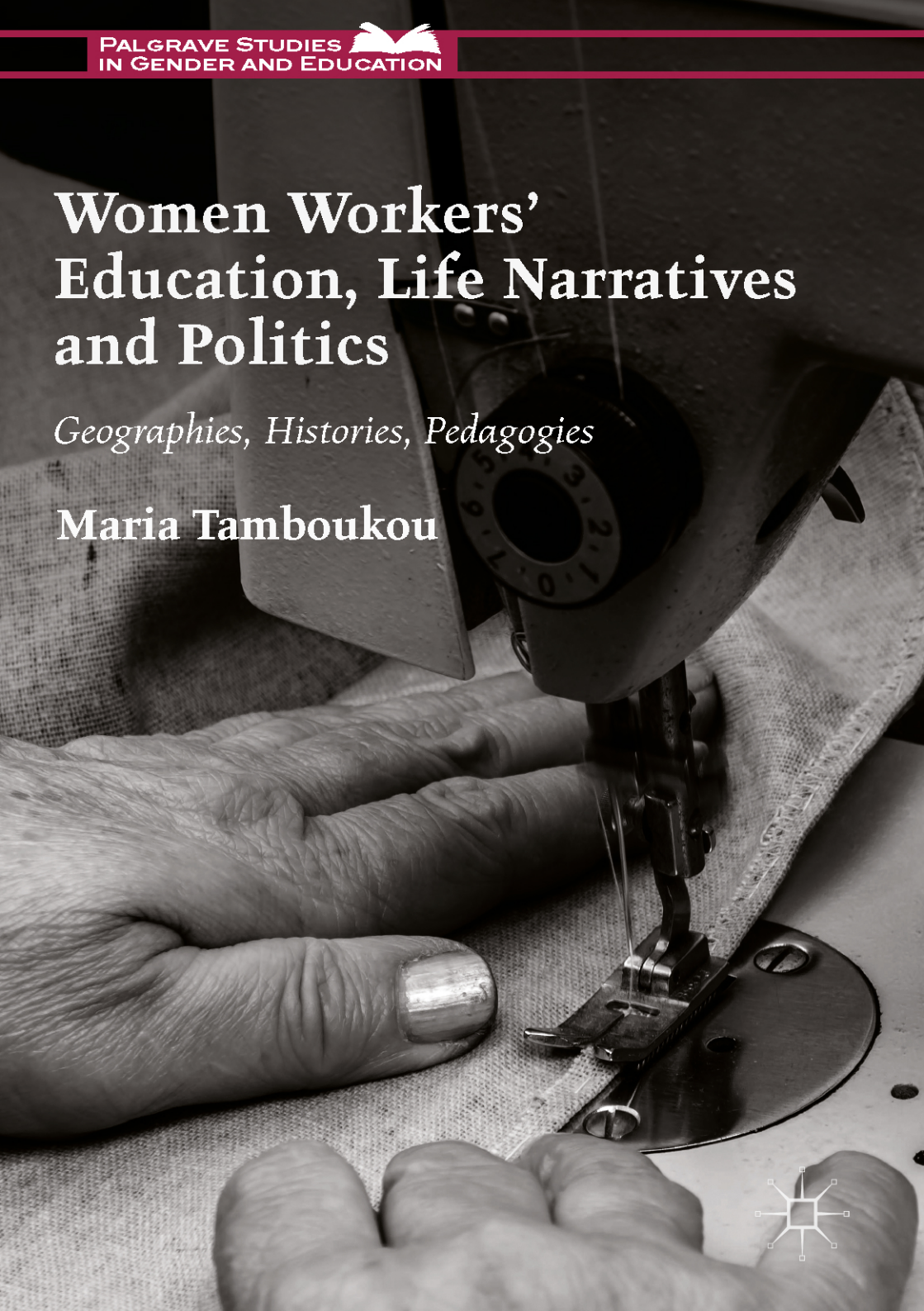
Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education

Women Workers' Education, Life Narratives and Politics

Geographies, Histories, Pedagogies

Maria Tamboukou



Palgrave Studies in Gender and Education

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Women Workers' Education, Life Narratives and Politics

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For Ariagni

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Contents

List of Figures

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Politics, Geographies and Histories in Workers' Education

> *I have very few experiences of the joys of childhood or the games of the early years. From the time I learned to read, reading became my only occupation and the charm of all moments. I felt a vague desire to experience and know everything. God and religion had aroused my attention most of all, but the mobility of my ideas kept me from focusing on the same object for long. Tired of searching without understanding I compared and related what was said to me and what my books and fairy tales taught me. Still too young to grasp my social position, I was happy. The future seemed bright and genial. I saw myself rich with the treasures of knowledge, unique object of my wishes, but these flattering dreams would soon faint. The necessity of work, made me understand that deprived of wealth, I had to renounce knowledge, happiness, I resigned to myself. A secret hope still delighted me. I said to myself: I will meet a philosopher as poor as myself in worldly goods but rich in knowledge, ugly as Aesop but loving and virtuous. He will share with me the gifts of knowledge, I will repay him with love and gratitude. Linked by a holly bond, we will console each other for the sorrows of life. But still I had to abandon these sweet chimeras.*[1]

In this moving section from her 'Profession of Faith', a rich and powerful text sent to the Saint-Simonian newspaper, the *Globe*, around 1832, Jeanne Deroin (1805–1894) forcefully expressed her love and passion for knowledge, as well as her disappointment for not being able to get an education. Deroin was born and brought up in Paris as a proletarian girl. She worked as

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a seamstress to earn her living, but she eventually became a self-taught worker intellectual; through her involvement in the romantic socialist movements of nineteenth-century Europe, she realised her dream of becoming a teacher and a journalist. Her love and passion for education was at the heart of everything she did, first in France and later in life in London, as a political exile.[2] It is the passion for education and its catalytic force in changing and revolutionising women workers' lives that this book is about.

As Deroin's early testament reveals, education has always been a project and a dream at the heart of many workers' lives, both men and women, from the beginning of industrialisation. And yet, workers' education has become a contested field since 'national histories, social systems, trade union developments, political attitudes, general educational policies and economic pressures have all intersected to produce around the world many different concepts [. . .] and many different practical expressions', Philip Hopkins has noted (1985, 2). It is the contested notions, porous boundaries, diverse practices, as well as the material and discursive entanglements of workers' education that I want to map in the first section of this introductory chapter.

Mapping Workers' Education

Deroin's passionate love for education and her deep conviction that it was a dream she could aspire to had not emerged out of the blue. Although the movement for workers' education was mostly an early-twentieth-century project, its trails go back to the early nineteenth century on both sides of the Channel and the Atlantic. There was a strong movement for public education in France in the beginning of the July Monarchy,[3] which culminated in 1833 when the *Loi Guizot* establishing state primary schools in all communities was implemented. Women workers, who were active in the romantic socialist movements of the era, such as Saint-Simonianism, Fourierism and Owenism, grasped the opportunity to campaign for women's right to education during this period.[4] As Marie-Reine Guindorf (1812–1836), the editor of the first autonomous feminist newspaper in France, wrote in February 1833:

> Public education is a question that at the moment preoccupies all advanced people, reasonably so, because the future of society depends on its solution. It is education that will transform gross and ignorant people to human beings, who are calm, know their duties and their rights and accomplish

> the first so as to have the right to demand the latter. In this important question I think that it is useful that women should make their voice heard.[5]

Despite women's fierce campaigns, however, the *Loi Guizot* was a disappointment for workers in general and working women in particular: primary education was not made compulsory and was only free for children of very poor families, whose parents had to undergo the embarrassment of being certified as destitute. Even worse, there was no provision for girls, whose education was dependent on whether there was 'free space' in the local communities. Girls had to wait for the *Loi Duruy* in 1867 to be granted the same educational opportunities as boys (see Anderson 1975). Guindorf was too young and too revolutionary at the time to wait for a state solution to the problem of proletarian women's education. Although working hard as a seamstress during the day, she joined the Association of People's Education and she devoted her free time in the evenings to the education of 'the daughters of the people'.[6]

The project of 'people's education' in France in the first half of the nineteenth century was inherited from the 1789 revolution and it included both the education of the children, as well as the education and training of adults. Although it was initially dominated by philanthropic discourses that aimed to moralise, instruct and discipline 'the working poor', it soon took a life of its own, particularly under the influence of the romantic socialist movements. It thus developed as a socio-political and cultural movement aiming to educate the people in general and the workers in particular about their right to work, their right to enjoy life both materially and intellectually, as well as their right to participate in the political formations and processes of their time. It is not surprising that many of the members of the Association of People's Education were persecuted and exiled and the association itself was forced to change its name and constitution many times during the repressive regime of the July Monarchy.[7]

The movement for people's education in France had its heyday during the February 1848 revolution and the early years of the Second Republic. During this period, many eminent academics delivered lectures at highly esteemed educational institutions, such as the *Sorbonne* and the *Collège de France*. The historian Jules Michelet was amongst them; during his *Collège de France* lectures between December 1847 and February 1848, he had highlighted the role of theatre in people's education, arguing that 'a truly popular theatre where the people played the people [...] is the

most efficient form of national education' (Michelet 1899, 241). Although Michelet's lectures were interrupted by the intervention of the French ministry of education, his ideas were expanded and advanced after the February 1848 revolution, this time including women in the project of universal education. Ernest Legouvé introduced and taught a course on Women's History at the Collège de France, which became very popular amongst women in general and women workers in particular, as we know from the enthusiastic articles they wrote about it in their daily newspaper, *La Voix des Femmes*.[8]

The role of intellectuals throughout the second half of the nineteenth century was further instrumental in a wider movement that sprang in Paris at the turn of the century, the *Universitaires Populaires*, the people's universities. Most arrondissements in Paris had their own university and there might have been more than one in working-class areas. Moreover, political parties and movements had direct links with such educational institutions: 'The cells of organizers – many with anarchist leanings though in principle independent – made a real attempt to include workers at the lower levels of administration and management', Mary Ellen Poole has noted (1997, 233). She has further added that anarchist groups met regularly and organised fund-raising and other events at the premises of the *Université Populaire* du Faubourg Saint Antoine, a Parisian working-class neighbourhood par excellence.

It was in the context of political interventions in people's education that the composer Gustave Charpentier founded the *Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson*[9] in 1902. Its purpose was to teach the Parisian working women voice, piano, harp, dance, and choral singing without any fees. Charpentier had actually persuaded some very famous professors to come and teach to his conservatoire, thus contributing to a wider philanthropic project of a series of concerts and performances that the *midinettes* – as they called the young Parisian seamstresses – would take part in, once they had completed their musical education. As Poole has noted, the *Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson* was an effect of the romantic socialist movements of the nineteenth century and particularly the Fourierist vision of 'art for the masses', as 'a didactic, morally uplifting, and pleasure-giving force' (1997, 231). What the popularity of the *Mimi Pinson* movement revealed was a wider interest in the importance of opening up cultural and educational opportunities for working-class women, a theme that I will take up again in Chap. 4. The movement for people's education in France was

thus embedded in the overall project for a national system of education realising the dreams of the *philosophes*. The state and its duties as educator of the citizens was central in this system, a feature that made it very different from the British movement for workers' education, which was very much embedded in the voluntary sector, as I will further discuss in the next section.

Adventures in Working-Class Education in the UK

There were two major institutional movements in the UK, the Mechanics Institutes and what came to be known as the Workers' Educational Association. The London Mechanics Institute was founded in 1823 and its purpose was to provide vocational scientific instruction that would help workers to adapt to the demands of the industrial revolution that was much more advanced in the UK than in France. In around the same time that the *Loi Guizot* was debated in France, there were around 7,000 students enrolled in the Mechanics Institute, whilst their number had risen to 200,000 by 1860 (see Jefferson 1964, 346). However, there was nothing from the spirit of 'people's education' in this movement and it was rather attended by aspiring members of the lower middle classes, since the British proletarians 'were practically illiterate and quite unable to benefit from the courses offered', Carter Jefferson has noted (ibid.).

It was in the context of grappling with such problems that the London Working Men's Association (LWMA) published its 'Address on Education, issued to the Working Classes', in 1837. Their project included a national system of public education for both sexes on four levels: (1) infant schools, (2) preparatory schools, (3) high schools and finally (4) finishing schools or colleges (Lovett 1876, 145). These colleges 'should be gratuitously opened for all who choose to cultivate the highest branches of knowledge' (ibid., 148), and they should therefore offer evening classes. The LWMA was a mass movement with radical ideas about social change and social justice: 'poverty, inequality and political injustice are involved in giving to one portion of society the blessings of education and leaving the other in ignorance' (ibid., 139), they highlighted in their address. Their overall project for equal opportunities in education prepared the grounds for a wider project with concrete institutional structures, activities and literature to emerge in 1903, when the Association to Promote the Higher Education of Working Men was founded in the parlour of a clerical worker, Albert

Mansbridge, in Battersea, London. Its title disturbed its women members from the very beginning and in 1905 it was renamed as Workers' Educational Association (WEA), 'the largest and most successful provider of educational courses for adults in the voluntary sector of the United Kingdom' to our own days, Stephen Roberts (2003, 1) has noted. The movement soon developed and expanded as a national and international network of educational activities: its Australian branch was founded in 1914, while in 1918 the Commonwealth WEA was set up. By 1923, associations had been formed in India, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa and Tasmania.

The workers' educational movement in the UK was initially driven by the ambition for preparing workers for university studies. It was thus organised along a three-year tutorial class of around thirty students taught by a professor and monitored and examined by a system of regular essay writing. However, tutorial classes were just one of many methods and practices that the different local and international WEA branches adopted over the years. Lectures and shorter courses were added and there was a wide array of topics from the social sciences and the humanities, including economics, government and literature. Over the years, there have been many historical studies about the WEA's constitution and activities, covering its foundation and early years of its development, as well as looking at the specificities of its different local and international branches and collaborations.[10] What has remained a grey area in this vibrant body of literature however, is women's involvement in the WEA educational activities and programmes.

'We know surprisingly little about the numbers of women who attended WEA classes', Zoë Munby has noted (2003, 216). Women's engagement was not statistically interesting, since the short courses or occasional lectures they would usually take up did not attract funding as the three-year tutorial classes, which were meticulously recorded. Within the tutorial classes there were nevertheless 9 per cent women students between 1910 and 1911, while the percentage rose to 32 per cent in 1919–1920, but dropped again in the 1930s (ibid.). It is not difficult to see why: tutorial classes demanded a long-term commitment, which was simply impossible for women workers with family duties and double and triple domestic and emotional labour shifts. Such classes could only be accessed by young women, who were trying to imagine a different life and shape a new form of self, no matter whether such dreams would eventually come true.

Trade union classes, on the other hand, were both boring and irrelevant for many women workers. They were clever enough to understand that even if they took such classes they would never survive the sexist hierarchies and structures of the trade unions. There were very few women who had made it in the men's world and they were only able to do that by sacrificing personal desires or family plans. As Margaret Bondfield wrote in her autobiography: 'I just lived for the Trade Union Movement. I concentrated on my job. This concentration was undisturbed by love affairs. I had seen too much – too early – to have the least desire to join the pitiful scramble of my workmates' (1949, 36–37). Through her early experiences as a textile worker in Yorkshire and well before she became the first female cabinet minister in British politics, Bondfield had understood that being in love and having a family were not compatible with being involved in agonistic politics.

Few as they were, women tutorial students were passionately engaged in their study; this is how Maude Royden, an Oxford lecturer, remembers women mill workers at Oldham studying Shakespeare in the class of 1908–1909:

> They not only stayed the course but, at the close of each class, accompanied me down the street to the railway station still arguing and discussing, stood on the platform while I, my head out of the carriage window, continued the class, and made their last contribution to the discussion in shouts above the roar of the train as it pulled out of the station. Can you beat it?[11]

Despite the lack of figures, a careful study of the WEA annual reports, as well as articles in its influential monthly magazine, *The Highway*, shows that apart from the tutorial classes and the trade union courses, women workers overtook men in all other short courses, lectures and outreach activities (Munby 2003, 217). More than being students, women workers were also involved in teaching courses they were passionate about. Although the names of women who organised and taught in women's education courses have largely been lost, the case of Sophie Green stands out as exceptional. Green was a garment worker at the Kettering Co-op clothing factory and despite her lack of formal educational qualifications – apart from her tutorial classes – she was appointed as tutor organiser in Kettering in 1919. For twenty years she organised and taught a rich programme of studies that included tutorial classes, shorter courses, as well as community and outreach

work with young people. As outlined in the WEA Eastern's district annual report for 1928–1929:

> Throughout the past winter Miss Green has run a Social on alternate Saturday evenings, to which the young people have come [. . .] it has done a good deal for young women working in Kettering, but living away from home, who have been brought in touch with a new group of people. Though it may be difficult to express it on paper, there is considerable evidence that Miss Green is a source of power and strength in and around Kettering (cited in ibid., 225).

'Miss Green' was not only a source of power but also an exemplary case of how women workers' education went far beyond strictly learning outcomes and objectives. It was the force of education to encourage workers to imagine a different world and to develop a sense of collective belonging that made it so attractive to women, who were oppressed by capitalist and patriarchal intersections. What Green's case also powerfully demonstrates is the idea that workers' education should be from and for the workers, an argument that Fannia Mary Cohn, a leading figure in workers' education in the USA would firmly maintain, as I will further discuss in Chap. 2. Green must have been influenced by the ideas of the workers' education movement in the USA, as she had won a scholarship for the famous Bryn Mawr summer school for women workers in Philadelphia, which I will further discuss in Chap. 2.

International connections and exchange programmes became possible in the interwar period since the WEA activities soon expanded not only to the Commonwealth countries, as we have seen before, but also to other European countries and the USA. The organic relations of the workers' education movement with national and international trade unions and consequently with the International Labour Organization (ILO) played a crucial role in the project of internationalism. As Arthur Greenwood, member of the Workers' Educational Trade Union Committee (WETUC), wrote in *The Highway:* 'It is probable that direct association with educational labour movements in other countries would increase our prestige and strengthen our position with the labour movement in this country.'[12]

It was in the context of internationalisation that WEA delegates attended the first Conference on Labour Education, held in Brussels on 16 and 17 August 1922. It was organised by the *Belgian Committee on Labour Education* (*Centrale d' Education Ouvrière)* and it was an excellent opportunity for participants from all over the world to exchange

experiences and views on workers' education. Three important resolutions were adopted at this conference: (1) an exchange scheme of students between labour colleges across countries and continents; (2) the idea of an 'independent working class education' in the struggle against national and international capital;[13] (3) a request addressed to the Belgian *Centrale d' Education Ouvrière* to maintain and co-ordinate relations between the organisation during the period leading to the second conference, which was eventually held at Ruskin College in Oxford on 15–17 August 1924. It was then that the *International Federation of Labour Organizations* concerned with workers' education was established.[14] Its aim was to make preparatory work for an *International Workers' Education Federation,* but it was only in 1945 that this project was eventually realised, with the creation of the *International Federation of Workers' Education Associations* (IFWEA).

Looking at WEA's history between 1918 and 1939, John Atkins has critically observed that despite some efforts for internationalism, such as Greenwood's statement in *The Highway*, as well as its members' involvement in the international conferences on workers' education, there is overall 'a glaring absence of internationalism and international perspectives' in WEA's documentation concerning its educational and organisational policy (2003, 125). And yet the WEA's overall vision, its democratic principles of education and, most importantly, its unique tutorial system profoundly influenced the workers' education movement in the USA in the first half of the twentieth century.

Women workers' education in the UK was largely shaped by the WEA educational programmes and projects but was not solely restricted within it. The history of Hillcroft College is a different paradigm. The idea for a residential college for working women emerged after the Great War and the changes it brought regarding women's role in society. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) National Education Committee made the initial proposal for such a scheme, but it was through voluntary subscriptions, students' contributions and bursaries provided by individuals and companies, as well as universities and schools, that the 'National Residential College for Women', as it was initially called, was founded in 1920. According to its 1920 annual report, the aim of the college was 'to enlarge the vision of its students, to develop their latent capacities for leadership and service and to stimulate their mental and spiritual growth'.[15] The report highlighted the fact that vocational training was not amongst its objectives. The college's council included seventeen members, six of them from the

YWCA, two from the National Federation of Women Workers and the University of London and one from the Educational Settlement Association, the Kent Education Committee, the National Adult School Union, the National Organization of Girls' Clubs, the Old Students' Association, the WEA and the World Association for Adult Education. The college was initially housed in 'the Holt', a rented building in Beckenham Kent, but in 1925 it moved to the area of Surbiton in South London in its own premises, 'the Gables'. This was a red brick listed building, which was surrounded by 6 acres of land and could offer accommodation for twenty-eight students. It was then that its name changed to 'Hillcroft College'.

The College adopted the motto 'Through Rough Ways to the Stars' and its curriculum included the following subjects: Bible Study, English Composition, The English Novel, English Constitution, Industrial History, Psychology, Biology, Mathematics, Economics, Physiology, French, Music and Handwork. Visiting lecturers from various London colleges and schools did most of the teaching. The college also organised a lectures series with invited speakers with topics such as 'The Value of Economics in Developing a Social Sense', lecture given by Miss Christie, senior tutor at the London School of Economics; 'Psychology of Play' by Dr Jane Reany; and 'The Value of Philosophy in Life' by E.S. Hooper, MA, amongst others. Finally, the students were taken to several field trips to places such as the Guildhall, the British Museum, St Paul's and the Houses of Parliament. They also visited other colleges and schools and even attended concerts, operas and theatres in London.[16]

When it first opened in February 1920, the college admitted eleven students aged between 18 and 35 years. Amongst this first cohort, there were a dressmaker and a shop assistant with full bursaries from Debenham's, a domestic worker and a lace mender funded by Reading and Royal Holloway, a jam tester funded by J.E Robertson and Sons and a clerk funded by Notting Hill High School, in total, six full bursaries. The rest of the group were students who were partly funded by organisations, which also contributed to their fees.[17] Apart from the principal, Fanny Street, there were two members of staff: Ruth Hinder, who was a resident tutor, and Maber Birtles, the bursar. They were both responsible for the internal management of the college, which was co-operative in nature. According to the 1920 annual report, all domestic issues were discussed by the house committee, composed of all members of the college, while the students' council was a forum for students to

express their opinion on general policies of the college.[18] The college's first annual report also highlighted the importance of visitors from all over the world, who contributed to the creation of strong international sympathies and understanding. Over the years, the college developed and strengthened such international relations particularly with the summer residential schools for women workers in the USA. Despite its many influences from the WEA tradition and policy, as well as its connections with educational programmes and institutions outside the WEA, there were two distinctive features for the workers' education movement in the USA: strong ties with the American trade unions, as well as active involvement of women labour organisers, as I will further discuss in the next section.

The Politics of Workers' Education in the USA

The first signs of workers' education on the other side of the Atlantic emerged in 1845 when the Lowell Female Reform Association was founded in the context of women workers' industrial actions and organisation in New England (see Dublin 1994, Walker 2009). The association launched a wide range of educational and cultural activities, including evening courses and public lectures on a variety of topics on science, literature and art, as announced and advertised in their journal, *The Voice of Industry*.[19] Given the richness and vitality of New England's working-class intellectual culture, it is no surprise that there was a vibrant literary movement and a rich body of fiction around women workers' in the second half of the nineteenth century in the USA, which Sylvia Cook has meticulously studied (2008). Despite the 'Mill Girls' pioneering industrial, educational and cultural activities, the first school for workers, *The Working Men's Institute*, was established at John's Hopkins University in 1879. But when in 1901, Walter Vrooman, one of the founders of Ruskin College in the UK proposed the establishment of a similar institution in the USA to the American Federation of Labor (AFoL), they did not show any interest. However, the Socialist Party took the challenge and in 1906 the Rand School of Social Science was founded in New York City. It is no surprise that socialism was at the heart of the school's vision and objectives, while politics deeply coloured the directions of the workers' education movement in the USA from the very beginning. The Rand School of Social Sciences offered educational programmes for two major trade unions in the US garment industry in the beginning of the twentieth century: the *International Ladies Garment Workers' Union* (ILGWU) and

the *Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Association* (ACWA). Both unions soon established their own educational structures and in 1917 ILGWU's educational department became the first recognised institution of workers' education in the USA, followed by ACWA two years later. What also emerged in the first decade of the century was the *Women's Trade Union League* (WTUL), whose activities were very much directed to the education of working-class women with particular emphasis on their civil and labour rights. As I will discuss throughout the book, women active in the US labour movement would move in between the ranks and leading positions of these unions; their involvement was crucial not only in how the movement for workers' education developed but also in how connections were forged with the UK, France and other countries around the globe.

Thus, unlike France and the UK, where universities had a formative role – through university lectures in France and extra-mural departments and tutorial classes in the UK – it was the trade unions that took the front seat in the USA. Their educational programmes included workers' universities, labour colleges, evening and weekend classes, and summer schools, as well as more informal educational activities such as reading groups and writing workshops that I will discuss in detail in Chap. 2. This is not to deny that universities as institutions, or through the involvement of their academics, did not play a crucial role in the USA, but that all such activities were organised, funded and administered by the trade unions, although the Federal government eventually came to support workers' education. In the words of Arthur Gleason, a radical intellectual and journalist, who supported workers' education from its very beginning: 'The heart of workers' education [. . .] the class, financed on trade union money, the teacher a comrade, the method discussion, the subject the social sciences, the aim an understanding of life and the remolding of the scheme of things' (1921, 5). This 'dream of a better world' was for Gleason a condition *sine qua non* of the movement for worker's education, which otherwise 'would fade away in the loneliness and rigor of the effort' (ibid.).

Gleason's ideas were largely influential in the 1920s boom time for workers' education in the USA, when more than 300 labour colleges emerged. In this context, 1921 was a particularly outstanding year: the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers in Industry opened its doors to its first students; the Brookwood Labor College started a two years' residence programme in Katonah, New York, and the Workers' Education Bureau of America (WEB) was formed in New York City. In addition, the University of California started a programme specifically designed for workers, an initiative

followed by a number of schools for workers at Barnard College, the University of Winsconsin, and the *Southern Summer School*, which organised courses at various university campuses throughout the South.

As I will further discuss in Chap. 2, these summer schools and courses went through a range of organisational changes to survive financial, ideological and political pressures that unavoidably erupted through the radical programmes and subversive organisational structures that they adopted. In 1927, the summer schools of Bryn Mawr, Barnard and Wisconsin formed the Affiliated Summer Schools for Women Workers. They joined forces to co-ordinate recruitment and fund-raising from the trade unions and the government and to stop competing with each other. However, they all suffered from the Depression years, as well as from political antagonisms. Such conflicts emerged from the fact that social change was central in the vision, programmes and directions of workers' education in the USA, its ultimate aim being to inspire workers 'to change economic and social conditions so that those who produce shall own the product of their labor',[20] as Cohn wrote in the socialist newspaper *Justice* on 5 January 1923.

As an ILGWU labour organiser, Cohn was a central figure in the development of the workers' education in the USA; her ideas and practices shaped the curricula, literature and overall activities of ILGWU's educational department, the first recognised institution of workers' education in the USA. This book has been designed and organised around themes that emerged from my archival research with Cohn's papers at the New York Public Library (NYPL) in the summer of 2012.[21] While workers' education has been the object of numerous studies, what I argue in this book is that a narrative and auto/biographical approach to the archives of the movement throws fresh light on understanding the subtleties and nuances of its development and directions, particularly highlighting women's involvement and contribution to the intellectual life of the working classes in the first half of the twentieth century.

Education as Action, the Adventure of Education

'Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for each', Hannah Arendt wrote in her essay 'The Crisis in Education' (2006, 193). Although education was never her research field, it was very much at the backdrop of everything she thought and wrote about, given her overall interest in the relation between individuals and human communities. What has historically emerged as a crisis of the human condition for Arendt is not the Marxist alienation of

human beings from their labour, but the human alienation from the world. We live in a world that does not feel any more as a home to us, she repeatedly argued throughout her work, since our involvement in the web of human relations and therefore in action, is the only way we can feel again 'at home in this world' (1998, 135). It is in this process of 'feeling at home in the world' that education becomes so crucial. Its aim is to enable human beings to know and come to terms with their past, understand their present through an awareness of what their involvement in the web of human relation means and in this way turn a creative eye to the future. After all, human existence for Arendt is an 'everlasting Becoming' (1996, 63) and education is instrumental in its multiple formations, particularly as it becomes the motor for acting and thinking. Thinking and acting are indeed inextricably linked for Arendt and their relation is horizontal rather than vertical: 'my use of the term *vita activa* presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of the *vita contemplativa*', Arendt has written (1981, 17). What she has highlighted as a problem, however, is 'the absence of thinking', the fact that very often we have neither the time nor the inclination 'to stop and think' (ibid., 4). Education thus becomes crucial as a social and cultural milieu where thinking can be cultivated and supported, not as a passive state of the mind, but as praxis in-the-world-with-others. In this light, understanding as the aim of education is an unending process for Arendt: it involves thinking, but it is also the inevitable result of human action, the effect of what human beings do to carve a place for themselves in the world.

Given Arendt's thesis on existence as 'everlasting Becoming' (1996, 63), as well as her interest in the never-ending process of understanding as a prerequisite for action, it is not surprising that early on in her work she reflected and drew upon the ideas of Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher of process: 'in the place of the concept of Being we now find the concept of Process', she emphatically noted in the *Human Condition* (1998, 296). Drawing on the utilitarian philosophical tradition that he was obviously well versed in, Whitehead made the link between the usefulness of understanding and the usefulness of education: 'if education is not useful, what is it?' (1929a, 2), he asked in his essay *The Aims of Education* that was first delivered as an address to the Educational Section of the International Congress of Mathematicians meeting at Cambridge in 1912. But hand in hand with utilitarianism went a concept of education as a process of joy and discovery, immanently entangled in the process of life itself. 'Education is discipline for the adventure of life', he wrote, while

research is in itself intellectual adventure. In this context, educational spaces should become 'homes of adventure' (1929b, 98) and imaginative learning: 'The combination of imagination and learning normally requires some leisure, freedom from restraint, freedom from harassing worry, some variety of experiences and the stimulation of other minds diverse in opinion and diverse in equipment' (ibid., 97). Adventure was indeed a crucial concept for Whitehead, figuring prominently in the title of one of his last book: *Adventures of Ideas* (1967). Thus, while Arendt highlighted responsibility and love as two components of the educational praxis, Whitehead configured education as an art and an adventure and argued that its aim should be to enable students understand Life in all its manifestations.

Whitehead's thought was formative in John Dewey's educational philosophy, highlighting the importance of experience in engaging with the world and its problems (see Dewey 1937). Dewey's ideas of education as an open platform cultivating the ability to think as a condition for democratic and participatory action underpinned the overall movement for workers' education in Europe and the USA in the first half of the twentieth century. It was not only through his writings and ideas that Dewy influenced the development of workers' education. In the context of his philosophical pragmatism, he actively participated in the governing bodies and advisory boards of the various US educational institutions for workers that erupted in the 1920s. Dewy intervened in several crises that the workers' education movement went through, defending the left-labour organisers' right to free speech and expression.

Cohn was in frequent correspondence with Dewy and drew on his ideas when organising the ILGUW's educational and cultural activities. But Dewey was also a comrade, who she would ask to come and talk at the conferences she was organising or wider events she was contributing to. On 19 January 1932, she wrote a letter to invite him to the Washington Pardon Tom Mooney[22] Mass Meeting and Conference: 'Your presence can be so helpful at this juncture that we feel certain you will attend the conference. Should you find it impossible to be present, would you send a message to be read at the conference?'[23] she asked. From his part, Dewy wrote to Cohn on 7 February 1933 to invite her to a conference 'to discuss the problem of independent political action'[24] at Brookwood College, during a turbulent period that the college was under attack on allegations of indoctrinating its students into Marxism and communism, as I will further discuss in Chap. 2.

Political action was thus at the heart of the movement for workers' education in France, the UK, the USA and elsewhere in Europe and across the globe, although there were different manifestations of the political

within different national borders and traditions. But as already discussed earlier, it was not only action but also adventure that overall shaped the conceptual framework of workers' education. It is thus around these two important notions that the analysis of Cohn's public and personal documents revolves. More specifically, Chap. 2 examines the importance of an Arendtian approach to the analysis of women workers' personal and political narratives in bringing together, work, stories and action. In fleshing out the narrative and auto/biographical approach, Chap. 3 draws on Cohn's personal letters highlighting three particular bodies of correspondence with her friends and comrades, Evelyn Preston and Theresa Wolfson in the USA, as well as Marion Phillips in the UK. Chap. 4 focuses on the importance of ethics, aesthetics and politics in women workers' education, as well as in their wider intellectual and cultural lives. Drawing on a range of very interesting photographs in Cohn's papers, Chap. 5 discusses insights that emerge from an image-based research in the history of women workers' education. In the Conclusion I bring together the analytical themes of the book particularly highlight women workers' 'lines of flight' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) within the assemblage of workers' education.

Read on! The adventure of women workers' education is about to begin.

Notes

1. Bibliothèque Nationale de France/ Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal/ Fonds Enfantin ou Fonds Saint-Simonien/ MS7608/ Correspondance du Globe (Dames)/ Deroin (Mme)/ Profession de foi/22 (1–44), (BnF/BdA/FE/MS7608/CdG/Deroin/22). Also, transcribed in Riot-Sarcey 1992, 128.
2. I have discussed Deroin's life and work at length in my study of nineteenth-century Parisian seamstresses (Tamboukou 2015). See also Pilbeam 2003; Serrière 1981, Ranvier 1897.
3. Also known as the 'bourgeois monarchy', this is the period of the reign of Louis-Philippe (1830–1848) who was brought to the throne after the 1830 July revolution that led to the abdication of Charles X and the fall of the Bourbon monarchy. For historical studies about the July Monarchy 1830–1848, see amongst others: Pinkney 1973; Pilbeam 1983; Popkin 2010.
4. There have been many historical studies on these movements, whose influences on women workers' lives I have reviewed and discussed elsewhere in my work (see Tamboukou 2015).
5. Guindorf, 'Response' *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle,* 1(12), 144–147, February 1833.

6. Suzanne Voilquin, *Tribune des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle,* 2 (11), 182, April 1834.
7. For an extended discussion of the movement for popular education in France, see Jaquet-Francillon 1995, Christen 2013.
8. See article on the success of Legouvé's course, *La Voix des Femmes* (5), 2, 25 March 1848. Legouvé's lectures were eventually published in a volume titled *Histoire morale des femmes* (1864).
9. Mimi Pinson was the title of a poem, by Alfred de Musset first published in 1845. It later inspired an operetta in 1915 and a film in 1924. Its heroine was Mimi Pinson, a Parisian working-class girl who sings beautifully and makes men fall in love with her.
10. See amongst others, Mansbridge 1920, Price 1924, Stocks 1953, Jennings 1979, Fieldhouse 1996, Roberts 2003.
11. Agnes Maude Royden Papers, NA412, Women's Library@ LSE. Cited in Munby (2003, 217).
12. *The Highway* xi, no. 10, July 1919, 104.
13. Ibid., xv, no. 1, October 1922, 12.
14. World workers' education; embodying report of the second International conference on workers' education held at Oxford from 15 to 17 August 1924, 51. Published in Amsterdam in 1925 by the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU).
15. College's First Annual Report, p.13 available at: http://www.hillcroft.ac.uk/media/documents/Annual_Report_1920.pdf [Accessed 20 March 2016].
16. For a full list of these lectures and visits, see the College's First Annual Report, p.3.
17. See Annual Report, 5.
18. See Annual Report, 3.
19. See for example: http://www.industrialrevolution.org/lectures-and-learning.html#topoflecturesandlearning [Accessed 3 December 2015].
20. 'New Year Thoughts', *Justice,* 5 January 1923, 10.
21. I am grateful to the British Academy for a small grant [SG112079] that enabled me to conduct this research.
22. Tom Mooney was a political activist and labour leader who was wrongly convicted of the 1916 San Francisco bombing and served twenty-two years in prison before he was eventually pardoned in 1939 (see Ward 1983).
23. Cohn to Dewey, letter dated 19 January 1932. Fannia Mary Cohn papers, MssCol 588, Correspondence. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
24. Dewey to Cohn, letter dated 7 February 1933 (Ibid.).

CHAPTER 2

Assemblages of Institutional Histories and Life Narratives

My dear President Green:
I wish to call your attention to the fact that this communication is not official. I am not writing to you as an officer speaking for her organization. This is an appeal to the head of the American Labor movement from a woman trade unionist.

I am impelled to write you after the attempt made by the A.F. of L. to devise ways and means of organizing working women, brought no immediate results.

We all realize the duty of the American Federation of Labor towards women workers. Whereas, the A.F. of L. and its affiliated unions consider that the organization of men is their concern, and it is carried on under their own auspices, they do not follow this out when it comes to the organization of women.

When the deplorable conditions of the unorganized working woman are to be considered, a conference is called by many ladies' organizations who have no connection with the labor movement, and they are the ones to decide 'how to improve the conditions of the poor working woman'.

By this time we realize that women have come into industry for good, whether from choice or from necessity, and this points to the fact that women will more and more become a factor in industry.

Some unions may succeed in keeping women out of their organization for a while but they cannot keep them out of industry. And what we need most is organization amongst women. I am conscious of the difficult task in

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organizing women into trade unions, but this should only increase our efforts in this field.

The organization of women is not merely a moral question, but also an economic one. Men will never be certain with their conditions unless the conditions of the millions of women are improved.

The old theory of the impossibility of organizing women will not solve this problem. Instead men and women trade unionists will have to make a joint effort to organize the unorganized women by carrying on an educational campaign amongst them and by enlisting the co-operation of men members of trade unions.

To achieve any results it will be necessary to make a study of women in industry; length of employment, the conditions under which they work, and most important of all, of their psychology, such research will be helpful to the trade unions in the industries in which women are employed and women in the Labor movement think that this task should be undertaken by the American Federation of Labor.

I as a woman who has dedicated her life to the cause of Labor am eager to have this research done by the American Labor movement through the A. F. of L. instead of leaving it to other organizations who have different purposes in view.

I take the liberty of writing you about this matter, because I am convinced that you too, are interested in solving this problem of the organization of women into trade unions.

With best personal wishes for a successful administration, I am

Sincerely and Fraternally yours,
Fannia M. Cohn[1]

On 6 March 1925, Cohn wrote this letter to William Green, newly elected president of the AFoL, just after the Federation's attempts to organise women turned out to be unsuccessful. The letter is rich in laying out the socio-political and economic plane wherein Cohn was situating women workers' education. It was imagined as a cultural and intellectual platform that would facilitate the rise of women's class-consciousness and would enable them to reposition themselves in the world with others. Women in the industry were there to stay and the trade unions had to devise ways to organise them as they were in the process of becoming a major force in the labour movement. Taking this letter as my starting point, in this chapter, I look at narrative and archival practices in creating a documentary history of women workers' education in the USA, while exploring some of its connections with the international workers' education movement.

Cohn wrote the aforementioned letter in the spring of 1925 at the heart of what has been identified as a booming period for workers' education in the USA, as we have already seen in the Introduction. And yet Cohn does not seem to share the historians' appreciation of the period, although she was organically involved in all the major events that mark the 1920s as the golden decade in workers' education in the USA: the establishment of the ILGWU's Education Department that showed the way to other unions to follow, the launch of the Workers' Education Bureau (WEB) as a network co-ordinating educational activities, research, publication and programmes in the USA and finally the foundation of Brookwood Labor College and the Bryn Mawr summer school for women workers, which were also followed by a number of labour schools across the USA. Although Cohn was a central figure in these important events, it is her uneasiness with the otherwise celebratory developments of the movement for workers' education that I want to consider through a close engagement with letters, journal articles and other writings in her papers at the New York Public Library (NYPL). What I argue is that a genealogical approach to these documents unveils marginalised and submerged stories and allows a different understanding of women workers' education and its multiple and contested entanglements with the history of the labour movement.

Excavating the Archive of Women Workers' Education

'Genealogy is grey, meticulous and patiently documentary' (1986a, 76) Foucault has famously argued in his often-cited essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy History'. But while a lot has been written about his genealogical approach as 'a history of the present' (1979, 31), the minutiae and micro-practices of his archival work have been mostly overpassed in the existing and ever-thriving bodies of Foucauldian literature.[2] And yet, Foucault was a passionate archive addict and spent most of his research life immersed in a bulk of archival documents that he kept digging and excavating in the *Bibliothèque Nationale, its branch*, the *Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal* as well as the *Bibliothèque du Saulchoir* amongst many majestic libraries and other state and local archives. Foucault in fact wrote very little about the nuts and bolts of his archival work. However, we know something about his visceral excitement

when reading a record of internment in the beginning of the eighteenth century at the *Bibliothèque Nationale:*

> It would be hard to say exactly what I felt when I read these fragments. No doubt, one of these impressions that are called 'physical', as if there could be any other kind. I admit that these 'short stories' suddenly emerging from two and a half centuries of silence stirred more fibres within me than what is ordinary called 'literature', without my being able to say even now if I was more moved by the beauty of that Classical style, draped in a few sentences around characters that were plainly wretched, or by the excesses, the blend of dark stubbornness and rascality of these lives whose disarray and relentless energy one senses beneath the stone-smooth words (1994a, 158).

However, as Foucault humbly admitted, his subsequent analysis of these texts was dry and the dream to 'restore their intensity' failed (ibid.). What he did instead was to compile all these 'poem-lives' (ibid., 159) in a volume with a few preliminary remarks, leaving the stories themselves to convey their intensity to the reader directly. Foucault's anthology of the prison archives of the Hôpital Générale and the Bastille, published in the Gallimard collection. *Parallel Lives*,[3] also included the volume *Le Desordre des familles* (Farge and Foucault 1982). This was a collection of '*lettres de cachet*', letters signed by the French King enforcing the incarceration of people whose families had asked that they be imprisoned or confined in asylums. Foucault co-edited this volume with the historian Arlette Farge, who has written beautifully about the art of doing archival research (1989). It is thus from Farge's influential text, *Le Gout de l'Archive*, that we can literally have a taste of some of the theoretical, methodological and affective practices in the archive that Foucault both deployed and experienced. More importantly, it is from Farge's work that my overall 'archival sensibility' (Moore et al. 2016) vis-à-vis grey documents, subsumed life stories and marginalised 'narrative personas' (Tamboukou 2014) emerges.

But how is 'archival sensibility to be understood' in the context of this research? As the authors of a recently published book on archival research in the social sciences have put it: 'archival sensibility encompasses an overall attitude to the archive and its use, including the understanding that archival documents and other archival objects are not to be taken as a backcloth to the researcher's discourse, but rather as a formative component of it' (Moore et al. 2016, 168) What is highlighted in this approach is the need to study archival documents carefully, in the sense that they should not be simply treated as sources of nice quotations or as illustrations of an analysis that was

not led by their study. Although we always go to the archive with some questions in mind, we should also let its documents surprise us, allow them to interrogate our *a priori* judgements, understandings and prejudices and let them redirect our analytical paths and routes of interpretation. Archival documents will always offer us exciting stories or quotations, but their place should be formative and not illustrative, or simply evidentiary in the historiographical practice. As Farge has pithily noted, 'a quotation is never proof, and any historian knows that it is almost always possible to come up with a quotation that contradicts the one she has chosen' (1989, 74).

But there is more to 'the archival sensibility': although archival documents are often assemblages of fragmented, broken and discontinuous stories, traces of the past rather than representations or mirrors of it, their fragmentation is not to be continued in the researchers' discourse. On the contrary, we need to be sensitive to the lives of the documents found in the archive, try to understand and map the conditions of their possibility and attempt to imagine their lives before and after our encounter with them. Finally, we need to be sensitive to their potentiality, the forces and effects of their intensity, which we need to facilitate and set in motion, rather than block, hide or sidestep.

Feeling Foucault's disappointment of having neutralised the visceral forces of the poetic lives he encountered in the archive, I am similarly mindful of the danger of my own analysis stripping the intensity of the stories that I have excavated in the archive of women workers' education. Dangers of drying up my archival documents notwithstanding, I have tried to listen to some of the flickering voices that erupt from the archives by allowing their order of discourse to mingle with my own interpretation and understanding. As in the letter that initiated this chapter, I have chosen to present some documents in their wholeness; in other cases, I have offered access to digitised versions or on-line transcriptions, thus offering my readers the opportunity to study and appreciate the documents' poetics, textual economy and discursive order.[4] In doing this I have attempted to open up a dialogical scene wherein the inevitable dryness of the researcher's analysis can be livened up in its entanglement with archival stories. Arendt's narrative thesis was catalytic in this process, as I will discuss next.

Narratives, Action and Meaning

A central understanding in Arendt is that stories are crucial in creating meaning, as they ground abstractions, flesh out ideas and thus create a milieu where thought can emerge from the actuality of the recounted event: 'I have

always believed that, no matter how abstract our theories may sound or how consistent our arguments appear, there are incidents and stories behind them, which, at least for ourselves, contain as in a nutshell the full meaning of whatever we have to say' (1960, 1). Indeed, storytelling is a fine discursive mode of expressing the contingency, unpredictable forces and ultimately the freedom of what Arendt has theorised as *the vita activa* (1998), the life of action in politics. In this light, story making fulfils life as it contributes to the pursuit of both meaning and action. In capturing the meaning of political processes, stories and narrative practices open up new analytical paths, as well as new modes of understanding life and/in politics.

What is particularly unique in Arendt's take on narratives, however, is that although life histories generate meaning, this meaning is only accessible to the tellers and listeners of the stories, not to their protagonists, at least at the moment of action. This is because human beings live fragmented lives, whose meaning always evades them in the actual process of the *vita activa*. Stories take up the role of congealing the fleeting meaning of moments and actions and their assemblage creates archives for historical understanding. As Julia Kristeva notes, actors make history only if their action is recorded and becomes memorable and this memoralisation is the role of narratives (2001, 16). How is this memory constituted? 'It is *spectators* who complete the story in question, and they do so through *thought*, thought that follows upon the *act*. This is a completion that takes place through *evoked memory*, without which there is nothing to tell' (ibid., emphasis in the text). It is this idea of a life lived as action that can be narrativised and shared by others who did not necessarily participate in the narrated action that makes the Arendtian conceptualisation of narratives so compelling and so relevant to her overall work as a political philosopher. Her narrative thesis is a mode of thinking about the world of human relations, but it can also be deployed as an analytical tool in understanding history and politics.

