

Twisted Seams: A Gendered Social Haunting

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Abstract

The starting point for this article is the bitterly fought UK Miners' Strike of 1984-1985 in which women played a significant role. The concept of 'social haunting', as developed by Avery Gordon and applied in the Manchester Metropolitan University Social Haunting project, is used to suggest that the strike activism involved a mobilisation and confrontation with the 'ghosts' of the mining past that involved complex and interwoven experiences of class and gender relations of power. The discussion focuses upon what is normally unspoken and unwritten about the impact of living with coal mining on the inter-generational subjectivities of women from mining families. I argue that the strike raised the ghosts of the injustices of mining history but that its defeat subverted the process that had begun of dealing particularly with the ghosts of gender inequality. The experience of the strike now constitutes a further dimension to the complexity of this haunting. Taking inspiration from Gordon's efforts to transcend disciplinary boundaries, I use a variety of sources and approaches, including sociological and historical research, memoir and the participatory learning achieved in a voluntary arts organisation in the ex-mining town of Seaham, to address this gendered haunting from my own, female perspective, and seek ways of raising, and transcending the ghosts through conscious art practice in a local setting.

Keywords

Miners' Strike, coal-mining, women, ghosts, haunting, community, memoir, art

The UK Miners' Strike

The UK Coal Miners' Strike of 1984-1985, provoked by the threat of pit closures, was bitterly fought between the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) under the leadership of Arthur Scargill, and the Conservative Government under the premiership of Margaret Thatcher. It was perceived on both sides as a struggle for the political future of the country and its narratives were dominated by the language of class struggle and the political ideologies of trade unionism versus emergent conservative neo-liberalism (eg. Scargill 1984; Beynon 1985). The miners were pitted against a government that was prepared to marshal all the resources at its disposal to defeat them, including the law, the police and the media (Williams 2019). Against overwhelming odds, and despite the suffering endured, the miners held out for a whole year, their determination bolstered by the support of international mining unions and socialist networks, and various non-aligned groups. The participation of a range of community, identity and interest groups was facilitated largely by the organisation of women from mining families who, although linked to the NUM, created their own self-directing organisation, Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC). The women's activism extended the terms of reference of the strike beyond the narrowly industrial sphere of the dispute and into the family and wider social and political spheres (Spence and Stephenson 2009; Spence 2010). Striking miners and their families carried a weight of emotionally charged

expectations concerned not only with the possibility of reversing the planned pit closures but also of defending the historically hard-won rights of working people against the depredations of neo-liberal policies. Throughout the year, the meaning of the strike was articulated through a developing and dynamic discourse around questions of 'jobs and community' in which women's voices were prominent and in which local community values, employment and industrial issues, and global questions of justice were inextricably linked (eg. Seddon 1986; Witham 1986; Stead 1987).

The strength of the miners' case depended upon establishing that their cause was a just one, and that their strike action was motivated by a very real threat to their jobs and way of life. Against a hostile state and press, miners and their supporters were keen to emphasise the importance to the wider society of the values traditionally associated with the miners' union and with mining life, rather than specific political ideologies. Such values included the right to secure, well-paid employment, the right to live in prosperous, settled and secure communities, the right to self-determination, and the right to expect a decent, secure future for children. Maintaining broad and popular support, notwithstanding political allegiance, depended to some degree upon stressing the 'authenticity' of the struggle and this was personified in the values represented by the active involvement of 'miners' wives' (Spence and Stephenson 2019).¹

The appeal to values in addition to the economic case, enabled a fairly wide spectrum of different interest groups to coalesce around miners and their families as the legitimate bearers of the social traditions associated with honest and respectable labour. This offered opportunities for women from mining backgrounds to publicly articulate their own understanding of what was at stake in words that were not restrained by the limitations of standard trade union politics and the minutiae of employment matters. Thus alongside the masculinist tropes of mining politics, a developing feminised narrative emerged, centred on ideas of 'community' and the stability of the familial world, that emphasised the emotional meaning of mining to the nation (eg. Parker 1986; Samuel et al. 1986; Witham 1986). The veracity of this narrative was grounded in the experiences of women and their relationship to mining, and its appeal was authentic insofar as it adhered to the women concerned. However, feminised strike dialogue tended to exclude those aspects of female experience and understanding that were not directly linked to mining, in other words to men, and decentred those women who participated who could not claim a direct relationship with a miner. Women's activism was given legitimacy in the strike predominantly with reference to who they were, rather than to their independent opinions. Meanwhile, the narrative of authenticity that facilitated female participation contained inherent tensions inscribed within the historically dependent and powerless position of women in mining life. In a class struggle in which human and social relationships were a feature of concern and a source of legitimation for activism, the female narrative was therefore problematic, inviting the incorporation of conservative family and gender mores into the strike narrative.

The question of pit closures was one of male work in a context of rising unemployment and de-industrialisation. Deep coal mining was already in decline and in mining-dependent localities the traditional bonds of mining life were loosening. From 483 pits, mid-century,

1 The matter of 'authenticity' caused some of the women's support groups to exclude women who were not members of mining families. One group, called itself a 'Miners' Wives' group as a 'political statement' even though it comprised women from a variety of backgrounds. The issue also affected the question of membership of the National Organisation of Women Against Pit Closures. (See Spence and Stephenson, 2009; 2019).

there remained only 133 in 1984 (McAlister et al. 2015). In County Durham, the focus of this article, the number of working pits had reduced from 121 in 1953 to 57 in 1967 with significant impact upon the reality of 'mining community' as ex-mining villages declined and miners from redundant pits were transferred to mines in other localities (Bulmer 1978). The strike was fought in a bid to halt the acceleration of this trend which presaged the end of the industry. As such, this was a struggle for a future that tended to be imagined in terms of the past.

