Jennifer Harding, Jessica Pauszek, Steve Parks, and Nicholas Pollard

Alliances, Assemblages, and Affects: Three Moments of Building Collective Working-Class Literacies

This article explores how assemblage and affect theories can enable research into the formation of a collective working-class identity, inclusive of written, print, publication, and organizational literacies through the origins of the Federation of Worker Writer and Community Publishers, an organization that expanded its collectivity as new heritages, ethnicities, and immigrant identities altered the organization's membership and "class" identity.

In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their cultural formation from those of other classes and bring them into conflict with those classes, they form a class. In so far as these small peasant proprietors are merely connected on a local basis, and the identity of their interests fails to produce a feeling of community, national links, or a political organization, they do not form a class.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

The connection between a literacy act and a political act, the intersection of *word* and *action*, within the context of social democratic movements has

been a principle site of investigation within modern rhetorical/composition studies (Flower; Kuebrich). Recently, however, the terrain on which that research occurs has undergone a significant change. Scholars have begun to understand the *word* through theories of affect—the feelings, intensities, and resonances that course through language, exceeding a particular word's overt meaning and creating a collective sensibility (Rice). And *action* has been reframed as being less a moment of determined causality and more a moment of assemblage where the interaction of human/nonhuman actants spins within ever altering networks of potentiality. When placed in dialogue with each other, then, seemingly settled connections between *word* and *action* have become destabilized. And, as such, it has also become uncertain what it means to study, rhetorically engage, and act effectively in social movements for collective justice.

We want to argue that the theories broadly nestled under the terms *affect* and *assemblage* can allow us to understand literacy as a materially produced site of networked practices; as such, they can help us understand the production of collective identities and actions. To support this claim, we intend to explore the opening moments in the creation of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), an international network of locally situated working-class literacy/publication groups, which existed from the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century. The FWWCP formed in the United Kingdom in 1976 from eight writing groups and literacy classes, many of which were based in adult education. It grew, with member groups changing as some joined and others left, into a network with approximately one hundred self-sponsored working-class writing groups, circulating thousands of publications and holding annual writing festivals and other events for almost thirty years.

Through a series of interviews with founding members of the FWWCP, we hope to trace how the affective and material assemblages articulated at the outset of its formation enabled the production of a collective identity that could sustain a working-class literacy that placed emphasis on workers producing writing, critically discussing their written expression of experience and its significance, and then circulating it through locally available print and performance venues to, ideally, multiple audiences.

In other words, critical theories of affect and assemblage might help us not only reflect on what the FWWCP sought to achieve, but also present its history in such a way that acknowledges the complexities of building

and sustaining collective identities within their contemporary moments. Ultimately, then, we want to suggest that new theoretical connections between *word* and *action* allow us to use the FWWCP as a self-defined site of working-class literacy, to recast working-class literacy within frameworks that not only demonstrate the production of collective practices but also highlight the equally important understanding of a collective identity open to revision and expansion—a working-class identity without guarantees.[1] And out of such understandings, we hope, a new materialist working-class politics for the present moment might emerge.

We also hope to move discussions of working-class literacy and politics toward a more central role within writing studies, which have seemed only marginally represented to date (see DeGenaro; Russo and Linkon). Here we align with Mike Rose's *The Mind at Work,* which argues for the need to reconsider our definitions of "intelligence and methods of assessing it" because they are "woefully inadequate" (xviii), when taking into account the intellectual skills and social action of working-class laborers too often mis- (or under-) represented. Indeed, our essay can be seen as a direct response to this very concern through its direct articulation of working-class literacies and skills as collective practices. Finally, we see our work as part of an interdisciplinary rekindling of working-class studies with the emergence of the new *Journal for Working-Class Studies* and a leading article by scholars Sherry Lee Linkon and John Russo that argues we must reach across disciplines, sites, and populations: "we must recognize that we cannot focus too narrowly on 'our' work. We cannot work only within academic settings. We need to continue to connect our research and teaching with emerging forms of activism and struggle among working people" (10). Ultimately, then, as a collective, we assemble as writers across disciplines, organizations, and countries to understand how new theoretical models might allow us to enact this important call to action.

Of Alliances, Assemblages, and Affects

We begin within new social movement (NSM) theory with its shift away from the study of political struggles over social and economic citizenship rights and toward "the analysis of symbolic challenges, collective identity and cultural politics" (Martin 74).[2] NSM theory works from the idea that movements are concerned with "post-materialist values" and exist in complex society suffused by "surplus opportunities, resources and choices"

(Martin 81). For this reason, Alberto Melucci argues collective action has shifted to cultural grounds, challenging dominant codes, language and symbolic systems ("Symbolic"). NSMs are seen as part of a cultural politics developing in a postclass society, concerned with "the production and reappropriation of meaning" (Melucci, "Strange" 221) and with practicing alternative lifestyles (Melucci, *Nomads*).[3]

From this context, NSM theorists highlight the significance of everyday social interaction and networks of relations to social movements (Melucci, *Nomads*). Melucci argues that a movement is, first, "a field of social relationships where, through negotiation among various groups, a collective identity is structured" and, second, "a terrain in which identity is recognized and unified." Importantly, networks within a movement provide some kind of continuity and stability for "the identities of individuals and groups in a social system where this identity is constantly fragmented or de-structured" ("Strange" 223–24).