Arendt's take on narratives is particularly relevant to Cohn's case. Cohn was an Arendtian political actor par excellence: her life was full of action and unpredictable events from the very beginning, when she took the decision to leave Russia and emigrate to the USA. Indeed, it was very late in life that Cohn could look back and understand the contingencies of the events that had eventually shaped her life course:

> I had one brother who was very dear to my mother and to all of us. He was almost killed in a little 'pogrom' in Russia. Though I was young at that time my brother and I decided to migrate to the United States as an outpost and

> later bring over the whole family. My parents objected to it, especially my going to America. We then communicated with cousins in New York, who were very wealthy. They did not know of my parents' objection and sent us two second class steamship tickets.[5]

Cohn wrote the story of her migration, in the aforementioned letter, sent to her comrade and friend Emma, who we know nothing about, on 8 May 1953. Although she was a prolific writer, she did not leave a diary, a journal or a memoir amongst the papers that she personally collected and bequeathed to the NYPL, the first women trade unionist to do so, Ricki Cohen has noted (1976, 1). It is thus in three rare autobiographical letters in the collection of her papers that we can actually discern traces of the unpredictability of the *vita activa* that eventually shaped her involvement in labour politics.[6] In this light, crucial historical moments became significant events in her personal trajectory, but it was later in life and in retrospect that she was able to tell their story and see their entanglement in shaping the decision she took and the paths she followed. The Triangle Fire was such a life-changing event that forcefully intervened in her existential understanding, and in an Arendtian mode made her see herself 'within the world with others' (Arendt 1998, 117). This is how she remembered it in writing to Emma in her autobiographical letter:

> It was the Triangle fire that decided my life's course. This tragedy influenced then my decision to join the labor movement. I faintly remember joining the protest demonstration on the East Side against this tragedy, but I cannot recollect the streets where we marched. My brother and sister advised me to continue my education and afterwards enter the labor movement. I rejected this because I was convinced then that to voice the 'grievances', the hopes and aspirations of the workers, one must share in their experience. I then joined Local 41, I.L.G.W.U. and went to work in a shop.[7]

The Triangle Shirtwaist Company Fire, at the heart of Greenwich village in Manhattan New York, is one of the most tragic events in American Labour History: as many as 146 young women garment workers died on 25 March 1911 while trying to escape the burning building they were locked in.[8] This horrible event not only led to a series of changes in labour legislation and occupational safety standards, but also marked the rise of women's active involvement in the labour histories of the twentieth century.

Cohn's epistolary account of how this event shaped her decision to dedicate her life to the labour movement is an exemplary moment of the long-lasting impact that the Triangle Fire had upon the lives of many women trade unionists. It was also an event that shaped the collective memory of the labour movement, while Cohn was instrumental in inserting it in the archives of 'the gendered memory of work' (see Tamboukou 2016b).

As I have argued elsewhere in my work, commemoration practices are organically entangled in the material assemblage of the memory of work, whose mnemonic technologies are also constituted by spatial and embodied components and processes. Drawing on Edward Casey's (2000) phenomenological study of memory, commemoration in my analysis is charted as a plane where 'bodies meet in places to enact collective memory practices' (Tamboukou 2016b, 39). It is in this context that Cohn's intervention was important: in fighting against oblivion she did not want the Triangle Fire event to be forgotten and tried hard to inscribe its story in the history of the labour movement.[9] Her unpublished papers include lectures and speeches that she gave over the years on the anniversary of the event, testimonies, as well as newspaper clippings not only about the event itself, but also about the unbelievable acquittal of the Triangle Fire bosses, despite the gravity of this major labour tragedy. The testimony of Rosey Safran, a girl who escaped the fire, was carefully archived in Cohn's papers as evidence of the culpability of the bosses, as well as a trace of the injustice of their getting away with the crime of locking the young working girls inside a flaming building:

> [. . .] I heard somebody cry 'Fire'. I left everything and ran for the Washington Place side. The door was locked and immediately there was a great jam of girls before it [. . .] The fire had started on our floor, and quick as I had been in getting to the Washington Place door, the flames were already blazing fiercely and spreading fast. If we couldn't get out, we would all be roasted alive. The locked door that blocked us was half of wood; the upper half was thick glass. Some girls were screaming, some were beating the door with their fists, some were trying to tear it open. Someone broke out the glass part of the door with something hard and heavy – I suppose the head of a machine – and I climbed or was pulled through the broken glass and ran downstairs to the sixth floor, where someone took me down to the street [. . .] I got out to the street and watched the upper floors burning, and the girls hanging by their hands and then dropping as the fire reached up to them. There they were, dead on the sidewalk. It was an awful, awful sight.[10]

Archival work was thus at the heart of Cohn's textual politics and mnemonic practices: she both wrote about women's involvement in the making of labour history and kept an archive of its traces. Grand historical events and micro histories were always entangled in her historiographical practice in a process that has been mostly luminously theorised by Michel Rolph Trouillot: 'the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history*) in the final instance' (1995, 26, emphasis in the text). We can see Cohn's 'words and deeds' mapped on all four phases, including her initial involvement in 'the facts' whose history she was writing. The 1915 Chicago strike, also recounted in her 1953 autobiographical letter, is such an exemplary case of micro/macro entanglements: a struggle that erupts in a local factory eventually becomes an event with a lasting impact on the history of trade unionism in the garment industry:

> [. . .] I went to work in the Herzog factory [. . .] Conditions there were terrible and I began to carry on an 'underground' campaign on 'my own hook' [. . .] Finally I succeeded in convincing all the workers in the necessity of forming a union that would protect them.
>
> One day, we called a strike and the few thousand workers walked out [. . .] I suddenly became the leader of a very exciting labor struggle. It was a terrific struggle. The police were brutal. They almost arrested every striker on the picket line, including myself. It aroused the interest of the community. The strikers were joined on the picket by John Fitzatrick, Mother Jones, many other outstanding labor leaders, and the wives of liberal professors [. . .]
>
> When the strike was finally settled, a board of arbitration was established [. . .] I was appointed chief clerk arguing the eases that were presented to the Board (the company insisted that they recognize the union on one condition, that I should be the chief clerk, because they said the workers had confidence in me and I would be a restraining influence against unnecessary stoppages [. . .] This was the beginning of local 100 in Chicago.[11]

As fleshed out in Cohn's epistolary extract above, life story and history are bound together in Arendt's political thought, but rather than following the imperative of the beginning, middle and end of the Aristotelian *Poetics*, Arendt's interest lies with the importance of narrative agency and closure in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. As Kristeva pithily remarks, in this philosophical text, 'the art of narrative resides in the ability to condense the action

into an exemplary moment, to extract it from the continuous flow of time, and reveal a *who*' (2001, 16, emphasis in the text). In this context, the exemplary moment of the Chicago strike not only condenses revolutionary action but also reveals Cohn not just in terms of 'what' she is in the intersection of social axes of difference – a woman, an immigrant, a worker, a labour organiser – but most importantly in existential terms of 'who she is' in her unrepeatable uniqueness as an Arendtian political subject, conditioned but not determined by the socio-cultural and political milieu of her actuality and therefore free to act upon them. As Olivia Guaraldo aptly remarks about Arendt's thought,

> each human being is unique, not in the sense that each possesses unique qualities, but conversely insofar as she/he can give birth to the unpredictable. Uniqueness, for Arendt, can come to the fore only in action, only in front of others, and it is strictly dependent upon the testimony of others in order to be (Guaraldo 2012, 99).

It is precisely in highlighting the importance of unrepeatable events and crucial moments that letters become so crucially important in the narrative analytics of this study. Following Arendt's lead, I have considered letters as 'portraits of moments', a phrase from Rahel Varnhagen, the cosmopolitan Jewess salonnière, whose intellectual and political biography became Arendt's (2000) secondary doctoral thesis: 'I want a letter to be the portrait of a moment: that in which it is written.'[12]

Cohn had no time to write her story and indeed she was not interested in doing it: she was too busy working for the labour movement and changing the world to have time for herself or her life story. But although she did not seem to have either the desire or the time to write her life story, she was a voluminous letter writer. It was through letters that she communicated not only with her friends but also with a network of people involved in workers' education either as academics, teachers, trade unionists, policy makers, politicians or journalists, as I will further discuss in Chap. 3. Her correspondence was thus crucial in shaping her social self, since it was mostly through letters that she would communicate across social, political and geographical boundaries. It is therefore on themes emerging from the narrativity of her correspondence, framed within real and discursive constraints of her epistolary self, that my analytical interest has focused and this is how I return to her March 1925 letter to the AFoL president that has initiated this chapter, as a way of framing women workers' education within the politics of the labour movement.

Women Workers' Education and/in the Labour Movement

Cohn's initiative to write to the newly elected president of the AFoL a letter reminding him of the moral and economic urgency of organising women workers did not come out of the blue. Despite women's massive entry in the industry in the beginning of the twentieth century, their presence in the trade unions was far from welcome: they were considered as both a threat and a burden. Since the majority of them were young and unmarried they were not taken seriously. Their position as workers was considered to be temporary and they were expected to leave it once they got married. Feminist labour historian Alice Kessler-Harris has succinctly observed that tensions between women and men in trade unions have been a historical constant, but the 1920s was a particularly interesting period given American women's newly won enfranchisement, as well as the fact that in the 1920s women's presence in the labour force had been finally admitted as a given, albeit reluctantly so, by trade unions. As a result, women were welcome 'as dues paying members, tolerated as shop-level leaders and occasionally advanced to become business agents and local and international officers' (Kessler-Harris 2007a, 38), but they were marginalised within the trade union structures and were practically excluded from its leadership. Moreover, there were no overall organisational structures or strategies in how to recruit, keep and organise women workers.

Men workers were not just hesitant or ambivalent about women, but also active in keeping them in the margins of the industry and of the unions. Sexual discrimination had been contractually enforced in 1913, when the 'Protocol in the Dress and Waist Industry' stipulated that the highest-paid jobs were reserved for men and even when men and women did the same work they were paid differently. The agreement signed between managers and some workers' unions also enforced a strict hierarchy along specialisation and gender lines: cutters, pressers and ironers, all exclusively male trades were at the top, while women's jobs such as drapers, joiners, examiners and finishers were unsurprisingly at the bottom of the pyramid (see Leeder 1993, 18–19).

Women workers were thus considered as 'a permanently threatening underclass of workers, who finally resorted to the protection of middle-class reformers and legislators to ameliorate intolerable working conditions' (Kessler-Harris 2007b, 25). This was exactly what Cohn emphasised in her March 1925 letter to Green mentioned earlier: her conviction that

women workers' conditions should not be in the hands of 'many ladies' organisations who have no connection with the labor movement'.[13] Cohn was adamant that improving 'the conditions of the poor working woman' was not a philanthropic issue, but an action and objective of the labour movement: a political platform that would advance not only trade unionism amongst women, but also an intellectual and cultural space that would radically change their views and position in the world. This task fell to a few women organisers, such as Cohn, who very much drew on educational and cultural activities not only to attract women garment workers to the union, but more importantly to persuade them to stay.

But apart from instrumental reasons, such as 'organizing the unorganizable',[14] there was more in workers' education: its underlying aim should be 'the desire for a better social order and the desire for a richer and fuller life individually and collectively',[15] Cohn wrote in her paper 'Aims of workers' education', read in 1926, on the fifth anniversary of the WEB. I want to stay in the way Cohn highlights desire twice in the course of one sentence, as a crucial component of what workers' education should be about. How are we to understand desire in the educational imaginaries of the labour movement?

It is here that I have turned to Deleuze and Guattari's (1984) conceptual configuration of desire, as an autonomous and productive force shaping the social rather than being determined by it. Far from being ideological or psychic, desire is a material force, incessantly producing the real: 'If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality', Deleuze and Guattari have argued (ibid., 26). It is in their attempt to map forces of desire in their entanglement with power relations, discursive practices, institutional structures, in short, in the complexity of the world they emerge from, that Deleuze and Guattari have come up with the notion of the assemblage that offers a novel approach to the historically difficult problem of the micro/macro relations. Conceived as open configurations, assemblages do not have a priori properties or characteristics: they are rather constituted through various relations and connections that their components keep making. In this sense, an assemblage can never be reducible to its parts, while the latter can never be constrained within the boundaries of any assemblage. Instead, components form relations of interiority and exteriority within and between assemblages. As Manuel DeLanda has noted, 'a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its

interactions are different' (2006, 10). In suspending a priori unities and predefined causalities, in focusing on the heterogeneous elements and meshwork of social relations and in reinvesting desire within social formations, the assemblage offers a new philosophical understanding of what constitutes the social, as well as of how individuals and societies relate and interact.

Elsewhere in my work I have drawn on assemblage theories, as briefly presented earlier, to analyse social, political and cultural formations and technologies in the field of gender and education (see Tamboukou 2008, 2010). It is thus on this theoretical platform that I have read, understood and mapped desire in the context of workers' education. Following Cohn's appropriation of desire, what I suggest is that it should be seen as a force of personal and social changes always entangled and intra-acting (Barad 2007), moving forward the process of becoming. We can thus trace desire's production of the real in the outline of a syllabus for the 1925 course on 'Philosophy and Social Change', carefully archived in Cohn's unpublished writings:

> The aim of this course is to examine the mutual relations between social change and philosophy. The emergence of philosophy from social experience will be shown. In periods of revolution philosophy will be shown to be the thoroughgoing sizing up of the universe of social experience with a view of determining what shape it might be made to take and the methods adequate for this reorganization. The philosophical roots of present day revolutionary movements will receive special attention. An attempt will be made to evaluate the ideals and methods of realization proposed by revolutionary thinkers. The function of philosophy as an instrument of change will be investigated.[16]

As already noted in the Introduction, Whitehead's centrality of experience and Dewey's pragmatism is the philosophical grid underpinning the syllabus outline mentioned earlier. But Marx's famous thesis that the point of philosophy is to change the world and not simply explain it[17] is the overarching axis, which becomes even more explicit in the proposed tentative list of lecture subjects, as well as its adjacent bibliography, which apart from the ancient Greek philosophers also includes Dewey, Scott and Marx and Engels, amongst others:

1. Philosophy and Social Life
2. The Sophists and the Athenian Expansion

3. Socrates and Plato and the attempts to construct rational sanction for social morals
4. The Greek view of labour and how it is reflected in metaphysics
5. Greek morality as upper-class morality
6. Stoics and the Roman Empire
7. Medieval Static Society and Scholasticism
8. Social and Philosophic Individualism in modern times
9. The Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution
10. Rousseau and the French Revolution
11. German Idealism as a reaction against social and philosophical atomism
12. Materialism and Scientific Socialism
13. The Hegelian element in Marxist Socialism
14. The Economic Interpretation of History
15. Class struggle and individual intelligence as points of leverage of social reconstruction
16. Intelligence and action. Do ideas and ideals make a difference?
17. Sorel's use of Bergson's philosophy
18. Is progress conceived as control possible?
19. Salient features of projected society
20. Are these types of society possible? A view of human nature and its possibilities
21. Methods of progress.[18]

Considering this proposed syllabus in mind, we can perhaps understand why the labour leaders were so puzzled with Cohn's educational ideas, as well as unsupportive of her projects and activities. Quite simply they thought that such curricula were irrelevant for workers' needs; their education would rather be focusing on training courses, preparing them to become conscious and effective trade unionists. Philosophy, literature and other liberal arts subjects were for the bourgeoisie, not the proletarians, they would persistently maintain. While the 1920s was a decade when many educational institutions for workers were established, it was also a time of intense educational wars, the beginning of a downside curve 'from soul to strawberries', as Susan Stone Wong has argued (1984). What started in the 1920s as a vision for workers' education that would become 'the soul' of the union movement for social change was ultimately transmuted to a narrow project of 'labour education' as a source of material happiness, aiming to instruct workers to cope with their world instead of

inspiring them to change it, Wong has explained, taking the strawberry metaphor from a *Reader's Digest* article, describing the ILGWU's Unity House in October 1948: 'We used to say come the revolution we'll eat strawberries and cream. This is the revolution. And I'm tired already of strawberries (cited in Wong 1984, 57). I will come back to the aesthetics and politics of workers' education in Chap. 4, but here I want to return to the pre-strawberries period and look more closely to the micro-histories of the movement for workers' education. In doing this, I follow traces that Cohn has highlighted in her letters, situating them in wider events and processes that emerged in the same period.

The ILGWU Education Department: Organising the Unorganisable

'The movement for workers' education in the US [. . .] has been over-estimated by some, under-estimated by others, and misunderstood by many',[19] Cohn wrote in an unpublished paper. But despite its misconceptions and different evaluations and critiques, it was still 'an intervention in "the social forces" at play',[20] she wrote in the same paper. How did the intervention unfold? This is what I want to look at in this section following Cohn's understanding of the history of the ILGWU Educational Department, which she served for almost half a century, from 1918 when she was elected as the first and only woman vice-president of the ILGWU General Executive Board (GEB), till 1962 when she died.

As already noted in the Introduction, ILGWU was the first trade union in the USA to establish an education department and its history mirrors the development of the whole movement for workers' education in the country (see Wong 1984, 39). Women's role was crucial in this historical development: despite their marginalisation within the union, they led the education movement and worked hard for its expansion and accreditation. It all started in the New York Waist and Dress Makers' Union, Local 25, with the appointment of Juliet Stuart Poyntz as its educational director in 1915. Poyntz organised Unity Centres at local public schools, where workers initially received courses in English and physical training, but they could also hold meetings and attend union lectures. This programme turned out to be very popular, and one year later ILGWU followed the lead of its local, formed an education committee, gave it $5,000 and appointed Poyntz as its director on a part-time basis.[21]

Apart from expanding the number of Unity Centres, as well as Unity Houses – recreational centres for union members – Poyntz also founded the first Workers' University at Washington Irving High School in New York. Workers could now take up courses in labour economics, American history and politics, literature and the social sciences. These courses were delivered at the weekends by the same eminent professors who taught the offspring of the elite during the week. In organising advanced courses for workers Poyntz collaborated with Cohn, who had also been appointed to the ILGWU's Education Committee in 1916. Cohn was actually quite fearless in inviting well-established academics to come and teach the workers. As Gus Tyler, a socialist activist, who worked in the ILGWU Educational Department and later became director of its political department, vividly remembered in an interview:

> There was a determination and sincerity about her and no sense of humility. She had a quiet matronly air of chutzpach (effrontery). She would go to the head of the history department at Columbia university and say: 'My name is Fannia Cohn. I come from the garment workers, the girls. They want to know about history. I want you should come and give me a lecture.' They all came. She got the top faculty at Columbia to come and give lectures.[22]

The two women worked together for 2 years between 1916 and 1918 and although their co-operation was shadowed by a character conflict,[23] their ideas about education were perfectly harmonious and Cohn worked tirelessly to realise them throughout her life. When Cohn took over in 1918, following Poyntz's resignation, she persuaded the GEB to double the budget of the Education Department for the next two years, while in 1920 the budget reached $15,000 at the Chicago convention.[24] Her unpublished paper 'Workers' University of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union' gives a comprehensive summary of how the union's educational activities were initiated, as well as what underpinned the philosophy of workers' education:

> It was in 1914 that a group of our members began to consider the necessity of having our International initiate education – not the kind of education which was offered to adults with a view to making them more efficient and better workers, but rather the kind of education that would make them more intelligent workers and citizens of the community in which they reside. The group felt that since many of the workers leave the schools at an early

> age (before they have an opportunity to develop personality and gain character) and enter into the mills and factories, and since under the strain of daily, continuous work they are apt to get out of touch with effective educational effort, that if our International would consider education as part of its activities, they might bridge the gulf between childhood and manhood. In short, this little group believed that their own Trade Union should be deeply concerned with the intellectual developments and spiritual needs of its members, in so far as their material betterment is concerned.[25]

The idea of providing for the workers' 'spiritual needs' was quite unique and well ahead of its time and ILGWU was the first labour organisation in the USA to adopt it as part of its educational programme. Throughout her life, Cohn worked hard to promote the workers' intellectual and spiritual development, but, as already noted earlier, she had to fight hard to stand her grounds as the initial generosity of the Union soon faded away, particularly after the 1920s when an internal strife between the Communists and the Socialists almost destroyed it. Cohn has written extensively about this period in an autobiographical letter to an anonymous friend from the Aurora Health Farm in Morristown, New Jersey, where she spent some time recuperating from a nasty flu, followed by what her doctors diagnosed as nervous exhaustion. Although the letter is undated, its content clearly indicates that it must have been written sometime in March 1931:

> Very few of the Vice-Presidents believed in Workers' Education; it really took courage from me to report at these meetings of the activities of our Educational Department. Many of the Vice-Presidents good-naturedly said to me that they could not understand why I, with my innate abilities, did not spend my time on something important, that would really benefit the Union [. . .]
>
> Then came the unfortunate internal strife in our Union that lasted many years. Many of the Leaders in their despair accused the Educational Department for not taking a more vigorous stand in the fight and outlawing the trouble-makers. I continued the tradition of the Educational Department that every member disregarding his political or economic tendencies is entitled to all benefits of the Educational Department.[26]

Cohn was supportive of revolutionary socialism since her youth, but she was against the idea of the labour movement being subordinated to the ideology and needs of any political organisation and she believed that

workers would eventually succeed in standing as an autonomous body. Although opposed to the communists, she refused to ban them from the activities of the Educational Department since it was her firm conviction that all union members should have access to educational and cultural opportunities regardless of their political affiliation. Her conciliatory stance created a lot of tension with her colleagues and comrades in the union and she found herself being accused by both parts. This untenable position severely affected her health and created a lot of anxiety and concern: 'at such a time of intolerance and mutual distrust one is in danger of getting hardened and embittered. That I would never survive . . . '[27] she wrote to her lifelong friend Evelyn Preston.

Although vilified by her comrades, Cohn was warmly embraced and persistently supported by a small circle of feminist friends, as well as a network of intellectuals, politically active journalists and eminent academics, as I will further discuss in Chap. 3. This was because she never confined her activities within the union. As she wrote to her anonymous friend in the letter mentioned above, she was aware that her project was precarious and wanted to have back-up plans and wider solution, in case things fell apart in the union:

> Never did I confine my activities to our Educational Department alone. I was tireless in my effort to expand the Workers' Educational Movement and make it a part of the activities of the Labor Movement as a whole. I did this with the view of not confining the Educational Movement to our International Union for fear that in case we would be compelled to give up these activities, it would then endanger the entire Educational Movement.[28]

As a consequence of this, Cohn became involved in the organisation of the WEB and the foundation of Brookwood Labor College, as well as in outreach work, developing educational programmes in other institutions, communities and unions all over the country. She also connected with the conferences, publications, policy motions and other activities of the international network of workers' education, as we have already seen in the Introduction. Cohn was amongst the delegates of the first two international conferences on workers' education in Europe. On returning from Brussels in September 1922, she wrote a letter to John Van Vaerenewyck, founder of the WEB, reporting on the proceedings of the conference: 'I was very sorry to learn how much our Labor Movement is misunderstood abroad, and I had to explain that we carry

on our struggle in our own American way according to conditions here',[29] she noted. Two years later, she explained her decision to attend the second international conference for workers' education at Oxford as a representative of the labour movement, whose voice was not always heard in such conventions: 'I always feel strongly that labor should present its own case no matter how friendly these people are, for certainly they do not know how the Labor movement feels on many things that concern it',[30] she wrote to A. J. Muste, director of the Brookwood Labor College in the summer of 1924. In an unpublished paper, she wrote extensively about her impressions of Ruskin College and the contradictions of the Oxford milieu:

> One was impressed by the surroundings. The numerous buildings and towers of the colleges that compose Oxford tell the story of the monopoly of education by the few families of wealth and influence who sent their sons here to acquire knowledge and refinement, thus preparing them to rule and manage the world. Yet in these surroundings was established the first England Labor Educational Institution, Ruskin College.[31]

What transpires from Cohn's correspondence and other writings is the importance of internationalism in the movement for workers' education, as already discussed in the Introduction. It is evident that despite many similarities in their needs and organisational structures, internationalism gave workers the opportunity to learn how to see, discern and understand differences, particularly in the wake of the Great War that had scarred humanistic ideas and pacifist and progressive movements across the world. Cohn's correspondence includes many letters to and from the Workers' Educational Association in the UK; she often wrote articles for *The Highway*, invited many of their members to deliver lectures in the USA and had a constant correspondence with Labour MP Marion Philips, as I will further discuss in Chap. 3.

Beyond the UK and despite language barriers, Cohn's visiting card was amongst the papers of Jeanne Bouvier, a leading figure in the French labour movement, whose life and work I have discussed elsewhere at length (see Tamboukou 2016b). We know from her correspondence that before visiting Brussels in 1922, Cohn stopped in Paris, where she met with trade unionists in the garment industry and Bouvier was obviously amongst them: 'When I was in France several years ago, the Tailor's Union, together with representatives of the Labor Movement gave me a fine reception',[32] she wrote in a letter

many years later, although she admitted that she had forgotten the names of 'the many friends' she had made there. What she did remember, however, was the poor state of syndicalism in France: 'I know that they have not unions in our sense of the word. That is why each time they strike it is for the same conditions. They do not realise as yet, that improvement of conditions depends upon the continuation of a union',[33] she noted. Her own misunderstanding of the different political and cultural traditions in the French labour movement was equivalent to her 1922 report to Van Vaerenewyck about the Europeans' false views of the American conditions, as we have already seen.[34] This is why international conferences and exchange visits were so important in bringing together different views and approaches in the labour movement in general and workers' education in particular.

Most importantly, Cohn never stopped considering herself as an activist, 'spending much time in agitating for the movement through mouth and pen',[35] as she wrote in her March 1931 autobiographical letter. It is to these wider activities in the workers' education movement that I now turn, keeping Cohn as a central figure holding them together and drawing on her papers to review their micro-histories.

The Workers' Education Bureau: Knowledge Is Power

The project for an organisation to expand workers' education in the labour movement came up in December 1920 when Cohn convened a meeting in New York with a group of similarly minded intellectuals, academics and activists. Their idea was that there was a need for a national hub for workers' education that would have six basic functions: (1) to collect, analyse and supply information; (2) to organise publicity through newsletters, bulletins and press releases; (3) to serve as a registration centre for labour teachers and schools across the country; (4) to produce and evaluate syllabi of courses, textbooks, comprehensive bibliographies and other class materials; (5) to formulate benchmarks for labour schools, colleges and courses with the view of outlining a tentative curriculum and to study pedagogical methods on labour education; (6) finally to co-ordinate statistical information and findings of research work undertaken by the various trade union colleges.[36] A committee was formed, with the task of organising the first national conference on workers' education, which took place in New York in April 1921. It was during this conference that the WEB was officially launched. Its purpose was:

> to collect and to disseminate information relative to efforts at education on any part of organized labor; to co-ordinate and assist in any possible manner the educational work now carried on by the organized workers; and to stimulate the creation of additional enterprises in labor education throughout the United States.[37]

The delegates of the conference adopted in full the recommendations of the organising committee as outlined earlier and stipulated as its seventh function 'to provide office or desk space and necessary assistance to the secretary.'[38] But this last function also raised the small detail of the bureau's finances. The WEB was an initiative founded on individual enthusiasm and voluntary work since the AFoL did not support it in the beginning. It was actually Cohn's extended family in New York that provided its seed funding, as Cohn has revealed in her May 1953 autobiographical letter.[39] As already discussed before, Cohn's family had not only paid for hers and her brother's second-class tickets when they first emigrated to the USA but had also offered to support Cohn's education. Cohn had repeatedly declined such offers, her reason being that 'I came from a very proud family, Rosofskys, and from a revolutionary background,'[40] as she wrote to her friend Emma.

Although too proud to receive personal help, Cohn would always welcome her family's and friends' contribution to the labour movement. But, of course, the WEB could not be sustained through such means. In attempting to safeguard the autonomy of the WEB, the organising committee had suggested a number of sources that included affiliation fees from labour schools and unions, membership fees and subscriptions to its bulletin and finally admission fees to entertainments and lectures.[41] Although precarious, these financial sources kept the bureau going for thirty years, given that Cohn worked hard to ensure that the AFoL would both endorse it, as well as offer financial support, without appropriating it. Indeed, in 1922, the AFoL entered a formal co-operative relation with the WEB; one year later, its convention resolved that they were integrated in the WEB network, and finally in 1924, the WEB obtained official financing from the Federation (see Cohen 1976, 143).

However, there was always a tension between the AFoL and the WEB. In March 1929, Cohn wrote a rather angry letter to the first WEB secretary Spencer Miller with heavy corrections to the draft of a preliminary report that was to be read in its forthcoming convention. The report referred to 'the vague and indefinite aspiration with which the movement

was launched and its almost complete want of recognition on the part of Labor with that of today.'[42] Cohn's response was furious: 'This is an unjust reflection on those who had the foresight to organize the WEB', she wrote. 'As a matter of fact we had a definite aim and purpose, and the Bureau as yet functions on the same basis.'[43] She also protested against the view that they had no support from the Labour movement: 'If you look up the proceedings of the first Convention, you will know that the Labor movement was very well represented there',[44] she wrote to Miller. Her letter explicitly referred to the AFoL's intervention in the composition of this report, particularly in the section where the WEB appeared to recognise mistakes made in its early period. Cohn's response hit the nail on its head and was straightforward: 'I realize that this cannot be corrected by you as it is quoted from the report of the Committee on Education of the AFoL Convention. Otherwise I would like to know, what were the particular mistakes that the Bureau made during its pioneer period',[45] she noted.

This was a difficult period for the WEB and AFoL relations due to the Brookwood crisis that I will discuss in the next session. What is particularly interesting in this communication however, is the fact that Cohn very early came to realise how history could be forgotten, distorted and rewritten. While heavily redrafting the secretary's report to the point of asking him to 'please correct these items in accordance with the facts [. . .] and send it to me as I want to see it',[46] she also made sure that their communication would be archived as evidence of the issues she had raised. It is because of such traces in her papers that a documentary history of the movement for workers' education paints a different picture and opens up paths for counter narratives and discourses to emerge. Indeed, the struggle for the WEB's autonomy, as revealed in its documents, went on till 1951 when it was finally taken over by the AFoL as its Educational Department. By that time, workers' education had become 'labour studies' and had lost the radical vitality of the first years: strawberries had satisfied 'the mental hunger' that Cohn has talked about in her paper at the 1921 first National Conference in New York:

> We realize that no plan for carrying on educational activities can be successful unless it does something more than install the machinery of Unity Centers and a Workers' University. We must stimulate that mental hunger which will demand satisfaction in education within the trade union movement. The rank and file must be on fire with the conviction that 'Knowledge

> is Power', and that with the 'Accumulation of wisdom the world is theirs'. Then, and only then, will we be on the road to success.[47]

Cohn's paper was also addressing a number of oppositions from the ILGWU leaders that had surfaced in the labour press in the previous year. 'The benefits of labor education should only be measured by the degree to which the worker could translate what is taught them in the class rooms into actual deeds at their shops and at their union meetings',[48] an anonymous editorial had stated in the ILGWU's weekly newspaper *Justice*, in May 1920, further noting that once-educated, workers seemed to lose interest in their union. 'We are on the proper road, under proper instruction',[49] Clara Friedman a student worker had swiftly responded. It was not because of education that workers got disillusioned with the union, Friedman had argued, tacitly pointing to the problems of uninspiring union politics that their leaders did not want to see criticised. Cohn had also intervened in the debate clarifying that her famous moto 'knowledge is power' could only be realised when in action, working for the labour movement through the union. But it seems that this debate and controversy went on for years to come.

Looking back at the WEB's history in a paper she wrote in 1926, Cohn felt the need to highlight the fact that the purpose of labour education was not 'to provide a system of education which would educate out of the labor movement the ambitious, the scholarly inclined, and those most interested in education'.[50] This was why she was so adamant that labour education should not be conflated with adult education. In writing to Miller, she was quite prescriptive about how the WEB should be represented: 'Instead of mentioning that "the WEB is promoting adult education" it should read that "the WEB is promoting adult workers' education"',[51] she remarked. Throughout her life and work, Cohn had written extensively and persuasively on this issue:

> Workers' education is of course a part of adult education. When we discuss workers' education, however, we cannot consider it apart from the labor movement; we must think of it in terms of the workers' problems. The background of workers' education must be the labor movement [. . .] The workers' education movement is based on confidence in the masses and on the assumption that human nature is not static. Given the opportunity, the proper atmosphere, and an inspiring environment, human nature can be influenced. It has been further guided by the theory of modern concept that creative imagination and initiative can develop in varying degrees.[52]

The way Cohn integrated Dewey's concept of 'creative imagination' in the discourse of her argument is striking, but not surprising.[53] As already noted in the Introduction, Dewey's philosophy was influential in the epistemologies and pedagogies of the labour movement. Cohn was deeply interested in the power of creative imagination to open up the dark side of things, reveal hidden meanings and remake the world anew. It was in the context of such ideas about not only the power of workers' education in reimagining the world, but also the importance of its organic entanglement with the labour movement that Cohn was involved in the establishment and running of the first residential institution for workers' education, the Brookwood Labor College, which I will discuss next.

The Brookwood Labour College and the Dark Side of Politics

> The recent condemnation of the Brookwood Labor College by the American Federation of Labor brings to the foreground the question of the future of adult education in connection with the labor movement. The issue is rendered especially acute because of the way in which the condemnation was effected; it was a scholastic lynching. Methods were employed which are not tolerated today in so-called 'capitalistic' private institutions, where accused persons are entitled to a hearing before condemnation can ensue. This phase of the matter has received attention in the press, but the extent to which the future of workers' education in this country is involved has not had corresponding publicity. Nor has the bearing of the Brookwood incident upon the prospects of organized labor itself under its present political management come to the notice of any large part of the public. A brief résumé of the leading facts, preliminary to a statement of these two larger aspects of the matter, is accordingly in place.[54]

Dewey wrote the aforementioned article for the liberal magazine the *New Republic* in January 1929 while trying to defend democratic procedures in the US labour education. His article painted a very grim image of the politics of the labour movement as manifested in the controversy that arose around the first American residential labour college, whose history I want to review in this section.

Three months after the launch of the WEB during the first National Conference on Worker's Education, Cohn attended a meeting at Brookwood School in Katonah. The purpose of the meeting was to convert the school into a workers' residential college following the model of Ruskin College in the UK. Brookwood School had been initially founded in 1919 by William

Mann Fincke and his wife Helen Hamlin Fincke as an educational initiative to teach the young people of the working classes pacifist ways for social change (see Howlett 1993). Fincke was a strong believer in the intellectual power of the working classes. Amongst his progressive educational views, he maintained that creative writing was a forceful way of expressing and developing working-class culture, in a way that would have a wider impact on the formations of culture: 'the experience of industrial workers in writing groups [. . .] might have a significant event upon our national literature' (1935, 185) he had written. Apart from Brookwood School, he had also convened a writing group of women workers, 'The Art Workshop for College and Industrial Women', who met on Thursday evenings at East 37th Street, New York, to contemplate, think and create. This is what Fincke wrote about the group's experience in introducing a brochure that the group published in 1931, just after his premature death:

> Wheels of sewing machines in garment shops have stopped turning, the clatter of typewriter in offices has ceased to tattoo. Outside over the city roofs the bright lights leap at the sky. In the rhythmic pulsation of human life, the beat of maintenance of existence is followed by the beat of marginal delight. And here are gathered a few who in seeking fulfilment would rather use themselves than be played upon by mechanized preparations.[55]

Fincke's ideas about the importance of cultivating the intellectual life of the working classes was highly influential in the organisation of the Bryn Mawr summer school for women workers in the industry, as I will discuss in the next section. Ideas do not always win however, and by 1921 the Brookwood School was struggling to survive. It is then that the Finckes decided to transfer the estate they had bought for the school in 1914 to a group of pro-labour intellectuals and trade union activists, who could guarantee its survival and expansion. The new college opened its doors to the first group of students who enrolled in September 1921 for a two-year programme in the social sciences and labour organisation.

Already in the proceedings of the 1921 New York Conference, there was a paper outlining the vision for this new college, framed within Cohn's and other labour leaders' firm conviction that workers' education should be in the hands of the labour movement, not of university faculty members or any middle-class organisations. The college would be based 'upon the hypothesis that a new social order is coming and that it is not necessary or desirable to aid in bolstering up the present social order which is passing'.[56] Brookwood's

curriculum was thus devised to address the twofold educational vision of the college: to educate leaders for the movement and to train researchers. Its first year comprised more general topics in the social sciences, including history, English, sociology, social psychology, economics and labour drama, which turned out to be very popular, as I will further discuss in Chap. 4. The second year became much more focused on labour subjects, including labour history, both national and international, as well as techniques of labour organisation and union skills, including speech and rhetoric (See Howlett 2008).

Although Brookwood was never accredited as a higher education institution, its classes and teacher attracted important names from the US progressive intellectual and academic circles: the novelist Sinclair Lewis, the historian Charles, A. Beard, the philosopher John Dewey and the sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, were amongst those eminent university professors who gave lectures in their subjects. There were also a number of well-known political and labour leaders who taught at Brookwood. As peace education was at the heart of its curriculum, a number of European intellectual and political figures were also invited: John Strachey, a British Labour MP, the French economist and socialist leader André Philip, Kurt Klaber, a German pacifist and J. Olson, the Norwegian Labour Party editor, were amongst them.

It was not just the curriculum and the eminent teachers that made Brookwood a distinct educational institution, but also its surroundings, which opened up *heterotopic spaces* (Foucault 1994b) for workers to think, study and create, away from the restriction of their urban industrial environment. Unlike utopias that are unreal spaces, *heterotopias* open up in the peripheries and margins of hegemonic spaces continuously challenging their control and domination, while eroding them from the inside. In presenting the new college's plans at the First National Conference for Worker's Education, the author of 'The New Brookwood' paper highlighted the college's intention 'to take thinking and active labor men and women away from the daily distractions and attractions such as the cities offer'.[57] Students would study there on scholarships that would lighten the burden of financial worries and offer them carefree time and space to unfold their potentiality, re-imagine and reposition themselves in the world. This is how Rose Pesotta, an immigrant labour organiser, who eventually climbed the ILGWU hierarchy and became one of the three women vice-presidents in its history, remembered Brookwood in her political autobiography *Bread Upon the Waters:*

> I spend the next two years there studying the social sciences – an adventure in living, with faculty and students not only meeting in classrooms and in recreational activities but jointly doing the manual labor of maintaining this co-operative college. Many new roads of thought are opened up to me by our instructors. Our dean, A. J. Muste, who teaches the history of civilization and public speaking, was formerly a minister in a conservative Massachusetts town. The others are David Saposs, Josephine (Polly) Colby, Arthur Wallace Calhoun, and Helen G. Norton.
>
> Brookwood attracts labor-movement notables from many lands. They come there to exchange views with the students and faculty members. Class study is informal but intensive. Every important industry is represented in the student body, which makes it easier for us to understand the industrial and rural problems facing the country. 'Organizing the unorganized' is our great objective. Many of the students come from steel mills, coal mines, auto plants, textile mills, and farms. After a year or two at Brookwood they return home to impart their newly acquired knowledge to their fellow workers (Pesotta 1987[1944], 16).

Previously in my work I have drawn on Foucault's notion of *heterotopia* (1994b) to configure the first university-affiliated women's colleges at Cambridge, as educational *heterotopias*, different spaces in the margins of mainstream institutions that disrupted the normality and linearity of traditional spaces and temporalities of femininity, allowing women to re-imagine their lives and actively intervene in the formation of the self (see Tamboukou 2003). It is in this philosophical and cultural context that Brookwood could be seen as a transitional space, saturated by power relations and forces of desire and thus creating conditions of possibility for new subjectivities to emerge.

Despite its pacifist vision, wide and diverse curricula, progressive pedagogical practices, inspiring campus, as well as the warm support of the most brilliant minds of the American academic world things did not unfold smoothly for Brookwood. As a matter of fact, political antagonisms became quite ugly in the end, since the old world that the Brookwood visionaries had considered as receding, turned out to be very resilient to change. Even worse, it was not from official state institutions that the war was waged, but from the heart of the labour movement itself, the AFoL. In August 1928, the AFoL asked labour unions to withdraw their support from Brookwood on the grounds that it was becoming a communist hub, encouraged anti-AFoL policies, criticised religion and included 'too much' sex education in its curriculum (see Dewey 1929, 1). What was

worse is that outrageous as the allegations were, the school was never investigated or given a chance to respond and action was taken despite many protests within and outside the Federation.

In his polemic article against the action of the AFoL, Dewey emphasised the fact that the attack on Brookwood was part of a more general plan for workers' education to be disciplined and controlled, 'part of the policy to eliminate from the labor movement the schools and influences that endeavor to develop independent leaders of organised labor who are interested in a less passive and more social policy than that now carried on by the AFoL' (ibid., 7). Attempts to hijack the WEB, as we have already seen earlier, were also flagged up in Dewey's article, thus revealing the labour war machine that Cohn found herself entangled in.

During the short WEB's history, Cohn worked closely with A. J. Muste: they were in constant correspondence about many issues of the college, including its always precarious finances. In June 1923, Cohn wrote a letter to Muste advising him on what to include in an article about Bookwood that was to be published in *Justice*. Given the ILGWU's resistance to the necessity of workers' education, as we have already seen earlier, Cohn wanted Muste to emphasise the fact that 'devotion and loyalty to the trade unions and their interest, are constantly impressed upon the students at Brookwood'[58] and that 'the graduates are advised to go back to their respective unions, become more effective on the various committees, and hold themselves ready to serve their organization or the Labor movement.'[59]

It was not only on the discursive front that Cohn was intervening. Early on in the college's history, she had also persuaded her rich young friend Evelyn Preston to create a fund for the college and had advised Muste on several occasions about how to handle the college's relationship with a young woman who not only had the means to fund workers' education, but was also trying to develop her career as a modern professional. In a letter written in July 1923, Muste thanked her for the contribution of the ILGWU Educational Committee to the college and also let her know that 'Evelyn was able to get for us the $5000.'[60] In the same letter, Muste asked Cohn's advice about how to respond to Preston's proposition to become his secretary. Despite the drawback of Preston's inexperience and young age, Muste had considered the benefits of having 'an important contributor' with 'an agreeable personality' work for the college for free, but he wanted Cohn's opinion on the matter. Cohn's response was swift and sharp: although she agreed that it would be good for Preston to work

for the college, she should by no means work for free. Women's right to work and their financial contribution to the labour movement should not have been conflated in her view.[61]

Given Cohn's professional and amicable relationship with Muste, she was amongst the first to protest against the unjust and unfounded attack that was mostly centred upon him personally. Such attacks did not only come from the AFoL, but also from some members of the Brookwood's faculty: 'Green [AFoL president] would make a statement and Muste would make a good healthy criticism of it', Mark Starr, the British Labour Educator who would later become ILGWU's Educational Director, had argued (see Cohen 1976, 204). Starr was one of the few staff members who had opposed Muste's efforts to turn Brookwood into 'a seminary of a sect' (ibid., 209).

Cohn's first move was to join other labour activists in sending a petition to the AFoL president Green, asking for all action to be suspended, so that Brookwood could respond to the allegations.[62] When later in October she was summoned by the AFoL to complete a questionnaire about Brookwood, she flatly refused to do so and loudly protested against the Federation's unjust attack: 'To answer Brookwood's side, you realize that I must first see the charges made against it. This is an elementary right granted to everyone who is charged with an offence',[63] she wrote to Vice-President Woll; she reminded him that 'the labor movement always believed in fair play'[64] and that the AFoL should 'conduct the entire affair openly and frankly.'[65] Despite her firm position in Brookwood's defence however, Cohn was not dismissing the possibility of errors on the part of the college. She had actually written to Woll in her earlier letter that 'no one is infallible [and that] it is never too late to correct an error.'[66]

However, the crisis was there to stay, since Muste was not willing to submit to the AFoL's conservatism. He actually chose to escalate the crisis by involving the Brookwood's faculty members in the Conference for Progressive Labor Action (CPLA), an organisation that intended to challenge the AFoL's pro-business agenda. It was evident that a labour division was imminent and Cohn felt she could not support Muste in this. She wrote in January to remind him of the importance of unity in the movement: 'I think the fight centered around Brookwood is a family affair; those who oppose Brookwood, as well as those who support it, are members of the same Labor Movement',[67] she noted. Cohn had stood by the college during the AFoL attack, but she could not support the CPLA initiative, since she could see that the AFoL trade unions would withdraw their support to Brookwood and workers' education more

widely. Although she recognised that her opinion in the Brookwood board was a minority, she still believed that the labour movement was mature enough to contain disagreements. She was also convinced that everybody's loyalty to the movement and not to any political party or opinion, should come first: 'we will assist it in every fight and be satisfied with our position of a group that holds an opinion that is in the minority at present, and maybe the majority in the near future',[68] she wrote to Muste in the same letter mentioned earlier.

Cohn had realised that the educational departments of the Unions were not independent bodies, so they had to follow the policies of their organisation if their work was to be continued.[69] Still, when the WEB board decided to expel Brookwood in April 1929, she voted against it and tried to persuade Muste to reconsider his position vis-à-vis the CPLA. Despite the fact that workers' education was part of the labour movement, she could discern the subtle boundaries between political organisation and workers' education. Brookwood should remain 'a college where men and women of the labor movement, regardless of their views, will study',[70] she wrote to Muste in June 1929, when she understood that there had been attempts to adhere students to the CPLA. Once again she had found herself between a rock and a hard place: she was attacked by AFoL followers, as well as its opponents. She was labelled as 'nonprogressive' and was censored from the annual publication of the left labour monthly magazine *Labor Age*, where Muste was involved in.

Cohn's stance in the intra-labour wars that erupted in the 1930s becomes particularly interesting if it is considered in the light of Arendt's take on politics in general and educational policies in particular.[71] Cohn seems to concur with Arendt's view that persuasion should be at the heart of politics and that through 'words and deeds' political actors can confer and find solutions. In a letter she wrote to David Saposs, on the aftermath of the 1933 final crisis when Muste eventually resigned, she noted:

> It is our desire and hope that this disagreement will not be used to reflect on the honesty of purpose of either side, but that we will part as comrades and friends, as far, as humanly possible, with respect for each others' views. After all we are interested in the same principles, ideals and objectives, but we differ as to what the present Brookwood policy should be.[72]

Cohn had not realised that being interested in the same ideals was not enough to sustain any political platform and that the problem of the Arendtian principle of political agonism is that it does not consider

antagonism, a point that Chantal Mouffe (2007) has raised in her critique of Arendt's view on democratic politics.[73] In raising realpolitik questions, so as to throw light on Cohn's stance in the Brookwood conflict, my point is that when dealing with educational policies, even within the progressive circles of the labour movement, it is useful not to lose sight of the fact that although persuasion is a desirable political process, it cannot always be attainable. What happens when persuasion fails? This is when hegemonic politics (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) take over, which is exactly what happened in the case of the Brookwood controversy.