Conditions for strikers became more desperate as the year progressed, entrenching further the appeal to the past. Miners and their families recalled the strength and determination of their forebears to create a powerful trade union and cohesive and mutually supportive communities, forging political and personal bonds of solidarity in the teeth of persistent oppression, denigration, and hostility from mine owners and the state. Strike narratives, drawing on historic images of mining community that had only partial bearing on the realities of 1980s life, presented the 1984-85 strike on a continuum with past glories, even though those glories were interspersed with some terrible defeats for miners. In so doing the discourse romanticised and idealised the class heroism of striking miners and their families and the fortitude of mining communities (Samuel et al. 1986; Allen 2001; Spence and Stephenson 2009). The cohesion of strikers and the central principle of class loyalty was reinforced by the dehumanisation and public shaming of strike breakers, a serious problem in 1984-85, as 'scabs'. The language of class loyalty, partnership between husbands and wives, trust between comrades, the performance of collective organisation, and indeed, the fate of strike breakers who could never again 'belong', drew inspiration from intergenerational memories of the past, especially the General Strike and Lock Out of 1926, within living memory, in which the miners' union had been at the sharp end of a defeated trade union struggle (Barron 2010).² Women are present, if not central in these narratives which continue to inform popular understanding of strike relationships, but they speak only of solidarity and loyalty in class terms. The mutual interest of women with their men is assumed, and gendered power relations are irrelevant to them.

History has consequences

The sexual division of labour in UK mining life derived from the 1842 Mines and Collieries Act that excluded all females and boys under the age of 10 from underground work. Subsequently, women inhabited a separate domain from men, with primary responsibilities for the private spheres of family, home, and neighbourhood, accruing social status according to their success in managing resources and relationships within that sphere. The nature of work in the mines was such that a bond of interdependence was created between men and women. She and her children depended on his wage for their survival. He depended upon her servicing his need to be fit for work, maintaining the comfort of his home, and caring for children and any other family dependents. Family life was shaped by the routines and rhythms of the pit. Men's shifts meant women's shifts plus: women had to be available to wake husbands and sons, perhaps at different times, to feed them, fill tin baths for them, have work clothes and 'bait' ready at whatever time they left for or returned from work and then undertake the usual work involved in childcare, elder-care, health care, and running the home (See Bulmer 1978; Carr 2001).

2 The miners' dispute with mine-owners continued, as a strike and lock-out for 7 months after the end of the 9 day general strike.

For much of the history of mining in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, housing conditions were poor, and women were engaged in a constant battle against dirt, lack of amenities, overcrowding, and all the pains that come with poverty. Generally, women were neither expected, nor able to take paid work after marriage, and in most mining districts, there were few opportunities available for such work. Although a few women became active within formal political and community organisations, in the main, these were a masculine domain and the women's organisations such as in the Labour Party or in the Church, were subservient to the primary organisation, dominated by men (Andrews 1957; Carr 2001). It was men who dominated local decision-making in the public sphere and even if women were granted day-to-day control over family decisions, it was men who had the ultimate say. Wives deferred to their husbands. They generally had no income of their own and money given to them by husbands from the wage-packet was intended for the household budget which women were expected to manage. Different families had different methods of dividing the wage, but invariably, the portion given to the woman was intended for family use, whereas the portion retained by the man was for his personal and leisure use. Thus women and children were financially absolutely dependent upon the male wage and men had absolute dominion within their families. The gendered division of labour in mining life, and the limitations it imposed upon women's health, welfare and expectations, has been well documented in a number of studies and memoirs. As Dennis et al. show, it lasted in these terms well into the 1950s (eg. Wilson 1910; Dennis et al. 1956; Williamson 1982; Thew 1985).

The different spheres inhabited by men and women meant different spatial positioning and different relational networks resulting in a correspondingly gender inflected discourse in social life. The inequality between men and women inevitably expressed itself unevenly, with different priorities and understanding according to circumstance and personnel, but for the most part, female knowledge and skill was accorded a lower value than that of the men, and often women did not presume to have, let alone speak an opinion (Dennis et al. 1956). Mining life was therefore imbued with gender tensions and on the part of the women, alive with silences that might only be broken in conversation between women. Even then, common experiences of oppression were not necessarily given words, though implicitly acknowledged in the subtext of what was spoken.

Women were acutely aware of the dangers of mining for the men, and the toll it took on men's health. This fostered a degree of female respect and concern that sanctioned male power. The exercise of that power in the home depended largely upon the vagaries of the individual personalities of adult men, and no matter how benign, it was assumed that such power needed to be managed by women for their own welfare and that of their children. Women lived in states of constant class anxiety that devolved around the dangers of the pit, the inadequacy of the mining wage, and poor quality housing in a degraded physical environment. Deep within that class anxiety was fear that understood the dangers of untrammelled male power, and concern for the future of children who were destined to inherit their parents' conditions. Anxiety about the dangers of underground work could be laced with guilt that men had to suffer so much on behalf of maintaining their families. No matter how much children were loved, they needed to be desensitised as they grew: for boys needed to be hardened to face the physical and mental demands of coal mining, and girls needed to be hardened to bear the physical and emotional demands of servicing the workers in such a brutal and brutalising industry. All had to be taught the importance of the pit, and to identify with the culture of mining life. The unspoken relationship of women with mining was thus complicated. It was both consensual and conflictual. Women's class interests and identities aligned with those of the men, but their gender interests and identities, largely known but

unspoken by them, cut across and through these class interests (Williamson 1982; Thew 1985; Barron 2010). The repressions and subjections of class powerlessness was never just that for women, it was also a context-specific repression and subjection of gender dependence.

By the time of the outbreak of the strike in March 1984, miners and their families inhabited a different world from their grandparents – more prosperous, connected nationally and globally through media and transport links, benefiting from technological innovation both within the pit and without, and as aware of the forces of social change as any other group of people. Local settlements were less monolithic and community relations less tight. Men and women were more similarly (if not equally) educated and women were benefiting from opportunities to take work in a feminising economy, although such work was relatively low paid. Issue based politics, including feminism, anti-racism, and gay rights³ were intruding on the national consciousness and representatives of these interests were to make common cause with the miners through WAPC (eg. Goodspeed 2019). 'Community of interest' was becoming a more significant organising force than 'community of place' (Bell & Newby 1971). Organising specifically as women, rather than as union or party members, was consonant with the principles of organisation established within second wave feminism and the informal conversations between women in shared, public spaces created conditions similar to those associated with feminist consciousness-raising (Rowbotham 1973a). Participating in traditionally union-organised strike activities such as picketing and public speaking, at the same time as running kitchens and organising food parcels for striking miners and their families, created conditions that called into question the historical silence and invisibility of the majority of women in public life (eg. Seddon 1986). Traces of the past still lived in everyday lives and relationships but the expectations and experiences of women in the strike rubbed against the traditionalist expectations of the historically authentic miner's wife. The appeal to the received and narrated past which, with its emphasis on 'Miners' Wives' spoke of the loyalties of the women to their husbands but precluded the possibility of their self-determination as women with their own class and gender interests (Beaton 1985). Thus the practice of activism in the strike began to open gender wounds and what had been 'hidden from history' began to demand attention (Rowbotham 1973b; Seddon 1986; Witham 1986; Stead 1987).