The work of NSM theorists, then, demonstrates that a sociocultural movement should not be seen as a singular entity. Indeed, its plurality might be better captured, following Hetherington, by the term *assemblage*. Assemblage can be understood as "a collection of heterogeneous elements," brought together in particular relations (Macgregor Wise 78). Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari argue:

> We will call an assemblage every constellation of singularities and traits deducted from the flow—selected, organised, stratified—in such a way as to converge (consistency) artificially and naturally; an assemblage in this sense is a veritable invention. (406)

In the work of Deleuze and Guattari, *assemblage* refers not only to the elements—which could be people, technologies, things, social institutions, concepts, ideas, words, and so on—but also to their qualities, affects, and effects at a particular moment. Importantly, an assemblage is constituted by lines, flows, and speeds as well as objects (4). So, our attention is directed to not only what an assemblage *is* but also what it *does* (Macgregor Wise 78) and so to movement and change. Assemblage, then, refers to the process of arranging, organizing, and fitting together parts. However, this is not the assembling of predetermined parts into an already conceived structure, nor is it a random collection of things, rather there is a sense that "an assemblage is a whole of some sort that expresses some identity and claims a territory" (Macgregor Wise 77).

Invoking recent assemblage theory, we would argue that the study of working-class social movements needs to examine not only meanings, ideas, and actions, but also the material machinery through which they are circulated: that is, to move beyond individual or "human"-based actants to include nonhuman entities as well. As Kathy E. Ferguson has argued in "Anarchist Printers and Presses: Material Circuits of Politics," in order to understand the elements that went into production of a social movement, human actors must be placed in relationship to machines/ecologies, which together shaped the possibilities of action available. In Ferguson's case, she traces how the relationships among newsletters, printers, and printing presses represented an *assemblage* that ensured the circulation and continuance of anarchist culture. Indeed, Ferguson traces how particular presses and fonts were circulated in a fashion that assured continued publishing in the face of extreme political oppression:

We would argue that the study of working-class social movements needs to examine not only meanings, ideas, and actions, but also the material machinery through which they are circulated: that is, to move beyond individual or "human"-based actants to include nonhuman entities as well.

> All printers, I imagine, participated in brain-body-machine assemblages, but those assemblages would probably have been more intense and extensive in anarchist communities, where the press, the printers, and the publications were vital to the politics that held them together. Presses were the connectors in anarchist assemblages; they were participants in the 'powers of self-organization and creative transformation' that allowed anarchism to be. (404)

The study of working-class literacies within assemblage theory, then, would involve not just the "content" of a publication, but the tools that were used in its production, the skills such production required, and how those skills and tools circulated among different members of the movement, replicating actions as a means to build and sustain a community. And as Ferguson notes, in the process of this circulation and community maintenance, the very tools themselves begin to take on an affect of community that circulates with them.

For these reasons, the study of collective working-class literacy practices should also take account of affect in encounters, relations, and processes of identity formation. Following Deleuze and Guattari, we

understand affect to refer to the force or intensity of an encounter—present in a coming together of different entities to form assemblages—and transition. The idea that "affects are becomings" (256) focuses attention on possibility and change as people, technologies, and ideas meet one another and things happen. Affect as intensity refers to sensible experience beyond "organizing systems of representation" (Colebrook 22) that is unrecognized and unqualified (Massumi). As such, affect theory draws attention to inarticulate sensible experience, a developing atmosphere, temporary affective alignments, possibility, process, transformation, and movement to act in various ways. It presumes relationality rather than causality and, as such, offers a way of thinking "how" rather than "why" something happened. Indeed, affect helps us think more deeply about the feelings—not yet articulated—that infuse, propel, and variously connect word and action in collective writing practices.

Within this logic, the FWWCP could be understood as some form of new social movement since its primary activity consisted of the production of literacy artifacts (groups, books, festivals) and not legislative or economic or political change. While FWWCP members did not see themselves in a NSM postclass society, their literacy production gains importance when viewed through the lenses of affect and assemblage theory. This NSM affect/assemblage paradigm clearly draws attention to the content of publications and the processes of crafting a new cultural space through which to articulate a complex and multifaceted working-class identity. It also highlights, however, through the entanglement of action, interaction, technologies, narrations, and memory, the production of an assemblage through which the FWWCP bodies and publications circulated—a countercultural space that emerged, which was about not only creative freedom but also the formation of alternative identities.

Rather than diminish the commitment to working-class literacy as a basis for political action, new social movement theory, affect theory, and assemblage theory allow us to expand our understanding of literacy not just as content or validation of linguistic patterns and literacy practices, but also as an understanding of how working-class bodies, in relationship with material objects, produce assemblages of possibility and affective intensity through which individuals can create new forms of collective meaning and action. And it is this new form of "working-class" assemblage that, we argue, provides a tentative path forward in the current moment.

