* example in her whole book of a working-class female photographer, who was the producer *and* subject of work that dealt with *women, class and representation*, the very subtitle of Doy’s book!

Women and Work, Invisibility and Representation

Jo Spence was a member of the photography collective Hackney Flashers (1974–1980), an agitprop collective of

socialist feminists, writers, and photographers, which produced two main bodies of work focused on the interconnected topics of *Women and Work* (1975), and women and childcare in *Who's Left Holding the Baby* (1978). The latter stemmed from their experiences of producing work for the first exhibition, and the realities of many women having double or triple duties—going to work, then coming home and doing housework, and the work of parenting—caused in part by the lack of decent affordable or state-funded nurseries and childcare. The project *Women and Work* came about during Hackney Trades Council's 75th anniversary, titled *75 Years of Brotherhood*: part of its celebration was a funded exhibition, so the impetus for the Hackney Flashers was to produce work to show the unsung contribution women make to the workforce. *Women and Work* was formed of black and white photographs, texts, and statistics about women's position at work, economically and socially, from factory work to clerical work, and the often invisible and devalued work done by women in the home.

As Nicola Baird writes on Spence's intentions for this work, "Spence sought, in photographing women at work, to render visible what has previously been unacknowledged, unappreciated", thereby (quoting Spence) "validating women's experience and demonstrating their unrecognised contribution to the economy."³⁰ The *Women and Work* project thus acted as an intervention into the Hackney Trades Council's otherwise exclusive celebrations of Brotherhood.

And yet, as I previously mentioned, Spence's relationship to women and work could not be a purely political one: she had an emotional connection of what factory work *felt* like for some women, which included shame and the sense that paid labour was something to be hidden. Spence writes of the Hackney Flashers' project: "When I got involved in the women's movement, a group of us photographed some women in factories. Although we achieved our object, I was very uncomfortable about celebrating this. I think this was because the women workers were very much like my mother and I felt accountable to them."³¹ This unease signalled a growing discomfort around photographing others, around the unequal power dynamics inherent in documentary photography and its practices. An explanation for Spence's move away from the assumed "realism" of documentary photography is provided by Jessica Evans's critique of this practice:

In the 1980s, documentary realism, in its effacement of the often middle-class position of the photographer and viewer, voyeuristically offered up the working-class or disabled body as a spectacle of passivity and unselfconsciousness. A whole regime of representation, typified by the *naturalism* of the black and white, grainy, and naturally lit photograph, was reserved for those lower down the rhetoric of liberal humanism, documentary subjects appeared as creatures patiently awaiting "our" beneficence rather than as self-conscious demanding their rights and needs be met.³²

Even with "good" politically sound intentions, when photographing someone whose experience, work life and position in the world differs from your own, it is very difficult not to misunderstand, misrepresent, or simply speak for them. In addition to already being part of workshops enabling people from working-class and marginalised backgrounds to pick up a camera and learn the means to represent their own lives and creative expressions, Spence's work from this point on would tackle and explore issues that affected many women, such as illness, sexuality, ageing, class conflicts, class shame, educational inequality, and representation, but by using her *own* body and direct experiences so as not to run the risk of exploiting others.

Turning the Camera on Yourself: Exposure, Emotional Work and Risk

To turn the camera onto yourself makes you intrinsically part of work: the process of analysis becomes both

political and personal, meaning that the most common classist and sexist judgements on the work are also judgements of yourself as a working-class woman. If you *are* the work, then the boundaries slip and creative labour also becomes emotional labour and risky self-revelation. When you do produce work using yourself, your body, and your class experiences, then you are, as Spence was, told off for “airing your dirty laundry in public”.

³³ As I’ve argued elsewhere, women are disproportionately accused of narcissistic self-interest when creating work about their own lives. ³⁴ This reprimand is a caution against exploring the personal and structural conditions women are situated within, as any examination of women’s lives under both capitalism and patriarchy exposes the gendered oppressions, violence, limited career and educational options, unequal pay and compromised life choices women face.

Much of the work Spence would go on to create with Rosy Martin focused on unearthing repressed childhood memories of how growing up working-class meant being treated as possessing a stigmatised identity, so that coming from that class background was experienced as shameful, something to hide. As I pointed out earlier, class is a regularly disavowed subject of discussion in the arts: to prove that there is a gap of serious class discourse within the arts is to expose an absence. Class is either ignored, quietly overlooked, or refuted. A classic example of this is a typical comment Spence received: “you can’t be working-class, you’re too intelligent.” ³⁵ The work on class was also difficult to *make*, as Martin explains: “If the work that Jo and I have done is influencing the way people are using and thinking about photography, that’s brilliant—that’s why we went public with the work, that’s why we took the personal risks of laying ourselves and our psyches bare, being publicly vulnerable.” ³⁶ For Martin and Spence, the vulnerability of self-exposure to an often hostile public was worthwhile if it encouraged people to use photography to take back the power of representation, to create images of identities that had been made invisible, replaced with negative stereotypes. However, the success of the work was always going to be held back by the limits of public reception: the aims of Spence and Martin could not be fully realised in institutions hostile to class discussion.