Finding the cracks between their performed historic roles and their emergent dynamic consciousness too great to hold, women began to grapple with what Avery Gordon would define as the 'ghosts' of mining life and their place within it. This process involved women at the heart of strike activism becoming increasingly self-conscious about their historically complex and changing relationship with mining work and life and indeed with men, in ways that were not always comfortable but that needed to be conceded and dealt with. The unfolding conditions of the strike demanded that 'something-be-done' about the received conditions of gender inequality as it manifested itself in conditions of class oppression in general and in the circumstances of the strike in particular (Gordon 2008, xvi).

The documented evidence suggests that most women activists were forced to deal with the ways in which received truths conflicted with present circumstances. Some repressed the ghosts further. Some acknowledged their existence and addressed the consequences of their presence during the strike, and then after the defeat reburied them. Some attempted to transcend them and changed their lives – often with a great deal of pain:

3 I have used terms in common usage at the time for these categories of inequality.

Cath: Everything isn't rosy in the women's groups now. In the strike we were all saying how the women's groups are going to go on and on for ever, we were never going to stop. It isn't like that. The women are tired, a lot of them are shattered, and they couldn't wait to get back to what they were.

Suzanne: They had a lot of conflict with their men. And now they have got peace. They don't want to start it up again. (Corrigan et al. 1986)

Those who were able to move into different futures mainly they did so as individuals or small friendship groups (Spence & Stephenson 2007). The defeat of the strike subverted the possibility of continuing a wider ongoing process of social transformation. The re-silencing, that followed the defeat, was not only about gender inequality but also about the powerlessness of class positioning. After the miners returned to work, the pit closure programme accelerated with 125 pits closing before the announcement in 1993 that another 30 would be closed precipitating a further wave of WAPC activism (Spence 1998; SWAPC 2018).

My purpose here is not to continue the narrative of the strike and the significance of women in it. That has been told elsewhere (Seddon 1986; Witham 1986; Stead 1987; Fitzgerald et al. 2005; Spence & Stephenson 2009; 2013). I begin with it rather as a pivotal moment in my life that focused on my own troubled relationship with a mining past and one that brought to the surface, as for many women an awareness of the ambiguities, contradictions and tensions of their position and their loyalties (Shaw & Mundy 2005). Following Gordon (2008) and also Bright (2016, 2018), I contend that people from mining backgrounds in general remain 'haunted' by the injustices of a painful history of oppression, including that endured during the strike and that there is a disquiet beneath the surface of the post-industrial and 'regenerated' landscape of ex-mining settlements. In post-mining landscapes, people from mining backgrounds continue to attempt to be 'who they were', struggle to prevent themselves being written out of history, and are impeded in efforts to imagine 'who they might become' in terms that resonate with their received knowledge and cultural expectations. The political turmoil and the dissatisfaction that can be discerned in everyday conversations, social media and local council agendas suggest a disturbance, a 'vertigo' (Young 2007) associated with late- or post-modern de-industrialised conditions. However, the experience of being haunted is not monolithic. It is gendered. The ghosts that trouble women, concern the difficulties of locating the anxieties that articulate with their complex experiences of class and gender relationships in mining history and the culture that emerged through that history.

Social Haunting

Gordon's thesis, as outlined in her seminal text 'Ghostly Matters' is an effort to address, and to find a way of writing about the consequences of the 'hidden injuries' (Sennet & Cobb 1972/3) caused by historic experiences of social violence visited upon particular social groups. She argues that the analysis of oppression through the modernist categorisation of gendered, racialised and classed structures of inequality are insufficient for a full understanding of the ways in which power operates on and through generations, and the ways that injustices present and remembered, manifest in everyday lives over time.

The concept of social haunting draws from a range of theorists in the fields of psychology, history, sociology, and literature and following Barthes' notion of interdisciplinarity, attempts

to break some of the disciplinary boundaries to open new ways of thinking and understanding and create 'a language for identifying hauntings and for writing with the ghosts any haunting inevitably throws up (p.7). Gordon finds a way into such writing through literature, exploring in particular Toni Morrison's *Beloved*' and Luisa Valenzuela's, *He Who Searches*' as novels which raise the haunting of slavery in the USA in one, and of Argentina's 'Disappeared' people in the other. In both these cases, the violence and injustices of the past are unresolved and continue to manifest in the present, disturbing the order of contemporary life in ways that are not easily identified through any rational or empirical attempts to understand. The form of the novels facilitates the possibility of speaking of and to the ghosts. Thus Gordon issues an invitation to social theorists to move beyond research and theory that can only touch what can be seen, and what is known, to acknowledge and work with what is unseen but present, silent but clamorous. To do so demands the use of processes and language that implicates authors and refuses to be bound by subject-object dualities. Such an approach ultimately demands transformation of all involved. In this way, Gordon suggests that sociology can be part of a dynamic social process of private and communal reckoning with the inherited past and the impact of power inequalities in the present. Dealing with haunted conditions, is not simply theory. Encountering ghosts, always demands a something-to-be-done in the present, and the beginnings of this involves acknowledging their destabilising and sometimes frightening presence.