Assembling Methods and Foundations

In order to investigate the generation of the affective assemblages in which the FWWCP gained meaning, we conducted focus group interviews. As a research method, focus group interviews are well suited to exploring ideas on a particular topic and the complexities of opinions and attitudes. They tend not to record the unfolding narrative of an individual's experience, but they do foreground interaction between group members as they respond to, agree with, or challenge each other on different topics: co-constructing meaning and shared understandings. That is, focus groups enable researchers to study how individuals collectively make sense of phenomena and why they feel the way they do. Some researchers argue that attitudes, feelings, and beliefs are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and interaction entailed in a focus group as it provides a more naturalistic (albeit constrained) setting than other methods (Bryman). We decided to use focus groups to gain insight into the formation of the affective energy and assemblages, which enabled the production of the FWWCP.

We conducted two focus group interviews, each involving four authors formerly active in the FWWCP or in the FED (the new network that developed after the demise of the FWWCP) in June 2015. These interviews were the first phase in developing a broader project to collect and preserve the history of the FWWCP, which involves digitizing and archiving FWWCP publications and collecting oral histories of its participants. The purpose of the interviews was to ask participants what they thought about creating a history of the FWWCP and its relevance for contemporary audiences and literary activism.

We invited fifteen former authors mostly from the London area to meet us at London Metropolitan University. Eight were able to attend on one of two nominated days, and so we formed two focus groups, one on each day. The authors of this article were present at each interview in the role of moderators, although one moderator (Nick) was also a former FWWCP member. Each interview lasted about one and a half hours and was audio-recorded and later transcribed. We began the interviews with self-introductions. The authors of this article explained the purpose of the focus group interview and the broader project (digitizing FWWCP publications, interviewing writers, producing a history of the FWWCP, producing a pop-up exhibition based on this history, promoting these resources to new

audiences). All interviewees consented to the use of interview material in writing about the project, which was approved by the London Metropolitan University Research Ethics Review Panel.

In preparation for the interviews, we identified a few key topics for discussion: we planned to ask participants what they thought about creating a history of the FWWCP, key moments in the FWWCP history, who should be interviewed, and who might be interested in a history of the FWWCP. In the actual moment, we did not get to ask many questions. The initial question about creating a history of the FWWCP was met with enthusiasm, and discussion flowed freely from that point: participants began to tell some of that history, including the negotiation of geographically, ethnically, and gender-based differences, describing how groups variously organized shared practices of reading, writing, and publishing, spaces and places of activism, and the contemporary political context. Focus group discussion included lively accounts of the origins of FWWCP activism, networks, and events. We tended to let discussion run its course, bringing it back to our brief agenda only toward the end.

Next, we discuss the texture and topics of focus group conversations. When citing from the FWWCP focus group interviews, we have included the use of *T* for the written transcript followed by a page number. For example T2, 3 indicates Transcript 2, page 3. These can be found in the Works Cited as "FWWCP Focus Group Interviews."

Here it should be noted that prior to the formation of the FWWCP in the 1970s, there was already a long history of working-class literacy movements (Thompson), as well as a more recent emergence of working-class adult literacy programs. In this sense, historically and in the current moment, there were numerous "moments" that might have been selected as the origins of the FWWCP. As such, it is not surprising that within our two focus groups of FWWCP members, the story of the FWWCP origins was articulated with different emphases. Within the FWWCP focus groups at least two origin stories were constructed—the "Chris Searle" protest and the "adult literacy workers" collaboration. Such differing emphases (protest and collaboration) should not be seen as contradictory but instead indicative of the complexity of the movement's formation and the richness of social and affective ties it embodied. We believe the stories detailed in the focus groups (discussed below) demonstrate a crucial ingredient in the ability

of the FWWCP to engage in an ongoing production of a collective identity and framework for collective action through social relations and interaction, that is, assemblages.

It was the first focus group that spontaneously introduced the topic of the FWWCP's beginnings. Sally Flood, a member of Basement Writers, one of the founding FWWCP member groups in 1976, started by articulating the ethos of the FWWCP—it was "for everyone . . . it was the interest in writing and everybody helped each other"—and stating that a teacher named Chris Searle "actually started the movement." She went on to explain that Searle worked at a school in East London in the 1970s, where truancy was frequent, and that he tried to engage children in literacy by asking them to write about "their experiences and their lives." Despite opposition by school governors—"they didn't think the children were worthy of this kind of thing"—Searle had the children's work published. He then lost his job, which set in motion a series of events.

> And he got sacked . . . but what happen is . . . without him knowing, the children all came out in strike . . . every one of them . . . the first I know about it was only [East End Night] there was a picture of them on strike with their flag all marching to Trafalgar Square to get him back and eventually he did come back and then he started the [Basement Writers] at the Town Hall in Cable Street. . . . All these children who had been truants in school joined him . . . it first comes back to Chris because he started the first group. (T1, 6–7).