But not everything was grim in 1929, since it was the year that Margaret Bondfield, the feisty trade unionist, was appointed as Minister of Labour of the newly elected labour government in the UK: 'I hope my appointment will be an encouragement to all women workers',[74] she wrote to Cohn, who celebrated Bondfield's achievement in an article linking women workers' change of status to workers' education.[75] While the harsh intra-labour politics ended up in Brookwood's final closure in 1937, the long-lasting impact of workers' education became more evident in the way it transformed women workers' lives. The Bryn Mawr summer school for women workers in the industry played a prominent role here, as I will discuss in the next section.

Women of Summer

> My dear Miss Anderson:
> Your communication of February 23 received. My delayed response is due to illness and death in the family, which kept me away from the office a great deal of time.
>
> I regret that I cannot accept your kind offer to serve on your committee of women workers to assist President Thomas of Bryn Mawr, in arranging educational activities for working women. It has always been my policy that unless I can give some attention to the work of a committee and in any way contribute to its success, I do not accept membership, there on, no matter of what importance such committee may be. At the present time I am so overwhelmed with work that I find it practically impossible to give my attention to anything else than to our own Educational Department. It so happens that I am a member of the committee, which is now calling a conference on labor education to be held in this city on April 2nd and 3rd. This is an additional burden to my already overtaxed time and energy.

> Please do not however hesitate to call on me at any time for information which you think will be of use to your plan. I shall try if possible to be present at the meeting to be held in Bryn Mawr, on March 19th.
>
> Thanking you again for your kind consideration, I am
>
> Sincerely yours,
> Fannia M. Cohn[76]

With this letter, written in March 1921, Cohn kindly declined Mary Anderson's invitation to join the Bryn Mawr Education Committee. As head of the Women's Bureau of the US Department of Labor, Anderson was keen to involve influential figures in workers' education in a new project: the Bryn Mawr summer school for women in the industry. How is then Cohn's negative response to be understood? The reasons she presents in her letter are of course sound; as we have seen in the previous sections, 1921 was the year that Cohn was involved in the WEB foundation, launched in the April conference that she mentions in her letter above, as well as in the establishment of the Brookwood Labor College. And yet the Bryn Mawr project was not only very important, but also closer to her heart in relation to her feminist vision about the need to educate and organise women workers. Moreover, Cohn was ready to throw herself in the whirl of hard work, a tendency that had serious consequences on her health, as we have already seen in the previous section. Her workload was then a factor, but not the heaviest one in her decision to stay away from Bryn Mawr.

Cohn had repeatedly argued that workers' education should be in the hands of trade unions, not of universities or middle-class women's organisations, hence her decision not to be involved. Although many years later Anderson herself admitted that 'this kind of education should be run by the workers themselves' (Anderson 1951, 229), Cohn was wrong: the Bryn Mawr summer school was to become a huge success, a famous model to be emulated, a centre where women labour activists from all over the USA and even Europe and Australia would come to be educated. Cohn must have understood her error: despite her initial refusal, she followed the school's activities, gave lectures and attended its cultural events, summer after summer, during the 17 years that its programme run. It is the history and organisation of this school that I want to look at in this section.

The emergence of the Bryn Mawr summer school project was an effect of wider changes in middle-class women's condition at the turn of the nineteenth century and particularly their admission in higher education, their

entry in the professions as well as their enfranchisement. Bryn Mawr was very much the fruit of the effort of two 'New Women' of the East Coast: M. Carey Thomas and Hilda Worthingthon Smith, who became legendary figures in the history of the school.[77] In this context, Bryn Mawr was initially conceived as a 'social feminist institution', with social reform at the heart of its vision (Heller 1984, 109). What is also interesting is that at the end of its trajectory the school had been unexpectedly radicalised, or as Esther Peterson, one of its faculty members simply put it: 'we were not just nice girls anymore; we were vigorous people who wanted to change society'.[78]

The Bryn Mawr Summer School is indeed an exemplary case of assemblage theory at work: its institutional foundation and history is difficult to be conceived and analysed in terms of structures, vertical power relations, hegemonic ideologies or dominant discourses. As already noted earlier, what is crucial in the assemblage theory is that social institutions are not seen as fixed units or entities but rather as assemblages of components that develop relations of interiority within their material and symbolic spaces. This interplay of relations of interiority and exteriority between and amongst components creates fluid and dynamic planes wherein change and movement rather than stasis and fixity become constitutive conditions of how assemblages operate and keep being reconfigured. It was this fluidity that Cohn's initial evaluation seems to have missed and hence her decision not to be involved. In this context of shifting grounds, the school was initially founded on the Jeffersonian idea that education is crucial for the electorate of a democratic body politic; it was further imbued by Dewey's philosophy of progressive education, as well as the idea of social change, that we have already discussed in the Introduction. According to its 1923 revised *Statement of Purpose*:

> The aim of the school is to offer young women in industry opportunities to study liberal subjects and to train themselves in clear thinking; to stimulate an active and continuous interest in the problems of our economic order; to develop a desire for study as a means of understanding and of enjoyment in life. The School is not committed to any theory or dogma. The teaching is carried on by instructors who have an understanding of the students' experience in industry and of the labor movement. It is conducted in a spirit of impartial inquiry, with freedom of discussion and teaching. It is expected that the students will gain a truer insight into the problems of industry, and feel a more vital responsibility for their solution (Smith 1929, 7).

It goes without saying that there were many pathways in cultivating 'clear thinking' in women workers and in inspiring them to look for solutions in

social problems. Coming from all over the USA, women students were exposed to this diversity of opinions and perspectives; it was actually the conceptualisation of and living with difference that made the Bryn Mawr experience unique, unrepeatable and certainly ahead of its time: 'the school's accomplishments can be readily appreciated in postructuralist terms, since [. . .] an emphasis was placed on locating the difference among women workers in terms of geography, race, ethnicity, class and religion', Karyn Hollis has pithily commented (2004, 4). In an Arendtian mode of 'being-in-the-world-with-others' (1994, 186), women workers were trained to expose themselves to a multiplicity of opinions and perspectives and were thus educated to position themselves in a plane of 'enlarged mentality' that Arendt highlighted and discussed in her lectures on Kant (1982).

Women workers' education at Bryn Mawr was thus conceived as a 'materialist pedagogy' (Hollis 2004), situating knowledge and learning within specific geographic, economic, cultural and political contexts that were relevant to the students' experiences. These materialist pedagogical practices were further contextualised within real and discursive power struggles, since in the Marxist spirit that we have discussed in the Introduction, the scope of the education programme was not just to enlighten the women workers about the world they were living in, but more importantly to inspire them to change it, to make them dream the impossible, the unthought-of. Moreover, the school created an assemblage of other spaces and different times for women workers, 'educational heterotopias' (Tamboukou 2004), where they could re-imagine themselves 'in purely aesthetic and intellectual realms [. . .] attending to both the "bread" and "roses" of their desire', as Hollis has poetically put it (2004, 1). This is how Pesotta remembered her 1922 summer at Bryn Mawr in her political autobiography:

> With 104 other young women from various parts of the country, I am given a scholarship and spend the summer of 1922 on that campus. Most of our classes are held under shady green trees on beautifully kept lawns. With a faculty representing nine top-rank colleges, we worker students are given short-cuts to an understanding of labor economics, political and social history, the relation of women to the labor movement, English literature, appreciation of music. (1987[1944], 15–16)

Clearly, throughout its history the school revised its course content, so that it could meet the changing student's needs: what was initially a liberal

arts curriculum was later redesigned to include English (composition and literature), economics and labour studies. These were the three core subjects that would be accompanied by combined options including art, history, dramatics, science, astronomy, psychology, music and health and physical education. An important aspect of the Bryn Mawr pedagogy was a thematic and interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning, with courses that were drawing on themes, questions and problems relevant to the students' needs, interests and experiences rather than driven by strict disciplinary boundaries or contents.

Given the horizontal pedagogical model of the school, students as part of their class work, had the opportunity to discuss and decide on the themes or areas that their learning would revolve around. This did not mean that disciplinary knowledge was discarded; once a problem or topic had been identified, it would be examined from two main disciplinary perspectives and a third supplementary one. Hollis (2004, 22) has given a very succinct example of how this worked; supposing the chosen topic was wage determination in textile mills: an economic analysis would show how profit is generated by explicating and discussing various theories of value; a historical study would explore how wages had evolved in the US or European industry; finally creative writing might be employed to allow students express and reflect upon their own experiences.

The students' body thus played a fundamental role in the way the school formed and reconfigured its educational programme and pedagogical practices. As Hollis has pointed out, through their participation in administrative and curriculum committees, the students succeeded in introducing a number of changes and programme additions: 'admission of African-American students in 1926, as well as waitresses and housekeepers of all races; an extracurricular poetry class; an expanded dramatic program; a "proletarian" literature course; and a "Marxist" instructor' (2004, 1). Such additions and changes were often controversial and rigorously debated by the different sections of the student body. Lillian Herstein, a union labour teacher at Bryn Mawr has vividly depicted some hot scenes from the debates around the admission of black students to the school:

> I remember when we had the discussion at the school by the whole student body. One lovely red head from the South said that she herself had no prejudice, but if [people in her small town] learned that the school admitted Negroes no other girl from the community would be sent [...] The students voted to admit Negroes (Herstein 1996, 22).

Equally controversial was the waitresses' admission debate, which was challenged not on racist but on moralistic and sexist grounds, since 'many of the working girls felt that waitresses were immoral; they made dates with the men they waited on' (ibid.). Here again, working-class solidarity prevailed in the persuasive argument of a New York factory girl: 'if they are immoral, it's because of the conditions under which they work. If they got wages instead of tips, they wouldn't have to smile at every man they waited on, they wouldn't be temped' (ibid.). In the logic of the girl's argument, the struggle should not be about keeping waitresses out of the school, but about changing their working conditions.

What is particularly notable in the aforementioned debates is that the school created conditions of possibility for political spaces wherein students could express their opinion, put forward all kinds of propositions – whether 'left' or 'right', 'progressive' or 'reactionary', 'radical' or 'conservative' – and feel free and fearless to persuade or be persuaded. As Arendt has noted: 'being seen and being heard by others derive their significance by the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position' (1998, 57). Persuasion was indeed particularly important in how the politics of the school evolved. In 1926, when the Director decided to invite black students in the school she followed the students' body democratic deliberation, while ignoring the President's vocal disagreement: 'I hope you will not complicate [the school's] full success by asking the girls to live, sleep and eat with even a very few negro girls [. . .] do not mix reforms, but drive straight to your goal, looking neither to the right, nor to the left',[79] Thomas had written to Smith. This is I argue, what was crucially important in the Bryn Mawr experiment: the role of workers' education in opening up political spaces wherein human beings appear to the world 'through words and deeds' and found freedom through making new beginnings.

Despite its various controversies, differences and changes, the school remained committed to the idea of humanistic education, while students often had the opportunity to listen to a stellar of guest lecturers, such as Margaret Sanger, Norman Thomas and Frances Perkins, amongst other academic, feminist and political figures. Moreover, in adopting the British tutorial approach that we have already seen in the Introduction, the school opened up spaces for dynamic encounters between middle-class college undergraduates and working-class summer students. 'We are aided in our studies by tutors, daughters of wealthy families, young women amazingly

tall, who never had to bend over a sewing machine in their growing years, and who always had proper food', Pesotta wrote in her political memoir, adding however that their tutors 'learn from us about the world of work', thus highlighting the effects of cross-class relations and synergies (1987 [1944], 16). Preston, Cohn's young wealthy friend and Brookwood benefactor, was one of those amazing tall women that Pesotta mentioned in her memoir mentioned above. Her correspondence shows indeed how much they were also to learn about the world of work:

> Here I am at last! And I am simply in a whirl and never felt so ignorant in my life [. . .] I arrived here one of the first yesterday and helped Miss Friedman with some of the office work. Then today we have already had one friendly meeting and a departmental meeting. Dr Mitchell is really a perfect peach but he thinks I know something! 'Miss Preston' says he, 'I want the girls in the first days to get to know the facts about child labor decisions . . . the Colorado coal case, etc'. Can you imagine? I am simply scared to death.[80]

According to Thomas, college women were best suited to become tutors of working-class students, since 'themselves just emerging from the wilderness, know best of all women living under fortunate conditions what it means to be denied access to things of the intellect and spirit' (cited in Smith 1929, 4). Life lines, thoughts, experiences and affects were passionately entangled in the Bryn Mawr campus: 'One of my Russian friends has a mother and eight sisters . . . her father was killed two years ago [. . .] another girl, an American, married a returned soldier whose lungs developed disease from poison gas [. . .] Why are lives ruined and tortured this way?'[81] Preston asked Cohn in another letter. Writing to a friend and comrade in New York about her experience of Bryn Mawr at the end of the 1922 summer, Pesotta was bemused by the fact that some of 'the revolutionary idealists' from the faculty members had shown their solidarity to the girls by picketing garment shops in Philadelphia: 'they wanted to be arrested so that it will stir public opinion', she wrote.[82] She contrasted their 'daring act' with the workers' experiential knowledge that 'nothing will come out of it', but she still admired the faculty members as proving to be 'idealistic enough to sacrifice for the welfare of others.'[83]

Such cross-class encounters changed women's lives, beliefs and aspirations from a variety of angles and towards different directions. Factory girls had the experience of 'a new world', since 'just being on the campus was very different in concept to what we from the factory were even aware

of – only the rich knew that life',[84] while faculty members had the opportunity to revise their political stances and views: 'The students were wonderful. They were overflowing with knowledge of a world I didn't know but felt I should have because my grandfather was a fisherman and my grandmother was a factory worker [. . .] The School turned my politics upside down'.[85] But what the faculty members also learned about, was the fierce intra-labour power relations and antagonisms: 'I learned more in two days here than in reading a dozen books – To hear the Amalgamated girls argue with the United to the part in an election for proportional representation and all sorts of other things'[86] Preston wrote to Cohn in awe of the girls' union politics: 'I can't tell you how I admire them and what it means to me to have these human experiences,'[87] she noted.

What is particularly notable about the Bryn Mawr pedagogical practices is that in grappling with the women workers' academic deficiencies, the faculty tutors found a valuable alternative by drawing on the richness of students' lived experiences as a departure point for the discussion and analysis of social and economic issues. In this light, women students were encouraged to write autobiographies and become creative through other media and genres. In the words of Amy Hewes, a Mount Holyoke economist and Bryn Mawr faculty member, who became a crucial presence in the whole history of the school: 'Classes in English composition often started with the writing of autobiographies [. . .] In the case of a group of textile workers a study ended in the composition and performance of the "Dance of the Weavers", set to appropriate music' (1956, 216). As Rita Heller has further noted, during the years of the Depression between 1930 and 1931, students drew on their unemployment experiences to make sense of their economic classes. Their autobiographical essays included themes such as 'The Effect of Unemployment on My Family and Me', 'My Experience of Being Unemployed', 'What Made me Hold On', thus becoming a valuable archive of unemployment life histories (Heller 1984, 119).

Women students' autobiographical writings did not just create an experiential context for teaching and learning; they became important literary tools through which women workers rewrote themselves in discourse and culture and repositioned themselves in life. Since some of these writings were included in official reports to the US Department of Labour (see Hollis 2004, 2) or were published either in the schools' annual magazine (see Wong 1984, 117) or as books in their own right (see Pesotta 1958, 1987 [1944]), they became valuable testimonies of women workers' lives that

have been silenced, ignored or marginalised. Moreover, these writings have become rich and rare sources not just for historical, sociological and literary scholarship, but also for experimental and critical pedagogies then and now. As Hewes wrote to Pesotta on 15 January 1944, shortly after her political autobiography *Bread Upon the Waters* had been published and long after Bryn Mawr had closed down: 'Are you enjoying all the nice things that are being said about your book? My students are reading it with great pleasure and I am sure it is the means of interpreting unionism to them.'[88]

Throughout its history, Bryn Mawr implemented an open and inclusive policy, welcoming applications from women between the age of 18 and 34 years with a background of elementary schooling and two years' work in the industry. As already noted, the school welcomed black students in 1926, while by the 1930s unionised women workers constituted half of the students' population, mostly from the garment industries. Moreover, the Bryn Mawr Board included labour representatives as equal partners, while 50 per cent of its members were democratically elected by former students. These changes however in the constitution of the students' body and in the administration of the school had some important repercussions in the politics and more importantly the finances of the summer school. The school came under severe criticism for developing too close attachments with the labour movement, for adopting value-laden approaches and for ascribing to radicalised ideologies that the majority of its middle-class trustees, alumnae and fundraisers could simply not stand. As a culmination of these tensions, the school was finally accused of supporting a strike in 1938, a stance that was violating its administrative agreement with the college. This accusation was never proved to be sound, but yet, the school was asked to leave the Bryn Mawr campus. The following letter between Hews and Pesotta allows us a glimpse into the battles that Bryn Mawr and all summer schools were immersed into:

> Dear Rose,
> On the eighteenth and nineteenth of November, the board of the Bryn Mawr Summer School is to have an important meeting. There has been no announcement as yet but I want to tell you confidentially that it seems clear that the College Trustees will not permit the school to have the use of the campus again [. . .] You will doubtless hear something to this effect soon and I think it would be better on many counts if you do not pass on the information until it comes out officially [. . .] My reason for telling you now is to get your advice as to what can be saved from this venture and how it can best be done. [. . .] In my opinion a change of location will call for a radical

> re-organization, will, in fact, make a new school of it. What I especially want to ask you is whether you think a school under some kind of inter-union auspices could be established now. It seems to me that nothing could be of greater use to the American labor movement at this time. [. . .] What do you think? [. . .] I feel the responsibility of representing the school in this crisis and would so like to benefit by any advice you will give me.[89]

Hewes' letter reveals the power relations around the existence of this school and the pressures that its board and faculty had to deal with, very similar to the ones we have already seen in the precious section about Brookwood. The letter further demonstrates not just the close collaboration between faculty members and trade union leaders, but also the detailed arrangements that were put in place to relocate the school, reorganise it in a way that would become more organically connected with the labour movement and ensure that it could go on with its educational vision despite and against the odds. Although wrong as a decision not to be involved in the school, Cohn's initial hesitation and her view that workers' education should be in the hands of the labour movement were not ungrounded after all. This is what Ernestine Friedman, a YWCA industrial secretary,[90] who served the school for years, wrote to her in response to her views, just after her first visit to the school in July 1921:

> This is just a little personal note to thank you for your visit and especially for the moments we had together on our trip in to Philadelphia. It was very helpful to me because I think you realise that I have been thinking over the question of workers' control of their own education very seriously during the days of the Summer School.[91]

The school was finally transferred to Smith's family estates on the Hudson River between Albany and New York where it continued as the *Hudson Shore Labor College*, a residential co-educational summer school for workers till 1952. In the meantime, many things would change in the way workers' education evolved, with residential schools being gradually replaced by weekend and/or after-work classes as well as university labour education programmes. Bryn Mawr was nevertheless a daring experiment in women workers' education, while many of its

pedagogical practices have yet to be evaluated and integrated in current critical feminist pedagogies and beyond.

Women Workers' Education: Entanglements Between Labour, Work and Action

As I have discussed throughout this chapter, the opportunity of having a break from work to study opened up 'different spaces' and 'different times' in workers' lives and offered them the opportunity to become aware of the politics of work as well as of radical possibilities for change. It is here important to highlight again the critical role of educational institutions for workers, such as the ILGWU Workers' Universities, the Brookwood Labour College and the Bryn Mawr, amongst others, in creating conditions of possibility that would encourage workers not only to act beyond and despite the space/time restrictions of labour and work but more importantly to draw upon their experiences in rewriting the cultural histories of the twentieth century. Drawing on Arendt's narrative thesis what I have argued in this chapter is that a close attention to 'documents of life' (Plummer 2001) opens up new approaches to the historiographies of the labour movement. It is in revisiting Arendt's tripartite configuration of labour, work and action that I want to consider in this final section as a way of framing women workers' education within the contested field of labour histories.

In theorising the human condition, Arendt (1998) has identified and configured two major planes of difference: (1) the difference between the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* and (2) different levels and relationships within them. While challenging the hierarchically inferior position of the *vita activa* in the philosophical and political tradition, Arendt has examined hierarchies within the *vita activa* that have been blurred and obscured by the supremacy of the *vita contemplativa*. In thus dissecting the functions and phenomenological appearances of the *vita activa*, Arendt was particularly interested in the tripartite relationship between work, labour and action.

Labour for Arendt is what we incessantly and repetitively do to renew life, 'the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body'

(1998, 7); work is about intervening in the make-up of the natural world and creating objects that will constitute the traces of civilisation, 'the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of the human existence' (ibid.); finally, action is what we do or what we say, 'words and deeds' (ibid., 19) through which we appear in the world and we connect with others, 'the activity that goes on directly between [men] without the intermediary of things or matter [and] corresponds to the human condition of plurality' (ibid., 7). Unlike work, actions do not produce objects, their only tangible traces are the stories that have been told and written about them, hence Arendt's interest in narratives and their analytical and interpretational role.

What Arendt identifies then as a problem in our understanding of the human condition in the twentieth century is the conflation of labour and work as well as two important historical reversals in the labour–work–action schema: (1) the reversal of the primacy of work vis-à-vis action and (2) the ultimate 'victory' of labour over both work and action. 'We live in a laborers' society', she has famously lamented (ibid., 126), where our life is directed in the pursuit of material happiness – very much an analogy of the soul-strawberries downside curve of the US labour movement that I have already discussed in this chapter. What is problematic in the history of these two reversals for Arendt is that we have lost faith in the constitutive power of action in initiating new beginnings and thus founding freedom. In further analysing the socio-historical and political conditions that made these two reversals possible, Arendt has carefully considered the time-consuming nature of labour – as identified by the Greeks, theorised by Plato and Aristotle, and revolutionised by Marx – as well as the means–end direction of work, juxtaposing both with the open, unpredictable and irreversible mode of action, wherein the means–end distinction is dissolved, as the end actually becomes the means. What historically emerges as a crisis for Arendt is not the Marxist alienation of [man] from [his] labour, but the human alienation from the world. We live in a world that does not feel any more as a home to us, she has repeatedly argued throughout her work, since our involvement in the web of human relations and therefore in action is the only way we can feel again 'at home in this world' (ibid., 135)

What I have therefore argued throughout the chapter is that it is this Arendtian need of feeling at home in this world through political action that the workers' education movement has cultivated and nurtured. Such existential understandings have been forcefully expressed in women

workers' writings, as in the following poem from a Bryn Mawr student, where the summer *intermezzo* felt like 'stealing time' from her work, family and community obligations:

> I Have Stolen Away
> I have stolen away from my friends and from the busy street.
> From the grind of the wheel, and the sweltering heat;
> I have come to visit you, and what you've in store for me.
> To tell you of my past Bryn Mawr, and my future through you to see.
> But now I must go.[92]

This 'stolen time' was an essential precondition to start thinking what they were doing, very much in the line of Arendt's famous statement: 'what I propose therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing' (1998, 5). As a precondition of freedom, thinking for Arendt occurs in the 'now', remembers the past and imagines different futures; as Mary Sekula, in the previous verse has beautifully put it: 'to tell you of my past Bryn Mawr and my future through you to see'. It is precisely women workers' troubled relation with time that I want to consider here. Labour organisers such as Cohn persistently insisted on the importance of workers' education in 'opening up time for thought' in women's lives. Unlike their male comrades' work rhythms, women workers' shift did not end when leaving the shop or the factory: it went on throughout their domestic labour duties to the point of completely turning them into labour machines, an experience that has also been expressed in their narratives:

> We only went from bed to work, and from work to bed again, and sometimes if we sat up a little while at home, we were so tired we could not speak to the rest, and we hardly knew what they were talking about. And still, although there was nothing for us but *bed and machine*, we could not earn enough to take care of ourselves through the slack season.[93]

Against the dominant idea within the social and historical sciences that 'the vocation of workers is to work [. . .] and to struggle and that they have no time to waste playing at flâneurs, writers or thinkers' (Rancière 2012, viii), what workers needed, Rancière has argued, was time and space away from labour obligations, so as to be able to think, read and write, activities that since Plato's *Republic* were only the privilege of citizens who relied on slaves, women and artisans to look after the

material necessities of life. 'For the workers of the 1830s', Rancière has written, 'the question was not to demand the impossible, but to realize it themselves, to take back the time that was refused them [. . .] by winning from nightly rest the time to discuss, write, compose verses, or develop philosophies' (ibid., ix). Rancière has imagined his workers, winning time, while for the women workers of this study the question was about 'stealing time', as we have already seen earlier.

It was, thus, conditions of possibility for such intellectual and existential needs that the movement for workers' education has historically created, and in this sense it was particularly appealing to women workers who had even less free time than their male comrades. The transformative force of their experience in the workers' education institutions, whether it was an afternoon in the union, a summer at Bryn Mawr or a year at Brookwood, would radically intervene in the sexual politics of time and would ultimately become a mode of durational/existential/non-calendar time.

But it was not just 'the stolen time' but also 'the different spaces' that were creating conditions within which it was once more possible to think and therefore to act. As already noted in the Bryn Mawr section, there was an important inflection in the troubled history of women's education: these different space/time blocks were much more politically oriented as they were from the beginning materially situated as critical and oppositional to economic, racialised, as well as gendered structures of domination. Thrown from the beginning within political spaces bursting with action, women workers would undergo radical transformations both on a personal and a socio-political level.

What certainly emerges from the archives of women workers' 'documents of life' (Plummer 2001) is that rather than being an obstacle for the appearance of action, both labour and work became conditions of possibility for it through the political spaces that workers' education opened up for them at the dawn of the twentieth century. Drawing on their educational experiences, women workers would allow for more ruptures in the repetitive cycle of labour and work to occur, mostly through union and community activities that would be gradually embedded in the rhythm of their lives. What I therefore suggest is that the historical reversals that Arendt has examined in her tripartite configuration of labour–work–action should be revisited in the light of the gendered experience of work that she did not particularly consider in her analysis. Despite her critique of Marx's analysis of labour,

Arendt remained equally blind in questions around the gendered experiences of work and labour, areas that still need to be understood and analysed, within the otherwise illuminating framework of the socio-political entanglements within the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. Women workers' lack of time was thus structured on the intersection of both waged and domestic labour. It was this intersectional exploitation of women workers' time that Cohn's vision of a liberal arts curriculum addressed within the wider horizon of workers' education for social change.

Notes

1. Cohn to William Green, letter dated 6 March 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
2. I have reviewed and discussed this literature elsewhere at length (Tamboukou 1999, 2003). For more recent studies see also Garland 2014, Fuggle et al. 2015.
3. The series also includes the memoir of *Herculine Barbin* (Foucault 1978). For an overview of the series, see http://www.gallimard.fr/Catalogue/GALLIMARD/Les-vies-paralleles/Herculine-Barbin-dite-Alexina-B [Accessed 12 December 2015].
4. In this book as elsewhere in my work I have created a virtual archival site, carefully mapping the archival sources of my research, and wherever possible giving links to the cited documents of offering full transcriptions of them. Here I have to acknowledge the NYPL archives kind permission to do that. See, https://sites.google.com/site/mariatamboukoupersonalblog/home/archival-sites.
5. Cohn to Emma [surname unknown], letter dated 8 May 1953 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.). For a full transcription of the letter, see Tamboukou 2016a.
6. See Tamboukou 2016a for an extended discussion of these three autobiographical letters, as well as full transcriptions of them.
7. Ibid. See http://jwa.org/media/beyond-place-and-ethnicity-figure-31 for images of the protests and marches that Cohn remembered in her letter. [Accessed 19 December 2015].
8. For a historical account of the fire see, Stein 1962. See also Benin et al. 2011 for rich textual and visual documents in a publication commemorating the centenary anniversary of the Triangle Fire.
9. For a visual overview of the commemoration events, see http://trianglefire.ilr.cornell.edu/primary/photosillustrations/slideshow.html?image_id=703&sec_id=2 [Accessed 19 December 2015].
10. Clipping from the ILGWU *News-History* magazine, dated May 1950 (FCP/NYPL/ILGWU).
11. FC to Emma, letter dated 8 May 1953, Correspondence, FCP/NYPL.

12. Rahel Varnhagen to Konrad Engelbert, letter dated 27 December 1821. Cited in Weissberg (2000, 11).
13. Cohn to William Green, letter dated 6 March 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
14. The phrase was used by women trade unionists to express the difficulty of organising women (see Rose Pesotta's letter in Tamboukou 2013c, 509), but also became the title of Kessler-Harris' 1976 influential essay (see Kessler-Harris 2007a).
15. 'Aims of workers' education', unpublished paper written in 1926 (FCP/NYPL/Writings, 1).
16. 'Philosophy and social change', unpublished course syllabus, 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
17. 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.' XI thesis on Feuerbach, written in spring 1845. Available on line at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.pdf [Accessed 20 December 2015].
18. 'Philosophy and social change', unpublished course syllabus, 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
19. 'The movement for workers' education in the US', unpublished paper (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
20. Ibid.
21. See Cohn's paper 'Educational department of the international ladies' garment workers' union', in *Report of Proceedings, First National Conference on Workers'* Education in the United States, p.45. Available on line at: https://archive.org/details/workerseducation00natiuoft [Accessed 12 December 2015].
22. Gus Tyler interviewed by Ricky Carol Myers Cohen, 30 October 1973 (in Cohen 1976, 128).
23. See Wong (1984, 43) and Cohen (1976, 129) about Cohn's low opinion of Poyntz's administrative and organisation abilities.
24. *Report of Proceedings, First National Conference on Workers' Education in the United States*, p.45.
25. 'Workers' university of the international ladies' garment workers' union', 1922–23 (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
26. Cohn to 'a friend', undated letter (FCP/NYPL/Writings), f.4.
27. Cohn to Evelyn Preston, letter dated 9 October [no year] (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
28. Cohn to 'a friend', undated letter (FCP/NYPL/Writings), f.4.
29. Cohn to Van Varenewyck, member of the WEB, letter dated 19 September 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.)
30. Cohn to A.J. Muste, letter dated 31 July 1974 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
31. 'The movement for workers' education in the US, unpublished paper. (FCP/NYPL/Writings), f.5

32. Cohn to David Milkol in Paris, letter dated 24 October 1929 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
33. Ibid.
34. Cohn to Van Varenewyck, letter dated 19 September 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
35. Cohn to 'a friend', undated letter (FCP/NYPL/Writings), f.4.
36. 'Report and Recommendations of the Organizing Committee to be submitted to the conference', FCP/NYPL/WEB, ff.1–4. Also published in the 'Report of proceedings, first national conference on workers' education in the United States', 143–144.
37. 'Report of proceedings, first national conference on workers' education in the United States', 142.
38. Ibid., 144.
39. Cohn to Emma, letter dated 8 May 1953 (FCP/NYPL), f.4.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Cohn to Spencer Miller, letter dated 25 March 1929 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.), f.1.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid., f.2.
46. Ibid.
47. 'Report of proceedings, first national conference on workers' education in the United States', p.43.
48. 'Editorial: The educational work of our international', *Justice*, 3 May 1920, p.4.
49. Clara Friedman, 'Education and the labor movement', *Justice*, 21 May 1920, p.6.
50. 'Aims of Workers' education', paper read at the 5th anniversary of WEB, (FCP/NYPL/Writings), f.2.
51. FC to SM, letter dated, 24 July 1923, Correspondence, FCP/NYPL.
52. 'Workers' education today and tomorrow', unpublished essay, Writings, FCP/NYPL.
53. See Dewey's 1896 essay 'Imagination and expression' (Dewey 1972). For contemporary discussions of Dewey's 'creative imagination', see Garrison (1998, 75).
54. 'Labor politics and labor education', *New Republic*, 9 January 1929, at: https://newrepublic.com/article/93594/labor-politics-and-labor-education [Accessed 11 December 2015].
55. 'Foreword' to *The Workshop Writing Table Book*, by William Mann Fincke, (RPP/NYPL/Writings).
56. H. B. Brougham 'The New Brookwood, A Resident College' in *Report of Proceedings, First National Conference on Workers' Education in the United States*', 52.

57. 'The New Brookwood, A Resident College', 52.
58. Cohn to Muste, letter dated 21 June 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
59. Ibid.
60. Muste to Cohn, letter dated 23 July 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
61. Cohn to Muste, letter dated 6 August 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
62. See 'Signators of Telegram to President William Green' (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
63. Cohn to Matthew Woll, letter dated 15 October 1928 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Cohn to A.J. Muste, letter dated 10 January 1929 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
68. Ibid.
69. See Cohn's unpubished paper, 'Labor Unions' (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
70. Cohn to Muste, letter dated 5 June 1929, (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
71. For an extended discussion of Arent's position in educational politics, see Tamboukou 2016c.
72. Cohn to David Saposs, letter dated 7 March 1933, (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
73. For an excellent explication of Arendt's notion of agonistic politics in the overall body of her work, see Honig 1992.
74. Margaret Bondfield to Cohn, letter dated 18 June 1929 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
75. See Cohn's article 'The Flapper and Labor's victory' *Justice*, June 2, 1929, p.6.
76. Cohn to Mary Anderson, letter dated 14 March 1921 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
77. See Heller 1984, 1986 and Hollis 2004.
78. Esther Peterson, Bryn Mawr gymnastics teacher speaking in Rita Heller's (1985) documentary film, *The Women of Summer*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRSemT8jCg [Part II, 21:40–21:44m] [Accessed 3 March 2016].
79. Letter from M. Carey Thomas to Hilda Smith, read at Heller's film (1985): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hOiOreS8ZQ [Part I, 16.44–17.13m] [Accessed 3 March 2016].
80. Evelyn Preston to Cohn, letter dated, 13 June 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
81. Preston to Cohn, letter dated, 16 June 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
82. Rose Pesotta to 'dear comrade', letter dated 4 August 1922 (RPP/NYPL/General Correspondence).
83. Ibid.
84. Freddy Drake Paine, class of 1934 (cited in Wong 1984, 126).
85. Elizabeth Lyle Huberman, 1936 Faculty (ibid.).
86. Preston to Cohn, letter dated, 16 June 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
87. Ibid.
88. Hews to Pesotta, letter dated 15 January 1944 (RPP/NYPL/GC).
89. Hews to Pesotta, letter dated, 8 November 1938 (RPP/NYPL/GC).

90. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) was one of the largest recruiters for Bryn Mawr over the years (see Heller 1984).
91. Ernestina Friedman to Cohn, letter dated 26 July 1921 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
92. Mary Sekula, *1932 Shop and School*, cited in Hollis 2004, 141.
93. Testimony of a young anonymous seamstress, cited in Clark and Wyatt 1911, 132, emphasis added.

CHAPTER 3

The Self as/in Dialogue

8 May, 1953

Dear Emma,
Do please accept this letter in the same friendly spirit as it is being written, because it is I that is responsible for the misunderstanding.

Many years ago you told me good naturedly, 'Fannia, you are getting away with murder'. This remark stuck to me as a 'pick of a raven', paraphrasing the famous American poet Edgar Allan Poe. Here is my story.[1]

On 8 May 1953 Fannia Cohn wrote a letter to her friend and fellow trade unionist Emma, giving a short narrative account of her life story. By the end of the letter we know that this was the first time that Cohn was entrusting her life story to a friend, 'you are the first person to read my story' she wrote, just after having admitted that, 'I know that I lived a full, interesting life, I always enjoy the confidence of our members and the officers. Isn't that reward enough for a life's work?'[2] What the whole body of her correspondence also reveals is that Cohn had been prompted in the past to give an account of her life but she had repeatedly declined such requests: 'Two prominent persons, a man and a woman, who have distinguished themselves in the world of literature and art insisted that I give them material which they wanted to use in preparation of a sketch of my life and work. I flatly refused to do so.'[3] she had wrote to a 'dear friend' in July 1937 by way of apology for having turned down their own request to give information for a biographical sketch: 'I will give you the same

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answer. I am not in a position now to provide this material,'[4] she concluded. While keeping her life narrative as a secret, Cohn had also revealed that she kept many letters and personal documents in a safe so that one day the people she loved and cared about could have access to them.

As already discussed in the previous chapters, Cohn was organically involved in the international movement for workers' education and left a rich body of labour literature, including lectures, essays, speeches, reports, journal articles and labour skits. But despite her lifelong commitment to the labour struggles of her era, her widely recognised status as a labour organiser, as well as her prolific work, she never published an autobiography and there are no diaries, journals or memoirs amongst her papers. How is this lack of autobiographical writings to be understood and what is the role of letters in filling the gap of autobiographical desire? In the previous chapter I have followed traces of Cohn's *vita activa* in the three autobiographical letters that I have identified in the overall body of her correspondence. In this chapter I want to take up questions of 'epistolary autobiographics' framing them in the context of Cohn's overall activism in the movement for workers' education. By using the term 'epistolary autobiographics', I draw on Leigh Gillmore's (1994) influential notion pointing to the truth games and power relations that are entangled in the autobiographical discourse, as it unfolds in the epistolary form, in Cohn's case:

> I offer the term *autobiographics* to describe those elements of self-representation, which are not bound by a philosophical definition of the self derived from Augustine, not content with the literary history of autobiography, those elements that instead mark a location in a text, where self-invention, self-discovery, and self-representation emerge within the technologies of autobiography – namely, those legalistic, literary, social and ecclesiastical discourses of truth and identity through which the subject of autobiography is produced. Autobiographics as a description of self-representation and as a reading practice, is concerned with interruptions and eruptions, with resistance and contradiction as strategies of self-representation. (Ibid., 42)

Following trails of Gilmore's theorisation, I have read Cohn's autobiographical letters as epistolary technologies of self-representation and expression that need to be charted and understood within the wider context of her relations and activism, as well as in their inter-textual connections with the political discourses of her geographies and times. Within such limitations and constraints, Cohn's decision to keep her life to herself had nothing to do

with her feelings towards her friends. She was, on the contrary, deeply appreciative of the value of friendship: 'contact with understanding friends is a pleasure that cannot be expressed in words',[5] she wrote in her July 1937 letter mentioned earlier. But while acknowledging the value of friendship, Cohn was also sceptical about individualistic approaches to 'the self' and defied any practices that would make her stand out as a kind of 'charismatic' leader, or otherwise exceptional individual. Such modalities of living were too bourgeois oriented for her taste and socialist world views: 'I was never self-centered. I always pitied people who considered themselves the center of everything. They are unhappy,'[6] she wrote in the same letter, adding that 'the work of enlightening the masses, of helping them to influence public opinion in our own organization and the labor movement is so imperative, that in comparison with this everything else seems insignificant'.[7]

Apart from her socialist ideas that turned her away from what Carolyn Steedman (2000) has called 'the autobiographical injunction', a discursive order rather than an urge or desire to tell her story,[8] Cohn had also revealed in her letters that her choice to keep her life as a secret was also because '[she] wanted to avoid a sensational impression'.[9] Cohn's story was indeed sensational; although she came from a well-off Jewish family in Kletzk, a town near Minsk in the Russian Pale, she joined the forces of the Socialist Revolutionary Party from a very early age. Her involvement in a radical underground political organisation was an effect of the untenable situation that many well-educated Jews in Eastern Europe had found themselves at the dawn of the twentieth century. Cohn became politically active in the aftermath of the 1880s murderous pogroms, encouraged by the Russian government's oppressive policies. But as her biographer has aptly observed, Cohn's choice to join 'a terrorist organization, which assassinated high Russian officials', but whose populist trends were in effect anti-Semitic, was 'peculiar' (Cohen 1976, 6). Her decision however, not to reveal her political past in the context of the 'Red Scare' hysteria of the US political scene in the 1920s, was not 'peculiar' at all. As Lara Vapnek (2013, 161) has noted, the Red Scare threatened to discredit the activities of the American labour feminists and significantly limited their further development. Writing about her impressions of the First International Conference of Women Workers (IFCWW) held in Washington in December 1919, the French trade unionist Jeanne Bouvier had written: 'Not only did the government systematically ignore the work of the Conference, but we felt much hostility: we were the 'undesirables'. Some U.S. newspapers have even said that we should be deported or imprisoned as 'Bolshevik'! Quite charming, is it not?'[10]

Contradictions and riddles notwithstanding, Cohn's early years' activism coloured her life choices and political orientations throughout her life. As she wrote to Edward Lindeman in 1933: 'Russia was the country in which I first saw the light of day, where I spent part of the young years of my life, and where I imbibed and first participated in the revolutionary spirit. These experiences influenced my whole life.'[11] Moreover, it was not only politics but also her family's strong belief in the value of education that drove her decisions and activism throughout her life: 'I was brought up by my mother on books',[12] she wrote to her friend, Selig Perlman, and this is why on departing from Russia she gave one promise to her family: 'I would continue my studies in the "New World" as my mother wanted her children to be no less than professors.'[13] We know of course that eventually Cohn's life trajectory would unfold differently; although she never became a professor, she devoted her whole life to the movement for workers' education.

While Cohn considered herself as part of the labour movement, taking any self-centred practices as vectors of unhappiness, she had also revealed that there were some family friends who knew about her life but she had asked them to join 'the conspiracy circle', as she had put it, in the May 1953 letter to her friend Emma:

> The only person who knew about my story was Professor Charles A. Beard, and this was due to the fact that my brothers and Professor Beard had a mutual friend who revealed to him this 'secret'. This explains why in his essay on the Workers' Educational Bureau he refers to me in these terms, and I quote 'of her life and labor an American epic, can be written' [. . .] But I admonished Professor Beard not to tell anyone about it, not even his wife who is a good friend of mine. So, he too joined the 'conspiracy'.[14]

In Cohn's perception then, Beard's authorial presence in the history of the American labour movement had validated her life story that she was trying to keep in the shadows. As an influential American historian and political scientist, Beard had a lifelong interest in the history of the labour movement and was actively involved in the movement for workers' education, which is how he got to know and respect Cohn's work. Her papers include a series of letters in a line of correspondence that went throughout her life until Beard's death in 1948. Beard was amongst those friends who supported her struggles for workers' education within the union and beyond: 'Without in any way depreciating the regular function of the

trade union, I feel that educational work is of equal importance with all other activities,'[15] he wrote to the ILGWU educational committee in July 1922, apologising for his absence from one of their meetings. In writing this letter, Beard was clearly endorsing Cohn's plea to the union for financial support of the education department – a constant struggle year after year during her time of office, as we have seen in the previous chapter. 'If the middle classes can spend millions on education, surely labor ought to find it worth while to spend hundreds,'[16] Beard had pointed out in his letter. In a different letter written to Cohn on Labour Day in 1945, Beard would recall 'that those of us who labored years ago to strengthen the workers' education movement know that we had many toilsome predecessors and had many helpers whose names are unknown [since] such is the nature of History in the making'.[17] Beard would further reflect on the ideas that underpinned their struggle for workers' education, including their efforts to avoid 'dogmas on the labor movement and seek to make the education programme flexible – so as to allow for changing times'.[18]

Cohn's correspondence with Beard reflects many of the problems and issues that we have discussed in Chap. 2, and it also shows that Cohn was not fighting for workers' education alone after all; as a matter of fact, she had the support of crucial intellectual figures of her times and geographies, such as Beard and Dewey amongst others. The radical journalist Arthur Gleason was also one of them and as we have seen in the Introduction, his ideas were formative in the movement for workers' education on a national and international level. Cohn was profoundly influenced by Gleason's ideas and she was in constant correspondence with him. Gleason also deeply valued Cohn's contribution to the labour movement as an extract from a letter to Cohn poetically reveals:

> Again, you have paid us the compliment, the honor, of writing a true and profound letter, instead of a New York note. I think you have stated those deep considerations that underlie the labor world, the loneliness and the hunger of the spirit. I read it aloud on Sunday evening to John Brophy of the miners, and he said you had there put the elements of distress and the dark-veiled hope which move in the heart of labor. What more can I say to you of your thoughts and the work you do than that I think of them in good moments and that in some little measure they become part of me. That your influence reaches many others, of whom we know, and further regions beyond any recording, does not lessen the pleasure one has in the personal share of friendliness you give to just us, and no one else.[19]

Gleason's appreciation of Cohn's ability to address 'the loneliness and hunger of the spirit' through her work for workers' education reveals a radical materialist approach to the socialist ideas and directions that underpinned the discourses and practices of the labour movement they were all working for. In the minds of Cohn and other pioneers in workers' education, such as Beard, Dewey and Gleason, workers were not just hungry for bread, but also for roses, as the 'Bread and Roses' slogan, movement and song had already forcefully expressed.[20] In this light, material needs were not taken as inert structures or entities, dominated by power relations and in need of improvement, but rather as dynamic assemblages infused with ideas, desires and future imaginings and in the process of becoming other, what has been charted as 'the neo-materialisms' plane (see Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). It was precisely the dynamic and agentic aspect of material relations that the uniqueness of workers' education both emerged from and sought to cultivate and move forward. Simply put, it was the study and exploration of 'how matter matters' in Karen Barad's neo-materialist approach (2007) that the movement for workers' education should be about. As we have already seen in Chap. 2, such ideas and approaches were only supported by a minority within the overall instrumentalism of the American trade unionism. The small network of labour intellectuals who believed in them cherished their friendship and relations and would support each other whenever and however they could. No wonder that Cohn was utterly shattered when she received the news of Gleason's untimely death:

> Arthur Gleason was essentially a poet; he was dragged into social movements [. . .] His gentle, artistic soul was always in search of expression, and this he found partly in his love for nature and in his interest in the labor movement. He was one of the very few intellectuals in America who had a real respect for the labor movement [. . .] It was always his belief that the leadership, spiritual, intellectual as well as economic, must emerge from within [. . .] He was one of the few who had a conception of what Workers' Education should be and its place in the American Labor Movement, and he urged that this movement be confined to the trade unions, and be directed by them and that the place of the intellectual in it be in an advisory capacity.[21]

This letter from Cohn to John Frey, labour activist and editor of the *Molder's Journal,* draws Gleason's intellectual portrait and gives an idea of the traits, life attitudes and subtle qualities that Cohn cherished and appreciated in connecting with others. Through her reflection on

Gleason's life and work, Cohn also expressed her firm belief that workers' education should be owned by the workers themselves, very much in line with how Rancière (1991) has provocatively supported the radical practice of the schoolmasters' ignorance as a pedagogical mode of intellectual emancipation. Through the story of Joseph Jacotot, a French exiled lecturer, who devised a pedagogical method for those who were not destined to be educated, Rancière put forward the argument that learning can emerge as a creative process in the margins and interstices of power/knowledge relations. It was precisely the possibility and dream of the workers' intellectual emancipation that Cohn's ideas and activism within the labour movement were about. Workers' education should be driven by the will to learn, so that 'every common person might conceive [his] human dignity, take the measure of his intellectual capacity, and decide how to use it' (ibid., 12).