That the concept of Social Haunting is relevant to the history of mining in the UK and that the 1984-1985 strike is a powerful ghost within that haunting has been recognised in the work of Geoff Bright (2016; 2018). The team of researchers involved in the participatory and dynamic Social Haunting research project led by Bright (www.socialhaunting.com), visited the Art Block, a small local art gallery in the ex-mining town of Seaham run by volunteer members of East Durham Artists' Network (edan) and in which I am involved. Using local networks and contacts forged through the community connections of edan, the Social Haunting team stimulated an open-ended process of discussion, reflection and identification with a group of local people that located emotion and memory specific to 'being in this place'. Participating in this process led me to consider how the gallery might use art to enable the beginning of an acknowledgement of the ghosts, and also to attempt to articulate the nature of my own haunting, awareness of which was precipitated by my response to the 1984-85 strike. It raised further questions about how locally based art practice might play a part in the 'something-to-be-done' that involves dealing with the troubled past. The remainder of this article deals with that experience, although it needs to be acknowledged that the very act of writing the article is also a response to the nature of my own haunted condition.

Ghosts of a miner's daughter

My concern with the gendered nature of haunting speaks of my personal ghosts that were activated by the 1984-1985 strike; they would not, and still do not rest. As the daughter of a miner who hated his job and was already dead by 1984, my own relationship with the strike was so fraught that I was almost paralysed by it. I could not join it as a female activist, even though I had done so in the mining strikes of 1972 and 1974, because the feminism that during the late 1970s had inspired me, offered me a new understanding of myself as woman, a voice with which to speak it, and the confidence to act it in the world, had revolted against what being a member of a mining family meant to me: kitchens, wife-dom and an inherent sexism that I did not see being addressed in the early stages of the strike. I was desperate that

the miners should win, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not believe they would.⁴ I wanted the pits to remain open but I wanted them closed. I wanted my identity to be affirmed, but I didn't want to inhabit that identity or join the struggle as a miner's daughter. I wanted the despoiled landscape to be reclaimed but I did not want the pit wheels to vanish. I wanted women and men to have equal access to safe, well-paid work and that meant an end to mining, but I knew such work did not exist. My ghosts stalked me and would not be put to rest. I was surprised by the depth of my emotion that spilled out in unexpected situations. I had thought I had left mining life behind. I had rejected it, leaving home when I was eighteen. Now, twelve years later, I was back in Seaham, my home town, founded on three pits. It was the only place I really wanted to be and I was unable to participate in the most important locally based class struggle of my lifetime.

Growing up in an almost monolithic mining culture, I had witnessed, and been part of the effort of women to bolster the masculine ego. Negatively, the process involved subterfuge, performance, and lies (Rowbotham 1973). Positively it encouraged the establishment of female networks based on mutual sympathy and recognition. Overwhelmingly, I had felt the anxieties of my mother and aunts in their daily struggles to keep life on 'an even keel'. I had seen violence too. Boys being 'hardened' to behave like men who would laugh in the face of conditions of the pit. Girls and women being cowed to accept the authority of men and the control of the community that judged them by their housekeeping and mothering skills. I had witnessed male pain. Despite the bravado, the humour, and the camaraderie, I listened to pit stories and knew men were often in danger and afraid.⁵ Sexism was taken for granted. Racism was part of everyday language. There was gossip. Everybody watched everybody else. My father was claustrophobic but the outbreak of war in 1939 when he was 14 years old left him with no choice other than to go to the pit. I had heard him crying when he had returned from trying to work a shift on the coal face, in order to earn better pay. He was condemned to being a 'banksman', an onsetter working a three-shift cycle, often seven days a week, for the rest of his life. He was perpetually tired and often angry. My mother was exhausted by the constant emotionally and physically draining effort to keep my father 'happy'. I had seen men bedridden on account of accidents in the pit. I had seen women support each other through childbirth. I had seen men drink themselves to a stupor because a boy child had been born. I had witnessed the grief of a mother when a boy of 15 was killed at the pit. There was pain, anger, prejudice, and inequality everywhere. I valued the love and security I had in my family, but I did not want to inherit this world in which I had grown up.

This description of my past skims the surface of my feelings. So, in the following I undertake some experimental memoir writing, I shift gear, and try to raise, acknowledge and deal with the affective nature of my ghosts. Partly I do this in third person, because the ghosts seem 'other'. They are me, not me now, but still with me:

A cabbage white butterfly flutters towards her father. He claps his hands together and it is dead. Her mother loves flowers. Her father grows cabbages and potatoes because his childhood was hungry. His father was sent to a work camp in Essex in the 1930s. He must work. Her mother sprinkles packets of Virginia and Night-scented Stock seed around the edges of the garden. Her grandfather smells of pipe tobacco and spits into the fire. He is loathed by his six children. He never took them anywhere. He walks

4 Others felt this too, but it is not apparent in strike narratives. See Chapman, (1999).

5 In the mining art group to which I belong, men have recently described their feelings about the movement underground of the earth above and below them, and about their fear in narrow tunnels. They too are haunted by their experiences.

into the countryside with her accompanied by the dog and his walking stick. He cuts her bunches of pinks and gypsophila from his garden. Her grandmother says he broke her nose in the sneck of the door. He denies it. He sings Methodist songs. They all watch 'Songs of Praise' every week. One year her father turns away from cabbages and plants rows roses.

She walks through the town park with a friend picking bluebells and primroses for a grandmother. The park-keeper looms behind them shouting. They drop the flowers and run. He is dressed in a brown overall and his face is red. They turn to see him stamping on the flowers and grinding them into the earth.

The slag is spreading. It has smothered the beach and is shrouding the fields. A pit heap slides into a school at Aberfan. She is fourteen and hurts. When she is seventeen a neighbour's nephew and a class mate's father die when the tippler depositing the slag falls over the cliff. They say a prayer at school to mark the loss. There are blue butterflies gathering at the edge of the slag behind the pit. They vanish when the pit closes and a new housing estate is built.

I needed to escape. I went south. But mining followed. Strikes in 1972 and 1974. Being a miner's daughter was never a neutral condition. It made demands on me. Always I felt tension between the rhetoric that elevated miners as heroes of the working class, and my experience as a female in a mining family. I unintentionally returned home, relieved to resituate myself in a cultural milieu where things unsaid were understood. My father died the year after I returned. Then there was the 1984 strike.