Others concurred with Sally's account. Indeed, participants in the second focus group also spoke of "the famous story of the formation of the Basement Writers" through Chris Searle, who was sacked from his teaching post "for publishing his kids' work without permission of the school's governors" (T2, 6).

That the Chris Searle story endured as a foundational story of the FWWCP, even though he himself was never a member, speaks to how it activated FWWCP writing groups as part of a countercultural movement articulating protest, involving the communication of discontent concerning education. That is, the focus groups demonstrated how the protest entailed the performance of defiance in the face of an educational authority—through the publication of students' writing and a strike—and demarcated "us" from "them," creating a sense of collective identity and a basis for collective action (Eyerman). The embodied actions of participants enacting spirited

rebellion and their representation in the mass media at the time, and their retelling since, helped create a sense of togetherness and articulated what it felt like to live the realities of social inequality, including limited access to cultural capital. Specifically, the Chris Searle story tells of a power struggle around literacy. And, as such, it has been consolidated as a foundational FWWCP myth through its reiteration in the countercultural space affirming working-class literacy and activism.

The second focus group, however, narrated an alternative story, which highlighted different events and connections. These participants told the story of an ongoing connection between adult literacy workers Sue Shrapnel, based at Centerprise, a community bookshop, café, and cultural and educational facility in Hackney, and David Evans, based in Liverpool, who established Scotland Road Writers, a community writing group, in the late 1970s. Both were running writing groups and decided that members of Scotland Road Writers in Liverpool would come to London to meet writers at Centerprise to talk about what they had in common and read their work. This meeting was followed by a day trip in a minivan to Liverpool, noted by Roger Mills: "and that was a big thing for the East-end lot because a lot of them had never even been out of East London so it was quite interesting to see Liverpool . . . you know . . . to meet these [Scousers, or Liverpool inhabitants] who were . . . you know . . . doing the same thing" (T2, 1). Other participants agreed that the Federation had started with the activities of Sue and David and that, subsequently, a meeting took place in the basement at Centerprise in 1976, with the eight groups that established the FWWCP. Here the narrative that emerges is of an unrecognized and unarticulated number of working-class writing groups "doing the same thing," an insight only made possible through the materiality of travel and group meetings, but which again spoke to a countercultural space of activity.

And while both stories seem to find a common moment of articulation in alliance around worker writing groups recognizing a commonality of feeling as well as the existence of others "just like them," it is the broad range of possible further articulations that enabled the FWWCP's continued existence. For instance, the Chris Searle story evokes an assemblage comprising bodies (students, teacher, governors, media reporters); actions (writing, protesting); things (books, flags, images, media reports); places (classrooms, streets, offices); technologies (for publishing, reporting); ideas (about literature, working-class culture, education); identities (working

class, East London, professional); and emotions (grievance, resistance, solidarity, pride, loyalty, discontent, outrage, defiance). This assemblage captures not only the complexity of performing opposition and countercultural activity but also the emergent circuits through which such activity could expand.

The London-Liverpool story suggests an assemblage and circuitry that comprises encounters across geographical distance; vehicles for travel (a minivan); places and spaces (London, Liverpool, Centreprise); bodies (adult literacy workers, writing group members); performances (reading work); and ideas (commitments to adult literacy, working-class writing, sharing). This assemblage helps to capture a sense of the spontaneity and newness of encounters in moving beyond the familiar as well as the social and affective dimensions of physical copresence and sharing writing. This assemblage helps us to understand connections across space, movement, and the interweaving of ideas and action. Thinking in this way (about assemblages) helps us also imagine the energies and intensities that made things happen: bringing people onto the streets; waving placards; making demands; propelling people to make long motorway journeys to read their work and listen to others. Affect helps us consider the enthusiasm and passion that moves bodies but is otherwise unarticulated.

Affect helps us consider the enthusiasm and passion that moves bodies but is otherwise unarticulated.

Taken together, what begins to become evident is the embodied and material network of the emergent FWWCP through which the affective energy of working-class identity in relation to literacy activism was being produced. That is, assemblage is a useful concept here because it helps us understand how various configurations of heterogeneous elements were able to express some kind of collective identity that could claim a *newly emergent* cultural political territory of working-class identity at a political time, from 1979, when that very term was soon to be under attack by Thatcherism (see Jones). Moreover, a new form of political space was being created that was not based upon previous manifestations of working-class politics, such as the Labour Party, but upon the current experience of a newly diverse working-class population (see discussion of the Annual General Meeting below). The various assemblages that constituted the FWWCP, then, at particular moments were suffused with and propelled by affect—a range of different feelings, rhythms, and energies—that ebbed and flowed

and were circulated through assemblages consisting of publications, events, travels, and meetings, a materiality that would result in a space where new types of "political work" could occur.