Cohn's epistolary obituary for Gleason earlier is also a fine exemplar of her overall philosophical discourse and becomes part of a specific sub-genre within her correspondence: letters opening up space for reflection, remembering and imagination. It is such existential trails in her correspondence that I will now follow, particularly looking at her epistolary relations with three women friends, who became 'significant others' in Cohn's personal life and further shaped her ideas, choices and orientations within the movement for workers' education.

Dear Emily: Class and Generation Differences in Workers' Education

> My dear young friend,
> What a delight it was after a 'two-days' strenuous session of our GEB with its excitements, and in addition having fourteen men in the same room smoking constantly – to read your lovely poetical letter. It is full of beauty, color and life! Everything so vividly described with a real love for nature and a youthful response to its grandeur!
>
> While reading it seemed to me that I was experiencing everything, so splendidly and artistically described by you. Could I do otherwise but respond to the call of nature and life?
>
> Just as lovely and feelingly is your appeal to my 'sense of obligation' toward the labor movement. Yes, my dear friend, the same appeal was made by many of my friends, but few of them did it so beautifully and heartily. But I do prefer to discuss this with you personally.
>
> Your sincere friendship and comradeship, and especially your interest in the labour movement is a source of encouragement to me.

> Here are my instructions: Friday you can come to my room at any time you wish. Write or telephone the time and you will find me there. The earlier the better. This means that we will have plenty of time for discussion, have supper together and afterwards if possible go to a show.[22]

Evelyn Preston (1898–1962) appeared in Cohn's epistolary life early in 1922 as a young wealthy New Yorker with a particular interest in the labour movement. As already noted in Chap. 2, Cohn was in the process of fund raising for a number of textbooks that the newly constituted WEB wanted to publish as part of its educational programmes and Preston made a significant contribution. 'You are fortunate to be in a position to make a reality of the things that were my dreams for many years,'[23] Cohn wrote in March addressing her as 'My dear Miss Preston.' Within a month 'Miss Preston' had become 'Evelyn' and a warm friendship between the two women had been born. Preston was twenty-three years old when she met Cohn, who was thirty-seven, and despite or maybe because of their age difference they immediately bonded and spent time together, talking, going to dinners, the theatre and even swimming at Coney Island: 'I am looking forward to having you chauffeur me around in your four cylinder Buick,'[24] Cohn wrote to Preston in September 1923.

The two women's love and passion for the labour movement was the initial force that brought them together, but their friendship soon went beyond political aims and interests to address existential anxieties and desires: 'I wonder if you realize that your coming in my life this winter has been the happiest thing that has happened to me in a long long while,'[25] Preston wrote to Cohn in April 1922. 'A desire to spend a few hours with you came over me, but alas, there is such a distance between Cleveland and New York,'[26] Cohn wrote in a birthday letter to Preston in May from the 1922 ILGWU annual convention in Cleveland. The two women even started making plans to live together in New York, but Preston's decision to follow a Master's degree in labour history and economics at the University of Wisconsin eventually led their lives into different paths. 'Last Saturday when I passed a house in Irving Place [. . .] you came to my mind because it was our original plan to live there [. . .] I want to believe that you miss me,'[27] Cohn wrote to Preston in a nostalgic mood in September 1922, shortly after her return from the Brussels conference on workers' education. Although they kept in touch through letters, their friendship became an epistolary one and it gradually faded, particularly when Preston moved to Europe, got involved in the British labour movement and lived for an extended period in the UK. Their personal estrangement notwithstanding,

Preston went on firmly supporting workers' education and through her lifelong relationship to Roger Baldwin she also became involved in the American civil rights movement.

As already discussed in Chap. 2, the period that the two women met was crucial in the history of workers' education in the USA. Preston's involvement in the WEB projects, the Brookwood Labor College and the Bryn Mawr summer school is an interesting exemplar of the cross-class synergies that Cohn was initially very sceptical about, at the same time of being entangled in them. When in April 1922 Preston offered to cover the expenses of her dental treatment, Cohn kindly declined, but she sent her friend a thankful and appreciative letter admitting that her refusal was possibly 'due to my "bourgeois" conception that is still with me. Yes, we are not only what we are, but we are also what we "were". It is not easy to free ourselves of many feelings, if you please, although we disapprove of them.'[28] Although Cohn's position in the class hierarchy dramatically changed when she emigrated to the USA, it remained ambivalent till the end: her 'bourgeois conceptions' that she could not shake off were not only the effect of her family background back in Russia but also of her extended family in New York, who kept supporting her education projects, as we have already seen in Chap. 2.

It is thus interesting here to note that within the framework of the assemblage theories that we have discussed in Chap. 2, social class should not be taken as a structural axis of difference, but rather as 'an assemblage of interpersonal networks and institutional organizations' in DeLanda's configuration (2006, 66). Networked communities and the institutional organisations that support and sustain them have differential access to resources and the interplay of material and symbolic relations and forces within them mould distinctive lifestyles and attitudes that cannot be contained within the bourgeois/proletarian binary opposition, DeLanda has further suggested (ibid.). Not even within the parameters of Bourdieu's more elaborated notion of 'habitus' (1990) can Cohn's ambivalent class position be accounted for and mapped. While there is no doubt that social classes possess, manifest and reproduce their own habits, this should not necessarily mean that submission to order – a condition of possibility for the formation of habitus – is a necessary consequence. 'In the assemblage approach submission or obedience cannot be taken for granted and must always be accounted for in terms of specific enforcement mechanisms,' DeLanda has noted (2006, 65). We can discern aspects of 'non-submission to order' in Preston's attitude, who became a firm supporter of the international labour

movement, through her involvement in workers' education, but also by throwing herself into labour activism. As I will discuss further later in the chapter, she served as the American treasurer of the British Miners Relief Committee in 1926, while she got arrested and sentenced for unlawful picketing in Manhattan in 1935, amongst other activities.

We have further seen this 'lack of submission' in the way Cohn's life practices were formed – an assemblage of proletarian living and working conditions, 'bourgeois' memories and socialist imaginings, not to mention the feminist choice of a solitary life outside the auspices of the patriarchal family. The image that her comrades had of her lifestyle is a telling testimony of how 'weird' such life choices seemed even in the circles of the labour movement: 'Her home was the saddest place. All she had was a cot, a few chairs and a little kitchenette. She never cooked a meal. The rest of the place was filled with newspapers and books,'[29] Sadie Reisch, a member of the Women's Trade Union League remembered in an interview with Cohn's biographer in 1974. Cohn's choice of living an ascetic life was apparently not intelligible amongst her comrades, but with her friends it was a different story: her correspondence with Preston leaves traces of the many ways Cohn was interested in the lives of others, whether they were 'the masses' or young, beautiful and smart women, who still needed advice and guidance.

In June 1922, Cohn exchanged a number of letters with Preston on the occasion of her graduation from Barnard College with distinction. Like all young people, Preston was very anxious about her performance in the final exams, but she was also trying to decide about her next steps in her career and life. She had also volunteered to become a tutor at the newly established Bryn Mawr summer school and all these responsibilities fell heavy on her. 'I know all these anxieties too well to underestimate them,'[30] Cohn wrote, reassuring Preston that worries would never go away in her life, they would only keep changing: 'this is the spring-time of your life and [. . .] I enjoy immensely watching you develop',[31] the letter went on. Academic knowledge is important, Cohn would admit, but she would also remind Preston that 'there is still another education – just as important – the one we get from life'.[32] In her attempt to relieve Preston's anxieties, Cohn's would also draw on the Russian classics to highlight the importance of materiality, emotions and visceral connections with humanity in a person's development and education: 'I personally agree with Tolstoy's philosophy, in that he places as much value in the influence of physical contact as the spiritual,'[33] Cohn's letter concluded. This is a rare letter of what I want to call 'epistolary pedagogics', which paints a colourful background for Cohn's educational ideas to be understood.

Preston would soon appreciate the value of Cohn's advice about the importance of human touch in education: 'I am really just as happy as the day is long,'[34] she wrote from Bryn Mawr in the middle of June. But her enthusiasm with the Bryn Mawr students and faculty would evaporate in the fall when she tried to organise lessons for workers while studying in Maddison Wisconsin: 'Our plans for workers' classes here are moving more slowly than I expected-as usual. We have come in conflict with the vocational school,'[35] Preston wrote to Cohn in December. Not only did she feel disillusioned with the labour leaders but also lonely and bored away from the New York cultural life: 'Loneliness, I miss NY and all my friends so that I don't know how I can stand the winter months ahead. When I read about the new plays I nearly go insane,'[36] Preston's whining would go on. 'I know just how you felt when you came in touch with persons whom you visualized at the Mind of the movement, and found yourself face to face suddenly with *little persons* of ordinary minds repeating what others have said and say,'[37] Cohn wrote back. Apart from advising her young friend, Cohn's stoic response reveals the technologies that she had learnt to deploy when dealing with 'the little persons' of the labour movement herself: 'we are still inclined to associate an ideal with the persons that are behind it [. . .] great movements are carried on by little persons',[38] she noted. Disappointment notwithstanding, Cohn was still optimistic that there was overall progress, despite the fact that people's minds seemed to change with a slower pace than institutions and structures: 'we are doing our very best to advance the work of the W.E.B., and through it to convince the Labor Movement of the importance of Workers' Education and to inspire the trade unions to take the lead',[39] she reassured her friend. In concluding her letter, Cohn would emphasise the affective force that Preston letters had upon her:

> I cannot end this letter without telling you how much I enjoyed your message. It is so full of beauty, understanding of human nature, and earnestness. If you only knew how much joy your beautiful and inspiring messages give me, you would not wait for my answers, but would send them to me as often as possible.[40]

While they lasted, Cohn's letters to Preston overflow with emotions and are traversed and saturated by intense affective forces. Having gone through the whole body of her extant correspondence, not only with Preston but with other friends, both men and women, never have I read such lyrical letters.

Cohn's epistolary self unfolds in the I/you autobiographical desire that Adriana Cavarero (2000) has mostly influentially theorised. While there is a rich body of literature around the autobiographical 'I', little has been written about the singular autobiographical 'you', Cavarero has pithily noted, drawing our attention to its marginalisation in philosophical and political discourses: 'the "you" is a term that is not at home in modern and contemporary developments of ethics and politics' (ibid., 90).

In highlighting the importance of the singular 'you', Cavarero has argued that the act of narration is immanently political, relational and embodied (ibid.). To the Arendtian line that human beings as unique existents live together and are constitutively exposed to each other through bodily senses, Cavarero has added the *narratability* of the self, its constitution by the desire of listening to its story being narrated. In Cavarero's nexus of autobiographical desire, the narrating singular 'you' is as important as the narrated 'I'. In this light, narration is perceived as a material and discursive milieu within which the crucial question of *who* one is addressed and deployed in unforeseen directions:

> We could define it as the confrontation between two discursive registers, which manifest opposite characteristics. One, that of philosophy, has the form of a definite knowledge, which regards the universality of Man. The other, that of narration, has the form of a biographical knowledge, which regards the unrepeatable identity of someone. The questions, which sustain the two discursive styles, are equally diverse. The first asks *'what* is Man?' The second asks instead of someone *'who* he or she is'. (ibid., 13)

Narration then is a process of responding to the world and connecting with it. It is important to remember here what Kristeva has noted: given that stories keep on unfolding, the revealed *who* is subsequently dismantled, 'dispersed into "strangenesses" within the infinity of narrations' (2001, 27). As we have already emphasised in Chap. 2 however, the 'unique existent', the revealed *who,* in Arendt's and Cavarero's philosophical thought has nothing to do with the individual of the dominant philosophical discourse. '*Who I am* can be told only in the form of a narrative recount of my appearance in the world. To appear means to stand before somebody else, and to depend upon that somebody in order to receive in return a confirmation of my existence,' Guaraldo has succinctly noted (2012, 99). It is this existential dependence on the other that is highlighted in the I/you epistolary relationship, a process within which the self is being constituted as narratable. In this light, Cohn's

persona that emerges through her correspondence with Preston is different from the epistolary persona of the correspondence with Teresa Wolfson, as we will see later on in the chapter. The persona who writes to her women friends is finally very little related to the austere figure of the woman activist writing to the AFoL and ILGWU leaders. We know of course that Cohn's epistolary narratives are just flashes of 'who she is' and will never encompass either the truth or the embodied texture of the self they refer to.

But there is more than desire in the relational ontology that underpins Cohn's epistolary self. Looking at the I/you encounter from the perspective of power and discourse, Judith Butler (2005) has focused on the conditions of possibility that compel subjects to give a narrative account of themselves when summoned to do so: 'no account takes place outside the structure of address, even if the addressee remains implicit and unnamed, anonymous and unspecified', Butler has argued (ibid., 36). But the story of the addressee always remains incomplete and opaque she emphatically remarks, since it is constrained and limited by discourses, practices and norms that both pre-exist and condition any narrative of the I: 'The narrative authority of the "I" must give way to the perspective and temporality of a set of norms that contest the singularity of my story' (ibid., 37).

Either driven by the autobiographical desire as in Cavarero, or limited by discursive constraints and power relations as in Butler, narration is a process where questions of the self are raised, thus opening up scenes for the enactment of ethical actions and responsibilities. As Butler aptly puts it, 'to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding' (2005, 83). Cohn's epistolary exchanges with her friend Theresa Wolfson, forcefully express the inherent discursive limitations of the narrative scene of recognition, as I will now discuss in the next section.

Dear Tania: Women Making Knowledge in the Labour Movement

> Dear Fannia,
> As I came to the desk to write my letter, my eye fell upon the letter you were writing- and my attention was riveted to one word – 'lonely'. That word followed me – I felt it so deeply – and your extreme loneliness that I read the few lines – and for this I hope you will forgive me!
>
> Why should I misunderstand your loneliness – your feeling of unhappiness? I feel rather that I understand you too well to misunderstand your legitimate emotions – and I am sorry that you of all people must have them!

> But, it has ever been the history of the man who climbs high, who aspires much – to walk the 'tight-rope' alone- and that unfortunately is your fate and for several reasons you have never sufficiently detached yourself from your work to become really human in your relations with others. It is only when one knocks, and knocks, and knocks, – that one can perceive the real 'you' and how many people are there ready to knock when souls can be had for the asking?
>
> And even when you and I are talking on a perfect basis of friendship – your work, yourself as a part of your work, creeps in and you are no longer yourself – but what you would be – what you would like your work to be!
>
> This is a rambling note. I wish I had time to write at length- I wish I could tell you to cut loose from yourself-round yourself out and be happy.
>
> And now – good night – dear Fannia, I cannot 'gush over' with affection – but you have mine – and also my deepest feelings of 'simpatico' which is not quite the same as 'sympathy.'
>
> Affectionately
> Tania[41]

When they first met, Theresa Wolfson (1897–1972) was a young labour lecturer at the ILGWU Workers' University. She was deeply interested in workers' education and particularly in women's unequal treatment in the workplace. This interest drove her to study for an MA. at Columbia University (1923), where she looked at health conditions in the New York garment industry, particularly focusing on the effects of bad postures, lack of lighting and fatigue. During the period of her studies, Wolfson worked tirelessly as an ILGWU health officer and as a field researcher in the National Child Labor Committee, amongst other labour activities. Her labour studies culminated in her pioneering 1926 Ph.D. thesis on *The Woman Worker and the Trade Unions* from Brookings Institution in Washington, the first study to address the issue of women's marginalisation within the labour movement. 'Where were the organised women and how were they kept out of the unions?' Wolfson asked as early as in 1926. Feminist labour historian Kessler-Harris has actually drawn on Wolfson's pithy question in her influential work on gender relations within the labour movement (2007b, 24).

Cohn was doubly influential in Wolfson's decision to study the position of women in the trade unions: 'My brief visit with you set my mind a buzzing and a thinking-on woman in the trade union,'[42] Wolfson wrote to Cohn in November 1923 in the very first months of her graduate studies under the supervision of Professor Hamilton. Despite her long experience as an ILGWU officer, Wolfson admitted that she had never quite got

women's strenuous position within the union: 'Never have I realized with such poignancy of feeling what it means to be a woman among men in a fighting organization – as last Monday, when I heard your outcry and realized the stress under which you were working,'[43] her letter went on. Cohn's response was to facilitate Wolfson's studies by introducing her to Samuel Gompers, president of the AFoL, so that he could act as the gatekeeper of her research.[44] We also know from their correspondence that Cohn read carefully the first draft of the thesis and offered detailed comments and suggestions: 'I noticed that you have made most of the corrections, which I suggested to you after I read it some time ago [. . .] and it seems to me that you have improved greatly,'[45] she wrote to Wolfson in March 1926, shortly before the thesis was submitted.

In light of this, Wolfson could not have been closer to Cohn's ideas, feelings and projects. There is a beautiful photograph in the ILGWU archive showing the two women in action during a symposium on 'Women in the Labor Movement' that Cohn had organised in the Unity House premises in the summer of 1925. Wolfson gives an open-air lecture to a mixed audience, while Cohn is sitting on the stairs of the speaking platform; she looks proud, content and ahead of the game (Fig. 3.1). She was forty years old and still an ILGU vice-president but soon to be unseated.[46] This photograph, which I will discuss in more detail in Chap. 5, captures one of many moments that the two women shared working to advance women workers' position in industry and in the labour movement from different positions and perspectives: 'Last night was the second time in seven years I believe that I missed joining with you in active celebration of the year's educational work,'[47] Wolfson wrote to Cohn in March 1926. She was going through an introvert period in her life, probably trying to finish her Ph.D.: 'These days – I have been unable to express outward sentiments – I have been through such a process of ingrowing,'[48] she wrote, 'but to you Fannia I want to some day express in word, song, poem – or through some human medium this idea of gratitude and love for the part you have played in my life'.[49]

Wolfson's letter in March 1926 reads very differently from her May 1922 letter that introduced this section. Taken together, the two letters leave traces of some of the tensions that the two women went through – their correspondence reveals that there were many; they also show how their friendship grew and developed through such tensions and discordances, not so much about the labour movement but about life attitudes and choices. Indeed, Wolfson's letter in May 1922 was an open critique

Fig. 3.1 Symposium: Women in the Labour Movement, Photographer: Unknown, 8 July 1925. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation & Archives.

of Cohn's surrender to the tyranny of work, to the point of neglecting her health, her friends and her whole life. At the time that the May letter was written the two women were sharing the same hotel room in Cleveland where they had gone for the 1922 ILGWU annual convention. This is how Wolfson inadvertently read Cohn's letter and realised her friend's loneliness. Cohn left Cleveland before the end of the convention, but Wolfson stayed on and felt the need to write to her friend about failures in their communication. In writing to her friend, Wolfson offered an apology not only for having read her correspondence but also, and perhaps more importantly, for having failed to understand her loneliness and unhappiness. But the letter also acts as a reprimand for the recipient's failure to disentangle her true self from her work and for hindering her friends from seeing the 'real you'.

Amongst the many themes that struck me when I first read this letter was the question of why Wolfson chose to write a letter to her friend from Cleveland, when she could have talked to her face to face in New York, where they worked together and they met almost every day. But such is the specific discursive function of the epistolary form: it occurs in the gaps and

silences of oral communication and it takes advantage of the imaginary dialogues that go on in our heads when we try to understand and communicate with others. As I have written elsewhere in my work with women's epistolary narratives, letters bridge the gap between presence and absence, but sometimes absence becomes their only condition of possibility, not only when oral communication fails, but also when emotions, ideas and feelings can only be expressed in the absence of the addressee: 'It might seem irrational to you, even absurd, that I am writing this letter – we live only ten steps apart and meet three times a day – and anyway, I'm only your wife – why then the romanticism, writing in the middle of the night to my own husband?'[50] Rosa Luxemburg wrote to her life partner and comrade Leo Jogiches in July 1897 (see Tamboukou 2013a).

Although Wolfson worked closely with Cohn and despite the fact that they had shared the same hotel room for three days during the ILGWU convention in May 1922, she chose the epistolary form to communicate with her friend and comrade. She was deeply concerned seeing her friend so overworked and as Cohn has revealed in one of her autobiographical letters, Wolfson was amongst the friends who urged her to travel to Europe in the summer of 1922 as an American delegate of the Brussels conference on workers' education: 'the story of having attacks on my health goes back to 1922 when I was on the verge of a nervous break down. But on the advice of my Doctor and the insistence of my friends, especially Teresa Wolfson, Evelyn and Arthur Gleason, I took a trip to Europe.'[51] And yet Cohn's response to her friend was swift and sharp; she did not mind about her correspondence having been read, but she fiercely objected the way her friend had misrecognised what was important in her life: her artistic sensitivity for the masses, as well as her decision to live a solitary life. Her letter reveals such emotions and attitudes in no uncertain terms:

> Dear Theresa,
> I read your note with deep appreciation of your true and most sympathetic friendship. I never doubted your understanding of my own self.
>
> There is one thing however, I wonder even you, with your keen mind and sympathetic response, appreciate. And that is that there are persons who combine in them something of the poetic and the artistic and therefore have the sensitive heart and tender emotions of the artist and the poet. Their creative instincts and resourcefulness, however, are not expressed in letters, but in actual achievement. These persons do not place too much importance upon the acquisition of knowledge and the pursuit of learning.

They feel that there is no special benefit in amassing information unless they do something with it. Frequently, being of a restless character, such persons cannot be happy unless they place all their experiences, information and ability at the disposal of the great masses for whom they have a deep and sympathetic feeling. And so, they identify their lives with the workers.

I wonder whether you fully realize what it means for one of these persons to devote his life to an ideal, and in his efforts to achieve its actuality, is compelled many a time to depend upon the cooperation and the good will of persons, who have either materialistic or prosaic souls, or both, who sometimes in their misunderstanding 'ignorance' are ready not only to discourage but even to question that person's motives. They do not abstain not even from insinuation.

Did you ever think of the inner pain, worry and spiritual humiliation that such a person undergoes? And still in face of all this, one does not feel justified to quit before his work, which is in an extreme pioneer condition, where it will be strong enough to stand the severest storm, and unhampered will continue to grow. There is a continual conflict going on in the heart and mind of such a person, a clash between deep feelings and duty. The sensitive heart is yearning for affectionate encouragement. The prophet in him is visualizing a beautiful future, the vision of a possible realization of some of his dreams. Inspiring and beautiful surroundings; congenial comradeship, are as much of a necessity to such a person to create, as sunshine and rain for a flower to bloom.

Do you wonder that working under such conditions for an ideal that is dear to one's heart, one can never sufficiently detach oneself from one's work, and willingly or unwillingly he is forced to become part of it?

Now dear friend, you will understand that it is not the married life or 'the cut loose from oneself' that will make me happier. Not at all! My unhappiness most of the time is due to offended sensitiveness.

So many can enjoy life without discrimination. So many take things as they are and leave them as they were. So many are simple – actually open books to everyone. But there are those amongst the few, who possess deep feelings and who refuse to accept things as they find them and work tirelessly for changes. They are among the few who are rather complex, and it is only 'when one knocks and knocks and knocks that one can break through one's real self.'

It is unfortunately true that those who are capable to knock 'at one's chamber door' are also among the few.

Yes, I too can live, interest myself in others, listen to others and be happy. I love people too much to be otherwise. But to satisfy my own inner self, I must be surrounded by true friends, who possess beautiful souls, loveable hearts

and tender feelings. Such friends never for a moment doubt my motives and always understand me thoroughly.

I hope you will not interpret this as a complaint! Not at all. I feel that I enjoyed and am enjoying my life as much as any of my friends and that my life was and is as interesting as the lives of my friends. It is a mere response to your thoughtful and sympathetic note.

What more can I say than that in you, I feel a true friend who tries to understand me and whose nearness is always a great pleasure to me.

Ever your friend,
Fannia M. Cohn[52]

Cohn's response to Wolfson unfolds as a Butlerian narrative account of the self par excellence. Having been challenged to disentangle herself from the worries of work, she counterpoises the argument that it is existentially impossible to separate what she is from what she does. In a very Marxist way, work grounds her human condition, but she is very careful to highlight the creative dimension of her work and to position herself as an artist crafting the form of a different life, both for herself and the workers, whose interests she identifies with. In exposing the limitations and constraints of her self-constitution, Cohn engages in an aesthetics of the self, a process that had a significant impact on how she re-imagined and designed workers' education, as I will further discuss in Chap. 4. She further works hard in her letter to defend the priority of action over knowledge accumulation, but also to spell out her defiance of social norms and conventions such as marriage. By responding to her friend's letter, Cohn thus becomes a social theorist in the way Butler has persuasively shown:

> When the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself it can start with itself, but it will find that this self is already implicated in a social temporality that exceeds its own capacities for narration; indeed when the 'I' seeks to give an account of itself, an account that must include the conditions of its own emergence, it must, as a matter of necessity become a social theorist (2005, 8).

In spelling out and problematising the conditions of her emergence, Cohn also points to Wolfson's ethical responsibility to see and recognise her friend's difference, since recognition grounds the Spinozist, 'conatus', the desire to live and to persist, as Butler has noted (ibid., 44). It is precisely in the whirl of 'the conatus' that Cohn asked her friend to become sensitive to

her vulnerability and 'to keep knocking on her door'. Her pleas would take a tragic turn at the end of her life: her body 'was discovered in her apartment' on Christmas Eve in 1962 according to her biographer (see Cohen 1976, 250); the knock on her door came too late. In giving an account of herself, Cohn was thus entangled in a struggle with power relations and forces of desire; what she wanted from Wolfson was to recognise her choice to live outside the norm of married life and social conviviality. No matter how opaque or ungrounded the self is, Butler has argued it can never shake off its personal and/or social responsibilities (2005, 26). Sometimes the 'I' even gets entangled in a struggle with norms while seeking to recognise the 'you', she has emphatically noted (ibid.).

Cohn's friendship with Wolfson flourished after their May 1922 interpersonal struggle for recognition. Indeed, they found a way to be harmonious together despite or maybe because of their differences. 'How beautiful are your flowers – as beautiful as the friendship which you are capable of building,'[53] Wolfson wrote to Cohn in June 1923, in a warm thank note for a gentle gesture of friendship. As already noted earlier, Wolfson had urged and supported Cohn's travel to Europe in the summer of 1922, a dark period in her psychic and mental life. On the day of her departure, she sent her a beautiful farewell letter asking her to leave everything behind and throw herself in her European adventure:

> And so today you sail out from the glorious New York harbour – it never looks so beautiful as when you sail down the bay and cut into the vast expanse of water with a knowledge that there are to be fine days ahead of you. It is going to be a wonderful experience for you, I know with a chance to really enjoy all of the newness of the Old World.[54]

As we have already seen in the previous chapters, this trip to Europe on the occasion of the first workers' education international conference was an excellent opportunity for Cohn to understand the wider context, traditions and rule of the game for a movement that was so precious in her heart and so central in her life and work. It was in 'the newness of the Old World' that a new friend would also appear in Cohn's life, as I will discuss in the next section. Her friendship with Wolfson however, followed the same pattern as with Preston: it faded away in the 1930s, when they mostly kept in touch through some rare letters, although they never stopped working together for women workers' education meeting in committees, conferences and other labour educational events. I will come back to some

questions that arise from women's friendship in the labour movement in the last section of the chapter.

Dear Marion: Women's Friendship in the International Labour Movement

> Dear Marion,
> I enjoyed reading your interesting article on the 'Old Emmeline Pankhurst' which appeared in a recent issue of 'The Labour Woman' and I was tempted to publish it in the next issue of 'Justice' our official publication, instead of my own article, which I prepared for that purpose. I am sure you have no objection [. . .] I was glad to hear from you through Evelyn. She told me how hard you are working. I carefully follow up your 'Labour Woman'. It keeps me in touch with your work. You have once promised to send us an article for 'Justice' from time to time. I wish you would do so. We are very much interested to know what is going on in England as, to my mind you are going through a very interesting and crucial period in the history of the Labor movement.[55]

This letter from Cohn to Marion Philipps (1881–1932), Chief Women's Officer of the British Labour Party and Labour Member of Parliament for Sunderland between 1929–1931, is one of several letters the two women exchanged between 1925 and 1932, the year of Phillip's untimely death.[56] Cohn met Phillips during her 1924 visit to the UK on the occasion of the Ruskin College conference. There is a photograph of the conference delegates in her papers showing Cohn sitting in the first row, with Phillips on her left. Preston, who had moved to the UK by then, is also there, standing in the third line (Fig. 3.2). As her letter shows, Preston had been collaborating with Phillips on a number of labour projects and Cohn had particularly endorsed and facilitated their bonding: 'It was good news to hear that she [Preston] found a friend in you. She needs it badly [. . .] What she needs most is work, responsibility [. . .] and I was glad to know that you offered her a position,'[57] Cohn wrote to Phillips in February 1925, a few months after they had met, when she was still addressing her as 'Dear Dr. Phillips'.

There were many things that brought the two women labour activists together: they were both Jewish, socialists and single women activists and they shared a passion for the labour movement in general and women workers' education in particular. As a member of the *Women's Labour League,* Phillips was very interested in the education

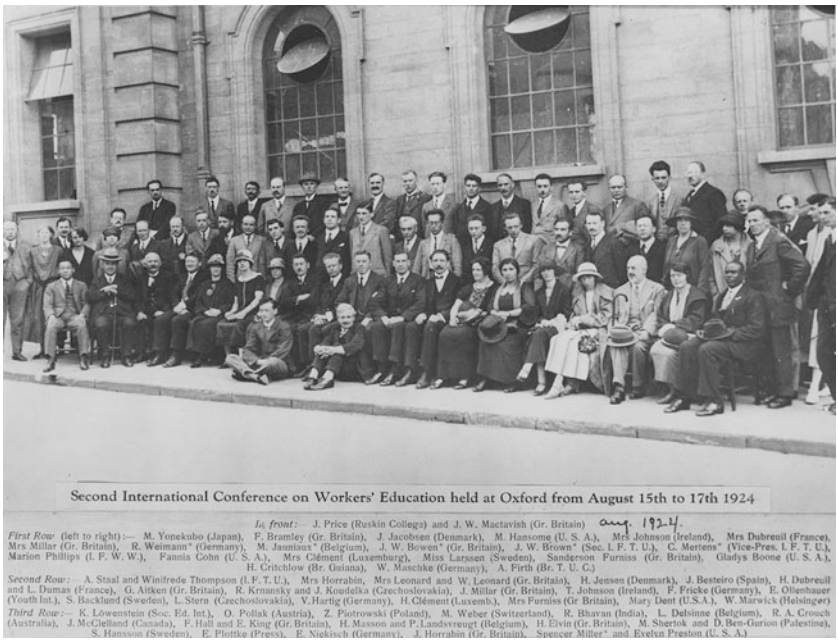

Fig. 3.2 Second International Conference on Workers' Education held at Oxford from August 15th to 17th 1924. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962. /VIII. Photographs and oversized items. 1924. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

of the children of the working classes and had supported the project of 'open air education'. Through her involvement in urban planning that would attend to the needs of the working classes she had suggested specially designed schools that would facilitate the children's exposure to daylight and air; she had also personally devised plans for new houses, which included a study room for the working class mother (see Goronwy-Roberts 2000, 8). Virginia Woolf's influential idea about the importance of *A Room of One's Own* should equally address working-class women's needs, Phillips thought, in her overall wider project of education for life.[58]

But apart from caring for working women's 'roses', Phillips was determined to make sure that they also had bread. Her correspondence with Cohn during the critical period of the Miners' Lock-out in 1926

shows not only Phillip's struggle to organise relief for the miners' families but also how closely the two women worked in the context of an international network of solidarity that 'The Women's Committee for the Relief of Miners' Wives and Children' had set up.[59] In the urgency of the situation, the two women communicated through letters and telegrams on a round-the-clock marathon to combat the miners families' distress: 'I answered your cable last night, and at the same time sent to all the American Agencies here our reply to the *Times*,'[60] Phillips wrote to Cohn in July 1926. She had enclosed a number of leaflets noting that 'a new one comes out tomorrow, and if it is in time to catch the mail I shall send that too'.[61] Cohn had asked her for some photographs as testimony for the miner's dire conditions but Phillips had difficulties in getting them: 'Unfortunately I had already given all that we had at the moment [. . .] I shall try to get some more [. . .] but the trouble is that Miners and their families are much too proud to let themselves be photographed as examples of poor people,'[62] she wrote, adding in relief that 'Thanks heaven we have no photographs of famine babies for we have the hope that so far we have prevented things from becoming so bad as that'.[63]

Although photographs were difficult to be found, Phillips had sent a number of stories and letters from the miners' wives that captured some acute moments of the crisis: 'Is there such a fund in the Labour Party that would help to buy boots for children? Poor little kiddies they are running about barefoot,'[64] a miner's wife had written to 'Dear Doctor Marion'. Her letter was one of many asking for children's clothes and boots and although such a fund did not exist, it was created under the circumstances. 'By the end of this week we will have raised £100,000,'[65] Phillips wrote to Cohn noting the $9000 that had come from overseas. She also commented on 'the attack of the *Times* [. . .] and the *Daily Mail* [which are] carrying on an abominable campaign' and the letter concluded with a remark that 'I am so dead tired that I hardly know what I am writing'.[66] Phillips' five-page letter addressed to 'Dear Fannia' and signed as 'Yours ever' carries some textual traces of how much the two women had bonded through their struggles for the labour movement. Although they would never meet again, swamped as they were with their labour work, their correspondence kept their friendship and camaraderie going: 'I was glad to receive your letter although sorry to hear that you cannot accept Evelyn's invitation to spend the summer with her

[. . .] I hope you will be able to visit the U.S. in the near future,'[67] Cohn wrote in the summer of 1927 also noting the initiation of a new educational programme for the wives of trade unionists, an auxiliary force in the labour movement according to Cohn, who had given a lot of effort to mobilise and educate them:

> I have written five articles on the wives of trade unionists which were reprinted in almost 30% of the labor press, and I was glad to hear that many leading men and women in the labor movement were impressed with the possibility of ladies' auxiliaries taking their proper place in our movement. Of course, the word 'ladies' is not mine. This is how they call themselves, but when I criticized it and suggested that they change it to 'women's' there was general approval.[68]

Phillips' interest in working-class women's conditions, whether they were actually receiving wages or supported their families through their unwaged domestic labour, as well as their sweated industrial homework, was indeed ahead of its time. This sensitivity to the open and hidden modalities of women's work rhymed perfectly well with Cohn's similarly pioneering interest in the lives of trade unionists' wives, 'the ladies' auxiliaries' as she has put it in her letter to Phillips earlier. Through tireless work, Cohn had managed to devise an educational scheme and to organise a summer institute at Brookwood Labor College: 'there was a general outcry that the development of workers' wives is being neglected and that they have no function as yet in the Labor movement',[69] Cohn had noted in her letter to Phillips, highlighting the many interesting discussions that the 'ladie's auxiliaries' summer institute had initiated. One year later, she would also mention a weekend conference of women's auxiliaries held at the ILGWU Unity House that was 'mostly inspiring'.[70]

What both women activists shared then, was the realisation of what I have elsewhere called 'the home/work continuum' in women workers' lives, as a gendered aspect in the history and sociology of labour that needs further study (Tamboukou 2016b). Although many women would officially leave the industry after their marriage, the majority of them would still be entangled in conditions of labour exploitation that involved both waged and unwaged work. It is in enhancing the quality of women's lives that both Phillips and Cohn were interested through interventions in social housing, childcare and nursery school projects, as well as in devising

educational and cultural programmes that would keep their involvement in the labour movement alive. Even if the labour leaders were not interested in women's lives per se, they knew that it was on the strikers' families that any future labour struggles would depend. That was a good enough reason for them to support such initiatives, albeit with a lack of enthusiasm. As Cohn had simply put it in an unpublished paper:

> True, after marriage, a girl is apt to leave the factory. But she becomes the wife of a worker, and the mother of workers. What an opportunity for her to utilize the knowledge of trade unionism she has had acquired! How well she –the former union member can enter into the spirit of her working family with an understanding that is priceless![71]

Although women's position in the patriarchal order is not disputed in Cohn's discourse of persuading the labour leaders, she still sensed the vulnerability and precariousness of her project. This is why she was counting on international networks and collaborations: 'It seems to me that your article dealing with the activities of wives of trade unionists on the economic and political field would be most appreciated by our readers,'[72] she wrote to Phillips in September 1927. Workers would greatly benefit from 'an understanding of the problems that confront each other, whether economic, social, labor or political and also of their ideals and aspirations', Cohn had also remarked.[73] Interestingly enough, it was two single women labour activists that would mostly look after the workers' wives. But they were equally interested in single women's lives and development, fighting against the discourses that demonised and ridiculed them. Cohn's congratulation letter to Phillips in July 1929 on the occasion of her election as a Labour Member of Parliament particularly highlights the role of 'the flappers' in securing the victory of the Labour Party in the UK through 'education, agitation and research':

> The victory is all the more significant and substantial when we consider that it is due to many, many years of education, agitation and research effort on the part of these men and women in the labor movement. I can imagine Mr Baldwin's disappointment at his defeat. His object in giving the vote to five million 'flappers' was undoubtedly a gamble on their intelligence. [. . .] I do not exaggerate if I repeat here what I said in my article of 'The Results of the British Elections' that the Women's Section of the Labor Party, so ably, intelligently and energetically headed by you was much to be credited that the 'flappers' helped the Labour Party in its success.[74]

Given their close collaboration, camaraderie and subtle friendship that developed mostly through letters, Cohn was deeply saddened by the news of Phillip's untimely death in 1932: 'I was shocked by Marion's death [. . .] at her age [it] is tragic,'[75] she wrote to Mark Starr. She was further infuriated by the little space that *Justice*, the union's newspaper, gave to her appreciation of Phillips' life and work. In writing to Helen Norton, one of the few women of the Brookwood faculty and also Starr's wife, Cohn highlighted the problem of women's marginalisation in the labour movement citing some outrageous comments of the British press about how Phillips had wasted her political charisma focusing her activities on women workers:

> I agree with you that the Movement is guilty of not realizing the importance of placing the interest of women on the same basis as of men and until they will accept this, I am afraid that the Movement will be hampered in its progress. Marion and I agreed on this point and developed an understanding friendship. 'Dr Marion Phillips would have been a more prominent figure in public life, if her gifts and energy had been devoted entirely to general political activity', thus says the Manchester Guardian, and we read further, 'From the beginning of her career, however, she concentrated her work in the narrower field of working women's interests'.[76]

This was the year when the Brookwood crisis had deepened, as we have seen in Chap. 2, so Cohn's disillusion with how the ILGWU's newspaper had covered Phillips' death was coloured by her own distress during that time: 'I doubt whether your men on the faculty realise the injury they have done to me. I wonder whether they would treat, in the same manner, a 'man', who would find himself in a similar position,' she wrote to Norton. Her disappointment was even deeper with how the women themselves in the faculty had acted. Her poignant feelings were a direct address to Norton herself, who had sided with Starr, given their personal relationship:

> It hurts me also to know that while 'men' frequently come to each others' assistance in an emergency, 'women' frequently remain indifferent when one of their own sex is confronted with a similar emergency [. . .] Her task becomes especially difficult when she, working side by side with man, dares to hold independent views and descend some of their policies and tactics [. . .] I am chagrined to find intelligent women frequently when it concerns their own sex, submerge their own judgement to that of men.[77]

Cohn's deep disappointment with the failure of women's solidarity within the labour movement is revealing of her experiences of isolation and estrangement from her close friends, Preston and Wolfson, as I have already noted earlier. Despite the initial fervour of their letters, as the years passed their correspondence became infrequent and their communication unsatisfactory and erratic, full of gaps, misunderstandings and failures: 'Your long expected message came at last. Surprising as it may seem, it did not surprise me. Why, I almost hear you asking. This cannot be explained on paper. '"Letter writing" is so unsatisfactory',[78] Cohn wrote to Preston in January 1925, one of the last intimate letters that I was able to trace amongst her papers. Wolfson had also tried to persuade Cohn that her problems of 'friends and friendship' had no solutions: 'if I waited in vain for you to speak and if you waited in vain for me to understand why you did not speak it is all a part of our frailty',[79] Wolfson wrote in January 1924. Years later, their letters would become vectors of memories but also traces of their failure in friendship: 'Your note called to my mind many pleasant memories, but it made me sad [. . .] I, too, thought that I am building lasting friendship but it seems that I failed in this,'[80] Cohn wrote to Wolfson in April 1930. This was also one of the last intimate letters found in their correspondence. Life had taken its course but they had parted company. We will never know the recipients of Cohn's autobiographical letters later on in her life: the autobiographical 'you' eventually became anonymous, a mask that absorbed the tensions and vibrations that had shaken and mobilised these early pioneers in the movement for women workers' education, whose trends, strands and lines of flight I now want to map in the final section of the chapter.

Women Worker's Education and the Power of Associations

> For those who examine today the state of society, one fact must seem remarkable, it is the tendency of all spirits to bring themselves towards association: this fact is even more remarkable as we live in an era of dissolution, when everything goes, but everything will also be reconstructed, because as they say most often, *nothing dies, but everything is transformed;* this is a proof that *the order of the future will be to draw upon association*. At this moment human beings of all parts associate to make their opinions prevail; we women should also spread our ideas to make people understand that our EQUALITY with the man, far from lowering them, as some seem to believe, will be on the contrary a pledge of happiness for all.[81]

As this extract from an article of the first feminist newspaper published by a group of revolutionary seamstress in nineteenth-century France powerfully demonstrates, association was at the heart of the European romantic socialist movements and it became particularly crucial in informing concrete political, economic and social projects.[82] When writing about the importance of association, the seamstress Marie-Reine Guindorf knew only too well about the proletarians' internal battles and conflicts and although she was also advocating unity amongst workers and amongst women, she saw it emerging through passages between and amongst differences.

For Alfred North Whitehead, the philosopher of process, association is inherent in the constitution of the real: 'every actual entity is in its nature essentially social', he has argued (1985, 203). As constitutive of the real, association is also linked to the idea of novelty, since what comes to exist always combines components, which were previously dispersed and in being re-assembled they create something new. In this sense the thorny relation of the individual to society, which has attracted so much ink in social theory, is not about relations of interiority, exteriority or even integration. Individuals and societies are assemblages that are constituted through their entanglement and intra-action, and so are associations. It is no wonder that Bruno Latour (2005) has drawn on Whitehead in configuring his sociology of associations.

What I have shown in this chapter is that it is in the light of the power of associations that women's involvement in the movement for workers' education should be mapped and understood, as an effect of their long revolutionary durée. Indeed, it was for international networks of people, practices, insights and sources that workers' education emerged as an idea and unfolded as a project, in the interstices of institutional arrangements and organisational structures, not only in the capitalist states of modernity, but also in the hierarchies of their opponents in the labour movement. Cohn's letters carry traces of the micro-practices involved in slowly weaving the canvas of workers' education from the initial phases of organising small-scale educational events, to the stage of extending and expanding them, as well as of making connections with similarly evolving educational projects on a global level.

There were five trails that I have particularly followed in this complex terrain: (1) cross-class synergies, which eventually exposed problematics with the very concept of social class per se and its limitations as an analytical category; (2) intra-labour and intra-gender relations that also need to be revisited in the light of associations; (3) the struggle for the

workers' intellectual emancipation and the autonomy of their education movement, as well as their contribution to the knowledge economies of modernity; (4) the formative role of letters in the movement for workers' education; and (5) lastly the importance of the cultural capital that migrant workers carried with them, which is also an area that needs further work and study. It is these five trails that I will now revisit, weaving together the different sections of this chapter.

1. Between the Moon and the Earth: Working Women and Literary Ladies

'I have ridden back on the bus but not dreaming to "go right into the moon". I am always satisfied to look at it and enjoy its grandeur and am striving to make the earth a more agreeable place to live in.'[83] This was Cohn's poetic end to one of her first intimate letters to 'my dear Miss Preston'. As already discussed earlier in this chapter, their correspondence reveals the importance of cross-class relations and synergies in the movement for workers' education and also exposes problems and questions arising from the role of the intellectuals in the labour movement. Preston remained loyal to the labour movement until the end of her life. So did Hilda Worthington Smith, the Director of the Bryn Mawr Summer School for Women Workers, who was educated in private schools and was herself a Bryn Mawr graduate.

What is important to note is that such encounters did not just crop up, neither did they develop easily. As we have seen in Chap. 2, Cohn flatly refused to be on the Bryn Mawr's education board, as she firmly believed that workers' education should be in the hands of the labour movement and not of universities. Herstein, a Bryn Mawr faculty member during its early years, has offered some vivid scenes of such cross-class conflicts in the school's founding meeting, which Cohn had declined to attend altogether: 'Do you think that we working women would fall for a fake like you're talking about? We know all about the welfare plans of employers. The game is to break up unions. I am on to your game', Hilda Shapiro, a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America had told M. Carey Thomas, Bryn Mawr's President, when the plans for the new school were presented (cited in Herstein 1996, 21). 'I don't blame you for being suspicious' was the President's answer, 'My class certainly has not been fair to you working people and has tried many schemes to subvert trade unionism. All I can give you is my own word that this is a sincere effort as I have described it' (cited in ibid.). Not only did Thomas persuade Shapiro, who actually enrolled in the very first year of the

summer school, but also the Bryn Mawr project became one of the most successful educational programmes and attracted students from the USA and overseas, as we have already seen in Chap. 2.