In 1993, hoping to assuage the guilt of the strike, concentrating on political issues and class politics, and resolving to ignore my woman's ghosts, I participated in the women's pit camp at Vane Tempest Colliery as part of the national campaign against pit closures. During that campaign, far from staying where I put them, my ghosts became clamorous. I found myself putting aside my feminism in favour of my identity as a miner's daughter, using traditional coping strategies to deal with working class female subordination, and performing a part that was not quite at one with my real self (Spence 1998; Spence & Stephenson, 2019). Could I be authentic? Could I deny that I was authentic? Was I 'one of us' or had I grown a different skin?

The pits closed and local life changed (Waddington et al. 1991). The sights and sounds and smells of work disappeared. The pits heads were demolished. Young men took drugs and some committed suicide. Young women worked as carers and cleaners. Men walked babies and dogs. Legal and illegal drug use escalated. The older mining generation of my parents died. Their colliery and council houses became 'undesirable'. Regeneration projects began the process of 'improvement': public art, pit wheels, heritage. A major First World War sculpture, 'Tommy'.⁶ A new population with southern accents living on a new estate on the Vane Tempest pit site. A new marina. Day trippers. Sea glass tourists from the USA. Fences. Fences everywhere where once there had been freedom to roam. Rubbish in the old town park as the cherry trees and roses died. Orchids emerging where once there was slag. Fields and flowers reclaimed from slag and mines, threatened by a ruthless process of housing development. The language of the town's Facebook page becomes increasingly fractious,

6 The 'Tommy' sculpture, officially entitled 11.01, By Ray Lonsdale, installed in 2014, is the main tourist attraction in Seaham.

immoderate, and right wing. I am alienated from people with whom I identify.

Finding a way through

Twenty years after the strike began, Carol Stephenson and Monica Shaw of Northumbria University interviewed twenty women who had been strike activists in Durham and Northumberland. They also interviewed me, knowing I had been involved in the pit camps of 1993, and I found myself attempting to rationalise my strike paralysis. This triggered a powerful need to understand more fully how gender division in mining life had affected me. The Stephenson-Shaw interviews revealed that most women had experienced ambiguous and contradictory feelings about mining (Shaw & Mundy 2005). This insight opened the way to academic research and analysis that I have pursued mainly in partnership with Carol Stephenson, that is always inflected with our personal stories (eg. Spence 2010; Spence & Stephenson 2007; 2019; 2012; 2013; 2019).

Research-based analysis offers insights that both reflect and affect 'living in the world'. Gordon's analysis of social haunting suggests the need to engage with personal-social 'ghosts' to actively transform that living world (Gordon 2008, p. 22). Applying my developing understanding in my own life has linked research practice with community based practice and impacted on my post-retirement participation in edan that is an explicitly 'non-political' arts organisation. East Durham Artists' Network has been a vehicle to transport me into different language forms – using poetry and the visual arts, to explore a different type of knowledge and understanding from that derived from 'professional' research and writing (edan Writers 2014; 2015).

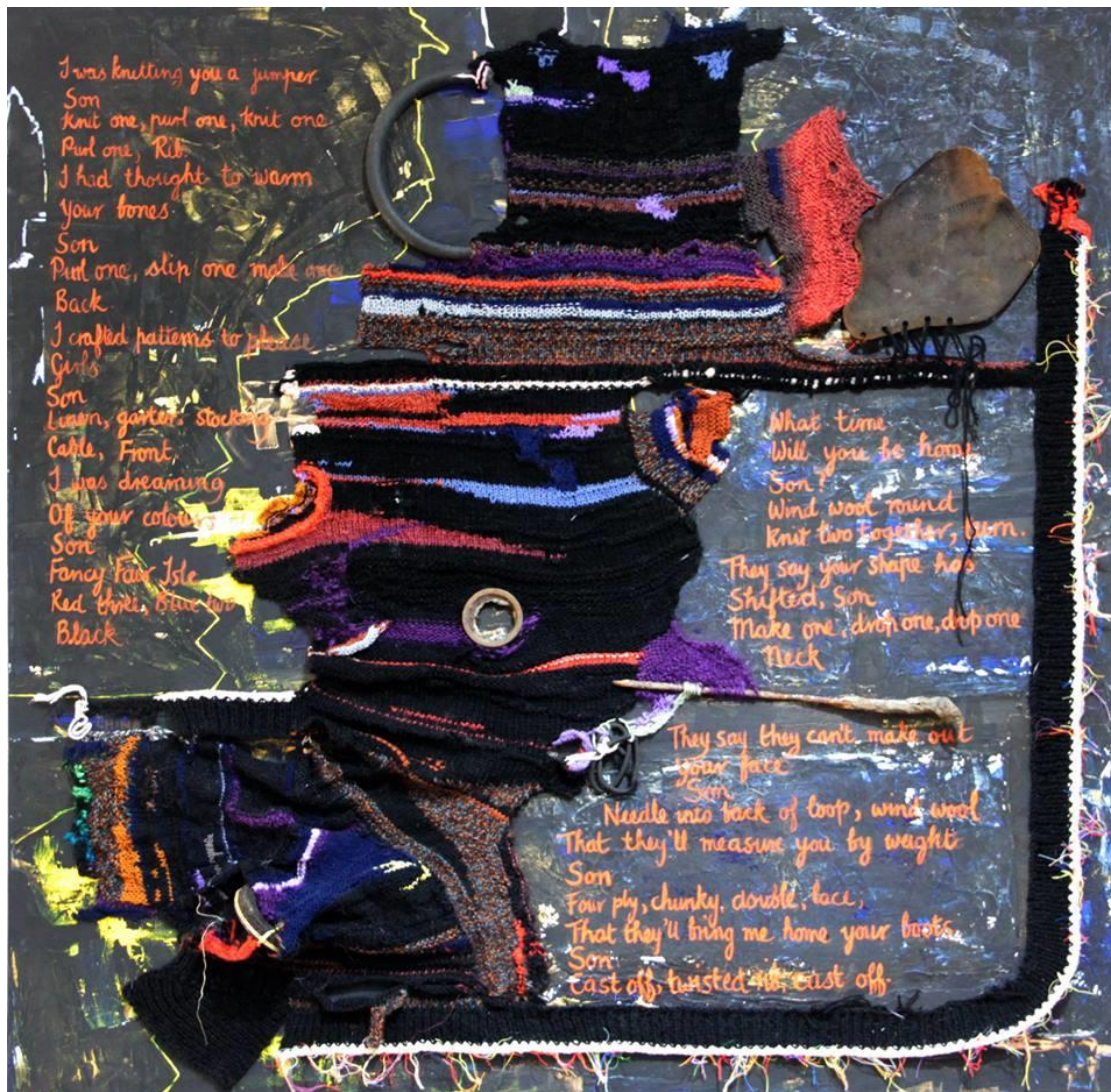
The membership of edan comprises local amateur and professional artists, some of whom have themselves been miners or have belonged to mining families. Through the Art Block, art work is exhibited with the aim of encouraging arts-based practices relevant to edan members and visitors. Exhibitions raise local issues and concerns, past and present, and workshops and talks offer opportunities for local people to participate in arts-related activities. An edan-sponsored mining art group, comprising men and women, has been formed by an ex-miner to foster the creation of work that both remembers the legacy of mining, and also provokes reflections on that legacy. As part of the organisation, I have participated in a number of mining-related projects. These include the publication of two books of poems and images by a writing group (edan Writers 2014; 2015), and engagement with the Social Haunting project that provided the stimulus for this article (www.socialhaunting.com). Art Block exhibitions that have focused on mining, include 'Mining, Politics and Unions' (2015) commemorating the thirty year anniversary of the end of the strike; 'The Art of Jimmy Kays' (2016) showing prints of work by a Horden miner, Jimmy Kays, (1886-1950); 'Legacy' (2018) displaying new work by the mining art group and 'Ghosts of Our Past' (2018) that derived directly from the input of the Social Haunting project.