Indeed, interview participants, in narrating the ideas, ties, and affects of the FWWCP/FED origins, drew attention to its activity-based understanding of the FWWCP's "politics." That is, the members of the focus groups stressed that what was "political" was not always the content of the work (for example, Sally Flood writing on kittens), but the activities of producing and sharing writing.[4] One member, Roger Mills, remembered:

> you know they were sharing their work about things they wanted to get across . . . so in my mind it was small "p" political . . . but not necessarily a party . . . certainty not [party Political] and also not even consciously political . . . I think the politics was that it was actually happening (T2, 4)

Here, focus group participants appear to suggest that in order to understand sociocultural activity, we need to take account of a broader cultural political context with its possibility of multiple antecedents. In doing so, they also offer a more nuanced snapshot of "the political" as assemblage, an open articulation of possibility for alliance: comprising multiple reflections of lived experience by differently positioned actors and various connections with other people, institutions, and processes. And as invoked by the interviewees, it was the constant rearticulation that occurred in embodied common space, such as the Annual General Meetings, that allowed this emergent and newly defined working-class "political" activity to develop within the context of multiculturalism and identity politics.

Assembling, Disassembling, and Reassembling

In discussing the original meeting that initiated the FWWCP, Sally Flood said: "eight groups all met up at Centerprise and that first night was wonderful" (T1, 5). Yet the same cars that allowed Liverpool to talk to London also allowed other parts of the UK to come together through the FWWCP. And the same feeling of existing in a countercultural and unrecognized "working-class" space could also apply to issues of gender, race, and immigrant status. In this sense, the original assemblage, which formed the FWWCP around a countercultural practice of working-class literacies, could not help as it expanded as an organization but encounter newly forming and alternative collectivities of "working-class" communities.

In this regard, the FWWCP Annual General Meeting became a key part of constituting the FWWCP as a heterogeneous assemblage that continued to claim a territory and collective identity. Over the course of its history, the FWWCP held over thirty such meetings in all, sited at university campuses with a weekend of workshops and performances. This annual event, initially referred to as the "AGM" and later as the "Festival of Writing," was significant in that all FWWCP member groups in the United Kingdom (and groups from abroad) were supposed to attend to reaffirm their membership. But as membership changed, so did the collective meaning of *membership* in the FWWCP.

In understanding the AGM, then, we were interested in how the focus group participants narrated the social encounter and atmosphere created by such events among a changing membership. Tom Woodin said that the AGM "stimulates so much enthusiasm. That coming together of different people, . . . it was a crucial kind of engine for the whole thing" (T1, 7–8). Roger Mills further explained this environment, saying, "It was a very social occasion. It was a way for Federation people from all over Britain to come together . . . at least on that once a year . . . for the weekend . . . it was an entire weekend . . . to meet each other socially . . . as well listen to each other's work" (T2, 6).

At their peak, the AGMs were attended by around two hundred people and comprised readings, workshops, and meals together (T2, 6). Participants told how, in getting together, writers fiercely debated differences based on gender, ethnicity, and locality—how even the term *worker writer* was put under pressure by the growing presence of the "middle-class" in groups and at the AGM. In doing so they highlighted the capacity of the FWWCP to enable and endure often violent exchanges that helped to distinguish it from other organizations. Tom Woodin stated:

> There were these very . . . strong debates . . . that relate to the nature of class and wider identities and the Fed . . . as an organization, it was very open . . . if you remember the Labour Party they wouldn't tolerate these kinds of debate . . . whereas in the Fed it was kind of the Wild West . . . they were just being expressed in an open and visceral way . . . (T1, 5)
>
> Doors were slamming about women only writing groups . . . and black only writing groups and what this meant. . . . I remember people like [Lemh Sissay] refuse to get on stage because there's too many white people on the stage and so he wouldn't . . . it was quite tense at times . . .

> . . . but at the same time . . . you know. . . . across those debates, the thing that stands out in a way is that there were a lot of alliances across all these debates and differences so people could be friends even though they have so violently different opinions on these kinds of matters. (T1, 5)

Here, participants describe performances, forms of acting in public, through which tensions were negotiated and mutual understanding developed. In narrating the passion with which differences were manifest, felt, and accommodated, participants helped to produce the movement's distinctive identity as embodying and celebrating diversity. These accounts narrate the production of a heterogeneous and reflexive collective identity. Nick Pollard stated:

> We were kind of negotiating our way through what was sexist . . . what was not sexist . . . what was racist . . . what was not racist . . . what was classist . . . and so forth . . . and my guess was . . . we were sort of negotiating a lot of stuff together. (T1, 16)
>
> And, the Fed was always about . . . very much about . . . the way that we . . . allow for . . . a lot of diversity in the way that allowed people to take control of their identity . . . and . . . that sort of integrity aspect is really really important. (T1, 24)

Participants also spoke of how the FWWCP, despite internal tensions and differences, felt the need (and were able) to come together to present a sense of unity to "outside" others: specifically, educational authorities and the orthodox left. Ken Worpole said, "and I think in a way we could have . . . you know . . . been like family . . . you keep your private discussions in private . . . but you have a different relationship with what was going on outside" (T2, 6).