Herstein's testimonial above has shown the two women speak to each other from quite entrenched class positions; what happened to the divisions that separated them though? It is here that the rigidity of the class structure impedes the analysis of how exactly things changed. In this light, should social classes be defined by their order, or by what escapes their order, their 'lines of flight' as Deleuze and Guattari have suggested? (1988, 216) What I suggest is that it is only on the plane of 'lines of flight' that workers' education can be understood since if we follow linear understandings of social facts and social orders 'the truly important political events of our century [. . .] come as a surprise to everyone', David Luban has remarked (1994, 186). In this context, a crucial theme that has come up in my analysis of the workers' education is the problem of how we can account for becomings. In following narrative lines of Cohn's letters to her friends and comrades, I could discern a pattern of associations that unsettles our perceptions of what education can do and shows how radical educational programmes can disrupt rhythms of exclusion and inclusion. Without discarding the importance of the notion of social class, what I have suggested following DeLanda (2006), is its reconfiguration as an assemblage. It is in this framework that that intra-labour and intra-gender relations and conflicts should also be mapped as I will discuss next.

2. Troubling Gender Relations

> Man must be convinced of the desirability and possibility of organizing women. An effective way to make this appeal to them is through the medium of Workers' Education – a field in which women have greatly distinguished themselves. Women's achievements must speak trumpet-tongued to men. Workers' education reveals to woman her importance in industry and gives her confidence.[84]

In defending the importance of women workers' education in this unpublished paper, Cohn was also fighting for women's inclusion in the rank and file labour movement but also, and more importantly, in its leadership. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, this was such a difficult project to achieve, since the labour movement was not just neglecting women, but actively pushing them out of its decision

centres. Cohn's correspondence with her women friends, but also with the men academics and intellectuals, who supported her educational work, highlights the importance of associations in negotiating intra-labour relations and conflicts. Here it is not only social class but also gender that we should reconsider in the light of some influential feminist critiques that I will now look at.

In her 1985 path-breaking essay, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis',[85] Joan Scott defined gender on two inter-related levels, the social and the political: 'gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power' (1997, 167). In charting the plane of the social, she proposed four fields for future research and analysis: (1) interrogating dominant representations of gender, (2) challenging normative concepts that underpin constructions of meanings and interpretations, (3) situating the analysis within specific socio-political contexts and (4) developing socio-historical analyses of the constitution of subjective identity (ibid., 167–69)

Turning to the political plane of analysis, Scott further raised a series of critical questions that would position gender at the heart of political history. 'Why (and since when)', she asked amongst others, 'have women been invisible as historical subjects when we know they participated in the great and small events of human history?' (ibid., 174–75). In addressing this last question Scott has provocatively argued that we could rewrite history, 'only if we recognize that "man" and "woman" are at once empty and overflowing categories' (ibid., 167) since they have no ultimate transcendent meaning and can never be pinned down and stabilised. Scott's political level of analysis has maintained that 'significations of gender and power construct one another' (ibid., 174) and in a Foucauldian vein they circulate in a cluster of power/knowledge relations. Education has historically created a stage for such antagonistic power relations at play and in this light it was influential in the women workers' lives: it was through education that they surpassed the hurdles of their social class and dared walk into the world of knowledge and culture. It was education that facilitated their inclusion in the labour movement and became the locale par excellence for feminist interventions.

This take on gender runs parallel with the assemblage approach that we have discussed in Chap. 2. In mapping gender differences on three major planes – between women and men, amongst women and within each woman herself – critical feminist theories have followed Scott's provocative argument but have also pointed to the necessity of keeping 'women' as a

political rather than a social entity, a platform supporting women's real and multiple struggles.[86] It is precisely on a political platform that the struggle of women workers' education should be situated, understood and analysed. Even when her relationships with her women friends and comrades kept failing, Cohn was firm in her conviction that workers' education had a crucial role in the labour movement in general and in women's position within it in particular. This gender/class consciousness was amongst the decisive forces that kept her going on, making connections with local, national and international assemblages. The role of intellectual men and academics was also crucial here in offering support and sustaining struggles within dark times. Although they inhabited different gendered subject positions, some of these men were clever enough to understand that the labour movement did indeed urgently need women. Others were radical enough to interrogate power-gendered relations and ally themselves with women in the anti-capitalist struggle, as well as the wider social movements for civil rights in the USA throughout the twentieth century.

What my analysis in this chapter has added to this critical body of literature is that notwithstanding the emptiness of the 'man'/'woman' nominal categories, the material and real conditions of women workers' cannot be downplayed. In the light of considering the materiality and linguisticality of experience as an entanglement, there is a need to rethink the difference that the gender of workers' educators has made in re-imagining women as subjects in culture. To paraphrase and expand Luce Irigaray's question[87] that Scott herself highlighted in concluding the 1985 essay: are the subjects of knowledge gendered and what are the effects of this difference? In reassembling Cohn's letters with both men and women active in the labour movement my suggestion is that gender has made a difference; simply put, if Cohn and other women activists had not done anything for women workers' education, nobody would have done it in their place. It is this understanding that leads me to the next trail, the struggle for intellectual emancipation in the labour movement and women's role in it.

3. Dangerous Liaisons: Intellectuals and Workers

'One outstanding achievement during the Department's 31 years of existence was that it bridged the gulf between the men and women of letters and the men and women of labor. It thus succeeded in bringing together the college professor and the worker,'[88] Cohn wrote in November 1947, looking back at the history of the union's education department. She painted the intellectual/worker encounter in positive colours in a way that

did not exactly rhyme with how intellectuals were seen and discussed in the courses of the Workers' University that she was in charge of organising. Indeed, Cohn's papers reveal that the role of the intellectual in the labour movement was not only an idea or an attitude, but also part of the course 'Trade Union Policies and Tactics' that labour students would follow in the Workers' University.

In the syllabus and content of this course, intellectuals and workers were brought together, but there were rigid distinctions between the two, as the lecture notes of a whole lesson on 'The Intellectual in the Labor Movement' clearly demonstrated: 'the term intellectual is used to designate those persons whose economic interest and livelihood lies for the time being in any direction other than that of wages derived from their own manual work'.[89] Interestingly enough 'brain workers', such as teachers, actors and scientific workers were not included in the category of the intellectual since 'they have organized their unions on the same lines as other workers, and have thereby become part of the labor movement'.[90]

Amongst the different social groups that intellectuals could emerge from in the same lecture notes, there were 'business men and capitalists with a philanthropic or political turn of mind',[91] professionals such as lawyers, editors, economists and engineers, 'speculative philosophers' and also former union members, who eventually became professionals but kept an interest in the labour movement. The lecture notes also painted a historical background to the existence of intellectuals with an interest in the labour movement, such as Robert Owen in the nineteenth century.[92]

According to the notes, the objectives of the early intellectuals was 'to direct the workers away from their strict and narrow interests as workers, as a class and to lead them towards affiliation with other classes'[93]; simply put, their role was to iron class conflicts and interests that could trouble and unsettle the social order. Even when some of them came to emphasise 'strongest Socialist and class conscious philosophies'[94] they would simply 'confine themselves to injecting idealism in the labour movement'.[95] The notes also pointed to the fact that very few intellectuals ever became trade union leaders, although they played a role in the history and development of syndicalism, particularly in Europe. The notes concluded with the sad recognition that 'the conduct of an element among the intellectuals had made the labour movement suspicious and antagonistic towards them' and it seems that the lecture notes rather reinforced this spirit of non-trust.[96]

There were many things that struck me when reading these lecture notes in Cohn's papers, particularly given that the course leader, Dr David Saposs, was himself a Russian immigrant, who quit school in the fifth grade to work in breweries in Wisconsin and was involved in the brewers' union before he eventually undertook undergraduate studies in 1911, followed by a Ph.D. in economics at the University of Wisconsin in 1915.[97] Simply put, Saposs' life-story seemed to be a counter-example of the grey figure of the intellectual that his lecture notes seem to draw. I was also intrigued by the recurrence of the Marxist notion of 'interest' in these two-page lecture notes. As Katerina Kolozova in a neo-materialist reading of Marx's concept has pithily noted, the workers' interest in Marx's analysis is not a final purpose, it does not have a meaning per se, neither does it require knowledge or education to be perceived or understood: 'interest is experienced, it is lived and it is the derivative – let us put it in Spinozian terms – the conatus to stay in life and to increase life power', she has remarked (2015, 3). The interest necessitates a response Kolozova has also added (ibid.), and it is in the space of the response that the intellectual in the labour movement can be situated in a way that need not be suspicious or dangerous for the worker.

It is precisely in this responsive space, as a gesture towards the workers' interests that Cohn saw the role of the intellectual. In doing so, she drew on her own lived experiences but also on the position of the many men and women that she collaborated with, who had no resemblance whatsoever with the grim figure of Saposs' lecture. In responding to the workers' lived interests, the role of such intellectuals was not only to educate workers but perhaps, more importantly, to create conditions of possibility for their intellectual emancipation. Cohn's firm views about the importance of workers' taking control of their education did not go unnoticed, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

What Cohn's relationship with intellectuals, such as Beard, Dewey, Preston and particularly with Wolfson highlights however, is the importance of new knowledges that derived from such an encounter between 'the professor and the worker'. In flagging up her friend's contribution to the existing bodies of knowledge, Cohn had written: 'Few of our talkers on the importance of organizing women, have made a thorough study of the problem. A comprehensive work on the subject is a study of Dr Theresa Wolfson, *The Woman Worker and the Trade Unions*.' As already noted earlier, Wolfson's pioneering work is still cited amongst feminist labour historians, but if Wolfson had never heard Cohn's outcry, she might have never responded to the women labour activists' interests. The dark side of

the moon here was that the trade unions that were supposed to take control of workers' education did not seem to acknowledge this need. Cohn had understood it soon enough to get involved in the activities of the international labour movement, which brings the discussion to the next trail: the importance of internationalisation in the light of epistolarity.

4. Epistolarity in the Movement for Workers' Education

> Dear Miss Cohn,
> I have just been reading the wonderful account of your educational work, which you have sent to Mr Mactavish, and as one who has devoted the major portion of his life to adult working class education and is the oldest officer in the Workers' Educational Association I feel that I must send you a word of congratulation. In future when I feel depressed by the apathy of the workers, or am appalled by the stupendousness of the task before us, I shall think of you and of your work and take heart again.[98]

With this short, but enthusiastic, letter sent to Cohn in September 1920 from the WEA's House in Reading, T.W. Price, the author of one of the first historical studies of workers' education (Price 1924), succinctly expressed many important themes that the international movement for workers' education brought forward and sustained. Price's letter also shows that despite geographical, political, cultural and organisational differences, there were strong international connections within the movement and Cohn's work had already made an impact on the other side of the Atlantic from its very early stage. The WEA educators were indeed impressed by the fact that 'you work within the Trade Union Movement, whereas we work from without',[99] J.M. Mactavish, WEA's General Secretary between 1916 and 1927, wrote to Cohn in September 1920, adding in a postscript that 'I assume you have no objection to our using your article in *Justice* for the *Highway*.'[100] The commonality of the English language gave the two movements in the UK and the USA more opportunities to share ideas and practices not only by meeting in conferences and by exchanging visits, as it was the case with other European countries, but also though almost simultaneous publications and reprints of each other's labour press.

Mactavish's idealisation of the trade union's role in the workers' education movement had missed however, the enormity of the problems that were also inherent in their involvement. 'The trade unions

are always practically at war',[101] Cohn wrote to 'Dear Comrades J.F. and W. Horrabin', authors of *Working Class Education* (1924) in January 1925, adding that their struggles and military activities take up 'their entire energy and all their attention is given to it'.[102] As a result, other activities, such as worker's education were taking the back seat in the union's priorities and were therefore neglected and suffered to survive. Cohn's letter also underlined the need that 'the leadership must be enlightened on the value of workers' education' and concluded with the hope 'that we will continue our pleasant personal and "international" relations'. In this way she highlighted the importance of letters as 'the only medium available' to sustain communication.[103]

It is precisely Cohn's emphasis on the importance of letters in sustaining the movement for workers' education that I have highlighted throughout this chapter. As Margaretta Jolly has argued in her work with letters in contemporary feminism, 'letters are a staple of any political movement' (2008, 2). This is particularly evident in Cohn's extensive correspondence with women and men actively involved in the labour movement. It was through her letters that Cohn would communicate across social, political and geographical boundaries. Her correspondence with the WEA, for example, shows how much she was influenced by the educational philosophy vision and approaches of the British experience. At the same time, it is in these letters that the differences between the movements are exposed, nuanced and discussed. In looking at Olive Schreiner's letters Liz Stanley and colleagues (2012) have highlighted their political character, amongst other generic traits and have argued that it is in her letters that Schreiner's politics unfold, particularly as they relate to different addresses in different geopolitical contexts and at different points in time. Read within the horizon of the political, Cohn's letters 'do things', 'foment change' and 'cement relationships', as Stanley and colleagues have insightfully commented about Schreiner's letters (ibid., 266). Frank Horrabin, for example, wrote to Cohn in May 1925, to thank her for the great time he and his wife had in New York and to send news from their 'side of the water':

> Our own movement goes ahead. The topic of the moment is the T.U. Congress education scheme, in which we co-operate – on a 50-50 basis – with the W.E.A. Naturally, we don't like having to do this last, as it involves more or less co-operation with the Universities – and government grants! But we've managed to get the aims of the scheme so defined as to ensure a pretty definitely working class outlook all through.[104]

Clearly, epistolary exchanges such as the previous, weave the network of like-minded comrades in the international movement, who would meet and support each others' views in international conventions and congresses. Apart from the visits and letters, there were also people who would fill the gap of 'interrupted presences' (Stanley et al. 2012, 270). 'The other day I discussed you with my friend Evelyn Preston, when she told me that she had had dinner with you and Mrs Horrabin',[105] Cohn wrote in August 1925, while in his May letter Horrabin had mentioned that his wife had passed Cohn's greetings to 'Dr Phillips', who 'was very interested to hear about our adventures in New York and our glimpses of the ILGWU's work'.[106] Introducing friends and comrades to her collaborators abroad was also part of this network building activities: 'Mr David J. Saposs, instructor of Labor Problems and History at Brookwood Labor College, is now in France, having been appointed by Columbia University to make a study of the French Labor Movement,' she wrote to Robert Smith at Ruskin College, drawing his attention to the fact that 'Mr Saposs is considered an authority on the Labor Movement' and that the 'Oxford students might benefit from a lecture on the American Labor Movement'. In the same letter, Cohn called Smith's attention to two other labour scholars who were also in the UK. Letters of introduction are examples of 'writing as action', Stanley and colleagues have noted (ibid., 267), occasions where the letter performs the act, in Austin's sense of 'doing things with words' (1962).

Apart from building networks, fomenting change and sustaining relationships, Cohn's letters also display particularly instructive and organisational features, whether it was about advising her friends or assessing the state of the movement, or both: 'I was glad to know that Dr. Phillips is helpful to you (I expected this from her) and that she has offered you a position as secretary of a commission,' she wrote to Preston in January 1925, but she was very insistent that 'this be a paid position.'[107] Cohn knew that Preston did not need money to survive and that she most probably had made generous donations to the British labour movement and to the miners' fund. But as I have already pointed out in the previous chapter, in Cohn's mind a salary would be a recognition of Preston's, and more generally of women's, work: 'I would rather that you made a contribution to this commission, but get paid for your work. Let this be no child's pay to you, but a real woman's job,'[108] she emphatically noted.

Cohn's letters were not only performative gestures, open political interventions, as well as actions in writing; they were also technologies of getting the records straight, particularly when periods of crises had created confusions and misunderstandings. In this sense, she had an acute historical sensibility, knowing that her letters would ultimately become records of the past and political memories of the future. Just after the Brookwood crisis and its eventual dissolution, she wrote a letter to David Stewart, State General Secretary of the Australian WEA, to give an account of the crisis. Written on New Year's Eve, the letter carries the stamp of its urgency, at least for its author:

> I am sorry that it [Brookwood] was not saved. Our International did whatever we could to help Brookwood, but to retain this for the labor movement could not be done through the efforts of one union only, and as you know, the labor movement in our country is divided now and is struggling, and it was therefore impossible to get a group of unions together to form a committee and take over Brookwood. Because of this, Brookwood will have to be sold.[109]

Cohn must have been heartbroken with Brookwood's failure, a project she had worked so hard for, but in a way leaving behind places, spaces, people and ideas she loved, while moving forward was part of how she had constituted herself as a nomadic subject, a Russian migrant in the New World. It is the impact of migration that I now want to consider as the final trail that I have followed in mapping the workers' education assemblage in this chapter.

5. *Nomadic Subjects: Migration and Culture*

> I made painfully slow progress at night school [. . .] Our teacher, of immigrant stock herself, a colorless young woman, obviously disliked her pupils, most of whom were adults with some education from their former homeland, but who could not readily adopt her way of pronunciation [. . .] I hung on to the end of the first term. But when summer vacation came I devised my own method of learning the new language. In the East Ninety-sixth Street Public Library Harlem branch, I found an excellent Russian section, and began rereading my favourite authors [. . .] And meanwhile I learned to read the daily press and magazines (Pesotta 1958, 246–247).

During her years as a Russian immigrant garment worker first and as an ILGWU active labour organiser later on, Pesotta developed a long-standing relation with the various branches of the New York Public Library. It was in their reading rooms that she first studied English after realising that her night language school was inadequate. Pesotta, who became the third woman ILGWU vice-president in the long history of the union, took advantage of the educational opportunities that Cohn had created for women workers and she kept in close correspondence with Cohn while organising educational programmes during her term in office between 1933 and 1934. Considered together, Cohn's and Pesotta's life histories bring forward the importance of what I want to call 'the migration cultural capital' in workers' education.

Cohn and Pesotta were amongst the thousand Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe who fled to the USA, avoiding the murderous pogroms at the turn of the twentieth century. As Cohen has shown, by 1904 there were 850,000 Eastern European Jews who had settled in the USA; 350,000 of them lived in New York, mostly concentrated in the Lower East side (1976, 14). Many of these immigrants, and certainly Cohn and Pesotta, had received a relatively good education, both formal and informal, but in arriving in the New World without speaking English, they were employed in the many workshops of the garment industry. The largest part of Jewish capital invested in industry in New York was in the needle trades Cohen has noted (ibid., 18); and since it was Jewish entrepreneurs who controlled the industry, the newly arrived immigrants would prefer to work in their shops as they felt more comfortable in terms of language and religious barriers. According to Louis Levine's first history of ILGWU, in the first decade of the twentieth century women were 80 per cent of its workforce and amongst them 55 per cent were Jewish, 35 per cent Italian and only 7 per cent were native born Americans (1924, 149). Although such estimations vary slightly amongst studies, immigrants–mostly Jewish and Italian—were definitely dominating the workforce in the garment industry (see Green 1997, 54).

As we have seen with Cohn's life history, apart from their educational capital baggage, many of the Jewish immigrants had also carried the political baggage of their involvement in underground revolutionary groups. In her study of Italian women's resistance in New York, Jennifer Guglielmo has also pointed to the revolutionary struggles in Italy in the beginning of the twentieth century, as the political context within mass emigration from Italy took place (2010, 11). Thus, the majority of immigrant garment workers in

New York were economically disadvantaged in terms of language barriers and job opportunities, but their educational, cultural and political capital created conditions of possibility for the workers' education movement to emerge and flourish amongst them. It therefore comes as no surprise that there was a kind of cultural spring amongst immigrant workers in the middle of the twentieth century, a theme that I will discuss in the next chapter in the light of the immigrant women workers' contribution to the social, political and cultural formations of modernity.

Notes

1. FC to Emma, letter dated 8 May 1953 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
2. Ibid.
3. FC to 'dear friend', letter dated 28 July 1937 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. For rich insights about how axes of difference such as class, race and gender inflect the genre of autobiography, see amongst others Smith and Watson 1998 and Cosslett et al. 2000.
9. FC to Emma, letter dated 8 May 1953 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
10. Bouvier, 'Au Congrès féminin International' in *Madame et Citoyenne,* c. 1919, Bibliothèque Historique de la ville de Paris, Archives Marie Louise Bouglé/ Fonds Jeanne Bouvier/ Divers/Boîte 20 (BHVP/AMB/FJB/Div/B20).
11. FC to Edward G. Lindeman, letter dated 7 February 1933 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
12. FC to Selig Perlman, letter dated 26 December 1951 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
13. Ibid.
14. FC to Emma, letter dated 8 May 1953 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
15. Charles Beard to the ILGWU educational department, letter dated 26 July 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
16. Ibid.
17. CB to FC, letter dated Labor day, 1945 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
18. Ibid.
19. Arthur Gleason to FC, letter dated 27 October 1921 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
20. 'Bread and Roses' is the refrain of a poem written in 1911 by James Oppenheim to celebrate the movement for women's rights. First published in *American Magazine* was closely associated with the Lawrence textile mill strike of 1912 and further became a popular labour movement song. See Eisenstein 1983 for a historical appreciation of the motto's influence on working women's consciousness and movement in the USA.

21. FC to John Frey, letter dated 8 January 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
22. FC to Evelyn Preston, letter dated 17 April 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
23. FC to EP, letter dated 10 March 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
24. FC to EP, letter dated, 21 September, 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
25. EP to FC, letter dated 25 April 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
26. FC to EP, letter dated, 9 May, 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
27. FC to EP, letter dated, 19 September, 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
28. EP to FC, letter dated, 10 April 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
29. Interview with Sadie Reisch, 11 January 1974, New York City, cited in Cohen 1976, 202.
30. FC to EP, letter dated, June [1922], (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. EP to FC, letter dated, 16 June 1922, (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
35. EP to FC, letter dated, 5 December 1922, (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
36. Ibid.
37. FC to EP, letter dated, 23 January 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.); 'little persons' has been stricken off in the typewritten text of the letter and replaced with handwritten 'ordinary'.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Theresa Wolfson to FC, letter dated, 6 May 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
42. TW to FC, letter dated, 11 November 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
43. Ibid.
44. See letter from Cohn to Samuel Gompers, dated 1 December 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
45. FC to TW letter dated, 20 March 1926 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
46. ILGWU Unity House, Forest Park, Pennsylvania, 8 July 1925. Part of Unity House display, caption reads: Lecture Symposium Shows Fannia M. Cohn (seated) and Professor Theresa Wolfson speaking. http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/KCL05780p.html
47. TC to FC, letter dated 20 March 1926 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
48. Ibid.
49. Ibid.
50. Rosa Luxemburg to Leo Jogiches, letter dated 16 July 1897 (Ettinger 1979, 22).
51. FC to 'dear friend', undated letter (FCP/NYPL/Cor), written in the spring of 1931, as inferred by its content and context.
52. FC to Theresa Wolfson, letter dated, 15 May 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
53. TW to FC, letter dated, 6 June 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).

54. TW to FC, letter dated, 28 July 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
55. FC to Marion Phillips, letter dated, 13 July 1928 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
56. For a full biographical study for Marion Phillips, see Goronwy-Roberts 2000.
57. FC to MP, letter dated, 2 February 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
58. Although Woolf's book was first published in 1929, it drew on her 1928 lecture at Girton College (Woolf 1945).
59. For a detailed discussion of the Miners' Families campaign, see Goronwy-Robers 2000, particularly Chapter 16.
60. MP to FC, letter dated, 1 July 1926 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. FC to MP, letter dated, 29 July 1927 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. 'Women', unpublished paper (FCP/NYPL/Cor.), 1–2.
72. FC to MP, letter dated, 13 September 1927 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. FC to Mark Starr, letter dated, 4 February 1932 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
76. FC to Helen Norton, letter dated, 9 February 1932 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
77. Ibid.
78. FC to EP, letter dated, 16 January 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
79. TW to FC, letter dated, 26 January 1924 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
80. FC to TW, letter dated, 30 April 1930 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
81. Marie-Reine Guindorf, 'In the spirit of association', *Tribune des Femmes-La femme Nouvelle* 1(15), 198–99, April, 1833 [all emphases in the original].
82. For an extended discussion of this newspaper and women workers' struggles in nineteenth century France, as well as for biographical details about Marie-Reine Guindorf, see Tamboukou 2015.
83. FC to EP, letter dated, 10 March 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
84. 'Women', unpublished paper (FCP/NYPL/Cor.), 8.
85. This essay was first presented at the meetings of the American Historical Association in December 1985 and was subsequently published in *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986), before being included in Scott's collected volume of *Feminism in History* (1997).
86. I have elsewhere discussed at length this rich body of critical feminist theories. See Tamboukou 2003, particularly Chap. 1.

87. Irigaray's question highlighted by Scott was the title of an article published in *Cultural Critique* in 1985: 'Is the subject of science sexed?' (see Scott 1997, 175, 180).
88. 'The Contribution of the ILGWU to the American Ideal', (FCP/NYPL/Writ.), 3.
89. 'Lesson 5: The intellectual in the labour movement', part of the course *Trade Union Policies and Tactis,* by David J. Saposs (FCP/NYPL/ILGWU), 1.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Ibid.
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Ibid., 2.
97. Obituary, 'David Saposs, 82, Labor Economist; Former Official of N.L.R.B. Dies—Also a Historian,' *New York Times,* November 16, 1968, p.37.
98. T.W. Price to FC, letter dated 1 September 1920 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
99. J.M. Mactavish to to FC, letter dated 6 September 1920 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
100. Ibid.
101. FC to Frank and Winifred Horrabin, letter dated 30 January 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. FH to FC, letter dated 2 May 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.), emphasis in the text.
105. FC to FH, letter dated 25 August 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
106. FH to FC, letter dated 2 May 1925 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
107. FC to EP, letter dated 16 January 1926 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
108. Ibid.
109. FC to David Stewart, letter dated 30 December 1937 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).

CHAPTER 4

Ethics, Aesthetics and Politics in Women Workers' Education

> *To those of our friends within the Labor Movement, who insist that we should not concern ourselves with purely cultural subjects, such as literature we wish to contrast the way in which this subject is presented in a university and in a workers' college. In the former art as expressed in literature, is entirely divorced from life. The teacher is generally concerned mainly with the form and the art of the content rather than with its social significance. On the contrary, in a Worker's College literature is presented as an expression of life, and a study is merely of the social forces, which it expresses [. . .] All things that are human are of concern to men and women who toil. But in workers' schools they will be studied as living forces.*[1]

This extract is from a paper Cohn wrote in November 1923 as a response to several criticisms that her educational and cultural activities received throughout her years of service at the ILGWU Education Department. In writing this paper for the ILGWU's newspaper *Justice*, Cohn felt the need to defend the idea of including cultural subjects in the workers' education curricula, as well as to show the difference that teaching culture to workers made. What is important to highlight here is Cohn's idea of 'art as an expression of life' and as a field of 'living forces'. What I argue in this chapter is that art and life are tightly interwoven in the politics and aesthetics of workers' education,

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creating an *artpolitics assemblage* that I will discuss and explicate framing it within Rancière's influential theorisation of the relation between aesthetics and politics, as well as Foucault's (1986b) notion of the *ethics and aesthetics of the self* as transformative forces in the constitution of the subject.

Unlike common perceptions, art is not an abstract universal for Rancière but rather a discursive regime, historically, socially, culturally and politically specific, while art history and labour history are inter-related in his analyses. Rancière has identified three such regimes, which, although overlapping, have specific rules of classification and taxonomy underpinning what is recognised and understood as art: the ethical regime, the representational regime and the aesthetics regime.

Within the discursive limitations of the ethical regime, art is contrasted to the notion of originality and truth as exemplary theorised and discussed in Plato. As it is well known, artists were excluded from Plato's universe since art was defined as the labour of the artisans, it was purely mimetic and there were no pure or original ideas to be found in it. Like common labourers then, artists could have no voice in the Republic. Their exclusion was justified on the grounds that their time was taken up by their work.

The ethical regime is then succeeded by the representational regime wherein art is granted its own privileged sphere, is differentiated from craft and labour, but at the same time is organised under a hierarchical system with strict taxonomy rules and classificatory principles. Within this regime, the artist is separated from the labouring classes and becomes an exceptional and charismatic figure, a talented genius, who shapes art movements and art histories.

It is only in the third schema, the aesthetic regime that previous hierarchies, constraints and limitations can be shattered, art can be mapped as an open plane of playful appearances, always fusing into ways of doing and modes of being, life and art being inextricably interwoven. Situated in this open field, the artist can take up different subject positions as a creator, a labourer, an activist, since art, life and politics are closely inter-related in the aesthetic regime. It is within the aesthetic regime then that 'the politics of aesthetics' take central stage; the aesthetic regime has historically become a battlefield of power relations and antagonistic forces at play, encompassed in what Rancière has famously theorised as 'the distribution of the sensible', *le partage du sensible*:

> I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the determinations that define the respective parts and positions within it. The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed . . . it defines what is visible or not in a common space, endowed with a common language, etc. There is thus an 'aesthetics' at the core of politics that has nothing to do with Benjamin's discussion of the 'aestheticization of politics' specific to the 'age of the masses' [. . .] It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time. (Rancière 2004, 12–13)

The 'distribution of the sensible' is therefore a system where inclusion and exclusion work hand in hand defining the grounds, subjects and implicit laws of certain communities of practice and thought. It has to be noted here that the 'sensible' should not be understood as something that makes sense but as something that can be perceived by the senses, 'what is visible and audible as well as what can be said, thought, made or done' (ibid., 85). As Rancière has lucidly noted earlier, time and space are crucial in 'the distribution of the sensible' and in this sense we can see how women workers are automatically thrown in its blind spots and grey areas. This is why Rancière rigorously argues that 'there is "an aesthetics" at the core of politics' (ibid., 13), linking his understanding of aesthetics to the way Foucault (1986b) has theorised entanglements between ethics, aesthetics, politics and pedagogical practices. In taking up the concept of *aesthetics* as central in the formation of subjectivities Foucault has highlighted the need for an *aesthetics of existence* to be cultivated through education, learning and agonistic practices, pointing to the empowering and transgressive possibilities of art:

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialised or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (ibid., 350–351)

Foucault's urge for the need of creating a form, a style for one's life has provoked intense objections about its supposed utopian and elitistic character.[2] But does Foucault have in mind a certain aesthetic model, a notion of a beautiful subjectivity that resembles a work of art like the famous lamp? The subject is not a substance for Foucault, it is nothing more than a form that keeps folding, unfolding and being moulded in an on-going process, *the aesthetics of the self*. Jon Simons (1995, 76) has thus discerned three central themes in the Foucauldian *aesthetics of the self*. First comes *the demands of style*, which Simons conceives as a never-ending struggle for transgressing the limits that constrain but at the same time define the very existence of human beings. The *demands of style* are directly related to the second theme: that of the *artistic practice as a source of empowerment*. This theme further elaborates the Foucauldian approach to a transgression of limits through the possibilities created by art. The art of living is therefore founded on the possibilities for interrogating one's present, working upon one's life and acting politically for the enhancement of this very life. This conception underlines the necessity of self-government as the kernel of *an aesthetics of existence* and leads to the third theme Simons has defined as *working with present conditions and limits*. These three themes, *the demands of style, the artistic practice as a form of empowerment* and *working with present conditions and limits* also ground the importance of education and pedagogical practices—what Foucault (1990) has influentially theorised as the *care of the self*—in cultivating *an aesthetics of existence*.

What I therefore argue is that Foucault's provocative suggestion, does not refer to a supposed model or art object that one's life orientation is striving to attain. *An aesthetics of existence* is seen as a sensibility towards what is happening around us, a sort of an aesthetic rationality, founded on a capacity to perceive, through an openness to experience. This sensibility is not limited to the private sphere. It extends to the public, what is out there that one cannot stand, a sensibility to what is intolerable and unacceptable. Such *an aesthetics of existence* also implies the development of an ability to judge, having the flexibility to change and have various options and criteria, for reconstructing oneself, ultimately *the ethics of the self*. In its relation to aesthetics, ethics is thus conceived as the reflexive form of freedom; 'what is ethics if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?' Foucault has asked (1991, 4).

In her autobiography, *A Bolton Childhood* (1973), British labour activist Alice Foley has expressed such entanglements between ethics, aesthetics and politics in no uncertain terms: 'For me the deadening

monotony of machine-minding was rendered bearable only by the harsh necessity of earning a living and redeemed solely by the day-to-day fellowship of countless other toilers,' (ibid., 59) she wrote about her experience at the Bolton cotton mill, where she started working when she was only 13 years old. 'But these subservient days were occasionally shot through with moments of magic when the spirit of freedom and joy broke through. Such a moment became enshrined in my first visit to the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan at the Theatre Royal, Churchgate,' (ibid., 65), she added. It was through art that the young working woman would experience freedom and joy. I will come back to the importance of theatre in the workers' cultural lives later on in the chapter, but what I want to highlight here is that the pursuit of culture for Foley, who later became an active member of the Workers' Educational Association, was a radical move against oppression. Art opened up for her different existential possibilities, cultivated her ability to criticise 'what is intolerable' and ultimately geared her will to reshape her life and imagine new moulds and forms of the self in the way Foucault and Rancière have suggested:

> As a member of a group of young socialists I hoarded my scanty pocket-money, amounting at that time to one penny in the shilling of factory earnings, so that I could afford with them the luxury of a monthly matinée. With a cheap seat in pit or gallery we saw most of the early Shaw and Galsworthy plays, followed by tea in the Clarion café in Market street, where I remember there was a fine William Morris fireplace [. . .] we returned home like exaltant young gods, tingling and athirst with the naïve faith that if only sufficient human beings could witness good drama and comedy it might change the world.' (ibid., 66).

In his analysis of the 'politics of aesthetics', Rancière has further emphasised the fact that boundaries and limitations do not only operate as a top down hierarchical mode of distribution, separating for example the workers from the bourgeoisie. As Cohn's paper previously in defence of the idea of teaching literature to workers shows, it was perhaps amongst workers themselves that 'the distribution of the sensible' was even more difficult to be discerned, particularly when gendered politics and power relations were involved. In writing the paper about the importance of teaching literature to workers, Cohn had actually criticised two opposing views: those who believed 'that the leaders of the Movement for Workers'

Education within the trade unions, do not appreciate the cultural value of literature [and those] who believe that Labor Colleges should not concern themselves with Literature'.[3] Cohn's response was adamant: 'We venture to disagree with both opinions. Those who fear that culture is in danger under workers' control [should do their homework],'[4] she suggested, and have a look at the curricula of workers' educational programmes across the country. They will find out that 'the study of literature is included in all, without exception'.[5] Her response to the other side has already been highlighted in the beginning of this chapter. It was the pedagogy of teaching literature that mattered and it was in the workers' hands that its transformative force could be unveiled, very much in the milieu of the *artpolitics assemblage* that we have discussed earlier. Literature for Cohn had the unique advantage of making a difference, creating long-lasting impressions upon the bodies and minds of the workers:

> Practically every change in our social and political structure was the realization of an ideal sponsored by some great literary genius. It is true that every age claims the credit for effecting changes, but nothing leaves a greater impress upon the soul than an appeal for social change and justice, made by a true artist.[6]

It was thus the politics of teaching literature that Cohn's paper highlighted in her argument of keeping literature in the workers' education curricula and programmes. Politics essentially involves opposition to 'the police order' that underpins and sustains 'the distribution of the sensible', Rancière has argued. Politics actually emerges as a challenge to the 'distribution of the sensible' by those who are excluded, 'the part which has no part' (2004, 29–30). In this context,'the distribution of the sensible' has a double sense in Rancière's work: it is both a form of symbolic violence, but also a form of resistance, in the sense of the possibility for redistribution, which is inherent in the very notion of distribution. But how does Rancière conceive the notion of redistribution?

In his reading of nineteenth-century workers' poetry, prose, as well as letters and diaries, Rancière has highlighted 'the thinking of those not "destined" to think' (2012), as a historical exemplar of 'redistribution of knowledge and truth'. In this light, the workers' collectives, be they formal trade unions or informal reading or drama groups, were crucial in opening up possibilities for redistribution through involving workers with the world of literature, drama, philosophy and science. These were all areas heavily laden with bourgeois ideas,

traditions and values: but as already noted in the previous chapter, it was through their encounter with these values that workers realised that a different world was possible and that they could become part of it.

Writing about the intellectual life of the British working classes, Jonathan Rose has particularly highlighted the importance of the nineteenth-century 'mutual improvement societies', which sustained and supported collaborative cultural and educational activities (2010, 58). As Rancière has lucidly put it, '[workers seek], to appropriate for themselves the night of those who can stay awake, the language of those who do not have to beg, and the image of those who do not need to be flattered' (2012, 22). In this context, Rancière argues there are no linear causalities between exploitation and class consciousness or collective actions; instead 'we must examine the mixed scene in which some workers with the complicity of intellectuals [. . .] replay and shift the old myth about who has the right to speak for others' (ibid., 22–23).

Cohn's friendship with Preston is such an exemplary mixed scene, as we have already seen in the previous chapter. Rose has given more examples of such mixed scenes in the Scottish weaver and miner communities, pointing to the many working-class libraries and reading groups in Scotland in the beginning of the nineteenth century: 'Weavers had to be literate for their work and mining companies wanted and educated work force,' Rose has noted in mapping the socio-economic conditions of possibility for such 'mutual communities of improvement' to emerge (2010, 59). Their short work hours—6 hours a day for miners and 4 days a week for weavers—also played a role in these friendly societies to flourish. As we have already seen earlier, time is important in 'the distribution of the sensible'. Rancière has written specifically about the cultural world of 'the proletarian nights'. Women workers did not have the luxury of such nights, since their unwaged work at home would absorb any free time they could possibly have. What some of them had however, is what I have called 'the proletarian summers', slack periods in the garment industry, for example, which opened up some space/time for them for educational and cultural activities. It is not surprising then that most schools for women workers in the industry in the USA would run during the summer period.

What is important to emphasise, is that 'redistribution' for Rancière should not be taken as an act of simply rearranging the existing order of things; it should rather be understood as an event that has the possibility of initiating a process of radical transformations. As Cohn previously simply put it in her essay about the need to study literature, workers' education may draw on literary outputs of the bourgeois world but it

radically transforms them into life forces. Smith, the Bryn Mawr Director, had also insisted that literature is a condition *sine qua non* for the intelligent understanding of life, and therefore 'fundamental in carrying out the purpose of a workers' school' (1929, 73). The following statement from a Bryn Mawr student powerfully shows why 'an intelligent understanding of life' was so important for women workers:

> Literature means to me the key to realms of beauty, dreams and fantasies [. . .] Often after a day's monotonous humdrum work I have rushed through the crowds of Broadway, mingling with the multitudes in my desire to escape myself. Yet, among the thousands I have felt alone [. . .] I wanted something. [. . .] But with my magic key of literature I was able to enter into strange lands. Sometimes, in the land of Poetry, I would meet with glorious sunsets, exquisite flowers, singing birds, storms on sea and on land [. . .] Sometimes in the land of Novels, I would see strange peoples, witness struggles between heart and mind. There I could hear things which my heart had often felt but could never have spoken [. . .] My possessing this magic key somewhat made up for my dull world.[7]

Literature is perceived as the key to 'worlds of illusions and realities'[8] for this woman-worker-writer. It is the imaginary work of literature that she highlights, which can be considered in the light of what Rancière has configured as 'the factory of the sensible' (2004, 43), a creative process through which 'a shared sensible world' can be formed, by bringing together 'the multitude of human activities' and experiences (ibid.). Some of the pedagogical practices for the teaching of literature in the summer residential schools truly reflect such shared sensibilities. Smith (1929) has actually written about how the teaching of literature in Bryn Mawr changed over the years to adapt to the students' needs and possibilities. In the beginning, students were given long reading lists and were encouraged to read as many book as possible. But the faculty soon realised that for many students this turned out to be a daunting task that in the end discouraged them from reading all together. They thus concentrated on fewer readings, usually done by reading aloud in groups and then discussing the content rather than the form. This was an approach 'in line with that of the European Folk High Schools, where the "living word" in the discussion group is considered more important than instruction through books' (ibid., 119). Smith had travelled to Europe to canvass ideas and approaches to women workers' education in preparation for the Bryn

Mawr School and she was in correspondence with trade unionists in the UK and in France: 'As we are sailing through the Channel and past the shores of France, we are wishing that we could once more get off at Cherbourg as we did before and take the first train back to Paris,'[9] she wrote to Bouvier, a leading figure in the French garment industry.

The process of fabricating 'a common habitat' is thus an agonistic one for Rancière, a site of struggles and conflicts, 'a polemical distribution of modes of being and "occupations" in a space of possibilities' (2004, 43). As already noted, in the Platonic world of the *Republic* that Rancière has persistently criticised in his discussion of the politics of 'the distribution of the sensible', work takes up time and thus de facto excludes workers and artisans from the city politics. But starting with Schiller's aesthetic revolution that radically challenged the boundaries between active understanding and passive sensibility, work was rethought of as a crucial 'aesthetic practice' in the distribution of the sensible. Rancière has particularly noted that the Marxist notion of work, as 'the generic essence of mankind' (ibid., 44) emerged in the context of the aesthetic programme of German Idealism, 'art as the transformation of thought into the sensory experience of the community' (ibid.). Workers could not remain passive in 'the factory of the sensible': it was precisely their active intervention in making culture that I will now discuss.

Making Culture: Writing Prose and Poetry

Being convinced that art and literature should become part of the workers' experience and everyday life, Cohn devised a range of practices that would radically intervene 'in the distribution of the sensible'. As we have already seen, she firmly believed that literature was crucial in workers' lives, since 'it is not knowledge of exploitation that the worker needs [but] a knowledge of self that reveals [. . .] a being dedicated to something else besides exploitation, a revelation of self that comes circuitously by way of the secret of others' (Rancière 2012, 20). Thus, it was not only a passive understanding and appreciation of literature that the workers' education was about: composition instruction and the development of writing pedagogies became important components in the curricula of workers' education in general and the summer schools for women workers' in the industry in particular. As Smith wrote in her book on Bryn Mawr: 'from the joy and illumination the industrial worker finds in literature, one may foreshadow what her creative expression might be, once released from the monotony and fatigue of the long day in the factory' (1929, 142).

Thus, despite initial hesitations and against the view that English composition was not relevant to workers' education, its teaching became essential: 'It is true we are here to study industrial problems but we have had industrial experiences which are an important contribution to the studying and to the solution of industrial problems,'[10] Ida Ritter, a Bryn Mawr student wrote in 1925. 'If, however we do not know how to express ourselves and make known to others our experiences, they will be of no use.'[11] In her view, the teaching of English composition gave workers the opportunity to express themselves: 'Not all of us can get up before an audience and tell our experiences, but some people can write them a great deal better than tell about them.'[12] Ritter's view about the importance of teaching English composition to women workers at Bryn Mawr seems to concur with Elizabeth Andrews' stance vis-à-vis the working women's difficulties of speaking publically at the other side of the Atlantic. In her autobiography, *A Woman's Work is Never Done*, Andrews has written about her absolute stage fright at the idea of presenting her own paper to the Wesley Guild. A miner's daughter, Andrews eventually became a Labour Party organiser and a suffragist, but it was the experiences of her youth that shaped her relations with young women activists:

> I wrote the paper but was so nervous at the thought of reading it that I made myself ill and was not able to attend [. . .] I realised in this first experience how the mind can affect us physically. It taught me to be very patient and understanding when training women to take part in public work for the first time (2006[1957], 14).

Thus it was not only Bryn Mawr that had included English composition in its curriculum. This subject was part of most educational programmes for workers on both sides of the Atlantic: it featured prominently in the curricula of all residential schools for women workers in the USA, as well as in the Hillcroft Residential College for Working Women in the UK. In teaching English composition however, what the workers' courses did was to combine mainstream pedagogies with more experimental projects that were emerging from the field of progressive education, as we have already seen in the Introduction. It was the material embeddedness of these approaches that gave them their distinctive and radical character, the removal of grammatical, structural and syntactical abstractions in favour of contextualised examples, vignettes and case studies. Students were encouraged to compose autobiographical narratives as an entry into

the art of writing and many of them turned out to become beautiful prose pieces. In sketching a day of her working life in 1929, Bryn Mawr student Sarah Gordon starts with a literary exercise in the diaristic genre by using metaphors, rhetorical questions and oppositions, as well as making skilful interchanges between the narrative 'I' and 'we', amongst many tropes that emerge in her writing:

> What does a day in the life of a working class mean? It seems so insignificant and yet it means so much. I have a habit of saying when I start out in the morning that I am going to war, for war it is for a worker, in an unorganized trade especially. We must always be on the defence because we never can tell how our day will end; it depends on the mood of our employer. I will however try and describe one of the average day in my life.[13]

Through their autobiographies, women workers wrote beautifully about a variety of themes and concerns in their lives: their love for education, their longing for nature, their anxiety and fear of unemployment. Their work life was unsurprisingly the most popular topic, but family and background topics also featured prominently in their themes. There were finally a number of imagined narratives, where women workers wrote, for example, how they had begun to see their future selves, as speakers, activists or organisers. Through autobiographical writing, women workers often took the opportunity to rewrite themselves as subjects in culture. Some of them also dared experiment in the world of fiction, although there are very few extant pieces of fiction writing with the exception of many pieces of autobiographical fiction, such as Theresa Malkiel's much-celebrated *Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker:*

> *November 24*
>
> Well, well, I think this strike is a more serious business than I thought, otherwise the papers wouldn't make so much of it. Why, every one of them is full of the strike and strikers; we are made so much of. It really feels good to be somebody [. . .] It's simply amazing what a difference one day may make. I think a complete change has come over me, and no wonder! [. . .] That's just the reason why I went down, just for the fun of it, but it's getting quite serious [. . .] That was a pretty smart woman who said that the trouble with us girls is our seeing life from its funny side only. That we think it nothing but a place of entertainment and therefore try to dance through it. Then she added that it wasn't so–that life was a pretty serious proposition, and us girls should take our time to think more about it. Honestly, there's

> nothing that will make you think so much as a strike does. I know it did me. I've been thinking and thinking till my head aches (Malkiel 1910, 6–7).

Malkiel's diary is a dramatic revival of the rise of the 20,000, the girls' strike that erupted in New York in November 1909 and took the American labour movement by storm. Taking the diaristic genre as the form of her narrative Malkiel gave a first person account of how the strike erupted, what made the girls defy their male labour leaders' hesitation, as well as what the strike meant to them, not only in terms of their revolt against exploitation, but also in terms of existential awareness and passionate expression of their will and joy for life and action. *The Diary of a Shirtwaist Striker* was published in 1910, soon after the strike had successfully ended and became one of the most well-known and influential pieces of the American labour literature of the time. It is not difficult to see why. Philippe Lejeune has suggested that the diary is defined by the way 'it sculpts life as it happens and takes up the challenge of time' (2009, 173). This is exactly what Malkiel's diary did in fleshing out the minutiae, emotional moments, and hidden aspects of a great event in labour history. Malkiel chose the form of a fictional diary to write about a historical event that she had herself participated, instead of writing a direct testament of her own lived experiences, but when she did it she had already left the industry and had become a journalist, as well as a leading member of the socialist party in the USA.