The mining-related exhibitions have been exceptionally popular amongst local people. For example, 'Legacy' brought in over 700 visitors in six weeks. Visitors have generally had some connection with mining, including those who travelled from outside the area to see the exhibitions. Teachers have brought primary school children. Stalwarts of the local NUM and Labour Party have come along. The audience has comprised many who would not normally visit an art gallery. The mining exhibitions signify a personal engagement with mining on the part of the artists involved, and this has been key to connecting with the audience. Many visitors have stood in front of particular images and offered information or told personal

stories to the edan volunteers on duty and much of this has involved a 'bringing to the surface' personal and emotionally charged memories – some of which are intergenerational.

There has been no questioning or systematic recording of the thoughts of artists or of the stories told by visitors. To do so would interfere with the processes and ethos of the organisation which is not a research project. So, the following simply recounts tales from my own experiences using three pieces of work. These are, firstly 'Twisted Seams' that I made myself; secondly 'In Memoriam- Dawdon Colliery' made by Jac Howard; and thirdly an untitled and undated Jimmy Kays cartoon.

Twisted Seams (textile and poem)



This piece began in March 2014 as a personal commemoration of the 30 year anniversary of the Miners' Strike. I intended to produce a knitted textile from scraps of wool, mainly inherited from my mother. Into this I would incorporate mining fragments collected from the local Blast Beach onto which waste from Dawdon Colliery had been tipped for many years. I planned to knit a couple of lines every day according to my mood, and to supplement this with a diary that recorded media references to mining during the coming year. I wanted to say something about the household skills of women in mining life and link these to the pit, to

reference the environment that was despoiled and polluted by mining, and to record the continuing global impact of mining outside the UK.

The knitting changed shape on 13th May 2014 when a mine in Soma, Turkey exploded, killing 301 men. That explosion, caused by lax health and safety practices (www.amp.france24.com), provoked in me a sea of empathetic outrage and grief. The knitting helped me find some sort of expression for my emotions, casting on 301 rib stitches in white and twisting the whole piece so that this line of stitches formed a new bottom edge. In the image above, those stitches are pinned to the canvas along the bottom and right side, but for the 2015 exhibition, I stretched them in one long line and hung onto each white stitch a white ribbon, bearing the name of each of the miners killed, echoing the black ribbons worn by relatives and supporters in the wake of the disaster. I needed to make graphic the meaning of '301 dead' and I was shocked by how 301 stitches looked.

As the year progressed, I read about the deaths of coal miners in other parts of the world, and incorporated more ribbing in the body of the piece. I added a yellow ribbed strip to signify the deaths of gold miners. On 8th September, I linked this with the history of Seaham's 1880 mining disaster by incorporating a piece of an old aluminium mining flask and recording the anniversary of the deaths of 164 men and boys aged between 14 and 71 (McCutcheon 1955; www.dmm.org.uk).⁷

Increasingly the knitting became a homage to the pains and worries of women in mining life. As I made the piece and recorded the diary I experienced enhanced levels of anxiety and anger and in editing the work for the subsequent 'Legacy' exhibition, I found myself writing a poem to express the nature of my feelings. To my knowledge none of my own relatives, including father, uncles, cousins and generations of grandfathers have been killed in the pit, but throughout my young life, I lived constantly with the fear that they would be. I cried as I wrote:

Twisted Seams

I was knitting you a jumper
son
Knit one purl one knit one purl one
rib.
I had thought to warm your bones
son
Purl one slip one make one
back
I crafted patterns to please girls
son
Linen garter stocking cable
front
I was dreaming of your colours
son
Fancy fair isle red three blue two
black.

What time will you be home

⁷ The ribbons with names, the yellow strip and the flask with names are not shown on the illustration which was reworked for the subsequent 'Legacy' exhibition.

son?
 Wind wool round knit two together turn.
 They say your shape has shifted
 son
 make one drop one drop one
 neck
 They say they can't make out your face
 son
 Needle into back of loop, wind wool
 That they'll measure you by weight
 son
 Four ply chunky double lace
 That they'll bring me home your boots
 son
 Cast off twisted rib cast off.