Interview participants described the AGM as a fluid space of encounter and negotiation—bringing together different bodies, alignments, perspectives, feelings, and intensities—which generated new meanings and alliances. Such assemblages were, it was claimed, the "engine" of the FWWCP. The FWWCP was concerned with self-representation and enabling people to "take control of their own identity" and with an emphasis on integrity, diversity, and mutuality within that process (T1, 24). It "was never a message" or an attempt to capture "the true representation of working-class lives" (T2, 3); rather it was a process involving the negotiation of the complex politics of representation.

Each AGM, as assemblage, included social interaction and multiple performances (reading, writing aloud, and debating). They also provided a space to listen and learn from each other through writing workshops, run by FWWCP members themselves. Moreover, the AGM also became a space to highlight and circulate the social and technological processes of publication (such as cut-and-paste methods; photocopying), through Book Stalls, which comprised the selling of the year's publications. In this way, the Book Stalls represented one piece of the assemblage between members and the practices that enabled the publication as products, representative of constant relationships between both people and technologies, within this network.

From the ways in which FWWCP members narrated its ties (in the interviews), it appears that the AGM assemblage embodied a pronounced relationality and mutuality and that its performances were suffused with exuberance and enthusiasm. Stories of the AGMs also signal the more elusive quality of listening: the capacity of members to attend to, connect affectively with, and be moved by the writing of others. And through these embodied and material contexts, the FWWCP was able to formulate a concept of "worker writer and publisher" situated in opposition to traditional working-class collectives, such as the Labor Party, and traditional literacy institutions, such as grade schools. Consequently, the AGM as an assemblage and its affects managed to articulate a complex, heterogeneous, and malleable collective identity and capture cultural political space at particular historical moments.

It is significant, then, that focus group participants actively described the processes for preparing writing for publication as an important communal task.

The Machinery of Expanding (and Limiting) Assemblages

In understanding the assemblages and affective culture, which initiated the FWWCP, the significance of actual book production cannot be under estimated. Not only did the material production of books create affective relationships between person and machine, but the circulatory abilities of "books" allowed additional linkages to be made by FWWCP groups to the larger culture, as well as demonstrating the borderlands of their emerging community—the place in which additional assemblages could not be made.

It is significant, then, that focus group participants actively described the processes for preparing writing for publication as an important communal task. They noted, for instance, differing practices within groups; few groups edited, except for spelling and grammar; some had word limits; some allowed a writer to publish one book or one piece in an anthology created by the group. They also described the material processes whereby members of writing groups would get together to cut, lay out, and paste down text ready for printing. Here Tom Woodin and Sally Flood noted the affective energy created:

> It was a social process wasn't it? . . . because everyone originally had to cut and paste . . . with scissors and cut and stick it down on a bit of paper and that would take a long time. (Tom Woodin, T1, 4)
>
> We never bother to send it out to somebody to actually to do it . . . because we would do it ourselves . . . we didn't have the money . . . to fund all that. . . . anyway . . . it took much longer to do it ourselves. (Sally Flood, T1, 4)

The availability of specific technologies—the know-how and machines—to print came to embody a nascent equality: "so the technology made it equal" (T2, 5). And, in effect, this created opportunities for groups to come together throughout the process to collaborate, even if it took a long time to complete, and develop a community.

Indeed, one of the results of the affective energy within FWWCP (and local groups) was to enable it to expand outward, disrupting and/or expanding the set or traditional conceptions of working-class identity in both countercultural and mainstream environments. That is, focus group participants talked about how the FWWCP transgressed boundaries to claim new territory for collective acting. Similar to the ethos of the AGM, publishing enabled a new type of working-class collective identity to emerge. Ken Worpole described the expansive nature of the FWWCP:

> It was in the way pre-figurative of the fact . . . that life is complicated and identity . . . is complicated . . . and it was set up in a period in which people wanted hard and fast barriers . . . they knew what literature was . . . they knew what history was . . . they knew what oral history was . . . they knew what left wing politics was . . . and they knew what working-class culture was . . . and the Federation kind of leaked into every one of those things. (T2, 7)

Stephen Yeo also spoke also of the unstoppable momentum of the FWWCP, writing groups, and writing with their boundless energies, creativity, enthusiasm, passion, and hunger.