Pesotta, who returned to her sewing machine soon after she stepped down from the ILGWU hierarchy, was amongst those few women workers who wrote fiction, although she drew on her lived experiences in doing so. She actually wrote three novels, as well as a number of fictional short stories and novellas. But although she published two autobiographies, a political one recounting her experiences of being an ILGWU labour activist (Pesotta 1987[1944]), as well as a personal one as a memoir of her early days in Russia (1958), her fictional writings never found a publisher. They have all been carefully archived in the collection of her papers, at the New York Public Library archives, where I found them while working there.[14] Fiction gave Pesotta the poetic licence to write about intimate, obscure and vulnerable moments in the lives of dressmakers and garment workers that her agonistic position as a labour organiser would have not allowed her to express. It is through her funny story *About a Girl and a Cat*[15] that we share some happy moments from

her childhood memories in Russia, before the fears of pogroms led her to forced exile and it is in her epistolary story *To a Spinster Sitting on a Park Bench*[16] that we have a glimpse of the lonely ambience of getting old as a single woman worker. Women workers' solitude is at the heart of Pesotta's literary pieces, since it was only single women like herself and Cohn that could ever make it to the harsh sexist world of labour politics. Loneliness however can become the fate of any woman worker in Pesotta's literary world; her novella *Mary* is a tragic depiction of a woman dressmaker who sacrifices everything for the man she loves, but she is finally rejected from his new social world that she had worked so hard to enable him to enter:

> Everybody in the trade knows Mary, the tall woman with sunken cheeks, dull-grey hair hanging untidily about her head. All battered, she is dressed in time worn clothes with an old-fashioned hat sitting uncomfortably on the right side of her forehead. Her prematurely wrinkled face bears an expression of utter hopelessness [. . .] She is often seen walking along the avenue, always loaded with newspapers under her arms, perpetually looking either for a job, or for a place to rest up. There really is no place for her tired body—Mary lost her mind years ago.[17]

Unlike Pesotta, who never published her fiction, Marguerite Audoux (1863–1937) became a successfully published author on both sides of the Atlantic. Her novels are in this light exceptional. Audoux was a seamstress working in Paris, but although writing about her experiences, she chose the novel as a literary form of expression. Between 1911 and 1937 she published 5 novels and several short stories.[18] Her first two autobiographical novels, as well as her short stories, were almost simultaneously translated in English. Her first novel *Marie Claire* took the prestigious French literary prize *Prix Femina* for 1910 and became a huge publishing success. Fiction gave Audoux the opportunity to convey impressions, emotions and affects that would be more difficult to express through the ethics of 'the autobiographical pact' (Lejeune 1989), the understanding and implicit agreement with her readers that she was writing about real life events and real life personalities and characters. Her short story, *the Fiancée* is about a single girl's train journey to Paris, where she meets a peasant's family travelling for their son's wedding. They have not met their future daughter-in-law yet, so a joke goes around the carriage that perhaps she is the one, travelling incognito to meet them. On arriving to Paris, they

separate and it is then that the young working girl feels the loneliness of the city more profoundly than ever:

> When I looked at these good people, who were so anxious to love the wife their son had chosen, I felt quite sorry that I was not to be their daughter-in-law. I knew how sweet their affection would have been to me. I had never known my parents and I had always lived among strangers [. . .] When the cab had disappeared I went slowly out into the streets. I could not make my mind up to go back to my lonely little room. I was twenty years old and nobody had ever spoken of love to me (Audoux 1912, 104–106).

Beyond the constraints of the 'autobiographical pact' there were other reasons why Audoux chose fiction to write about her life. While her lived experiences gave her rich material and inspirations to work with, Audoux was also writing to forget the miseries and drudgeries of her working life, as well as to entertain her solitude through writing, Octave Mirbeau noted in his enthusiastic preface to her first novel, (1910, 4). Although Audoux was writing beautifully and simply about real places, characters, emotions and human relations, fiction gave her the ground to create a synthesis that went beyond the material constraints of their actualisation, opening up planes of imaginary worlds both for the heroes of her stories, as well as for their author. The poetic licence of fiction, its literary forces, as well as the freedom of not writing an autobiography gave her the opportunity to find some harmony and meaning in the otherwise chaos of the Real. Interestingly enough, Audoux did not attend any kind of organised workers' education. Her literary talent erupted in the wider cultural milieu of the French metropolis that we have already discussed in the Introduction.

But while women workers were constrained in the production of literary prose, they were extremely prolific in poetry writing. This 'poetic spring' was an effect of a wider progressive educational trend of their times putting forward the idea that poetry was a creative process that all students could join in search of existential truth and expression. As Hollis has noted, the women workers of the Bryn Mawr Summer School 'had a passion for poetry, so much that they met with faculty after their regular classes to read and write verses, which were published in their annual *Shop and School* magazine' (2004, 36). In her

meticulous study of the Bryn Mawr's students' poetry writing Hollis has found out that most of their poems were about work life and would go under the sub-genre of 'lyrical protest poetry', that is, poems written to 'right a wrong, reveal an inequality, or demand justice' (ibid., 129). Very much like Rancière's nineteenth-century workers—poets, working women's poetry expressed their desire to be free of labour altogether, highlighting its drudgeries and boredom:

> Weary, monotonous
> is everyday toil!
> Happy when the time passes by.
> No love for the work do I feel,
> Just mechanically pushing the wheel[19]

The grey picture of their work life was often juxtaposed with idyllic images of nature, particularly as these poems were written in the beautiful Bryn Mawr campus where women workers had the opportunity to enjoy nature at its best. The harmony and beauty of nature were used as moral symbols in their discourse, revealing 'truths' that were hidden in the rush and frustration of their working life, as beautifully expressed in Betty Katz's poem included in the 1932 *Shop and School*:

> Tree, beautiful tree,
> As I lie under thee,
> You intoxicate me,
> Your height makes me see
> The beauty above thee.
> Branches so loose and free
> Make me forget the slavery
> Far behind.
> The leaves full of fragrance
> And delight
> Awaken in me
> Desire for right,
> Whisper, telling me
> Of secrets beyond thee,
> O glorious thing of nature,
> I love thee.[20]

Writing poetry also gave them a platform to protest against inequalities, express political thoughts, initiate dialogues with 'the bourgeois other' and exchange opinions about their oppression:

> Thoughts
> I work, you play,
> You have everything,
> I have nothing.
> Why should I sit here, afraid to take my coat off?
> Is it because I smell so strong of acid?
> Why don't I take my gloves off?
> Is it because my hands are so rough and dirty-looking?
> Why do I keep my hat on?
> Is it because my hair smells like a wet dog?
> Acid again. Acid that smells like burning Sulphur.
> There are fumes of Sulphur in Hell.
> You daughters of the rich,
> You walk so easy and sure of yourselves,
> You don't smell at all.
> Your hands are well kept,
> Your hair shines with cleanliness,
> Your eyes are bright and eager looking.
> But who makes your sweetness, your cleanliness possible?
> Is it not workers like me?
> I work, you play,
> You have everything;
> I have nothing.[21]

Poetry was thus at the heart of how workers on both sides of the Atlantic expressed themselves in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through formal and informal publishing networks and outlets. As already noted earlier, Rancière has written beautifully about the nineteenth-century working-class poets in France (2012) and although there were not many women amongst them, my research with nineteenth-century French seamstresses has shown that there was a constant preoccupation with poetry, literature and drama in the feminist newspapers that these women workers, wrote, edited and published in the long durée of the nineteenth century (see Tamboukou 2015). Brown's poem written as an imaginary dialogue to 'the daughters of the rich' very much reminded me of a nineteenth-century poem of a proletarian girl addressed to her brother

and published in the 11th issue of the French feminist newspaper *Apostolat des Femmes/La Femme Nouvelle* in January 1833:

> Verses to my brother
> How happy are you my brother . . .
> You walk on earth without trembling
> You can know everything, see everything
> As for me [. . .] I stay put with my mother,
> Thinking and sewing in the evening
> With your strength and your youth
> You can face whoever hurts you,
> [. . .]
> I must suffer and complain,
> I am weak, nobody fears me,
> All alone at night, I am afraid
> [. . .]
> You can dream of independence,
> choose to be whoever you want,
> You can take a leap with your young soul
> [. . .] I should only form wishes
> You are like a young frivolous butterfly,
> a happy bird which sings and flies,
> [. . .] I am like a ball thrown in the air
> I leave and take my shackles with me
> In walking your life,
> you can [. . .] take the sugar of all flowers
> But I am the turtledove
> I will die being faithful
> Somebody will draw my tears.[22]

The young proletarian girl, who writes this poem, juxtaposes her brother's freedom of movement and independence to her own solitude and restriction within inner thoughts and wishes. He is free, like a butterfly or a bird, she is like an object, a tennis ball thrown in the air. There is a strong corporeal element in this poem: the young man's physical strength is opposed to the proletarian girl's weakness, solitude and fear. He has the choice and the possibility of seeking pleasure, she should always be faithful to somebody and tied to them until death. We can see the moral elements, but also the social and political themes that populate women workers' poetry creating a particularly intense milieu for their creativity to be expressed.

There is also an interesting conjunction of thinking and sewing in this poem, also invoked in the prose, poetry and autobiographical writing of other seamstresses that I have looked at: the possibility of being reflective while doing the monotonous work of sewing either in the industry, the workshop or at home. Speaking in Heller's film, *The Women of Summer*, John Broadus Mitchell, an economic historian of the Bryn Mawr faculty remembered how impressed he was by Pesotta's response to one of his lectures about the destructive monotony of machine work:

> I remember one day in class I had been expanding on [. . .] the repetitive work in the factory, where you just do the same over and over and over and there is nothing to permit you to transfer your personality to your product or anything of that kind. Rose Pesotta spoke up and said 'I don't think that's true'. I said, 'what about it Rose?' She said 'due to the automation I don't have to look at it', she said, 'but I just let my mind wander . . . it's a period of leisure for me and contemplation'. I made the mistake to ask 'what do you think about Rose?' She said, 'you'd be surprised . . . '[23]

Working women's literary production has a long, albeit neglected history that goes back well into the eighteenth century, as Donna Landry has shown in her important study of *The Muses of Resistance* (1990). Ellen Johnston, 'the Factory Girl' poet carried this tradition well into the nineteenth century and became one of the few working woman who saw her poetry in print during the Victorian period. To go back to the horizontal power relations in 'the distribution of the sensible', Johnston has interestingly written about the impossibility of being a recognised woman poet in the labouring classes, particularly highlighting her suffering from other factory girls, 'who did not understand, consequently they wondered, became jealous and told falsehoods of me' (1867, 9). What I have also found in my research with women workers' creative writings is that it is mostly in their literature and poetry that we can trace gendered aspects in the memory of work, a newly emerging area in the field of cultural memory that has yet to be explored and expanded (see Tamboukou 2016b). Johnston's poems leave forceful traces from the memory of work and in this aspect they are quite different from the Bryn Mawr's students' poetry, where work is always painted in dull colours. 'Kennedy's dear Mill' is such a lyrical poem that throws a different light in the lived

experiences of the 'factory girl', maybe because Johnston was still writing in the early period of industrialisation:

> Kennedy's Dear Mill
> Oh! Kennedy's dear Mill
> To you I'll sing a song
> [. . .]
> Thou hast a secret spell
> For all as well as me;
> Each girl loves thee well
> That ever wrought in thee
> They may leave thy blessed toil;
> But, find work they will,
> They return back in a while
> The Kennedy's dear mill (Johnston 1867, 19)

What were then the conditions of possibility that enabled working women's literary production? In pointing to the history of an 'autodidact culture', which goes back in the late middle ages, but had its heyday in the late nineteenth century, Rose has highlighted the role of the movement for workers' education and its contribution to the emergence of such literary modes of expression (2010, 11). It is in this socio-historical and political context that far from being restricted to the elite, art was opened up to the masses through different channels, as we have already seen earlier. 'The development of talent and the enjoyment of the beautiful things which talent creates, should not be limited to the well-to-to do,'[24] Cohn wrote in 1926 when the ILGWU joined with other unions to provide a $1,500 scholarship to sponsor a talented working-class artist to study abroad.

In thus excavating women workers' creative writings, what I suggest is that women's intervention in the educational and cultural practices of the labour movement have radically interfered in 'the distribution of the sensible' in the interface of 'the "aesthetic" avant-garde and the "political" avant-garde: the invention of sensible forms and material structures for a life to come', a kind of 'aesthetic anticipation of the future' (Rancière 2004, 29–30). Art as critique has been extended to politics, art and politics becoming constitutive of each other, an *artpolitics assemblage*, within which work, far from being a stumbling block to artistic and aesthetic

practices is crucially linked to their conditions of possibility, wherein the development of a culture of reading was crucial, as I will discuss next.

Books for a Troubled World: Technologies of Critical Reading

> I am a product of that education. Working at the machine or sticking pins in dresses does not do much for the education of the members, but after my work was done I was offered an opportunity by my organization to study in a school and learn in classes where I was taught the philosophy of trade unionism [...] Our International found out that teaching girls how to picket a shop was not enough and they taught us how to read books... The girls decided to ask the Public Library to open up a branch where they could get the best books on trade unionism and various subjects [...] It is an inspiration to the workers of New York. The girls and boys come together to get the works of the great authors they cannot get an opportunity to read at home.[25]

In June 1918 Mollie Friedman gave a passionate speech at the American Federation of Labor Convention in Saint Paul, Minnesota, highlighting the importance of workers' education. 'When I was asked to join the union, I felt I had to join it, but now I feel that I would give my life for an organization that will educate its members,'[26] she concluded her speech. Friedman, who eventually unseated Cohn as ILGWU Vice-President in 1925, had not fully realised at the time that if it were not for Cohn and a line of passionate women organisers before and after her, she would have never gone through the educational experiences that shaped the route of her life. Apart from including literature and poetry in the curricula of workers' education, Cohn was deeply aware that it was reading itself as a practice for life that would reinforce and sustain the workers' literary engagement. She thus organised the book's division of the union through close collaboration with the New York Public Library (NYPL). Her papers include yearly exchanges with NYPL librarians, meticulously arranging how the library would supply books for workers: 'I have your request for a camp collection for your summer home,'[27] Ruth Wellman from the NYPL extended division wrote to her in June 1927, inviting her 'to come in to talk over your needs and make an application'.[28] Moreover 'the book division' of the union would 'bring good books to the attention of our members [through] annotated bibliographies, interpretive book reviews and discussion on the appreciation

of literature', Cohn wrote in her 1946 essay, 'Books for a troubled world',[29] raising important questions about the role of literature in the labour movement:

> What kind of literature best sustains an intellectual, moral and emotional balance? Can the creative novel, which deepens sympathetic understanding and refines the sensitivity in human relationships combine art with a serious consideration of the problems of our time? How much assistance can be expected from the critical reviewer in selecting books?[30]

Apart from the questions that Cohn raised here, the reading of literature opened up different possibilities. During her years as a newly arrived immigrant in the New World first and as an ILGWU active labour organiser later on, Pesotta developed a long-standing relation with the various branches of the New York Public Library. It was in their reading rooms that she first studied English after realising that her night language school was inadequate: 'when summer vacation came I devised my own method of learning the new language. In the East Ninety-sixth Street Public Library Harlem branch, I found an excellent Russian section, and began re-reading my favourite authors', she wrote (Pesotta 1958, 246–247). Pesotta's 'migration capital' that I discussed in the previous chapter created interesting connections; far from being 'lost in translation', she came to learn and enjoy English through literature in translation. But her relation with the Public Library went well beyond her struggle to learn English: it was in the Library that she would keep her mind busy during the slack period of the garment industry fighting the ghost of unemployment, when in despair with her amorous relationships, or while arranging books to be sent for the ILGWU educational activities she was organising over her labour activism years. Finally, it was in the Library that she found a shelter and consolation when she was forced to step down from the leadership of the union. Writing in her diary in the first days of returning home after almost ten years of intense labour activity she noted: 'My first day 'at home' [. . .] I shall try make myself comfortable while the slack season is on [. . .] After lunch I went to the public library to read.'[31] In light of this, the New York Public Library became a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1994b) for Pesotta, as well as many of her contemporaries, a marginal alternative space challenging the hegemonic striated spaces of the garment industry, as well as of the male dominated spaces of the labour movement.

It was not only with public libraries that Cohn collaborated in setting up and running 'her baby', as she called the ILGWU's Book Division.[32] As she wrote to the ILGWU labour leader Morris Bialis in August 1958, while looking back at her activities, she was in close collaboration with publishers, who she had persuaded to donate books or offer them in lower prices in an attempt to widen their reading public, by reaching out to people who would have never got the habit of reading: 'important publishers expressed their appreciation of our Book Division stating that not only do we make a contribution to the trade but we also make an important contribution to the culture of our country'.[33]

Reading became indeed a powerful technology of cultural intervention, a radical wave of interference in 'the distribution of the sensible'. Elsewhere in my work I have followed genealogies of reading in the cultural world of the nineteenth-century French seamstresses, following their literary reviews in the French feminist newspapers of the nineteenth century (see Tamboukou 2015). Apart from their journal articles, reviews and commentaries, their passion for reading was also forcefully expressed in their autobiographies: 'I passionately loved reading; I could indulge in this penchant in the evening next to my mother on condition that I read to her, while she worked,' Suzanne Voilquin wrote in her memoirs (1866, 20). The celebrated seamstress/novelist Audoux has also written about how uncomfortable she felt when being interrogated at work about her love for reading:

> Sometimes I brought with me a book wrapped up in the same paper as the bread for my lunch. The *patron* turned over the leaves and gave it back to me quickly, and in a scolding tone he said, "You have a passion for reading, eh?" This reproof had been flung at me so often that I had acquired the habit of excusing myself by replying that I only read in odd moments, or during the night when I could not sleep (1920, 41)

While recognising the importance of reading in making up for the formal education they lacked, the French seamstresses would also point to its discursive limitations: 'Instead of that solid instruction that young girls are now beginning to receive, I extracted from these novels false notions about real life,' Voilquin wrote (1866, 20). The more she read, the more critical she became; her autobiography thus lucidly reveals the philosophical and literary archive that would later underpin and inform her reviews and cultural interventions in the feminist newspapers she

edited and contributed: 'From Voltaire I only read his theatre with interest; I preferred Rousseau; from him I read with joy *Emile* and mostly the *Nouvelle Héloïse*. [. . .] I no longer felt the same after this reading' (ibid., 36). Writing her memoirs at the end of a long active life in the French syndicalist movement and after she had published four historical studies, Bouvier forcefully expressed her love for the French National Library: 'as soon as I had some free moments, I would go into the temple of wisdom, where a multitude of interesting work has been assembled and religiously preserved' (1983 [1936], 233), she wrote, thinking that she was one of the few women who had passed their life in the industry but had discovered freedom in the spaces of the National Library.

But reading was equally important for women workers on the other side of the Channel. In writing the history of 'ordinary readers' Rose (2010) has noted Margaret Perry's testimony of her mother, who was a Nottingham dressmaker: 'The public library was her salvation. She read four or five books a week all her life but had no one to discuss them with. She had read all the classics several times over in her youth and again in later years, and the library had a job to keep her supplied with current publications.'[34] In her autobiography Foley has written about her reading experiences while attending night-school at the age of 13, when she had already entered the factory: 'I was happy there and recall writing a little essay on Romeo and Juliet' (1973, 55). Her little essay gave her a book prize, as well as the opportunity to go on with the evening classes of the Secondary School, where amongst the book titles 'chalked on the blackboard [. . .] my eye caught the strange name *Jayne Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte' (ibid.). Foley admitted that while she chose the book because of 'the odd name' she was totally enthralled by it: 'I read the book avidly for it was an enchanting experience in a new romantic world', she wrote (ibid.), giving us some rare glimpses of young working-class girls' relation to literature, a field where much research yet needs to be done.

Indeed, Rose has particularly highlighted the fact that many working-class autobiographies have lengthy extracts and even whole chapters about their authors' readings, but he has also noted that the autodidact culture, which was supported by reading practices 'was an overwhelmingly male territory' until the late nineteenth century (2010, 18). And yet, Foley's enchantment with Shakespeare and Brontë does not come out of the blue. Landry's important study of working-class women's poetry in Britain in the eighteenth century (1990) points to the fact that that there must have been strong reading practices and traditions amongst women of the

working classes, well before the nineteenth century. In revisiting histories and modes of literary production that have been marginalised, hidden or ignored, we also excavate feminist genealogies of reading, embedded in the multi-modalities of informal education.

Reading sustains practices of the self, Foucault has noted; like writing, it has a transformative effect upon the self, it is a *technology of the self* in its own right (1997, 211). Foucault's study of *the technologies of the self* (1988) has been restricted within the male elite of classical antiquity. Elsewhere in my work, I have shown that the study of *technologies* of reading and writings throws light on how women teachers have moulded new forms of subjectivity at the turn of the twentieth century. In doing this I have also argued that the inclusion of gender as an analytical category changes the conceptual understanding of such practices, as well as their effects upon gendered subjects (Tamboukou 2003). What my research with women workers' narratives and creating writings has further shown is that reading and writing as practices of the self-transgress and deconstruct boundaries and divisions between intellectuals and workers, unveiling submerged histories in the area of informal education. Amateur theatricals and adventures in labour drama were amongst such experiments that the workers' education movement adopted and cultivated, as I will discuss next.

Staging the Revolution

'It is in the theatre, the new temple of popular aspirations, that one can see the laboring class living its true life,' Rancière has suggested (2012, 25). Already in the Introduction I have highlighted Michelet's lectures at the *Collège de France* on the educational role of the theatre for the people, which largely influenced Charpentier's *Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson*. My research with the nineteenth-century feminist movement in France has also shown how the proletarian young women, who run the first feminist newspapers had frequent reviews of theatrical plays that they presented and discussed in relation to their engagement with gendered issues and problems of their times. What is striking in their articles is the immediacy of their response to the cultural production of their times and geographies. This is how Voilquin reviewed the one act vaudeville, *Reine, Cardinal et Page*, by François Ancelot in December 1832, just a few days after the play had its premiere at the *Théâtre de Vaudeville* in Paris:

> The character of the queen in M. Ancelot's play is superbly traced. He expresses better than me, what I expect from women [. . .] At last then, an author who understands us! The rest that he has shown in this nice vaudeville and in his other works are excellent paintings! He touches the intimate feelings of the heart with a feminine truth and delicacy! The intrigue is based upon a true fact; the play is written with elegance; the characters are truthfully historical and staged very well through the effect of contrasts.[35]

Voilquin was enthusiastic about the author's insights in women's world and confidently conveyed the view that theatre has the power not only to arouse feelings of joy and entertainment, but also to form views and influence perceptions, in short to educate. As a matter of fact, she could not disentangle emotions and affects from reason and understanding and she believed that the experience of theatre created a plane for emotions, affects, reason and knowledge to co-exist: 'before I can articulate any thought, it has to pass from my heart, I can only talk of my impressions',[36] she wrote about the play *Aoust 1572 ou, Charles IX a Orleans*, a historical drama by Jean Lesguillon that she had also seen performed at the Théâtre du Panthéon in December 1832. The importance of feelings notwithstanding, some reflections and evaluations were unavoidable: although the historical facts of the drama referred to the massacre of St Bartholomew's night, the sentiments were almost contemporary, Voilquin suggested, making allusions to the turbulent politics of her times. She further commented on the charming scenes of love and her overall feeling was that there was a lot of hope amongst young French intellectuals, a generation that the playwright was emerging from. When *La Voix des Femmes*, the first daily feminist newspaper was published in the wake of the 1848 February revolution, it also included a cultural column 'a feuilleton', where interesting theatrical plays were presented and discussed.

The establishment of Charpentier's *Conservatoire Populaire de Mimi Pinson* at the beginning of the twentieth century thus came as no surprise in the context of the wider intellectual and cultural milieu that it emerged from. As Poole has noted the idea of this *Conservatoire* 'had its roots in a substantial nineteenth-century tradition of music-making by French workers' (1997, 232). There were strong moral, educational and pedagogical elements in this tradition, but until the turn of the century women were not included. Innovative as it was, Charpentier's *Conservatoire* was not the only music project to include women. In 1901 Ernest Chebroux founded the singing society *L'Œuvre de la Chanson Française*, which was enthusiastically endorsed

by Marguerite Durande's feminist newspaper *La Fronde:* 'The love of simple souls for rhythm, harmony, melody is confirmed by the enthusiasm which brings . . . working girls to . . . those evening classes of M. Chebroux,'[37] an article on 'People and the Art' emphasised in August 1903. There were significant changes between these two contemporary movements in women workers' musical education that show how the field was from the beginning a terrain of antagonistic powers at play and remained so throughout the twentieth century as I will show in this section.

Chebroux's approach was to educate working women in respectability, which meant to accept their domestic duties and avoid the vices of the modern city in which they worked and lived. Influenced by the romantic socialist movements of the nineteenth century and being himself a member of the anarchist circles in Paris, Charpentier's approach was more liberal, vis-à-vis gender, but still there was nothing fundamentally wrong with gendered roles in his and indeed in most socialist and anarchist comrades' universe. As Madeleine Pelletier had aptly put it in an article she wrote in May 1905:

> The socialist worker has a conception of women no more elevated than the religious worker. Even the fraction called the most advanced, the anarchists, have in general nothing for women but mistrust. In the society envisioned by Kropotkin, women do not work. They have only to be mothers of families.[38]

What was common in both perceptions about women workers' dramatic music education was the idea of 'a theatre of instruction', which was promoted by the French philosophers Rousseau and Diderot, Raphael Samuel has noted, pointing to its later version of Michelet's 'didactic play' that we have already noted earlier (1985, xvi). A philanthropic approach, as well strict hierarchical relations were also embedded in this kind of theatre, quite simply the idea that the cultivated elite should organise educational programmes and policies without considering the lived experiences and needs of proletarian girls and women in the case of the conservatoires. Thus, while Charpentier encouraged a degree of autonomy amongst his pupils he remained 'le Maître', Poole has noted (1997, 235). And yet it was from this tradition of 'the didactic play' that the 'peoples' theatres' experiments emerged at the turn of the century in France and other European countries, Samuel has written, particularly

highlighting the role of the socialist movement in this development (1985, xvii).

Music was indeed the main cultural thrust of the early socialist movement in Britain and was organically incorporated in the various drama and musical groups that were formed during this period. Drama encouraged creative collective work, but also individual discipline; 'it offered the kind of intellectual freedom that had always been the prime objective of the autodidacts' Rose has written (2010, 82) giving an impressive list of amateur theatrical groups and their repertoires during the first decades of the twentieth century. Samuel (1985, 27) has particularly highlighted close interrelations between drama groups and the education of working women in the context of co-operative education: 'it introduced them to good literature, taught them to speak well, and gave them the necessary confidence. In addition, the acting took them out of the hum-drum of everyday affairs'.[39]

But while championed by many forms of labour and socialist groups of the time, labour co-operative drama was nevertheless underpinned by a desire to transcend working-class needs and access a higher culture, a more spiritual plane of existence 'in brief, *emancipation* from the working class's condition of existence' Samuel has commented (ibid., 29, emphasis in the text). The power of music and drama was thus perceived within the discursive limitations of Rancière's representational regime, a *sui-generis* sphere of transcendent values of beauty, harmony — and subsequently hierarchies. Even when workers seemed to be determined to take control of their relation to art through drama expression and appreciation, it was still conveyed as a desire to transcend their condition: 'We are going to force the doors open, we are going to take our place at the feast of beauty [. . .] There will be an Art for the People, produced by the people, played by the people, enjoyed by the people for we will not be content with the commercialized stuff of modern capitalist society', Labour Party politician Herbert Morrison had fiercely argued in 1925 (cited in Donoughue and Jones 2001 [1973], 71).

The theatre movements that erupted in the 1920s and 30s however, 'opened up a new epoch in the socialist imagination and in the relationship of socialist movements to their theatrical auxiliaries' Samuel has emphatically noted, to the point that when looking at them it is not possible to talk about a dramatic tradition, but rather about 'moments' (1985, xx), perhaps something like 'the magic moments' that Foley's autobiography has recounted previously. Looking at some of these moments, Samuel (ibid., 33) has noted

that amongst its many differences from the labour drama the Workers' Theatre Movement put emphasis on class struggle, which it flagged up and celebrated. Led by the communist part of socialism, this movement was a theatre of action and political intervention. In the words of its theoretician Huntly Carter: 'workers should edit present class-struggling experiences, episodes, stories, scenes in plays &c. The form should be episodic, not epic; short stories with punch, rapid and exciting actions, satirical revues; not big canvasses.'[40] Such changes in drama productions went hand in hand with changes in music productions, which turned their repertoires to mass revolutionary singing.

Moreover, workers' education was heavily involved in the Workers' Theatre Movement; its actual formation was a joint initiative of the left newspaper *Sunday Worker* and the Central Labour College, Samuel has written (ibid., 37). Frank and Winifred Horrabin, authors of a much-celebrated book on workers' education, were amongst the actors of the first public performance of the Workers' Theatre Movement at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon Road in July 1926. In the previous chapter we have seen how the Horrabins were in constant correspondence with Cohn, who was organising the cultural activities of the ILGWU Educational Department in New York. Moreover, the Workers' Theatre Movement was loosely connected to the wider labour movement through the National Council of Labour Colleges and the Plebs League, which propagated the idea of 'proletarianism', 'a belief that workers were the "coming class" and that the future would be made in their image' (ibid., 38). Their position vis-à-vis worker's education was very different from the universities-led Workers' Educational Association. They believed in an 'Independent Working Class Education', very much in agreement with the American trade unions' approach in the matter.

Having moved into 'the aesthetic regime' of art by challenging its orders and hierarchies, the Workers' Theatre Movement also entered its battlefield of forces: while in the beginning it co-existed with the other drama and music groups of the Labour movement, they eventually parted company in the period between 1929 and 1930 when some Labour College students were expelled for having taken part in the Workers' Theatre Movement productions. The politics of workers' education had taken a different turn during this time on both sides of the Atlantic, as we have seen in the previous chapters.

The Workers' Theatre Movement in Britain run in parallel, but also different ways with the Workers' Theatre in the USA and as Stuart

Cosgrove (1985, 259) has argued the two art movements ultimately took different routes and developed different approaches. '"The anti-racialist tenor of American Workers" Theatre' was only one strain in a whole series of differences,' Cosgrove has commented (ibid., 260), pointing to the many ethnic, racial, cultural and language groups active in the political stage at the time, such as the Jewish Artef group, the Hungarian Dramatic circle and Uj Elöre group, the German Prolet Buehne and Die Natur Freunde, as well as numerous black groups, including The League of Struggle for Negro Rights. Its differences from the British movement notwithstanding, the history of the USA Workers' Theatre followed 3 periods of development that run in parallel with the other side of the Atlantic: (1) the establishment and growth of the movement between 1925 and 1932; (2) the consolidation of the movement and the ultimate formation of an anti-fascist ideology between 1932 and 1935 and (3) the final phase of its decline between 1935 and the second World War. Its final demise occurred in the same period that the workers' education movement in the USA was being transposed into 'labour studies', while its liberal art curriculum vanished in the air.

As with their British counterpart, the American workers' theatre movement was often expressed through songs and sketches that were written, rehearsed and performed in various formal and informal art groups springing from communities, trade unions and other grass roots organisations. In 1935, the heyday of the workers' theatre in the USA, the *League of Workers' Theatres* had 400 theatre groups in 28 cities, Hollis has noted (2004, 95). Although the revolutionary spirit of the workers' education movement had declined, the radical movement of the 1920s had influentially shaped the American workers' cultural lives and experiences and theatre was a big part of this politico-aesthetic transformation. What was a distinctive characteristic of the workers' theatre as compared with mainstream drama performances, was the blurring of the distinctions between 'spectators' and 'actors', creating a milieu of participation that had left a long lasting impression upon the Bryn Mawr student, Victoria Grala:

> A unique and somewhat startling technique which was used over and over again in our drama this summer, was that of actors speaking from different parts of the audience . . . We discovered that an emotional feeling of unity resulted from such drama, because we were sympathetic with these audience actors and felt in our own hearts that they themselves were speaking in the play. Then again it broke the sharp line which is usually found between actors and audience as we were as one with the players.[41]

Grala's account of the 'technique' used to mingle actors and audience, brings forward the importance of the pedagogies of theatre education and the efforts that were put into developing a dramatic curriculum in the various educational programmes for workers. The idea of making the audience take the part of the players came of course from the Russian dramatic tradition that had a huge influence in the USA political stage, as Samuel has observed (1985, 43). Such cultural influences from Russia, but also from Germany were brought to the American workers through *The Workers' Drama League*, which was formed in 1926 and subsequently paved the way for the *Prolet Bruehne*, a German language theatre group specialising in a fast, visual and rhythmic style of recitation (see Cosgrove 1985, 266). They collaborated with an English-speaking group of the avant-garde, *The Workers' Laboratory Theatre* and together they edited the magazine *Workers Theatre* between 1921 and 1932.[42] In this context, an interesting conference was organised in New York in June 1931, which raised two important issues: (1) the problem of surpassing ethnic, national and language differences in forging an international cultural and political movement and (2) the thorny question of the workers' theatre relation to the bourgeois drama tradition, in short how the workers' theatre movement could deal with ethnic and class antagonisms. This is how John Bonn artistic director of the *Prolet Bruehne* articulated the problem of antagonisms with the bourgeois culture:

> We understand that aims, working conditions, players, directors, writers and audiences of the Workers' Theatre are different from those of the bourgeois theatre, and at the same time, we try to find appropriate form for our theatre among the forms existing in bourgeois theatre. This is an obvious contradiction.[43]

Although the Workers' Theatre kept a hard anti-bourgeois stance in its first phase, it eventually came to the understanding that 'not everything that the bourgeois world created is bad'[44], a statement made by Cohn in one of her letters to her friend Preston. Cohn's ironic statement can be taken as an indication of the differences that existed between the mostly communist-oriented Workers' Theatre and the more grounded concerns of the labour drama groups that the trade unions' educational departments, as well as the residential schools and labour colleges supported and sustained. Cohn was immensely enthusiastic about the importance of the workers' theatre to create a distinct

working-class culture that would inspire political and economic struggles, but would also alert them to the specificities of gendered power relations within the union. Unsurprisingly, the issue of gender relations was not very popular in the repertoire of the workers' theatre on both sides of the Atlantic. It became a burning issue in the context of women workers' education however. Cohn's papers include a number of skits she wrote and produced precisely on the importance of women's involvement in the trade union. As we have already seen in Chap. 2, Cohn was convinced that women in the industry were there to stay and that her male comrades should devise ways of including them in the unions and most importantly of keeping them there. Even when she had to step down from the ILGWU hierarchy, she made sure that her successors would follow her vision about the importance of developing dramatics curricula. This is what she wrote to Pesotta, who was busy organising a major dressmakers' strike in Los Angeles at the time:

> You will be interested to know that we are dramatizing important events in the life of our union. A skit based on the life of our new married members is ready for your presentation. This skit requires only four characters — 3 women and 1 man. An instructor in dramatics will begin today coaching our members. After a few rehearsals, some corrections will probably be made. If you want to stage it on the coast [LA], I shall be glad to send it to you.[45]

Cohn did not have to work hard to persuade the young ILGWU organiser about the importance of theatre for workers. Pesotta was one of the first students of Bryn Mawr and had first-hand experience of the excitement of workers' theatre. So important was the dramatic activity in this school that Smith, the school's director was leading the whole programme in the first ten years of the school.[46] In her autobiography *Opening Vistas in Workers' Education* she has written about the techniques adopted to inspire the girls to devise their own skits, spontaneous dialogues and short drama scenes, drawing on their own experiences and performing them on stage (1978, 138). Peterson, who was the Bryn Mawr Director of Dramatics and Recreation, has also talked about how through drama, women workers would discover way to stand up and speak in front of an audience fighting off their stage fright, but also coming up with ways of making

sense of their exploitation and even daring to oppose patriarchal discourses within and beyond the union:

> We had mock meetings for example. They said that they would never dare to stand up in union meetings . . . in front of all the men. But we developed them. We'd put on plays. They'd take parts; they played that they were men. They experienced the kind of heckling they would get. They took the parts of the boss, the citizens. We call it role play [. . .] It was such a wonderful experience. Terrific. When I think of the women who developed out of those schools, they became terrific trade union leaders.[47]

Peterson, who also taught drama courses for several trade unions, talked and wrote enthusiastically about the role of theatre programmes as a source of leadership training. Cohn was more preoccupied with how women could be persuaded to join the union in the first place and how their partners and husbands could see them as comrades, as well as wives. She knew by experience that young women tended to leave the trade unions once they got married, even when they stayed on in the industry to supplement the family income. Friedman for example, who had spoken so passionately about the importance of learning how to read through her union and who had even climbed the ILGWU hierarchy to become the second woman vice-president after Cohn, had herself withdrawn from the union after her marriage. It was such phenomena that Cohn's skits were fighting against. Not only would the union weaken, but also women workers' lives would be destroyed if they left activism.

'All for One' was such a play dealing with the life of Gertrude, a working woman, 'who at the time of her marriage was intellectually superior to the man [. . .] the "smarter" of the two, according to their friends.'[48] Both Gertrude and her husband Jack continued to work after their marriage. But while Jack was able to carve out some time for his involvement with the union, his wife had no time for such activities since 'after a day's work in the factory, began her second shift at home'.[49] It was the problem of these two young people growing apart and losing the joy of shared experiences that Cohn's play was about: 'Gertrude dominates the stage. She brings with her the resentment and the protest of a woman worker, wife and mother against an economic condition that compels her to work days in the shop and evenings at home.'[50] But as a strong character in the play Gertrude ultimately acts against the conditions of her oppression and attempts to reclaim her right to leisure and politics.

In this way she also 'wins back "her man" [...] as a comrade and companion with whom she would work side by side for a better world'.[51] Her women friends, fellow workers and comrades are also part of this struggle to reconnect with union activities. Cohn wrote and directed this play in the summer of 1934 for the ILGWU's Unity House cultural activities, but she also sent it to different Locals across the country with detailed directions about how to stage it, as we can see in her letter to Nate Egnor, ILGWU, organiser for the Local 120 in Decatur, Illinois:

> When you select the players for the skit, try and find a full-blooded enthusiastic man for the part of Jack. Gertrude, his wife should be reflective, depressed and be bewildered when the other girls speak to her about the union. She must display animatedly the change that comes upon her when she says 'I am with you'. Dorothy, the dressmaker should be young, flirtatious, charming and one who enjoys everything that transpires at their meeting with Gertrude. Mildred the shop chairlady, always takes advantage of an opportunity to inject her feelings about the change since she joined the union. Ida, who has more lines to speak than the others, must have good diction and must be a positive type. She talks to Gertrude with conviction and self-reliance.[52]

By dramatising the everyday life of the union's members, Cohn could point to gender inequalities without hurting workers' solidarity and the union of the movement. After all, the skit has a happy ending since Jack recognises his wife's decision to join the union and even promises to share some of the domestic responsibilities: 'Never mind that now. You can go to all the meetings you want, and I'll be glad to stay with the kids... You're clever Gertrude. I've often wished I had you beside me,'[53] are his last words, shortly before the curtain falls. For Cohn then, labour theatre staged 'imaginary denials and symbolic subversions [...] the momentary reversal of roles needed to restore equilibrium between rulers and ruled', as Rancière has pithily remarked (2012, 25) Indeed the majority of her skits in her papers are about women workers' lives and the difficulty of finding some harmony under the double pressure of capitalism and patriarchy. 'Happiness' in these skits is linked to political activism and involvement in the life of the union, otherwise women would wither away under the pressure of the double shift labour. Workers would warmly respond to such performances, although men were understandably less enthusiastic about the artistic messages of Cohn's skits. This is how she

described the reception of 'All for One' in her letter to Jess Ogden, an ILGWU organiser in Rochester NY, in June 1935:

> A day after this was presented at Unity House husbands jokingly remarked to me: 'Sister Cohn, you will cause us trouble with "All for One". After the performance our wives discussed this play until three o'clock in the morning and decided that the authors were right and that henceforth they would catch up with their men folk and make them stay at home with the children one evening a week while they would go to a union or socialist meeting.' It is again the same story. 'The actors make the play and the play makes the actors.'[54]

But it was not only the mundane details of the women workers' lives that Cohn wrote skits about. Big events in the history of the union celebrating women workers' militancy, were also high in her repertoire. 'Marching On' was a moving play celebrating the uprising of the 20,000 in the tradition of 'the participatory pageant'. As Hollis (2004, 94) has shown, these pageants were performed by civic associations, as well as various formal or informal groups creating a performance where actors and audiences mingled, usually to commemorate and celebrate an important event: 'they combined song, dance, mass chants, and often spectacular costumes, scenery and orchestration to make their dramatic point' (ibid., 95). Their history went back to European folk performances and according to drama historian Daniel Friedman they were introduced to American workers through the *Prolet-Buehne*, the German immigrant workers' theatre that we have already discussed earlier (1985, 114).

In introducing the play Cohn situated the event not only in the history of the labour movement, but also as an important event of her own life: 'it was the turning point of my life',[55] she wrote, 'the first organized protest and struggle of women garment workers against the sweatshop, which had become the symbol of all that is destructive, humiliating and degrading [. . .] the most important struggle of working women throughout the world'.[56] Cohn's paper goes on carefully accumulating historical material and evidence about the event, particularly highlighting women workers' defiance of all material constraints that made their strike look like a chimera doomed to failure: 'most of them were young girls, recent immigrants, and few of them spoke the language of this country. Their union books showed one hundred members, most of them inactive, and in their treasury there were about four dollars'.[57] It is against this bleak background that the dialogues of the play are staged:

– We admit that women's function is mainly to inspire man in his battle for human freedom
– We have been long enough the moving spirit behind men. It is time for us, women to be something more than 'behind' [...] to fight our own battles.[58]

In forwarding women's will and their militant spirit, Cohn would respond to dominant discourses within the union: that women were not to be trusted when crises emerged, they were the first to back down and betray the movement. Such prejudices were prevalent across the Atlantic at the time, Judith Coffin (1996, 175) has noted, despite the fact that the history of militant syndicalism tells a different story about women's involvement. History and its different appropriations becomes indeed a point of reference for the play:

– But you have no experience in leading a fight. There is no record in history to support you in such a venture.
– History tells us of man's many defeats but still that does not discourage him from trying again. How does one get experience unless he dares to do things?[59]

Through the discourse of history Cohn skilfully inserts the question of how we are to understand the importance of 'the event', which breaks through historical necessities and continuities and initiates something new. The girls' strike in November 1909 was such an 'event'; it erupted out of the blue and radically changed the history of the labour movement, throwing women's participation at the heart of it. The play freezes this moment of eruption in a short statement: 'General strike! Get up girls! All out!'[60] This was the girls' response to Clara Lemlich's legendary speech at the Copper Union meeting the day before: 'I have listened to all the speakers. I have no more patience for talk. I feel and suffer the things we have heard about. I move that we call for a general strike.'[61] The play thus brings together multiple views and weaves them together in a polyphonic narrative, where women's voices are heard loudly for a change. This is the difference that Cohn's plays made in the Labour drama tradition. In including women workers' experiences and voices in the repertoire of a movement that was at its heyday, Cohn intervened in the theory and praxis of labour dramatics. She particularly highlighted the fact that drama was ontologically

inherent in the labour movement: 'the history of the labor movement is rich in social conflict; it is full of drama',[62] she wrote, setting out to explore approaches and techniques for the development of 'social drama'.

Although endorsing the possibilities of the theatre of the people, Cohn, a theatre fan herself, did not want to misrecognise or downplay the value and subtle skills of dramatic art: 'Two kinds of drama will have to be created,'[63] she argued, 'the simple plays that will be presented by the workers themselves and plays for professional groups'.[64] But as Samuel has noted, the recruitment of professionals for the needs of the labour drama, gradually worked against the Workers' Theatre Movement and contributed to its demise (1985, 59). The Broadway success of 'Pins and Needles'[65] a play that started as an ILGWU amateur production, but was taken up by professionals is a paradoxical example of how stage success does not necessarily support the workers' empowerment and that the 'professionalization' of the Workers' Theatre Movement also meant its ultimate decline. Kathryn Dowgiewicz (2015) has outlined some alarmingly serious racial issues that arose in the production of the play:

> While the show ignored references to racial issues on the stage, behind the scenes racial inequality abounded. Olive Pearman was the first African American cast in the show and initially only had a supporting role and worked as the seamstress on the road. Additional African American cast members were added later after pressure [. . .] but no Hispanics appeared in the productions. Other cast members were pressured to suppress their Jewish ethnicities and forgo religious observances during performance schedules, some changing names and a few altering their appearances. On the road during the touring productions, the African American cast members were often forced to follow local segregation laws in the cities where they were performing and encountered prejudice in finding accommodations, eating with the cast in a restaurant, or in the extreme case, being unable to perform.[66]

By the time such issues had arisen in the ILGWU Educational Department, Cohn was working in the shadow of its Director, Mark Starr who had moved the ILGWU drama department to its 'Broadway Glory'. However, she went on working in the margins through her own view of what workers' drama should be about. She urged playwrights to look for inspiration in the workers'

real life experiences, but also to rework 'reality' when transferring it on stage: 'The criticism of the social drama is that all the workers speak and act alike. We need a real artist to work out a new approach,'[67] she argued showing that she was aware of the criticisms of the socialist realism movement. She also underlined the importance of dramatising historical facts, as she herself had done with the uprising of the 20,000, but here again she warned authors about the tensions of transferring history to the stage. She finally highlighted the importance of knowing the art of theatre, 'which is the best medium for making people think, because it is a creative interpretation of their own experience'.[68]

Given her admiration for the dramatic art, Cohn worked hard to arrange special prices for workers' theatre tickets and she would often organise group theatre outings for the members of the Union. In bringing labour drama to the life and experiences of the union members, Cohn created conditions of possibility for workers' active involvement in art. Through the performances, workers not only acted 'but lived through the skit', a distinguished dramatist had commented after seeing a workers' performance.[69] But while acting their lives, workers could also distance themselves from its minutiae and by doing this, they actually became critical of common sense discourses and practices and were inspired to imagine themselves differently and therefore to be geared for social change, which was after all what workers' education was about. 'For the workers of the 1830s', Rancière has written, 'the question was not to demand the impossible, but to realize it themselves, to take back the time that was refused them [. . .] by winning from nightly rest the time to discuss, write, compose verses, or develop philosophies' (2012, ix). Rancière has imagined the workers of his studies, winning time, but as I have already shown in Chap. 2, for the women workers of my research the question was about 'stealing time' from their families and their communities, so as to re-imagine themselves in different times and other spaces. What I have shown in this section is that while there is a rich body of literature about the workers' theatre movement on both sides of the Atlantic, plays written and performed about and by women workers, as well as the pedagogical and educational context within which they emerged have been completely neglected. It is only in the archives of the summer residential colleges for women workers in the industry and in the forgotten papers of some women activists that some trails of this movement can be traced.