When this piece of work was displayed, it was mainly the women who stopped in front of it, read it and then talked about it. Some cried. They did not assess the piece in terms of artistic or literary criteria, but rather from their subject positions as women with personal histories in mining life. They emotionally connected with the knitting. They talked about the jumpers they, their mothers, and grandmothers had knitted. They remembered local disasters that had happened before their time and in their time, about individuals who had been killed and

injured. But mostly they said 'that's how it was'. They continue to feel this, as I do; it binds them to fore-mothers, to other women in their position and to the men; and it informs their political perspective. How could women who feel like this not have supported their menfolk in every strike? In 1984-1985, how could they not have felt the rage when their neighbourhoods were colonised by police and when miners were named by Margaret Thatcher as 'the enemy within'? (See Samuel et al. 1986; www.margareththatcher.org). Every death in the mine has been a death remembered, inscribed in female anxieties, with the sorrow and anger passed down the generations, as the next piece of work illustrates.⁸

In Memoriam – Dawdon Colliery (Encaustic)

Jac Howard's father, like mine, worked at Dawdon colliery. She explained this image as follows:

I did want to show that dark oppressive weight of rock above the men – that entrapment – both physical and mental.

Yes it was a steady job – with a steady wage – you kept your family in food and clothes – but this particular hamster wheel had the power to kill you...hence naming the miners who lost their lives during the 'life' of this particular colliery' (private correspondence).

Every miner who died in Dawdon Colliery from its opening in 1907 until closure in 1991 is named. Naming, as in the case of the Turkish miners on 'Twisted Seams' is important in overcoming the reduction of human life to bloodless statistics. It recognises not only that there was an individual life there, but that the person concerned had a family name, that the individual was connected to others, was a member of a social network. This point was powerfully demonstrated by one little family who came to the Art Block to especially view this picture.

Two women probably mother and daughter, a girl of about eight and a baby in a buggy stood in front of it. The older woman told me that she had heard it was on show and that they had come especially to see it. Her father's name was there, and she pointed it out to me. He had been killed in 1952 when she was four years old. This wasn't an underground accident. It had happened on bank. It was a mistake. Somebody had left a wire in the wrong place. Her father had stood on it. There was an explosion and he was decapitated. Her mother was left with seven children, and the woman speaking wasn't the youngest.

Her account was brief but said enough. She did not want to own the picture, but seeing her father's name publicly displayed validated his existence not only as a member of her family, but as part of a larger society. It enabled her to 'tell the story' - explicitly of her father's death and implicitly of her mother's struggles. Others should know. She was offering the story to her daughter, her granddaughter and anyone else who might listen.

For me, as a viewer of this image, the sense of entrapment raises the ghosts of my father's claustrophobia and its impact on his work and our family. My father's inability to work at the

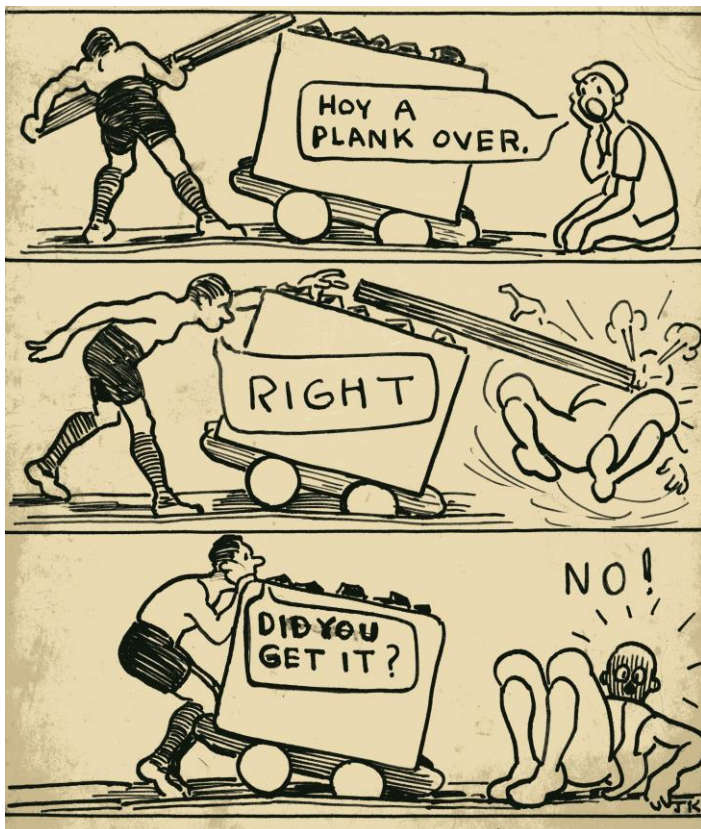
8 I recently talked to an ex-miner who remembered and described to me in detail how the 23 year old son-in-law of one of my mother's friends had died. I had never previously heard this harrowing information. It appears to me that men know and are haunted by the details of a death but seldom spoke of this while the mines were working. Women have repressed those details, even when they have known them, and focused on the feelings of women who are suffering the consequences of loss.

face meant lower wages. So he worked overtime. Six or seven days a week, fifty weeks a year he laboured on a three-shift system that meant he never had a settled sleep pattern. He was carried out of Dawdon pit with the heart attack that killed him at the age of 55. He didn't die in an accident, but just as surely, his work killed him. That his name is not on the official death list serves as a reminder of so many people whose lives have been and are being shortened by their conditions of labour, by the entrapment in particular labour markets.

Historically, mining people were trapped not only by the work itself, but in places where there were few alternatives to mining. They were trapped in life patterns dominated by the demands of the pit. The relative physical isolation of new 19th century mining settlements, the absence of alternative work and the development of a work-related, bounded culture, made mining societies difficult to leave⁹ and they were alien, barren places for outsiders (Priestley 1977 [1934]). Leaving mining places remained difficult but became more of a possibility for the generation who benefited from the 1944 Education Act and the 1960s expansion of Higher Education. Migration then became a necessity for many as mining in the UK began its decline in the late 20th century. Leaving was frequently undertaken as an absolute act of abandoning not just a place, but a way of life and its values. Accessing new opportunities could be a source of pride, but it also carried a sense of loss. The ghosts follow.

It is perhaps no accident that Jac Howard's picture was bought by a man who had once worked at Dawdon colliery but had left the area. He had 'done well for himself' but now, back visiting, he was buying a picture about the entrapment and death inscribed within his own history.