> well it wasn't very difficult to demonstrate the need for Federation type work . . . at least in writing . . . because the demand was . . . self-evident . . . you actually couldn't stop it. . . . This is not romanticism . . . you had much more to do with than you could possibly cope with because one book led to another . . . [unclear/gap] . . . and then there was another one . . . and then there was another one . . . and so this is organic. (T2, 8)

Nor were attempts by mainstream institutions able to dampen the enthusiasm being produced. Roger Mills mentioned how an early application to the Arts Council for funding received a dismissive response suggesting that the writings were "the scribblings" of taxi drivers and schoolboys (T2, 8). However, Mills also noted the impact or affect that these very writings had on him personally:

> But it was the exact two books . . . the scribblings of the school boy [it was written by Vivian Usherwood] . . . and the taxi driver from Hackney [Ron Barnes] which were the two books that made a huge impact to me because I discovered them on the shelves at Centerprise[5] . . . and I thought "wow . . . you know . . . black school boys writing poetry . . . middle age taxi drivers writing about their lives" . . . you know. . . . We could all join in this . . . you know . . . we could all tell stories . . . and create things. . . . and it was an [eye opener for me] that normal people can be writers . . . it was an enormous impact on me . . . and there were lots of different books. (T2, 8–9)

Indeed, the "dismissal" by the Arts Council led to the collective writing of the *Republic of Letters*, a manifesto on the value of self-published working-class writing as a means to demonstrate both the complexity of working-class culture and the narrow confines into which British mainstream culture and educational institutions forced it to be understood.

Here it is important to note that Centerprise published poetry of Vivian Usherwood, pa young Caribbean schoolboy, and attempted to sell it to schools. Focus group member Ken Worpole stated that there was great need for teaching materials that students in secondary school found relevant:

> It was material for education . . . it was part of that sort of cultural evolution going on about . . . whose lives are represented in school . . . in the history books . . . in the literature. (T2, 5)

Indeed, sales of Usherwood's book were "phenomenal and eventually 10,000 copies were sold" (T2, 5). While it is somewhat unclear how many of the books were used in schools, the fact the book crossed between community and classroom at all speaks to the ability of the FWWCP to introduce elements of its new conception of working-class identity into traditional educational environments.

Indeed, participants described the FWWCP as "pre-figurative" in the way that it introduced new ideas about what counts as culture and who can be a writer, articulating new practices in producing writing, writers, and books. New practices emphasized an affective context, atmosphere of solidarity, inclusivity, and mutual learning. Ken Worpole commented:

> So in a way . . . again . . . it was pre-figurative . . . of a notion that . . . you know . . . that not surprisingly can be taught but actually support . . . and sympathy and comradeship and mutual learning . . . is actually a very healthy atmosphere which can improve what you are writing. (T2, 10)

This inclusive atmosphere that sparked a "writing group—self-publishing—cabaret" assemblage also meshed with broader networks, affective contexts, and countercultural activities. That is, the events and products within the FWWCP also connected to and expanded into other networks at the same time: alternative theater and comedy as well as punk and acoustic punk. As Roger Mills put it:

> The Federation was quite a porous type of thing in a way . . . but the barriers were . . . you know . . . very soft and so you would get cross over . . . you got Alan and the theatre group . . . alternative comedy . . . punk rock . . . music stuff . . . the Federation wasn't in isolation . . . you know . . . there were lots other things feeding into . . . feeding off of it. (T2, 14–15)

Such sentiments represent the height of FWWCP's expanding territory.

However, as it grew, the FWWCP also began to connect to "machines" in a fashion that fractured the community and drew a hard line about who was or wasn't an author. As Tom Woodin notes, the earlier sense of equality through publishing technologies didn't last forever. He describes technology to allow more professional "books" as a potential reason for the decline in publishing by FWWCP members over the years:

> I guess there was the impulse to make it a bit more professional and it started off another debate. . . . It started off as easy and accessible and quite cheap

> to do a pamphlet you can sell it for 10, 20, 30, or 50 pence . . . and then [for] a mixture of reasons . . . partly professionalized . . . [partly] technology started to become more available . . . [FWWCP member group] QueenSpark . . . started publishing two or three books a year that were kind of well produced. . . . It might've cost you a 1,000 pounds to print . . . which also relates to the argument about culture which still goes on now . . . [If] it looks cheap . . . you know . . . on the one hand it is accessible, free, and easy and everyone can participate easily . . . but on the other hand if it looks cheap, then it means kind of working people . . . [are] kind of second rate somehow . . . they should have a proper book. (T1, 8)

Here QueenSpark stands in for the move by some groups to publishing store-quality bound books, with ISBNs and glossy covers—each element of which demanded further integration into the mainstream publishing industry machinery. Once a "professional bar" entered the FWWCP network, it led to some groups moving to an economic model that mandated fewer publications per year and, often, expensive print runs that left many books unsold, depleting scarce resources in the group. Such a moment represents how the FWWCP collective assemblage could be altered by its articulation into mainstream publishing culture. In this sense, we see how the FWWCP created a countercultural territory through the collaborative creation and circulation of its own products, performances, and, most importantly, the social interactions these processes engendered, but that larger market economics ensured that success and endless expansion was by no means guaranteed.

A Working-Class without Guarantees

We began this article with a citation from Marx's *18th Brumaire*, a work where Marx implies class identity is more a result of consciousness collective formation than in other of his works, which can be read to imply class formation is the necessary result of economic forces. Using new Social movement theory, coupled with assemblage and affect theory, we then demonstrated how the FWWCP created a countercultural space, premised on a collective "feeling" of working-class identity, enacted as both a conceptual and pragmatic literacy practice (*word* and *action*).[6] In some sense, we were almost situating the FWWCP as possessing its own theory of assemblage/affect as they developed their "federation" of worker writers and community publishers, endlessly articulating new horizons and boundaries of their identity.