Disrupting the Distribution of the Sensible

In developing his tripartite schema of the politics of aesthetics Rancière has suggested that what distinguishes the aesthetic regime of art today is the recognition that there can be no straightforward connection between political awareness through art and political action. The fact for example that through art education women workers became aware of their exploitation within capitalism, as well as of their exclusion and marginalisation in the gendered hierarchies of their union, has not necessarily led to political action against such oppressive regimes of power and domination. What the aesthetic interventions of the movement for workers' education achieved however in the realm of politics, was to mobilise 'processes of dissociation: the break in a relation between sense and sense—between what is seen and what is thought, what is thought and what is felt' (Rancière 2008, 12). Rancière maintains that such processes of dissociation, create conditions of possibility for a democratic redistribution of the sensible, although he has been careful to clarify that 'the aesthetic regime of art is not a matter of romantic nostalgia' (ibid., 14), a return to aesthetic utopias. Although I am aware of the subtleties of Rancière's notion of 'the redistribution of the sensible', I have been quite sceptical about the effectiveness of the notion of 'the redistribution': quite simply I cannot see how any sort of redistribution won't create a different regime of taxonomies, classifications, inclusions and exclusion. The bitter tensions in the Workers' Theatre Movement that I have reviewed in the previous section show that power relations and intersectional differences and antagonisms will always be entangled with aesthetic and artistic practices.

In the light of the assemblage theories that my analytics in this study have been placed, what I have suggested instead is that the interventions of the movement for workers' education have introduced anti-rhythms in the distribution of the sensible and have created interstices, ruptures and lacunae, heterotopic spaces, wherein new beginnings and new sensorial modes have emerged. Here I am in agreement with Rancière that we need to chart 'new passages toward new forms of political subjectivization' (ibid.), hence my interest in the women workers' education *artpolitics assemblage* that I have discussed in this chapter. In mapping this *assemblage* I have looked at entanglements between reading and writing, literature and poetry, fiction and autobiographical writing, music and drama, making connections and comparisons between and amongst three geopolitical and cultural contexts in the first decades of the twentieth century: France,

the UK and the USA. In drawing on specific archives of documentary histories I have shown that it is through the study of the minutiae and details of lost feminist genealogies that women workers' intervention in the cultural politics of modernity can take shape. Women workers' education is a movement that needs further studies beyond western constraints and limitations. Excavating its history can open up new ways of contesting and counterpoising educational discourses, policies and practices within the neoliberal regimes of our actuality.

Notes

1. 'Should literature find a place in the curriculum of workers' colleges?', November 3, 1923 (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
2. See Thacker 1993, McNay 1994.
3. 'Should literature find a place in the curriculum of workers' colleges?' (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Jeanne Paul, 'What literature means to me', *Bryn Mawr Light*, 1926 (in Hollis 2004, 149–150).
8. Ibid., 149.
9. Hilda Smith to Bouvier, August 14, no year, (BHVP/AMB/FJB/Cor/B17/2).
10. Ida Ritter, *Bryn Mawr Light*, 1925 (in Hollis 2004, 33).
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Sarah Gordon, 'A typical day in my life', 1929 (in Hollis 2004, 74).
14. See (RPP/NYPL/Writings) for Pesotta's three unpublished novels: *The Jew is Human Too, From My Left-Hand Pocket* and *The Unconquerables.*
15. (RPP/NYPL/Writings/About a Girl and a Cat).
16. (RPP/NYPL/Writings/To a Spinster Sitting on a park bench).
17. (RPP/NYPL/Writings/Mary).
18. *Marie-Claire* (1910), translated in English in 1911; *'Atelier de Marie-Claire* (1920), translated in English in 1920; *Valserine and other stories*, 1912, bilingual publication; *De la ville au moulin*, 1926. *Douce Lumière*, 1937. Available on-line at: https://archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Audoux%2C+Marguerite%2C+1863-1937%22 [Accessed 19 February 2015].
19. Helen Roseman, 1931, *Shop and School* 30 (in Hollis 2004, 130).
20. Betty Katz, 'Tree, beautiful tree', *Shop and School*, 1932 (in ibid., 135).

21. Thelma Brown, 'Thoughts', *Shop and School*, 1937 (in ibid., 137).
22. *Apostolat des Femmes/La Femme Nouvelle*, January 11, 1833, 132–33.
23. Women of Summer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRSemT8jCg [Part-2] (9.05–10.08) [Accessed 28 March 2016]
24. 'Educational department of the international ladies', garment workers' union', unpublished essay (FCP/NYPL/ILGWU), 32.
25. 'Garment workers speak' (FCP/NYPL/ILGWU).
26. Ibid.
27. Ruth Wellman to FC, letter dated June 4, 1927, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
28. Ibid.
29. 'Books for a troubled world: The influence of literature on our daily life; the contribution of creative criticism to the enjoyment and understanding of good books' essay by Fannia Mary Cohn, March 1946, (FMC/NYPL/Writings).
30. Ibid.
31. Rose Pesotta, diary entry, May 25, 1942, (RPP/NYPL/Diaries).
32. FC to Morris Bialis, letter dated August 26, 1958 (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
33. Ibid.
34. Margaret Perry (b.1922), untitled TS (1975), Brunel University Library, p.9 (cited in Rose 2010, 5).
35. Voilquin, 'Reine, Cardinal et Page', Comedy in One Act de M. Anselot', in *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle* 1(10), 118, December, 1832.
36. Voilquin, 'Aoust 1572 ou, Charles IX a Orleans', a historical drama by Jean Lesguillon, in *Apostolat des Femmes-La Femme Nouvelle*, 1(8), 80–81, December 1832.
37. Parlor, 'Le peuple et l'Art,' *La Fronde*, 9 August 1903.
38. Madeleine Pelletier, 'Admission des femmes dans la franc-maçonnerie', extract from the magazine *L' Acacia*, May 1905, pp. 5–6. Available on Gallica (BnF), http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k80102k/f1.image [Accessed 17 February 2016].
39. *Comradeship*, monthly journal of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, July 1923 (cited in Samuel 1985, 27).
40. Huntly Carter, 'Workers and the Theatre', *Sunday Worker*, 18 July 1926, p.8 (cited in ibid., 33).
41. Victoria Grala, *Shop and School*, 1937 (in Hollis 2004, 96).
42. The complete set of the magazine in microtext is at the Cornell University Library.
43. 'The problem of form', Workers' Theatre, 1931 (cited in Cosgrove 1985, 268).
44. FC to Evelyn Preston, letter dated, 19 April, 1922, (FCP/NYPL/GC).
45. FC to Pesotta, letter dated March 1934, (RPP/NYPL/GC).
46. There are some interesting scenes of the students' dramatic performances at Bryn Mawr in Heller's film see, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRSemT8jCg [Part 2], [3.00–4.3m] [Accessed 28 March 2016].

47. Esther Peterson in conversation (Goldfarb 1984, 330).
48. FC to Jess Ogden, letter dated 25 June, 1935, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. FC to Nate Egnor, letter dated 29 June, 1934, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
53. 'All for one', One Act Playlet by Irwin Swerdlow and Fannia M. Cohn (FMC/NYPL/Writings).
54. FC to Jess Ogden, letter dated 25 June, 1935, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
55. 'Material for the Pageant 'Marching On' by Fannia M. Cohn, April 12, 1934 (FMC/NYPL/Writings), 1.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 2.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid., 10.
61. 'The Uprising of the twenty thousand. The General Strike of the Waistmakers of 1909', Summary by Daniel Nelson, (FMC/NYPL/Writings), 3.
62. 'Social drama: A technique for workers' education', (FMC/NYPL/Writings).
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. For an overview of the production, see http://www.laborarts.org/exhibits/ilgwu/culture/pins/index.cfm [Accessed 20 February 2016]
66. 'Sing me a song with social significance', http://ilgwu.ilr.cornell.edu/announcements/oneLongAnnouncementFromDB.html?announcementID=28 [Accessed 20 February 2016].
67. 'Social drama', (FMC/NYPL/Writings).
68. Ibid.
69. FC to Egnor, a union member, letter dated 29 January, 1934. (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).

CHAPTER 5

Visual Technologies and 'other archives'

> *Fannia Cohn's service to our organization is only recognized by those on the outside who can dispassionately evaluate such unselfish efforts on the part of one person, for the cause of worker's education [. . .] She remains a tragic figured amidst her own fellow workers, whom she helped to gain prestige with the outside educational world. Were she a man, it would have been entirely different.*[1]

Writing to the ILGWU's leader David Dubinsky in November 1939, Pesotta expressed her indignation at the way the union had treated Cohn. By that time Pesotta had become the third woman vice-president in the Executive Board of the Union and knew only too well the untenable position of being the only woman in the world of male leadership. As she wrote in her political autobiography about her feelings on the day she was elected vice-president for the union: 'it was my contention that the voice of a solitary woman on the General Executive Board would be a voice lost in the wilderness' (1987[1944], 110). Two photographs of hers amongst men of the ILGWU Executive Board testify to the harshness of the experience, as I will discuss later in the chapter.[2]

Already in the previous chapters I have looked at Cohn's archive, reading, analysing and effectively rewriting her letters, articles, essays and other personal and political writings that revolve around her lifelong passion: the movement for workers' education. But what was also intriguing in my research at

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the New York Public Library (NYPL) is that Cohn left a significant number of photographs amongst her papers that I want to consider and discuss in this chapter forming textual and visual entanglements in the understanding and appreciation of women workers' education. These photographs are further viewed in the context of two wider digital photographic archives: the Bryn Mawr School for Working Women in the Industry[3] and the ILGWU records at the Kheel Center of Cornell University.[4] Researchers in the digital humanities have already written about the possibilities that are opened up by digital collections, particularly in relation to the 'contextual mass' and the multiple connections they can facilitate between and amongst texts, authors, images and documents (see Flanders 2014). There is of course a wide range of theoretical, epistemological, methodological and ethical issues that the digital turn has brought forward, which I have discussed elsewhere in my work (see Tamboukou 2016d). Digital archives have radically changed our understanding of 'what an archive is' to a realisation of 'what an archive can become'. Having an overview of wider photographic collections literally in my hands, I could more easily discern visual patterns of presence and absence, feel and follow space/time rhythms and map the entanglements of gendered bodies and practices.

In this light, what is the role of photographs in Cohn's archival assemblage and how is the visual conceptualised in my analysis? Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have pointed out that 'photographs never simply illustrate a written narrative' (2010, 96). What I want to add here is that in the same way that photographs cannot be used as illustrations, narratives cannot be used as captions of images either. Photographs and stories should rather been viewed, read and analysed in their inter-relation, forming a complex and often conflicting network of visual and textual practices and discourses. What is also important to remember is that in bequeathing her papers to the NYPL, Cohn has created an autobiographical archive, where photographs, personal letters and political essays have been artfully brought together. As Alexandra Allan and Penny Tinkler (2015, 793) have aptly noted, many feminist have drawn on family albums and photos to deploy autobiographical methods of interrogating specific cultural constructions and representations of their identities and subjectivities and it seems that Cohn was a pioneer in such *visual technologies of the self*, as I want to call them. In collecting and archiving photographs and documents in the history of workers' education Cohn has created an assemblage of stories, discourses and images that rather than representing the real, they respond to the world, opening up dialogical

scenes where the readers/viewers are openly invited to participate (see Tamboukou 2013b). In this light, the visual analysis of Cohn's autobiographical acts has been framed within Peircian and Barthian semiotics that I will briefly present and explicate next.

Ways of Seeing

Signs in Peirce's theory constitute the world, thinking is sign and even human beings are signs. How does the sign relation function? Peirce introduces the role of the *interpretant* in the sign relation and in this sense a triadic relation is configured between the sign or *representamen*, the object, which is what is being represented and the *interpretant*. 'A sign receives its meaning by being interpreted by a subsequent thought or action [and] it is only in relation to a subsequent thought . . . the *interpretant* that the sign attains meaning' (Hoops 1991, 7). In the context of this relation 'every thought is a sign without meaning until interpreted by a subsequent thought [and] consequently there is no such thing as a Lockean idea whose meaning is immediately intuitively known or experienced' (ibid.).

In Peircian semiotics therefore, 'every thought is a sign' (Peirce 1991a [1868], 49). It is also important to remember here that thought is matter for Peirce, described as a bodily feeling or action, 'just as real, just as historical, just as behavioral as operating a machine, fighting a war, or eating a meal' (Hoops 1991, 9). Moreover, even human beings are signs: 'the self is manifested in a sign relation; indeed the self *is* the sign relation, since feeling is meaningless unless it is interpreted as the sign of an object' (ibid.). Consequently, the *interpretant* is a sign and thus becomes a second signifier of the object that was initially presented to it as an *interpretant* – only one that is purely mental. It thus initiates a cycle of sign relations *ad infinitum*, since the second signifier identified earlier, will also have *an interpretant*, which will become the third sign of the initial object. In this line of thought, when an object – and in the case of this chapter, a photograph – enters a sign relation it gets to have an infinite sequence of signs. As succinctly summarised by Peirce in his entry in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, 'a sign [is] anything which determines something else [its *interpretant*] to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so *ad infinitum*' (1991b [1901], 239). Within the cycle of the triadic sign relation, Peirce further introduces a tripartite taxonomy of signs depending on the indispensability

of the presence of the *interpretant*, and the *object* in the configuration of the relation:

> A sign is either an *icon*, an *index*, or a *symbol*. An *icon* is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line. An *index* is a sign, which would at once lose the character, which makes it a sign if its object were removed, but would not lose that character if there were no interpretant. Such for instance is a piece of mould with a bullet-hole in it as a sign of a shot; for without the shot there would have been no hole; but there is a hole there, whether anybody has the sense to attribute it to a shot or not. A *symbol* is a sign, which would lose the character that renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech, which signifies what it does by virtue of its being understood to have that signification (Peirce 1991b [1868], 239–40).

In explicating Peircian semiotics Shearer West has noted that 'an icon looks like the thing it represents, an index draws attention to something outside the representation and a symbol is a seemingly arbitrary sign that is, by cultural convention connected to a particular object' (2004, 41). Drawing on the earlier explication, we can therefore argue that a photograph has qualities of all three typologies of previous signs: 'it resembles the object of representation (icon), it refers to practices, surroundings and subjects that constitute the backdrop of the photograph (index) and it contains gestures, expressions and props that can be read with knowledge of social and cultural conventions (symbol)' (2004, 41). The indexical qualities of photographs are particularly interesting for the analysis of this chapter and in this light I will argue that photographs will be taken as an index in the Peircian taxonomy delineated earlier. It is not only what they represent, but the system of relations that they point to that I will be mostly analysing. Drawing on Peirce's semiotics therefore, my contention is that photographs are participating in an infinite series of sign relations and thus their interpretation can never close off.

Although the meaning of a photograph can never be fixed or static, but only relational, there are some meanings that become powerful and dominant in the overall photographic assemblage. Take Cohn's archived photographs for example. The majority of them are institutional or official photographs taken and collected within the union's propaganda policies; they are also part of any institution's archival practices to create a documentary history of its

activities. But when I looked at these photographs I was struck by the fact that Cohn and Pesotta seemed to be the only women in the various group photographs of men ILGWU organisers. In my interpretation women union leaders became a Barthian *punctum*, a sign that erupts from the photograph and wounds the eye, as it makes the viewer aware of the 'co-presence of two discontinuous elements, heterogeneous in that they do not belong to the same world', according to Barthes (2000[1980], 23): the male world of labour politics and the woman activist, fighting alone.

Peirce's tripartite schema has thus made interesting connections with Barthe's notions of the *Operator*, the *Spectator* and the *Spectrum*: 'The *Operator* is the Photographer, the *Spectator* is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs [. . .] and the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent [. . .] which I should like to call the *Spectrum*' (ibid., 9). But the *punctum* in Barthes's analysis always functions in relation to the *studium*, a kind of common sense understanding and taste through which we look at and make sense of photographs, without any passionate attachment to them. As Barthes writes: 'the studium is that very wide field of unconcerned desire, of various interest, of inconsequential taste: I like/I don't like' (ibid., 27).

Here, it is obvious that photographs of trade union events and of men 'doing politics' constitute a field of 'unconcerned desire' par excellence. The presence of a single woman amongst men, however, irrevocably unsettles our understanding of what kind of organisations or institutions trade unions are and therefore disrupts the *studium* of labour politics. Moreover, as a *punctum*, the image of a woman organiser acting amongst men is always linked to a subjective interpretation and can never sit comfortably within any kind of generalised or common-sense understanding. Such images become visual signs that disturb the *studium* and at the same time attract the viewer to the image, creating strong affective ties with it: 'a detail attracts me,' writes Barthes. 'I feel that its mere presence changes my reading, that I am looking at a new photograph, marked in my eyes with a higher value' (ibid., 42).

In thus taking Peircian and Barthian semiotics as the framework of my approach, what I propose is that the archive photographs I have worked with generate meaning, draw the *spectator's* attention to something outside the representation and inspire us to imagine worlds beyond what has been merely represented. 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence,' Barthes has written (ibid., 87), women's precarious presence in the trade unions in this case. Moreover, the relations between the *spectrum*, the *operator* and

the *spectator* are fluid, but they are also constituted as a 'closed field of forces' (ibid., 13), a battlefield of power relations at play, wherein women organisers were inevitably entangled.

Cohn's act of collecting particular photographs to be included in her papers also reverberates with Susan Sontag's suggestion that photographs are not so much an instrument of memory, reducing the past into visual representations. Rather photographs are an invention of the past or a replacement of it in Sontag's analytics (1979, 165). This is why I have been so interested in her collections of photographs, looking at them as an assemblage of how she had re-imagined her past when creating an archive of memories for the future. What I argue is that Cohn's act of assembling and archiving some very powerful images of 'moments of being with the beast' brings to the fore the bold reality of women's exclusion from trade unions, but also visualises their political and existential struggles of fighting alone in a men's world. 'A photograph could also be described as a quotation,' Sontag has acutely observed (ibid., 71). It is in this light that I now want to rethink the act of collecting, captioning and archiving photographs in their interrelation with other archival documents.

Photographs and/in 'Other Archives'

Why do people collect photographs and make albums and what is the role of everyday life photography in narrative research? Barbara Harrison (2002) has engaged with photographic practices that go beyond the artistic or professional realms of social life and in this context she has looked into the role of photography in capturing and recording important moments such as anniversaries, graduation ceremonies and other significant life events. Cohn's collection of photographs fall I suggest in this photographic field of narrative inquiries. In looking at them as a feminist narrative researcher, I attempt to seek meaning and understanding not only through a visual analysis of their content, by also by focusing on the very act of collecting and archiving such photographs. As already discussed earlier, in selecting these photographs and including them in the papers she bequeathed to the NYPL, Cohn has consciously created a visual archive of her involvement in the labour movement, but once created the archive gets a life of its own that always goes beyond the archivist's intentions.

Indeed, these photographs have become components of a wider narrative assemblage (Tamboukou 2011) including letters, essays, speeches lectures and labour skits, 'documents of life' (Plummer 2001) par excellence that

carry traces of a woman's involvement in the movement for workers' education. It is therefore as components and through their relation with other documents that these photographs take up meaning and become visual forms of story-telling. As Harrison has pointed out: 'It is not necessary for images to be self-generated for visual materials to be read hermeneutically as texts' (2002, 92). And although I agree with Sontag (1979, 111) that 'photographs do not explain', but merely 'acknowledge', when seen in relation to other documents as components of a narrative assemblage, they open up paths of meaning making, without necessarily restricting various interpretations that can emerge from such a process.

'The norms which organize the photographic valuation of the world in terms of the opposition between that which is photographable and that which is not are indissociable from the implicit system of values maintained by a class, profession or artistic coterie,' Pierre Bourdieu has argued (1998, 6). His suggestion that photography needs to be understood through its interrelation with ways, institutions and rhythms of social integration is I think a useful way to think about how Cohn's selected photographs reflect both the collective life of the union and its discontents. If photographs constitute and reaffirm group unity, they can also disrupt or challenge it, revealing the dark side of unity, the harsh sexual politics of the labour movement in Cohn's case. In the same way that family albums display 'many possible pasts' (Holland 1991, 1), union albums can also reveal multiple layers of truth, meaning and understanding. While there are many photographs depicting Cohn as an isolated woman figure amongst men, there are also some other photographs where she appears in the company of women activists, laughing and having fun. If a family album 'is noticeable for its particular constructions of what a family is and for the silences and absences of both people and topics' (Harrison 2002, 103) then the 'trade-union' album similarly constructs what a trade-union is in terms of its gendered constitution as displayed in its photographs, but also discussed at length in feminist rewritings of the US labour histories. Cohn's photographs thus raise questions around representation and memory: they carry visual traces of her involvement in the labour movement, but they also open up different 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972).

In making sense of Cohn's archival practices in collecting textual and visual documents I have drawn on the notion of 'the other archive' that Niam Moore and colleagues (2016) have coined to denote parallel archives that are being constituted in the peripheries

and margins of state, institutional and other formerly established archives. In carefully editing and collecting the papers and photographs that she wanted to bequeath to the NYPL, Cohn was fully aware of how her legacy and tireless work for women workers' education had already been distorted and its traces would be totally erased from the ILGWU's official histories and archives. It was with this understanding in mind that she personally prepared her own archive of workers' education, as 'the other archive' of a woman labour organiser. In doing so she was also participating to a wider movement of creating women's archives that the historian Mary Ritter Beard had initiated at the time. This archival movement was connected to the establishment of the first women's colleges, since 'there is a connection between the pursuit of women's education and the documentation of women's past activities' Scott has noted.[5] The pioneers of women's education on both sides of the Atlantic had a deep historical consciousness, which was driving their will to preserve traces of their struggle; they also knew that women's history was nowhere to be found in state archives or major libraries and it thus fell upon them to initiate the task of documenting their history.

It was in this context that Beard set out to organise the World Center for Women's Archives (WCWA) in 1935. Her project was not only to record women's history, but also to found a disciplinary platform for this history to be studied, written and taught.[6] Taking its motto 'No documents, No History' from the French historian Fustel de Coulanges, the Center's brochure outlined its vision as:

> To make a systematic search for undeposited source materials dealing with women's lives and activities, interests and ideas, as members of society everywhere [. . .] To reproduce important materials, already deposited elsewhere, by means of microfilm and other modern processes [. . .] To encourage recognition of women as co-makers of history.[7]

In this light Beard's archival project also included the establishment of an educational institution that would take up the task of writing and advancing women's history through research and teaching. As stated in a fundraising letter: 'It is our idea to make this center a vital educational plant in which the culture represented by the archives will receive the attention at present given in "seats of higher learning" [. . .] we hope to provide an *equal education*.'[8]

The Centre lasted only for five years and was eventually folded in September 1940 as a result of internal tensions, lack of funding, as well as an increasing authoritarian regime just before the Second World War that would stifle any pacifist voice such as Beard's.[9] However the project of recording, researching and teaching women's history was to be transferred to already-established academic institutions, such as the Sophia Smith Collection, one of the world's largest women's history manuscript collections, as well as the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe. Beard worked closely both with Margaret Grierson, archivist at Smith College, and with historians at Harvard University for the creation of these archival collections. It was these two institutions that received the bulk of the WCWA documents. Although the WCWA had to close its legacy would change the US archival sensibility. As Inez Haynes Irwin, director of the Centre put it in her last letter to the WCWA members: 'We have achieved a great deal of publicity of the finest possible quality. We have opened the minds of people all over the country to the necessity of collecting and preserving archives-especially about women.'[10]

As we have already seen in the previous chapters, Cohn was a good friend of Charles and Mary Beard's and as their correspondence reveals she was from the beginning a firm supporter of the WCWA: 'I agree with you as to the importance of having a world center where a record of women's achievements will be preserved,'[11] she wrote to Beard in January 1940, adding that 'this should be done not only for the sake of encouraging women by making use of their experiences and achievements, but also for general historical reasons'.[12] While supporting the wider movement for women's history to be recorded, Cohn was adamant that it was not just women's history, but also 'history from below' that urgently needed its archives: 'I do hope that in your efforts to get justice for women by recognizing their achievements, your Board will not make the mistake of not including the records of certain social groups in your archives,'[13] she wrote. Cohn's idea was that not only social groups should be included in these archives, but also that their representatives should be invited to the Board of the WCWA, so that they can 'speak for themselves'.[14]

Cohn's decision to deposit her papers recording her involvement in the history of the US labour movement was thus neither individualistic, nor whimsical, but rather a contribution to the wider project of creating an archive for women's history. As an ILGWU educational officer, Cohn further shaped the women workers' archival sensibility, cultivating and

nurturing their historical consciousness. Pesotta, was one of those women workers, whose ideas were moulded in the process of her labour education. It is no surprise that she followed Cohn's initiative in bequeathing her papers to the NYPL, a knowledge institution that was so crucial in the development of her intellectual autobiography, as we have already seen in the previous chapter. It is in the context of this 'archival sensibility' (Moore et al. 2016) nurtured and developed within the classes, curricula and practices of workers' education that I will now turn to the analysis and discussion of Cohn's photographs, using some of them as exemplars of wider photographic groups and visual topics.

Proletarian Summers

A photograph always functions in relation to its context and the image it offers continually emits different signs and is subject to continuous transformations. 'Whenever we look at a photographic image, we engage in a series of complex readings', Graham Clarke has argued (1997, 27) making a distinction between merely looking at a photograph 'as a passive act of recognition' (ibid.) and reading it as a text. Although I don't think that there are clear distinctions between seeing and reading, I agree that photographs are entangled in complex photographic discourses and their specific order, grammar and syntax, which have their own genealogies, limitations and constraints. In Chap. 3, I referred to a beautiful photograph in Cohn's archives taken in the summer of 1925 during a symposium on 'Women in the Labour Movement' (Fig. 3.1). I want to return to this photograph and look at it in a context that goes beyond Cohn's friendship with Theresa Wolfson. The photograph depicts Wolfson giving an open air lecture to a mixed audience in the beautiful surroundings of the ILGWU's Unity House. Cohn is sitting on the stairs of the platform at the bottom right hand corner of the picture, next to Wolfson. She is holding a stick, although it is not clear what its function might be. Perhaps it is a symbol of traditional schooling: an instrument for teachers to impose order and call for silence. The stick in Cohn's hands thus creates a contrast with the overall educational milieu of a relaxed open-air lecture very much in the spirit of liberal education: it becomes a Barthian *punctum* in the way we make sense of this photograph. Cohn's expression shows pride, relief and satisfaction. Clearly she must have worked hard to organise this symposium and she is happy to see that the event is well-attended. We can only see Wolfson's profile, but she seems to be relaxed and in

control of her lecture. The sun is shining through the leaves of some very tall trees that frame the picture, creating an idyllic landscape for the workers' cultural lives and activities. The wooden platform is a spot appearing in other photographs featuring open-air lectures on Unity House grounds, as for example in one taken in August 1926, which shows an engaged audience for a lecture on social psychology.[15]

This is definitely a documentary and not an art photograph and yet there are some interesting artistic elements in its composition: a man in a black summer vest leans forward to take a better look of the speaker and in doing so he is framed within the wooden banister of the platform. Most of the audience are looking at the speaker, very intensely so, but some of them are looking at us, the spectators, or perhaps the photographer, who is shooting the scene. There is a couple in the middle of the photograph standing rather than sitting, like most of the attendees. The man has passed his arm firmly around the shoulders of his female partner and they both seem very serious at what they are listening to and perhaps in a slightly defensive attitude. We need to remember here that this is a lecture as part of a symposium on women's position in the labour movement, an uncomfortable topic in terms of the gender relations it most probably interrogates and scrutinises. We can see the back of a woman towards the left back corner of the photograph: is she leaving? Why? The event whose visual traces are captured in this photograph has passed. Whenever we look at a photograph we try to relate to something that occurred in the past, Barthes has famously declared: 'The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*' (2000 [1990], 85, emphasis in the text). And yet the photograph tells as much about the event it captures, as about the context from which it has emerged. It is its indexical qualities that I will discuss now drawing on Gillian Rose's tripartite schema of visual meaning making: 'the site(s) of a production of an image, the site of the image itself and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences' (2001, 16). In this context it is the ILGWU's Unity House, as the site of the photograph itself that I want to consider here. Places are crucial in the deployment of power/knowledge relations and as Cohn had repeatedly emphasised in her papers, the Unity House project was a fundamental spatial component in the assemblage of women workers' education:

> While our International has always appreciated the fact that the first duty of a union is to improve the working conditions of its members and to solve the daily problems which they face in the shops, mills and factories, we have at the same time held the opinion that the union has also to take care of other

> needs of the workers and their families. The longing of our members for beauty, for comfort, rest and recreation in country surrounding first found expression many years ago, in the Unity House idea.[16]

The ILGWU's Unity House, a vacation destination away from the city started as a co-operative recreation facility in 1919, when the ILGWU Local 25 purchased a luxury former hotel and its surrounding 750 acres of forest in Forest Park, at the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. At the 1924 Convention, the resort passed to the central ILGWU administration. Cohn had been active in persuading the ILGWU leadership to do this investment when it became impossible for Local 25 to keep it running. In July 1922 she wrote a letter to the General Executive Board, sending apologies for her absence from the GEB meeting as she would be attending the First International Conference on Workers' Education in Belgium. In the same letter she highlighted the 'constructive and idealistic foresightedness' of retaining Unity Houses for the Labor Movement and voted as Vice-President for ILGWU to buy the Forest Park resort despite 'the little financial risk attached to it'.[17] Cohn was a firm supporter of union co-operative activities, very much in the spirit of various nineteenth-century movements which had briefly linked trade unions with cooperatives: 'the trade union is really a big co-operative organization destined in the near future to take over the industries for their own workers',[18] she wrote.

Cohn's firm conviction that the union should attend to the workers' desire for beauty, comfort and intellectual development was materialised in the Union House co-operative project: over the years it became a relatively inexpensive getaway for union members and their families, as well as a hub of recreational, educational, cultural and political activities. Its forest and lake offered a wide range of sports and aquatic activities, such as hiking, tennis, baseball, basketball, swimming, fishing, boating and canoeing. The calendar of the resort also included dancing, roller skating and camp-fires. The ILGWU archive has many photographs of such outdoors activities. They show workers watching swimming competitions, taking lazy boat rides, fishing, playing badminton, dancing or just sitting and talking in the sun.[19] In Cohn's description Unity House was 'one of the most beautiful vacation spots in the country [. . .] forming a background for rare scenic charms'.[20] Its natural beauty was not only ideal for sports and recreation, but also a perfect background for educational and cultural activities. 'The contact with nature is most enjoyable,'[21] Cohn wrote to Artie White an ILGWU

organiser from Atlanta, urging her to combine educational activities with swimming lessons, outings, picnics and singing sessions for all union members.

With an amphitheatre for talks and seminars built in its premises, Unity House functioned as a superb education centre, a perfect conference venue, a meeting place for local unions and national labour organisations, as well as an arts centre.[22] Cohn organised exhibitions of paintings by members and their children in the Unity House library. There is an interesting photograph showing an art exhibition and lecture on 'Appreciation of art' taken on July 6 1925, most probably during the summer conference on 'Women in the Labour Movement' that we discussed earlier. Cohn is sitting next to the speaker and there are some beautiful tapestries hanging on the exterior wall of a building in the background of the picture.[23] The photograph emits signs of enjoyment and calmness since as Charlotte Bates (2013) has argued, visual images enact the spatiality and liveliness of embodied educational encounters and carry traces of the intensity of emotions, feelings and affective relations.

It was perhaps because of the workers' love and appreciation of art that the ILGWU decided to acquire thirteen panels painted by the famous Mexican artist Diego Rivera to decorate the Unity House main building. These panels were initially made for the New Workers' School in New York in 1933, after John Rockefeller rejected Rivera's Radio City's murals, although the artist's commission was paid in full. In his autobiography Rivera has written that after the destruction of his murals, he was attracted to 'the idea of spending the last of Rockefeller's money to decorate a workers' school' (1991[1960], 130). Since the premises of the school were rented, he decided to create a series of movable panels, as 'a Portrait of America'. He thus painted twenty-one beautiful murals depicting the country's colonial history, the ousting of the Native Americans, the establishment of a new labour regime, as well as the workers' struggles.[24] Rivera has also highlighted the contribution of the school to his art project: 'To insure the historical accuracy of my portrayals the faculty and the student body of the school labored as one to supply me with contemporary documents of the successive periods including newspapers, photographs, woodcuts, caricatures, prints and reproductions of oils' (ibid.). Unfortunately these beautiful and historically symbolic murals were destroyed in a fire in 1969, but they remain a trace of how the politics of aesthetics that we discussed in the previous chapter were at the heart of workers' educational and cultural activities.[25]

The photographs and videos of Unity House, currently housed at the Kheel Center Archive thus paint different spaces and times of 'proletarian summers': workers would leave the drudgeries of their urban working lives and would invent and experience new ways of being together. Getting away from the city, they had time to think, read, educate themselves and enjoy art. It is no wonder that many labour drama performances had their premiere at the Unity House, as we have seen in the previous chapter. In 1956 a new theatre opened in the premises, which enabled ILGWU members to see not only their own amateur performances, but also Broadway shows. Since workers would go there with their families, Unity House also offered opportunities to organise women. Working-class women needed free time to pursue intellectual, social and civic activities Cohn thought and the Unity House catering and accommodation facilities could offer them a domestic labour free period, during their summer vacation. In July 1927 she organised a conference at Unity House on the role of trade unionists' wives in the labour movement, an area that she had tried hard to develop, as we have already seen in Chap. 3, and there is a photograph marking the occasion amongst her papers (Fig. 5.1). There are five men only amongst the twenty-seven delegates, who pose for this photograph, taken in some green part of the gardens. Cohn is sitting in the middle looking content and satisfied. She looks much more serious and grim, posing as the only woman amongst four men in a photograph also taken in the gardens of Unity House, just a year later, in 1928 (Fig. 5.2). It is this group of photographs, depicting women activists in different subject positions that I want to consider next. As I have already noted earlier, taken as a visual assemblage the ILGWU photographs reveal many truths and offer different perceptions and understanding within the cycle of Peircian and Barthian semiotics.

Women in the Wilderness

'Fannia Cohn and several men review documents'[26] is a striking photograph, both in terms of content and caption: it depicts Cohn as the only woman amongst several men immersed in intellectual work: reading and reviewing documents. The place and the date of this photograph are unknown and so are the names of 'the several men' surrounding Cohn, who seems to be amused – we will never know why. There are many more photographs depicting Cohn amongst men in her papers, but none of them emits any signs of joy, as this photograph definitely does. As I have already discussed in Chaps. 1 and 2, Cohn's relation with men was

Fig. 5.1 Unity House, June 1927 Auxiliary Conference. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962. /VIII. Photographs and oversized items. June 1927. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

ambivalent: she had many disputes and disagreements with the ILGWU and AFoL male leaders, but she was warmly supported by male academics and public intellectuals. What these photographs' indexical properties definitely point to is women's precarious position in the labour movement, a topic that many of Cohn's writings have engaged with. 'Can Women lead?' is an article published in *Justice* on 15 February 1936; it deals with the problem of leadership and questions around women's ability to become labour leaders. Cohn begins this article outlining some of the arguments against women leaders:

> Many characteristics of women are held to be detrimental to their developing leadership. It is said for example, that women are too individualistic and that they are comparatively new in social movements; hence their experience is limited. It is further stated that their approach is too personal; that they are

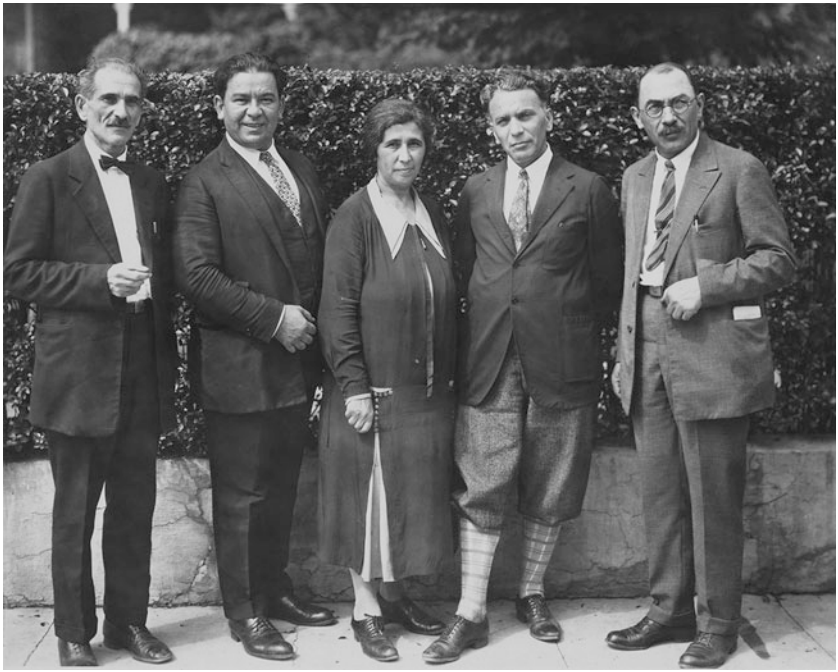

Fig. 5.2 A. Raisin Cashier FMC Pinsky + Pres. M. Sigman. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962. /VIII. Photographs and oversized items. 1928. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

> jealous of each other and lack generosity in encouraging and recognising ability in other women to aspire to leadership.[27]

Cohn's initial response was that women were judged according to male norms, while their own qualities for leadership were ignored. Taking an essentialist stance, she particularly stressed women's relevance and appeal to other women, their attention to details, as well as her 'imaginative abilities to visualize the whole'.[28] She also referred to women's 'organizational directness, practicability and persistence'[29] as qualities inherent in their upbringing and socialisation. In addressing the critique of women's jealousy, Cohn pointed to the fact that women's rivalry was not due to their character, but rather an effect of the very few positions

that were available to women in the hierarchy of the labour movement: 'frequently they are forced to act like a herd of hungry animals to whom one piece of food is held up', she wrote.[30] Moreover, women leaders were often more severely criticised by both parts and particularly so by other women.

Time was also identified as an enemy for women leaders: 'No man is too old to lead, but a woman in the labor movement is either too young – inexperienced – or too old to find a place in the temple of leadership,'[31] she bitterly commented, obviously drawing on her own experiences. A series of photographic portraits in her collection carry traces of the passage of time upon her. Although she always tries to put on a brave face we can discern the effects of time on her face and body gestures, the hairstyles, the clothes and the accessories that she chooses. There is a particular group of photographs showing her young, careless and dressed in a pretty floral dress that create a stark opposition with the majority of her 'older' official portraits (Fig. 5.3). Looking at these photographs one wonders about what happened to this young woman and why she had to suffer so many health attacks upon her body and mind during the time that she served the union. Her letter to an anonymous friend from Aurora Health farm in the spring of 1931, which I have already discussed in Chap. 3, allows a glimpse into some of these problems:

> It is nearly four weeks that I am out here. On the surface it seems that I am recovering from the 'flu' only and this requires enough time in itself that kept me three weeks confined to my bed from February 6th to the 22nd [1931] when I left for this farm. But the story of having attacks on my health goes back to 1922 when I was on the verge of a nervous break down. But on the advice of my Doctor and the insistence of my friends, [. . .] I took a trip to Europe, where I spent six weeks attending the First International Conference of Workers Education held in the Belgium Labor College in Brussels. [. . .] Since then I had from time to time breakdowns [. . .][32]

As Cohn shows in the letter, it was her passion for workers' education that had helped her recover from these series of health attacks. It is in the same vein of highlighting the importance of workers' education that her article about women's leadership surpasses its initial bleakness and becomes much more optimistic in the end. Women have now come to the industry with an intention to stay on, she argued and they can see

Fig. 5.3 Seated portrait at desk in garden. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962. /VIII. Photographs and oversized items. 1928. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

more clearly the need to engage with their union. They are no longer just 'girls', but also young mothers and middle-aged women. It is these new waves of women workers who were mostly taking advantage of the union's educational provision Cohn argued, particularly highlighting their contribution to the cultural activities of the union: 'They are effectively playing their part in dramatics in which their victories, hopes and aspirations are reflected. They inspire our audiences with their instruments and choruses.'[33] For Cohn then, there was a new wave of women workers students who were discovering and developing new social and cultural values. Young mothers attended labour classes leaving their children at home with their husbands, and 'even a grandmother has been granted one of the five scholarships given by the International to study at Brookwood Labor College to prepare for greater service in the labor movement'.[34] Cohn's article concludes with the certainty that women no longer needed to change their nature in order to develop leadership, further celebrating the fact that 'the great leaders among women were motherly and had a flow of sympathetic understanding of their followers and an enthusiasm for human values'.[35]

What we have in this article is the return of the mother as a heroic figure of women's history, a powerful discourse in feminism, emerging from the nineteenth-century romantic socialist movements. As Scott has succinctly pointed out in her influential study of nineteenth-century French feminism, the figure of the mother was an exemplary discursive site wherein rights and duties were entangled: 'an identity achieved through the performance of socially attributed duties, the very model for the meaning of reciprocity and obligation' (1996, 70). There are not many motherly figures in Cohn's collections of photographs, but there is one beautiful photograph showing her in the company of a young girl, wearing a costume, possibly in preparation for a labour play (Fig. 5.4). Both women are depicted in profile talking to each other about something pleasant or amusing, as they are smiling. Cohn is standing with her left hand slightly touching the girls' knee, who is casually sitting at a table's edge. Although the photograph is undated, Cohn seems young and they are both relaxed and in a good mood. The overall ambience of the photograph is sweet and motherly, but since there is no caption for this photograph in Cohn's papers, we cannot know much about its context. Taken as an index however, the photograph reminds the viewer of the many friendships with young women that Cohn developed throughout her life, but also her disillusion with most of them, as we have already seen in Chap. 3. This is

Fig. 5.4 In garden with a young girl. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962./VIII. Photographs and oversized items. N.d. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

one of the few intimate photographs in Cohn's mostly 'institutional photographs' and as such it stands out in her collection.

But even amongst Cohn's institutional photographs there are several showing younger and older women acting together in camaraderie, joy and friendship. A photograph taken on the occasion of the Atlantic City convention in 1934 is one of them, showing six women and one man walking and laughing happily together (Fig. 5.5). Cohn is in the middle of the photograph, her face completely shadowed by her hat and she seems to be pointing to something that has attracted the attention of all the figures in this photograph. Despite the accusations that women were undermining each other, the photographs and documents in Cohn's archive tell a different story. This is how Cohn remembered the occasion of her election as the first woman vice-president at the ILGWU Executive Board in the same letter that recounted her previously mentioned health adventures:

Fig. 5.5 ILGWU Convention. Atlantic City. Fannia M. Cohn Papers, 1914–1962. /VIII. Photographs and oversized items. 1934. Photograph. Manuscripts and Archives Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

In the year of 1916 I was a delegate from Chicago to the Convention of the I.L. G.W.U. I was then elected for the first time Vice-President of the International. This came to me unexpectedly. When I arrived in Philadelphia where the Convention was held, I found that a Movement had been started there among the women delegates to elect one of them to the General Executive Board.

A meeting was held of all the Women Delegates, which I had not even attended. They assembled, voted down the candidate on whose behalf the Movement was started, and they unanimously agreed to designate me as their candidate, and placed me in nomination.

There was another woman nominated to the same position, who was turned down at the Women's meeting. She was sponsored by the 'Manager' of her Union, who, not being a member of our Organization was not eligible for election himself, but as the rumor was, that he wanted to have somebody on the G.E.B., he therefore put her forward as a candidate. The 'Manager' was quite strong politically; many men worked for his candidate, but at the election – that is the secret ballot – she received an insignificant vote, but the real contest was between a man and myself who was the candidate of the Boston delegation, and who was endorsed by the General 'Caucus'. But I defeated him.

It is worthwhile here to mention that I could not have been elected by the Women's Vote alone, because they were comparatively few in number; the majority vote came from men. But I was conscious of the fact and impressed it on others that I was in reality elected by the women because it is they who insisted on a Woman Vice-President, and it is they who put me forward as their candidate.

I have never seen a group working for the election of a candidate with so much enthusiasm and unselfish devotion. I cannot forget the scene when the votes were counted; the atmosphere among the women was tense with fear and hope. Each woman delegate had a paper before her and a pencil in her hand marking my vote as it was loudly announced by the teller.

It is not easy for me to describe the joy with which these women received the announcement of my election. It was greeted with loud applause by most of the Delegates, but still louder by the Women. Momentarily I was surrounded by the Women Delegates, who warmly shook my hands, kissed me – in a word, it became a spontaneous reception. They were all singing revolutionary and labor songs, holding hands and dancing with me in the center, and in a few more seconds the entire delegation was applauding our group. (Much enthusiasm was displayed at the succeeding four elections, when I was returned as a member of the G.E.B. Just as much was the sadness when I decided at the 1925 Convention not to be a candidate for re-election – but about this next time.)

The only silent and confused observer was I, because I had then realized the responsibility that was mine. I had then solemnly resolved that never, never would these women and men resent the confidence they placed in me.[36]

Cohn's letter offers a *tableau vivant* of how some women found themselves in the hierarchy of the union. While it was other women's political will that often pushed them into the fields of power however, it was women again who often sided with men when intra-gender conflicts emerged in the union. Cohn's letter makes no attempt to hide the many differences amongst women, but it transmits strong signs and intense effects of women's solidarity, as well as the political power of acting in concert. The ILGWU photographs depicting women walking and laughing together in the different US cities where the annual conventions were held tell as many stories as they hide.[37] In this context Cohn's shadowed face in the Atlantic City photograph is a visual referent to the entanglement of the many visible and invisible spaces in her life and action.