At the end of this article, I now return to the topic of Art and Work—to how all this relates to stories of working-class women, education, and art, and why this might matter. The perception that artists are part of the middle and upper classes still prevails, despite an understanding that artists live with precarity, exploitation and irregular paid work etc. So, what about artists, cultural workers and writers who come from the working classes, who are poor to begin with—is our work less valid if we are not perceived to be part of an elite? Or is it more comforting to just imagine that the working classes do not produce art and culture; that nothing of value can come from people who are economically disadvantaged? The answer is that intelligent and talented working-class people destabilise the assumed hierarchy of who gets to create culture and who deserves to take up elite positions within education and art spaces. When their work gains visibility, it leads us to question how and why the current occupiers of these institutional spaces came to be there: perhaps it is not because they are smarter, or more creative, or harder working than us, but because they are luckier, structurally more advantaged, and benefit from more opportunities and financial support. When writers and cultural workers produce work about our working-class backgrounds, this work is doubly intrusive, as it contests narratives around meritocracy and exposes the fact that class inequalities are still very much alive.

If our work discusses class, and thus exposes the aspects of self we are taught to find shameful, to treat as best kept hidden, then pushing these stories into the public eye risks not only our work being rejected—deemed too personal, too subjective, not political enough—but also our very existence being denied or disavowed. What I have illustrated here is that the “unmentionableness” of working-class work, of our lives and stories, makes such work a constant personal labour of love and a demand for worth, for ourselves and our own culture in all its variations. To write, speak and create for ourselves, acknowledging our class, is an uphill battle that takes us

further and further from the class origins in which we began. It seems most fitting to end this article with a passage from Spence describing this process:

I can't go back to any physical roots, there was never any pure state left behind to be rediscovered. Only half truths, evasions, fabrications, fantasies, memories, hypotheses. The best I'll ever be able to manage will be a montage of fragments of reconstructed histories in which I can gain new knowledge and wisdom and perhaps begin to share it. Not merely a history of victimisation and injury, nor a shift into a utopian world of "*positive images*", but one which represents the continuous struggle to speak, to re-define, to name, of coming into being. Where I become the subject of my own enquiry rather than the object of someone else's, where I act rather than am acted upon.³⁷

Notes:

1. Spence, Jo. "Cultural Sniper". *Ten* 8, "Photo Paperback: Bodies of Excess". Vol. 2. No.1. pp. 8-25.
2. Discussing Spence's expulsion from Half Moon Photography Workshop, see John A. Walker. *Left Shift: Radical Art in 1970s Britain*. London: IB Tauris. 2001. p. 244.
3. Cooper, Emmanuel. *People's Art: Working-Class Art from 1750 to Present Day*. Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing. 1994.
4. Meiksins Wood, Ellen. *The Retreat From Class: A New "True" Socialism*. London: Verso Books. 1998. pp. 10-11.
5. *Ibid*, p. 14.
6. *Ibid*, p. 47.
7. See Hartmann, Heidi I. "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a more Progressive Union". *Capital & Class*. Vol. 3. No. 2. Summer 1979. pp. 1-33.
8. Although the phrase "we're all middle-class now" is strongly associated with Tony Blair, John Major was discussing a much-desired neoliberal society as being classless before him.
9. The opposite of this trend can be seen in Christine Delphy's *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. London: Verso Books. 2016. The book is a collection of the 1970s texts of French feminist writer Christine Delphy, which was first published in English in 1984. Delphy treats women as a separate class from men, in their oppression via men directly, and patriarchy structurally. The problem with this argument is that Delphy ends up arguing that there is no class difference between women (p. 135), which is simply not the case. The oppressions faced by middle-class women are different from those experienced by working-class women and women of colour, and affect women's lives in different degrees and aspects: for example, access to education, childcare and job opportunities.
10. I have, for example, been told that although an article I submitted on representations of working-class girls in British film was very strong, the journal already had a piece discussing violence against indigenous women of Canada: as if publishing two very different articles that both discussed class was unnecessary.

I have had discussions around class inequalities in arts and education called “straw-man” arguments, and my piece rejected without revisions, despite a wealth of statistics that prove both institutions to be complicit in discrimination and unequal practices.

11. Power, Nina. *One Dimensional Women*. London: Zero Books. 2009. p. 19.
12. Tyler, Carole-Anne. *Female Impersonation*. London: Routledge. 2003.
13. Hatherley, Frances. “A Working-Class Anti-Pygmalion Aesthetics of the Female Grotesque in the Photographs of Richard Billingham”. *European Journal of Women’s Studies*. July 2018. Special issue titled “Femininity Revisited: Figuring Critical Femininity Studies”.
14. Spence, Jo. “Beyond the Family Album”. *Ten-8*, No. 4. 1980. pp. 8–10.
15. In Spring 2018 I co-curated the exhibition *Cultural Sniping: Photographic Collaborations in the Jo Spence Memorial Library Archive*, highlighting the often maligned collaborative nature of Spence’s work.
16. Lee, Louisa (ed.). *The Final Project*. London: Ridinghouse. 2013.
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