Jimmy Kays (Cartoon)



9 Although there was always mobility between mines, that in the 19th century was global. See Wilson 1980.

This cartoon was produced some time in the first half of the twentieth century by an East Durham miner, Jimmy Kays (1886-1950). I discovered a batch of his art work on eBay and subsequent research indicated that he had started work in a local colliery at the age of thirteen, eventually becoming a coal hewer. His ambition to become an artist was realised for a short time between 1923 and 1924 when he was employed by a short-lived newspaper, the *Weekly Star*, to produce cartoons as 'Jimmy Kays, the Horden Miner'. By the end of the 1920s he was no longer working as a miner, possibly one of the 1000 sacked during the 1926 lockout, and he ended his days as a night watchman. His mining images probably all refer to the period between 1901 and 1926.

Prints of Kays' work were first shown at the opening of Horden Heritage Centre, run by volunteers and situated at the edge of a refurbished welfare park in what had once been a mine ambulance station.¹⁰ Later they were shown at the Art Block. At the Horden opening, the excitement shown by local TV and newspapers was exceptional: 'Was this a new Norman Cornish?' (eg. *Northern Echo*, 12.6.2015; BBC, 12.6.15). This was not the concern of local people who were present. One man talked about underground art work chalked by miners in the tunnels. One woman said how much she had laughed at some of the cartoons of local life which involved encounters between a miner, his whippet and a housewife. People delighted in the local dialect in the cartoons. Kays' humour often plays off the division between male and female worlds, wrong-footing men who find themselves given childcare responsibilities or being out of place in other social worlds such as the theatre. Mostly though, the images use humour to highlight the discomforts, indignities, and dangers of the underground world. That sense of humour, used by miners to cope with their lot, has carried down the generations and is perhaps unfathomable to outsiders.

When the prints were shown in the Art Block, unpredictably, it was the cartoon above that seemed to attract most attention. One man remembered that putting a derailed truck back on the rails was one of the first jobs he had learned in the pit. Another explained that the reason it was necessary to 'hoy (throw) a plank over' was because the sides of the tunnel were too narrow to pass it around the truck. Then an elderly woman spoke about her grandfather. She said he had been 'A big man. And strong'. Indeed he was so strong that he hadn't needed a plank to lift a truck back on the rails. He could lift the truck with his bare hands. After saying this she paused. Then she said that before he died, he was 'like a matchstick'. That the slightest push would have knocked him over, and that this was because of the black lung. The dust of the pit had given him emphysema, like it did so many men. The pit had stolen his strength and eventually killed him. There remain people in ex-mining localities who today are dying of emphysema caused by the pit. One of my own cousins suffers from it. We all know it and it is a collective grievance. Women mourn the diminution of the strength of men by the toll it takes. They mourn the nature of the power it gives them in their own survival and it is their job to carry the story and remember.

Conclusion

Complex and gendered ghosts stalk ex-mining areas. To understand and to begin to create conditions in which they can be exorcised, it is necessary to draw from the deep history of mining, to ask what forces gave people the will and determination that characterised the 1984-1985 strike, and to recognise the damage sustained by the defeat of the strike and the

¹⁰ The prints and their framing were paid for by East Durham Heritage Coast Partnership.

subsequent and rapacious closure of mines.

With the demise of mining and institutional degeneration that has taken place in the public life of most ex-mining localities, there are now few everyday situations in which the significance and meaning of mining can be interrogated. Mostly, public acknowledgement of the history of mining life is mediated by social policy decisions that direct funding towards a process of 'regeneration' that includes memorialising. Regeneration implies degeneration and implicitly denigrates the past. Memorialising airbrushes the historical complexity and imposes sanitised images that are depoliticised, romantic and male. It continues the process of silencing the ghosts. Public art, including the siting of redundant pit wheels in colliery areas, and sculptures portraying the lost world of the underground miner, are a recognition of heritage, but they are almost exclusively masculine. They do not offer any prompt to critical analysis or even reflections that might enable people to enter into communication with their past, and work towards new ways of being. The continued exclusion of the female in these processes demonstrates a failure to acknowledge the role of women historically in the sustenance and maintenance of post mining life not only in the private sphere, but in public activity centred on community health and well-being that was demonstrated so practically in the strike.

Yet women have continued these patterns of social activism since the defeat of the strike and the demise of the pits. They have an active and visible presence in self-help and voluntary initiatives and in the paid community work that is endeavouring to restore some vestiges of self confidence and self-directed renewal in defeated places, and they are frequently central to initiatives such as efforts to restore the mining banners that are potent symbols of mining solidarity and union. Significantly, women have been leading figures in the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign that seeks an official inquiry into the police charge on pickets in June 1984. To move forward beyond the pain and defeat of mining, recognition of the work of women, not just as strike activists but as the bearers of responsibility for a wider social solidarity, collectivity and the search for recognition and justice is essential.

The mining-related exhibitions in the Art Block are but one example of the potential for locally organised initiatives to acknowledge the ghosts and stimulate the type of conversations that allow both men and women to articulate and validate their own histories and identities. Notably, such organisations are usually not funding-led, but they are frequently woman-led. They thrive outside the control of charity and policy agendas. Neither do they necessarily have explicit political or educational aims. They draw from women's traditional roles and address both local people and the diaspora. They include an older generation who remember, and the younger generation who are the recipients of new conditions, who must deal with the legacy of the past. The methods used are neither therapeutic nor educational. Rather they depend on mutual recognition of a troubled, complex past and a desire to use that recognition for transformation which implies confronting the silences of conflict, division, danger, and defeat, and through dialogue, working with and beyond the ghosts.

Author Bio

Jean Spence is the daughter of a Durham miner who, thanks to the expansion of higher education in the 1960s was able to leave her home town and gain a degree in social sciences. She has worked as a community and youth work practitioner, and as a trainer and lecturer in Sunderland and Durham Universities, undertaking research and writing relating to the history and development of youth work in working class areas. In 1993, she took part in the Women's

Vigil at Vane Tempest Colliery, since when she has been actively addressing issues that were raised at that time relating to gender in mining contexts. She began working in partnership with Carol Stephenson on this subject in 2005. After retirement in 2010, she joined East Durham Artists' Network (edan) as a volunteer, writer, and learner-artist. Along with other members of edan, she took part in 'social haunting' workshops organised by Geoff Bright of Manchester Metropolitan University that provoked this article.

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