What is however completely silenced in Cohn's aforementioned article about women's leadership is the figure of the single woman worker activist, ironically enough the subject position she acted and wrote from. We have a glimpse of this solitary figure as 'a silent and confused observer' in the end of Cohn's aforementioned letter to her friend. Moreover, it is in the photographic archive that traces of such marginalised figures can be found. Photographs display solitary bodies in spaces and places, while they enact the materiality of absence by attracting the viewers' attention to what is not seen or said. Cohn's photograph on a train[38] while travelling on union's business is in this light unique, as it captures something of the dynamism of women organisers, always, already on the move. As a Peircian 'index' however this photograph also reminds the viewer that this possibility of always being on the move, meant that very few women organisers were able to have or sustain a family: the majority of them, like Cohn or Pesotta lived a solitary life, going through elated moments of creative comradeship, but also acute experiences of loneliness. Already in Chap. 3 we have seen how Cohn suffered from the understanding that she was seen and pitied as a loner. Pesotta was more courageous in expressing her solitude not only in her personal letters and diaries like Cohn, but also in her political autobiography. On arriving in Seattle for a new mission in late December 1934, she felt somehow overwhelmed by the unpredictability of her life in this new city:

> Unpacking my things in this new home, I turned on the radio and sat down in front of a bay window facing magnificent Mount Rainier, topped with snow the year round! Rain was falling, the sort the Scotch call a 'drizzle-drazzle', but which people in the Puget Sound country speak of as 'Oregon mist'. I contemplated the mountain as if through a veil of gauze. The air was

> chill, and a great loneliness pressed down upon me. I asked myself: 'What am I doing here alone? What is in store for me?' (Pesotta 1987[1944], 136)

Memories of loneliness are entangled with the greyness of the weather in this narrative by Pesotta, thus creating a material backdrop for sad feelings and affects to be expressed. The mist is particularly suggestive of the uncertainty that such a lifestyle brought with it, but it is also a beautifully chosen metaphor for the blurring nature of memory, whose thick layers she is trying to disentangle by writing. Becoming a woman trade unionist was thus a long, laborious and emotionally intense process, a passage whose traces are left in Pesotta's autobiographical narratives or in Cohn's photographic archive.

Cohn lived a solitary life but as we have already seen in Chap. 3, it was her conviction that this was the life that she wanted to live and had consciously chosen. In collecting photographic accounts of herself, she remembered and recognised herself as a subject and in doing so, she actively deployed what drawing on Foucault (1988) I have called *visual technologies of the self*. It is thus through the creation of an archive that Cohn constituted herself as a subject to be remembered and in doing so, she attempted to rewrite herself in the discourse of History. In this light, her letters and writings, as well as her collection of photographs constitute an archive that offers a glimpse into the harsh minutiae of women workers' involvement in the history of the labour movement and in the cultural politics of the twentieth century. On the one hand they counterpoise dominant discourses that have tended to represent women workers and particularly garment workers as mere victims of capitalist and patriarchal exploitation; on the other hand, they unveil the dark side of the moon, by exposing the existential struggles underpinning heroic representations of the female revolutionary. Cohn's political struggles for the labour movement went hand in hand with personal agonistic politics against material restraints, bodily problems and health breakdowns, as well as solitude and gaps and failures of communication not only with men, but also with women friends and fellow comrades. It is in the messiness of human relations that Cohn's epistolary and photographic fragments emerge from, as traces of gendered memories of agonistic politics. Her lifelong passion for workers' education create a specifically interesting group in her archived photographs and work hand in hand with the progressive approaches that she took in the workers' educational curricula and pedagogical approaches that I will discuss next.

Educating Women Workers: An Ethic of Joy

There are many photographs in Cohn's archive depicting different workers' education classes with some interesting gendered components in them: the majority of the students are women, while the majority of the tutors are men. Cohn appears as a standard mother figure in all of them: even when she does not teach, she oversees the class, leads the discussion and seems to be seeing to the whole process. Among this group of class images I have been particularly drawn to a photograph taken at the Textile School Educational Recreation Centre in 1948. There are 24 participants in this photograph and they are all women students with the exception of a single man sitting at the back. Apart from Cohn, who is standing, they are all sitting at their desks laughing their hearts out.[39] It is the experience of the joy of education that I want to consider here, a theme that goes beyond its momentary caption in this particular photograph, creating conditions of possibility for a different approach to what education is and what it can do.

There is a connection between joy and empowerment, in that 'we organise encounters to maximise joy', Susan Ruddick (2010, 22) has noted in a rich field of contemporary interpretations of Spinoza's philosophy that is becoming increasingly influential in educational studies.[40] For Spinoza, humans collaborate with one another to enhance their power for action; this is not suggested as a moral proposition – humans should collaborate – but as a matter of fact, an immanent process of how things work, changes happen and the world moves forward. Drawing on Spinoza's theory of how bodies are in a continuous process of affecting and being affected, Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd have argued that 'freedom is not a possession of the autonomous individual, but rather an ethicopolitical practice [. . .] a collective process of *becoming*-free' (1999, 146). As Ruddick has aptly put it, for Spinoza, 'the expansion of our capacity to act is at once relational, produced by mutually reinforcing collaborations, and the outcome of a complex interplay of affect and reason' (2010, 26). In this context joy and happiness became the passage alongside which the workers would move from the experience of feeling joy to the phase of conceptual understanding and learning and further on to the expression and enactment of political discourses and practices. As Lloyd has commented, 'the strength of reason is for Spinoza the strength of human desire and human joy' (1996, 87). Desire is not taken psychoanalytically here, as lack but as 'the striving to persist in being' (ibid.).

Elsewhere in my work with narratives of women students from the first university associated women's colleges at Cambridge I had highlighted the joy and gaiety of the first women students as expressed in their writings and photographs (see Tamboukou 2003, 160). But these were young, middle class women who were happy for having been given the opportunity to escape the cage of Victorian womanhood, so that they could throw themselves in the adventure of education. Their conditions were so far away from the experiences of the Textile School women students of the photograph above. How can we map the existential platform on which they stand when they laugh? Henri Bergson has considered the role of laughter in throwing light 'on the way that human imagination works' (2008[1901], 9), particularly focusing on social and collective imaginaries, the 'ethicopolitical practice of *becoming-free*' that Gatens and Lloyd have highlighted earlier (1999, 146).

It is the experience of creative and radical education that has created a platform for workers to re-imagine themselves in the world with others: 'reason is [. . .] associated with desire and joy [and] it is from reason that we love ourselves, seek our own advantage and strive as far as we can to preserve our own beings' Lloyd has commented on Spinoza's 'ethic of joy' (1996, 87). Joy is not a single concept in Spinoza's *Ethics*, but an entanglement of passions that act as moving forces towards 'greater activity and perfection', Lloyd has noted (ibid., 90). Joys and pleasures of the mind and the body are of course interconnected in Spinoza's monistic philosophy: 'The advantage we reap from things which are outside us together with *the experience and knowledge* which we acquire from the fact that we observe them and change them from one form to another is principally the preservation of the body,'[41] Spinoza has written, adding that 'the more the body is apt to be affected in many ways or to affect external bodies in many ways, the more apt is the mind for thinking'.[42] Laughter is thus the bodily expression of *hilaritas*, the notion Spinoza uses for cheerfulness, as one of the passions entangled in the assemblage of joy. As Lloyd explains, '*hilaritas* is the reflective joy a thriving human being is able to take in having in this sense "a life" – in being a unified whole in which a wide range of pleasures come together' (1996, 92); in this sense *hilaritas* completes *gaudium*, that is gladness, in the affective assemblage of joy. Taking the photograph of the women students laughing their hearts out in the Textile Class, as a visual trace of the Spinozist 'ethic of joy' what I further suggest is that this snapshot is part of a wider archive of

photographs that freeze such moments of experiencing education as desire and joy, particularly pointing to the gendered dimensions of the phenomenon, as well as its feminist context. Feminism liberates in women amongst other things, a desire for lightness, Rosi Braidotti has noted, pointing to the merry spirit of women's groups, 'when it was clear that joy and laughter were profound political emotions and statements' (1994, 167). Drawing on the Spinozist idea of the positivity of passions, Braidotti has theorised feminist subjectivity as an object of desire for women, creating intense affects in their lives (ibid.). It is therefore striking to bump into occasions, when women workers bracket the miseries of their lives and let themselves be carried away by laughter in the context of transforming themselves through education.

Already in the previous chapters I have referred to the happiness and joy that the Bryn Mawr students and faculty would experience during the annual summer school courses. A number of photographs, as well as a film in the existing literature around Bryn Mawr have visually captured the affective dimension of women workers' educational experiences in the idyllic landscapes of the campus.[43] Summer school students reading in the portico, sitting and discussing in the cloisters, taking a poetry-reading class on the lawn or having an economics discussion group under the trees, allow visual glimpses of other spaces and other times in women workers' lives, surely different from the cramped urban sweatshops they used to work. As we have already seen in Chap. 4, women workers expressed their love for Bryn Mawr's natural surroundings in their autobiographies and poetry. But what would educational programmes for freedom look like in the context of the movement for workers' education? In the previous chapter I have referred to the teaching of drama, literature and poetry. What I want to do now is to consider the teaching of philosophy, history, and economics as fibres in the backcloth of joy.

Examining the relations between philosophical ideas and the revolution was the main aim of a course syllabus on 'Philosophy and Social Change'[44] that Cohn has included in her papers with a date of September 1925. As I have already noted in Chap. 2, there was a particular focus on the philosophical roots of the twentieth-century revolutionary movements with an attempt 'to evaluate the ideals and methods of realization proposed by revolutionary thinkers'.[45] Despites its focus on 'the function of philosophy as an instrument of change'[46] the subjects for this course included six lectures on Ancient Greek philosophy and Medieval scholasticism, one lecture on Intelligence and action and one on Bergson's philosophy amongst

others. The rest of the twenty-one topics were about Rousseau and the French revolution, the German idealism and, of course, Marxist interpretations of History.

We see in this syllabus a combination of abstract philosophical concepts with questions and issues arising from social experience. Even amongst the abstract concepts in the history of philosophy there were lecture topics such as 'The Greek view of labor and how it is reflected in metaphysics' (lecture 4),[47] or politico-existential questions such as, 'Is progress conceived as control possible?' (lecture 18)[48] We do not have enough information about what happened to this course and how the students received it. But the syllabus is interesting in allowing glimpses into the ideas that drove workers' education at the time, as well as the attempt to ground theoretical abstractions with knowledges that made a difference to the lives and understandings of the students. It was in the same pedagogical spirit that Cohn wrote a leaflet on approaches and methods in the study of History. As the leaflet was intended to become a teaching aid in the labour class, it was written in a dialogic form, as a series of exchanges between a discussion leader and a group of students:

> Discussion Leader: [. . .] What do we mean when we say that an individual or an organization or a country makes history?
> One Student: When something is being done . . .
> [. . .]
> Another Student: Something that is worth while writing down
> Discussion Leader: According to your opinions, history means a record of the achievements of men and women, individually or in groups. Now, how do we get the facts of which history is made?
> One Student- We get them from the newspapers
> Another Student: . . . and from reports . . .
> Another Student: I think we also get them from people themselves
> Discussion Leader: Are historical facts necessarily recorded – or written down by those who participate in the event?
> [. . .]
> One Student: We imagine how we would act if we were in their place
> Discussion Leader: According to your analysis then, we make up the part of the story we don't remember by using our imagination.[49]

Using the Socratic dialectic method of engaging the interlocutor through thought-provoking questions, the history teacher of the labour class helps the students find their way in the vast and complex field of historiography

and the making of historical truth. As questions and issues emerge, the students get the chance to interrogate common sense ideas about what history means and how it is written, to put it in contemporary terms they were given the opportunity to deconstruct the historiographical discourse. What I further suggest is that Cohn's ideas about the teaching of philosophy and history draws on the Spinozist idea of freedom, which is hugely important in his configuration of joy. To become free subjects need to acquire a method of forming ideas for themselves: 'That thing is said to be FREE (libera) which exists by the mere necessity of its own nature and is determined to act by itself alone.'[50] Students have further given vivid description of the freedom and joy they experienced when they realised that they could understand labour economics. This is how Carmen Lucia, a Bryn Mawr student remembers the day she understood the notion of economy, commodity and selling one's labour. As she talks with a friend in front of the camera, for the Bryn Mawr documentary film 'Women of Summer' her face beams:

> Did you ever have Amy Hews in the classroom? Do you remember the morning she said 'how many of you think that the laundry is a factory?' We all were stunned: 'Well the laundry is not a factory, all they do is wash clothes' [. . .] but she insisted [. . .] it finally turned out, sure, I am selling my labour . . . 'oh, she said, you mean you are a commodity?' Then we got the first inkling of what economy and what social problem means [sic] when you sell your labour, that's when the question of the union came in.[51]

It goes without saying that joy would reach its climax in the theatrical performances that we discussed in the previous chapter. There is rich visual material around these artistic events that capture not only the final performances, but also the whole process from the initial stage of reading to the preparation of the scenery and props, as well as the anxiety of the rehearsals and the excitement of the theatrical tours.[52] What is particularly interesting in the majority of these photographs is that they are mostly populated by women. In a photograph taken on 30 March 1935 outside the ILGWU headquarters, a group of members are ready to leave for a field trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They carry an ILGWU Educational Department banner and a poster advertising the labor drama festival. There are twenty members and only two of them are men.[53] There are several photographs in the ILGWU archive of such field trips, which were part of the project 'class on wheels', that is, Saturday visits to points of

interest.[54] According to Cohn, such visits offered a sort of 'visual education' and taught workers students to observe, to ground their knowledge and to have an in-depth understanding and appreciation of art:

> Instead of having a classroom discussion of the various forms of art, industry, science and natural history, leaving only an abstract impression with the student, the Educational Department, for the past 26 years, has conducted Saturday visits to Points of Interest under the title, 'Know your City.' These included visits to museums of art, natural history, science and industry, educational institutions, newspaper plants, industrial establishments, governmental institutions, special exhibits, historic and scenic points. A lecturer, who is in authority in the field discusses with our people all that they see. It is *a form of visual education*, applying the case method. By visiting exhibits, they see their surroundings through the eyes of the artist.
>
> Such visits are also valuable for they put into practice, the principle of basing conclusions on self-observed facts. Furthermore, important is the fact that this brings our members into closer touch with the life of the community; they thus get an intimate knowledge of the complexities of our social system and gain an appreciation of its cultural values.
>
> In addition, arrangements have been made with theatre and concert managements whereby our members obtain admission to musical programs at reduced rates. Before the concerts, teachers at our centers discuss the programs, illustrating particular points on musical instruments. The discussion by a drama teacher follows the theatre visit.[55]

Cohn's approach to education was far ahead of its time, understandably so, if we consider her influences from academics and philosophers such as John Dewey and Charles Beard, whose thought moulded the approaches, educational programmes, curricula and overall activities that she designed, wrote and implemented. An overall spirit of adventure, joy and freedom saturated the way she re-imagined education for workers in general and women workers in particular. It is the visual themes that I mapped and discussed in this chapter that I now want to see in their interrelation in the last concluding section.

The Force of the Visual: Unveiling Hidden Dimensions of Bodies, Spaces and Affects

In this chapter I have taken the visual turn in opening up new ways of seeing and understanding workers' education. In doing so I have focused on archival research with photographs found amongst Fannia Cohn's papers,

which I have contextualised within the ILGWU and Bryn Mawr photographic archives. My visual inquiries have benefited from the rich digital archives of labour history that have recently become available with network and database technologies. Edward Hall (1966) has called our attention to how people use their bodies to structure social and personal spaces in ways that are often invisible and unspoken of. It is such invisible spaces, interpersonal relationships and institutional environments that the visual analysis has unveiled. The photographs and videos that I have discussed or pointed to, have brought in space, place and the body as material entanglements, opening up vistas in the history of workers' education with gender at its centre. The fact that male and female bodies have become visible in these photographs begs for questions around women's absence from the writing of labour histories to be revisited. It also highlights women's neglected role in the movement for workers' education, as well as their important contribution to the cultural formations of modernity. As Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor (2007) have argued, sexualities, gendered subjectivities, space/place entanglements and embodied practices are amongst the themes that visual studies in the history of education have brought to the fore.

In light of this, I have been particularly drawn to the photographic archives that I have presented earlier, excavating ways that women labour organisers have been seen, pictured and represented, particularly in relation to their involvement in the movement for workers' education. There were thus three insights that emerged from the turn to the visual. The first was the importance of space/time rhythms that created the phenomenon of what I have analysed and discussed as *proletarian summers*. Since it was the ILGWU's Educational Department pioneering work that shaped the movement for workers' education in the USA, it was the seasonal character of the garment industry that gave summers such an important role in freeing time for workers. Women workers particularly benefited from such arrangements, once they were given the opportunity to be free from both labour shifts: the workshop and the home. It is no wonder why they so enthusiastically embraced the union's educational and cultural activities that helped them re-imagine and reposition themselves in the world of work, family and beyond.

Such new-found possibilities did not emerge out of the blue however: they were the effects of tons of tireless, thankless and unrecognised work that a bunch of ILGWU women activists put into the impossible task of 'organizing the unorganizable' through educating women workers. Their few photographs standing and smiling uncomfortably amongst men constitute a punctum of the labour movement's photographic archive, the

second insight that emerged from the visual analysis of this chapter. Indeed, these photographic images acted as obstacles or interferences in the discourses of labour histories, materialising women's absence from them. Such photographs were further juxtaposed to some very few group photographs of women organisers walking together happily and to many others exposing women activists' solitude. These images have boldly revealed that women's friendship and solidarity, important as they were in the history of feminist movements, cannot be taken for granted. What the photographs have brought to the fore is that women acting together should actually be taken as a phenomenon of diffraction in its classical physics understanding: like waves in the sea, women organisers combine when they overlap, while they bend and spread out when they encounter an obstruction.

Despite their collisions and interferences however, the waves of women organisers in the labour movement, became champions of a new philosophy of education beyond the sterility and conventions of both academic scholasticism and narrow vocational training. They promoted the idea of education for freedom and in doing so they created conditions of possibility for forces of educational desire and joyful passions to be unleashed, the third analytical insight that emerged from the visual analysis of the photographic images. The photographs were indeed catalytic in registering feelings and emotions that had remained invisible in the bodies of the textual documents that I had studied in the archives and beyond. As Bates (2013) has persuasively argued, visual methods are more sensorially attentive and in this sense they can better capture visceral bodies and register intense emotions and feelings.

'The visual has become somewhat invisible in accounts of gender and education research,' Allan and Tinkler have argued (2015, 791) further suggesting that visual studies and image-based research can significantly enrich a wide range of studies in the field and need to be developed more. It is to this project of the turn to the visual that this chapter has contributed, unveiling invisible areas in the history of women workers' education and beyond.

Notes

1. Rose Pesotta to David Dubinsky, 7 November 1939 (RPP/NYPL/GC).
2. See Pesotta amongst men at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279330871/ and https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5278921239/ [Accessed 7 March 2016].

3. Bryn Mawr Summer School for working women in the industry at: http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/search/collection/BMC_photoarc [Accessed 7 March 2016].
4. Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives Cornell University Library: http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/KCL05780.html For the on-line photographic archive, see also, https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/with/5279612316/ [Accessed 23 February 2016].
5. 'Women's archives and women's history' Joan Wallach Scott's comments on the dedication of the Christine Dunlap Farnham Archives, 10 October 1986. Available at: http://www.brown.edu/research/pembroke-center/sites/brown.edu.research.pembroke-center/files/uploads/JWSExcerpt_06957_0.pdf [Accessed 12 November 2015].
6. For an overview of Mary Beard's work see Lane 2000. Her papers are housed at the Sophia Smith Collection (SSC/MS 13).
7. World Center for Women's Archives (WCWA) brochure, (SSC/MS 13/Series IV/WCWA/General).
8. Open letter, dated 17 September 1935, signed by Mary R. Beard, Dr Kathryn McHale, Mary Jobson, Lena Madesin, Phillips and Geline MacDonald Bow [emphasis in the text]. (SSC/MS 13/S. IV/WCWA/Cor) The letter has been reprinted in Relph 1979, 599–600.
9. See Relph 1979 and Voss-Hubbard 1997 for the history and difficulties of the WCWA.
10. (SSC/MS 13/S. IV/WCWA/Cor) The letter has been reprinted in Relph 1979, 602–603.
11. FC to Mary Beard, letter dated 23 January 1940 (NYPL/FCP/Cor).
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. See, https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279153393/ [Accessed 6 March 2016].
16. Fannia Cohn, 'Unity house' in *The Educational department of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union: Its Aims and Achievements*, paper presented at the 1940 ILGWU Annual Convention (FCP/NYPL/Writings), 53. For images of the main building and its premises, see: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/with/5279760854/; https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279760680/; https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279760538/; https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279760360/; [Accessed 28 February 2016].
17. FC to ILGWU's Executive Board, letter dated July 31, 1922 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).

18. 'Unity Summer House of the Philadelphia and Boston Waistmakers', *Ladies' Garment Worker*, October 1918, 23–24.
19. See https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279155461/; https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279152935/ [Accessed 6 March 2016].
20. FC to Frances Perkins, US Secretary of Labour, letter dated 4 April 1933 (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
21. FC to Artie White, letter dated 2 July 1934, (FCP/NYPL/Cor).
22. See a video about the life of the Unity House from the Kheel Center film archives at: http://ilgwu.ilr.cornell.edu/archives/filmVideo/index.html?defaultVideoID=5 [Accessed 27 February 2016].
23. See, https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279756142/ [Accessed 6 March 2016].
24. See photos of these destroyed murals at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5278985153/ [Accessed 27 February 2016].
25. See image of this destructive fire at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279759022/ [Accessed 28 February 2016].
26. See, https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279622496/ [Accessed 28 February 2016].
27. 'Can women lead?', *Justice*, February 15, 1936, reprinted as a pamphlet. (FCP/NYPL), 2.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. FC to a friend, undated letter that has been written sometime in the spring of 1931 as transpires from its content and context, (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
33. 'Can women lead?' (FCP/NYPL), 3.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 4.
36. FC to a friend, undated letter that has been written sometime in the spring of 1931 as transpires from its content and context (FCP/NYPL/Cor.).
37. See another group photograph with six women organisers walking happily together in the 1937 Atlantic city convention: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5278911285/ [Accessed 29 February 2016].
38. See, https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279609254/ [Accessed 29 February 2016].
39. See [Fig. 26] at: https://sites.google.com/site/womenworkerseducation/home/visual-archive [Accessed 1 May 2016].
40. See for example the special issue of the *Educational Philosophy and Theory Journal* on 'Thinking with Spinoza about Education: a new materialist ethics', to be published in 2017.

41. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part IV, Appendix XXVII, (2002, 192).
42. Ibid.
43. Heller 1985, *The Women of Summer*, documentary film. See it at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hOiOreS8ZQ [Part I] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRSemT8jCg [Part II] [Accessed March 3, 2016]. There is further a rich collection of photographs at Bryn Mawr at the M. Carey Thomas Library at Bryn Mawr College, also available as a digital archive at: http://triptych.brynmawr.edu/cdm/search/collection/BMC_photoarc. See also http://greenfield.brynmawr.edu/exhibits/show/the-summer-school-for-women-wo/introduction; http://www.brynmawr.edu/library/speccoll/rbma/archivesresources.html#sswwii [Accessed 3 March 2016].
44. 'Philosophy and social change', course syllabus (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.
49. History, Fiction or Fact, Approach and Method in the Study of History, including suggestions for teacher in Workers' Classes by Fannia M. Cohn, (FCP/NYPL/Writings).
50. Spinoza, *Ethics*, First Part, Definition VII (2002, 4).
51. Carmen Lucia, a Bryn Mawr students talking in the film 'Women of Summer' (Heller and Bauman 1985). Available on line: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hOiOreS8ZQ [Part I, 14.06–14.45m].
52. See for example: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279527718/ [Accessed 3 March 2016].
53. See: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5278606724/ [Accessed 7 March 2016].
54. See also: https://www.flickr.com/photos/kheelcenter/5279619790/ [Accessed 7 March 2016].
55. 'Education for a troubled World, class on wheels' by Fannia M. Cohn, unpublished paper dated March 1946 (FCP/NYPL/Writings, emphasis mine).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion: The Adventure of Women Workers' Education

'In considering the history of ideas, I maintain that the notion of 'mere knowledge' is a high abstraction which we should dismiss from our minds. Knowledge is always accompanied with accessories of emotion and purpose', Whitehead wrote in the introduction of his highly influential work, *Adventures of Ideas* (1967 [1933], 4). As already highlighted in the Introduction, the idea of adventure was crucial not only in Whitehead's overall philosophical thought but also in the way he conceptualised education as a creative process facilitating the adventure of ideas. In the last concluding chapter of this book I want to return to this image of education as adventure, reassembling its multifarious expressions in the movement for women workers' education.

What is particularly important in Whitehead's statement is the connections he makes between knowledge, emotions and purpose. Steven Shaviro has pithily pointed out that feelings precede understanding in Whitehead's philosophy and as a consequence his notion of experience emerges as affective rather than cognitive (2012, 57). This is because Whitehead's overall philosophy highlights our entanglement in the world: 'we respond to things in the first place by feeling them; it is only afterwards that we identify, and cognize, what it is that we are feeling', Shaviro has aptly explained (ibid., 58). Education in this light becomes a plane creating conditions of possibility for affective connections to be made that will further facilitate imaginative learning. Whitehead was very

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specific in laying out the conditions of possibility for imaginative learning to be enacted: 'The combination of imagination and learning normally requires some leisure, freedom from restraint, freedom from harassing worry, some variety of experiences and the stimulation of other minds diverse in opinion and diverse in equipment' (1929b, 97). Moreover, imagination is in itself a process, it can never be crystallised, condensed or conserved, let alone commodified in any sort of knowledge exchange economy or market, notions and structures that we simply take for granted in contemporary educational discourses and policies. In this context universities should be the places par excellence where education and research should meet:

> Do you want your teachers to be imaginative? Then bring them into intellectual sympathy with the young at the most eager, imaginative period of life, when intellects are just entering upon their mature discipline. Make your researchers explain themselves to active minds, plastic and with the world before them; make your young students crown their period of intellectual acquisition by some contact with minds gifted with experience of intellectual adventure (ibid.).

As already noted, adventure emerges as crucial in Whitehead's suggestion: his idea was that education should throw light to the fact that 'the history of ideas is a history of mistakes' (1967 [1933], 25). Educators should acknowledge such limitations, point to the history of countless, experiments, failures and adventures and show their students how to throw themselves in new adventures of ideas. For Whitehead, this should be precisely the role of the university: to create and maintain the connection 'between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning' (1929b, 93). We know of course that universities have very rarely fulfilled this purpose. Whitehead has pointed to the very interesting fact that as a result of scholastic education that was prominent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the great thinkers of this period, including Spinoza, Leibniz, Bacon and Erasmus, amongst others, were not members of university faculties as the imaginative and creative force of their thought could not develop within the restraints and limitations of the university milieus of their era (1967 [1933], 59).

But what about the workers' universities that cropped up on both sides of the Atlantic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? As I have shown throughout the book, it is in these 'universities of the people' that the idea

of education as adventure, imagination and creativity was seriously taken up and materialised, bringing together knowledge, emotions and purpose in the wider movements for social justice and change. Within this new image of thought the movement for workers' education followed different trends that reflect geographical, national, historical, political and cultural differences. Women workers' presence was however catalytic in all of them: they took up and moved around a wide range of subject potions as students, teachers, activists, creators. It is the cartography of their *vita activa* that has brought together work, education and creativity and has made horizontal connections between and amongst them that I now want to revisit.

Women Workers as Students

Bryn Mawr, 4 August 1922

> My dearest Comrade:
> This will be the last letter you will receive from Bryn Mawr. Next week this time, I will be with you again in the dusty city doing my daily work in the shop and spending the evenings with you in the little office, planning to organize the non-organized. Really, dear comrade, when I look back into the past, not very long, oh say only two months ago, I find such a change in my thoughts.[1]

Writing from Bryn Mawr at the end of her summer school period, Pesotta vividly described her experiences of being a student of an institution that became legendary in the history of women workers' education in the USA. As I have discussed throughout the book, women workers' educational encounters were catalytic in the course of their life trajectories. For the majority of them the idea of having an education was an effect of their political involvement: wider political and social movements in France and the UK, more specifically focused trade union politics in the USA. Women workers' education was permeated by elements of what Rose (2010) has discussed as 'the autodidact culture', which was nevertheless underpinned by different socio-political, cultural and economic conditions. In France and the UK, it was the romantic socialist movements of the nineteenth century that created strong educational and cultural movements amongst the workers of the early industrialisation period. These movements were also spread on the other side of the Atlantic through the ephemeral utopian colonies and communes that were established in the second half of the nineteenth century.[2]

It was thus from the Saint-Simonian and Fourierist circles that the first autonomous feminist movement emerged in France, led by young proletarian women, who fiercely campaigned for women workers' education. As already noted in the Introduction, the majority of these young women were self-taught and it was through their engagement with politics that they were able to advance their education and those of their contemporaries. Education, or rather the lack of it, comes up as a strong theme in their autobiographical writings. Voilquin, one of the editors of the first feminist newspaper wrote powerfully about the sorrows, anxiety and anguish of searching for knowledge while working as a needle-worker: 'Many times in public concerts and in museums, I would feel my tears flow. In those tears there was a mingling of the happiness of aspiring to the unknown with the despair of never being able to attain it' (1866, 20). Tears flowing in the young girl's face create a visceral image of women's desire for education and would become a constant theme of their future campaigns. As a Saint-Simonian writer, Voilquin felt no restriction whatsoever in exposing the force of her emotions, powerfully interrelating the intellectual and the material in the assemblage of the social and cultural conditions she had emerged from. Happiness and despair were entangled in her experiences of seeking for knowledge and reading opened up heterotopic spaces in the constraints of her environment: 'I passionately loved reading; I could indulge in this penchant in the evening next to my mother on condition that I read to her, while she worked' (ibid.). Passion, joy, happiness, indulgence fill up and indeed overflow from the writer's discourse alongside her tears. Moreover, reading to her mother in the evening while she was engaged with most probably needlework created a different pedagogical context for working-class girls than those of their brothers.

Such gender differences were equally strong on the other side of the Channel and the overall movement for workers' education in the UK. Elizabeth Andrews has written about how much she loved school, but being a miner's daughter she was not allowed to continue with her studies: 'I had to leave school at twelve owing to our large family and the coming ninth baby', she wrote in her autobiography (2006 [1957], 10). Although she had a strong desire to become a teacher, this never happened; instead she became a dressmaker. Alice Foley concludes her autobiography with the sweet memories of attending a Workers' Educational Associations (WEA's) summer school in Bangor, North Wales: 'The various seminars were small but spirited; the tutors understanding and encouraging. On sunny days, in circles on the

University terrace [. . .] we read and explored Browning's poems. It was a strange joy [. . .] a month of almost complete happiness' (1973, 92).

Foley's fond memories of her summer school echo impressions and feelings from the many summer schools for women workers in the industry that flourished at the other side of the Atlantic. In looking at the specificities of women workers' education in the USA, I have highlighted the cultural effects of migration, as a particularly unique phenomenon of their experience. As we have seen throughout the book, education gave these migrant women workers the opportunity to learn the language of their new country, but once they had mastered the language they were able to unfold and deploy the rich cultural capital they were carrying with them from their countries of origin. Women workers' rich 'migration capital', as I have called it was catalytic in the different dynamics that were developed not only in women workers' education in the USA but also more widely in the trade union politics and women's involvement in it. It is therefore no surprise that it was from the ranks of migrant women workers that some influential educators, emerged, as I will discuss next.

Women Workers as Educators and Labour Organisers

Women workers emerged as educators through the channels of 'the autodidact culture' (Rose 2010), the education they received as workers, as well as their political involvement in the European socio-political movements and in the American trade unions. Marie-Reine Guindorf left the editorial group of the first feminist newspaper in France to devote her free time in educating other young proletarian women; Jeanne Deroin worked hard and eventually became a teacher; while Désirée Véret-Gay experimented with Robert Owen's liberal educational ideas, founded and run two schools – albeit unsuccessfully – and even published a book about the importance of mothers' involvement in the education of their children (Gay 1868). Proletarian women's education was at the heart of the feminist clubs and newspapers that emerged after the February 1848 revolution in France. Deroin and her friend and comrade Pauline Roland founded the *Association of Socialist Teachers* in 1849 and became central figures of the Union of Workers' Associations, before they were both arrested and imprisoned for their revolutionary ideas and actions between 1850 and 1851. 'Your courageous declaration of Woman's Rights has resounded even to our prison, and has filled our souls with inexpressible joy,' (in Bell and Offen 1983, 287) they wrote to the *Convention of the*

Women of America on June 15, 1851 from their cell in the Saint-Lazzare's prison in Paris.[3] But while joining their American sisters 'in the vindication of the right of woman to civil and political equality', (in ibid., 289) they concluded by highlighting the need for solidarity and union with the working classes: 'only by the power of association based on solidarity – by the union of the working-classes of both sexes to organise labour – can be acquired, completely and pacifically, the civil and political equality of woman, and the social right for all' (in ibid., 289).

The French activists' message was well-received by the newly emerging feminist movement in the USA, but as we have seen throughout the book American working women had to grapple against a number of adversaries as educators. Sexism in their union, as well as the negligence and marginalisation of workers' education in the overall priorities of the labour movement were amongst the greatest difficulties they had to overcome. Their role as educators was complex and multi-faceted. First they had to fight for resources and persuade their suspicious male comrades that spending money for workers' education was not a luxury but a necessity. Once they had secured a meagre and precarious budget, they had to find, rent and maintain buildings and put in place other material infrastructure for educational programmes to become possible. Further, they would design educational programmes and curricula, search for suitable labour tutors and persuade famous professors to give lectures. Lastly, they had to recruit students for their programmes, something that was far from easy or straightforward, given the many pressures looming upon workers' lives, particularly during periods of prolonged unemployment, as in the time of the Depression.

Cohn's correspondence gives a vivid image of the multi-faceted and exhausting experience of being a women worker educator and labour organiser. 'I appreciate the fact that you realize how hard it is for us to "get across" health lectures for our members [. . .] those of us who are pioneers in this movement, must [. . .] suffer inconveniences,'[4] she wrote to Dr Ian Galdson in February 1923, in response to his letter about the difficulties of holding a lecture on occupational health to the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) members. Cohn knew only too well how difficult it was to educate workers, but she was convinced that such difficulties were part of the struggle; indeed her correspondence shows how hard she worked to co-ordinate, sustain and support the educational and cultural activities of the union. As we have seen throughout the book and particularly in Chaps. 2 and 3, her letters to a range of

ILGWU locals across the country offer detailed advice on what to do, including feedback about the level of the classes as well as the time slots chosen for the lectures. Apart from being a tireless organiser, Cohn was also a highly respected mentor: 'I think it is a well written, clear and exact statement,'[5] she wrote in April 1923 to Emma Yanisky, a young woman who had sent her statement for her application to Brookwood College and was asking for feedback. This letter is also one of many she wrote throughout her life in support of young people's educational aspirations within the union and beyond, while in Chap. 3 we have seen how much she influenced other women scholars and educators such as her friends Preston and Wolfson.

Cohn's tireless efforts for the American movement for workers' education were documented thanks to her decision to collect and bequeath her papers to the New York Public Library. British women workers' participation in the WEA's educational programmes in the first half of the twentieth century is unfortunately not very well documented. As I have already noted in the Introduction, women were less involved in the WEA's university-led tutorial system. However, their autobiographical sources have revealed the importance of education in changing their lives and improving the conditions of their community. In writing the biography of her father as a case study of a labour farmer in a Warwickshire village, Mabel K. Ashby noted how her mother never thought of intellectual pursuits or endeavours, 'for it seemed her duty to be perpetually poised for swift service –to husband, child, animal, neighbour and the chapel' (1961, 243). But while her mother 'naturally [passed] into the background of her husband's and children's lives, not often to emerge' (ibid., 244), her daughter grew up to become the principal of the Hillcroft Residential College for Working Women between 1933 and 1946. This was perhaps because despite her indifference in cultural matters, Mabel's mother participated in 'the rich autodidact culture' that Rose's (2010) important study has explored. Her husband taught her to read and enjoy Walter Scott and George Elliot, as he firmly believed in the importance of education according to his daughter (Ashby 1961, 258).

But as already noted earlier, it was not only the development of cultural and intellectual interests that women workers pursued through education. It was also though the channels of formal and informal learning that many of them got involved in labour politics. 'The spirit of the WEA was to sustain and accompany me through long years of humble toil,' Foley wrote in the concluding passage of her autobiography, which finishes at the point where her involvement in trade union politics and the WEA's educational programmes begins (1973, 92). Despite their active involvement in the movement for

workers' education however, British women workers remained in the margins of the WEA's organisational structures, unlike their American sisters, who became the driving force of workers' education in the USA.

Women Workers as Creators and Writers

Women workers' intellectual and cultural life was rich and diverse on both sides of the Atlantic. Not only were they avid readers, theatre goers and art fans, but they actively participated in the cultural production of their times and geographies. It was their formal and informal education that created conditions of possibility for such intellectual pursuits, and it was through different channels that they unfolded their creative forces. As we have seen in Chap. 4, women workers' creativity has made forceful connections between ethics, aesthetics and politics, although they were differently shaped by the intellectual and cultural trends and movements of their specific national and socio-economic contexts.

Autobiographical writing was a crucial component of working-women's literary creation, but poetry and drama were also high up in the agenda of their cultural contribution. There were further many women workers who immersed themselves in historical, sociological and economic research and became political analysts, journalists, historians, economists and social scientists. Whether in the academy, like Theresa Wolfson, or in the wider public intellectual sphere, like Jeanne Bouvier, Fannia Cohn and Rose Pesotta, women workers brought material grounding in the abstractions of theoretical approaches to the question of women's labour and their overall social and economic condition. Writing about their experiences of work and action women workers shed light on the blurring boundaries between the private and the public and exposed women's vulnerability in the interstices of waged, unwaged and domestic labour, as well as their impossible position in the male-dominated hierarchies of the labour movement. What they wrote are the only tangible traces in the gendered memory of work, as I have elsewhere discussed at length (see Tamboukou 2016b).

Here again it was the autonomous feminist movements that sprang in the second half of the nineteenth century that created conditions of possibility for the figure of the woman worker/writer to emerge, very conscious of her uniqueness in the cultural histories of her time: 'I believe I am the only worker who has become a writer. Margueritte Audoux, who is also a seamstress is a novelist, but I feel attracted by historical research',[6] Bouvier wrote in an article in *La Française* in 1928. It goes without saying

that in all of the aforementioned, imagination played a crucial role: to begin with, women workers imagined that they could actually write. Indeed, such an imaginative leap was a condition of possibility of the project of writing itself. They all expressed their fear of writing, they revealed how humbled they felt in front of the task, how uncertain they were of its outcomes.

When Georges Renard, Professor of Labour History at the Collège de France asked Bouvier to write the history of the linen-goods industry and its workers, as a contribution to a series of 58 volumes comprising *La Bibliothèque sociale des métiers* (The Social library of trades) that he was editing, she confessed that she felt utterly out of her depths: 'When alone, I was thinking: "M. Georges Renard has been deluded about my value and my knowledges. No, it is not possible for me to accept to write a book, I have always suffered by my ignorance"' (Bouvier 1983 [1936], 214). But putting her fears aside, Bouvier threw herself in the pleasures of research and produced a rare study of the French linen-goods industry in the twentieth century that has become an invaluable source in women's labour history (Bouvier 1928). 'You have written a book and you will write others,' (Bouvier 1983[1936], 216) Renard told her when she delivered her manuscript and indeed research and writing became her life-long passion.

'I had the material and the urge, but soon realized that I was not equal to the task before me,' (1987 [1944], xxi) Pesotta wrote in the acknowledgements of her political memoirs *Bread upon the Waters*. And yet she decided to write this book since she was convinced that it would be useful for the women workers she had unionised through her career as a labour organiser. As she wrote to a friend her book was written for those women 'who would never read such books as the Needle Trades by Siedman, which are too technical for them'.[7] Her book became very successful not only for the women workers who read their experiences in it, but also for many college and university students who were studying labour economics at the time, as we have already seen in Chap. 2.

Imagination played a crucial role then, not only in winging working women's pen but also in opening up vistas of another world that was possible. How is then creativity to be understood in the context of the adventure of women workers' education? As already noted previously, the role of education for Whitehead is to support the adventure of ideas, the fact that although many elements in our experience are 'on the fringe of consciousness' (1967 [1933], 163), they are still important and that 'our powers of analysis, and of expression, flickers with our consciousness'

(ibid., 164). Instead of supporting the certainty of analysis, knowledges and ideas, which it can't, education should instead encourage and facilitate 'creativity' a notion that very few know that originates in Whitehead's work: 'creativity is the actualisation of potentiality [. . .] viewed in abstraction objects are passive, but viewed in conjunction they carry the creativity which drives the world. The process of creation is the form of unity of the Universe' (ibid., 179). Creativity for Whitehead then is an open and ever-changing process that the universe is engaged in. Being part of nature human beings emerge in the world with cognitive capacities, while the ultimate aims of their actions is to seek change. It is thus in the realm of sustaining and supporting change that education takes up creative dimensions: it becomes an assemblage of ideas, practices, knowledges, discourses and actions, a plane wherein women workers' lines of flight can be charted and followed.

Becoming Other: Charting Lines of Flight in Women Workers' Education

In mapping the complex field of women workers' education drawing on archival documents from three countries – France, the UK and the USA – I used the concept of the assemblage as a useful analytical framework that could encompass diverse and complex discourses, institutions, practices and subjectivities. As I have already shown in Chap. 2, the theory of assemblages is a novel approach to social ontology offering an analytics of social complexity that accounts for open configurations, continuous connections, as well as entanglements between power relations and forces of desire. It is on this plane of analysis that women workers' resistance to the social, economic and political conditions of their actuality took up new forms of expression and understanding that I now want to revisit through the concept of 'becoming'.

Both Foucault and Deleuze were preoccupied with 'becomings' in the context of rethinking time in philosophy. Foucault's genealogical problem actually starts from a problematisation of the historicity of our present, and the possibilities of opening it up to radical futures. Deleuze's work has been particularly attentive to the latter: planes of open futurity. As John Rajchman (2009, 47) has poetically put it, for Foucault, a history of the present 'is a history of the portion of the past that we don't see is still with us', while for Deleuze the diagnosis of the past was not as important as the imagination of the untimely future, 'to be attentive to the unknown that is knocking at the door' (cited in ibid.). Becoming is then always a process

that is set into motion by the will to lose the self, leave the grounds on which you think you stand on, follow lines of flight, de-territorialise and disperse the self. Becoming is thus an open process, a nomadic journey, a wandering:

> Becoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equaling,' or 'producing'. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 239)

As I have shown throughout the book, women workers' autobiographical narratives trace lines of flight and recount events of becoming other. But as I have also pointed out, women workers often found themselves entrapped in the black holes of patriarchy not only in the context of capitalist exploitation but also and perhaps more poignantly in the context of the male-driven trade unions and even amongst their sister comrades: 'What is it which tells us that, on a line of flight, we will not rediscover everything we were fleeing?' Deleuze has asked in his illuminating conversations with Claire Parnet (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, 38).

However, within the framework of the assemblage theory, the end is never important when you trace a line of flight; what is always more interesting and fascinating is the experience of being in the middle, the intermezzo, the strength to take up fragments and loose ends of broken lines of flight. This is, according to Deleuze, another way of beginning, another way of becoming: 'to take up the interrupted line, to join a segment to the broken line, to make it pass between two rocks in a narrow gorge, or over the top of the void, where it had stopped' (ibid., 39). These new beginnings in the middle always appear as discontinuous and fragmented events that can only leave their traces in narratives. As Deleuze has argued, the event is always elusive and cannot be reached: 'The pure event is tale and novella, never an actuality' (Deleuze 2001, 73).

Women workers' narratives were indeed rich in recounting 'new beginnings in the middle', 'interrupted lines taken up again', 'passages between rocks'. Their formal and informal education and the new vistas it had opened up in their lives was crucial in facilitating such 'new beginnings in the middle'. When Bouvier was forced to step down from the leadership of the Confederation General du Travail (CGT) in 1923, she threw herself in the pleasures of

research: 'Due to my estrangement from the workers' organisations I was able to work in tranquillity on historical questions, which interested me and more particularly on women's work. In the silence of the library and the solitude of my home, I could see the state of inferiority women were held within workers' organisations,' she bitterly noted, surely reflecting on her own experience of the labour movement (1983[1936], 145–6).

Pesotta did the same: she began writing her political memoirs, as soon as she returned to her sewing machine in New York after stepping down from the ILGWU hierarchy: 'When I went back to work in a dress factory in 1942 I set out to write a book on my years afield as a labor organizer. During that period I had accumulated a great mass of memoranda – letters, articles written for the labor press, pamphlets, copies of special publications used in organisation drives, statistical reports, diaries,' she wrote in the opening pages of *Bread upon the Waters* (Pesotta 1987[1944], xxi). Writing a book about her political activism was not only a way of 'talking back' to her male comrades but also 'a new beginning in the middle', an existential search, an attempt to reposition herself as a woman/activist/worker/intellectual.

What I therefore suggest is that brought together on a plane of what Deleuze has identified as 'minor knowledges' (1997, 192), working women's personal and political narratives create archives of radical futurity: they offer possibilities both for their narrators and readers 'of becoming untimely, of placing ourselves outside the constraints, the limitations and blinkers of the present' (Grosz 2004, 117), of imagining a future, a world, a people yet to come.

Notes

1. Rose Pesotta to 'dear comrade', letter dated 4 August 1922 (RPP/NYPL/General Correspondence).
2. Inspired by Étienne Cabet's utopian novel *Voyage en Icarie*, the Icarians established a series of egalitarian communes in Texas, Iowa, Missouri and California between 1848 and 1898, while a Fourierist colony was founded in Texas between 1855 and 1857. For a discussion of such utopian movements and links between France and North America, see Allain 1978 and Gauthier 1992.
3. For more details about these events, see Tamboukou 2015, 161.
4. FC to Ian Galdston, letter dated 13 February, 1923, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
5. FC to Emma Yanisky, letter dated 10 April, 1923, (FMC/NYPL/Cor.).
6. *La Française,* 17 November 1928, BHVP/AMB/FJB/B20/Divers.
7. Rose Pesotta to Sue Adams, letter dated, 11 November 1943 (RPP/NYPL/GC).

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Index

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