We hope, however, that we have also reframed what is meant by *class formation* and, in doing so, have begun a conversation concerning how activism can grow from assemblage and affect. For even in the *Brumaire*, we would argue, there is still a latent belief in economic fundamentalism—a definition of class read off the means of production in a way that produces a singular static identity. What the process of understanding the development of the FWWCP has shown is something slightly different—but a difference that seems important for us to notice. This is the recognition that one's economic identity is differentially spread across a neighborhood, region, and country. It is endlessly wrapped up in micronarratives that are stitched together to maintain an assemblage of global capitalism, but it is a globalism, which is never more than actualized local moments of negotiation. In this sense, one cannot claim a singular "working-class identity" but instead must work to understand as we move throughout our day, endlessly shifting rhetorics and physical landscapes, how we are bodily wrapped within a web of narratives, affective relationships, and assemblages that tilt toward inequality and injustice. And, just as important, we must consider how to reconfigure such assemblages toward a future that is more equal, more just.

We might explore the physical acts of meeting, writing, and publishing; of gathering and debating; and of building assemblages where such emergent feelings of commonality are linked together, assemblages that can begin to provide a counterweight to the nationalism, xenophobia, and racism emergent in the United States and Europe.

For us, then, the FWWCP's creation of a "federation," enacted in local literacy writing groups, national generalized meetings, and dispersed through publication as well as performance, represented how countercultural politics, informed by the endless proliferation of micro-embodiments can be stitched together, collectively, to allow an alternative, diverse and diversifying, understanding of class alliance to be developed. And at this historical moment, the moment of Trump, when media outlets, mainstream parties, and leftist activists are organizing under the need to understand the white working class and their needs, it is important to remember the micro-moments out of which such broad slogans emerge. It is important to recognize the exclusionary and marginalized visions of class they enact.

Instead, like members of the FWWCP, we propose, as writers and as teachers, that we place our labor in the interstices, in those moments of

failed intersections between populations whose status on the wrong side of privilege is currently articulated as the fault of, or in opposition to, those suffering the same fate. We might explore the physical acts of meeting, writing, and publishing; of gathering and debating; and of building assemblages where such emergent feelings of commonality are linked together, assemblages that can begin to provide a counterweight to the nationalism, xenophobia, and racism emergent in the United States and Europe.

It is an enterprise stripped of guarantees, humble in its actions, potentially blocked at many moments, but perhaps exactly the work that needs to be done.

Notes

1. Of course, the FWWCP was only a section of working-class literacy, as there were many other local organizations and networks, but, on the whole, many had not come across the FWWCP or chose not to affiliate for various reasons involving the organization's political nature.

2. We recognize the seeming contradiction of producing an article on working-class collective literacy practices in the discrete and specialized language of academic theory—even when attempting to make such language as accessible as possible. It is important, however, to see this article as part of an assemblage of the FED (an organization based on FWWCP principles and values and comprising many of its original members; FED is not an acronym, but the nickname given to the FWWCP by its members, and it was applied to the new network of writers in 2008 after the original FWWCP lost funding and membership), Syracuse University, Sheffield Hallam University, London Metropolitan University, and Texas A&M–Commerce designed to support the historical and current writing/publication of worker writers. This assemblage has produced the re-publication of the Republic of Letters, an FWWCP manifesto discussed in this article; Pro(se)letariets, a community publication featuring US/UK working-class writers and students on working-class identity and formal education; Preserving Hidden Histories, a community publication premised on the creation of the FWWCP archive and the collaboration between college students in America with FED members through a study-abroad writing course held in London; *Crossroads*, a similar anthology focused on the complexity of class identity; and the FWWCP archive (http://fwwcp.gn.apc.org), which features 2,500 unique publications by group members. This nexus of publications, in academic and non-academic discourses, is part of a larger collective strategy by all involved to both draw material support to the FED (through grants/in-

kind support) as well as an international network of readers/scholars to the FWWCP materials. In its own way, then, we understand this article's use of academic theory as an attempt to establish a connective circuit with our field, drawing its members into the assemblage, supporting the continued work of worker writers and community publishers in the UK and US.

3. However, critics of NSM theory argue that concern with material issues (such as material redistribution and citizenship rights) persists in contemporary "new" movements (Diani 388). And, it is argued, old social movements were also multidimensional and concerned with culture and identity (Martin 81–82).

4. Some individuals or groups, however, might have had overtly political aims, but this varied from group to group or even between members.

5. See Usherwood's *Poems* and Barnes's *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars* for more information. You can also find more information in FWWCP Digital Collection: http://fwwcp.gn.apc.org.

6. Interestingly, Word and Action was the name of a FWWCP member group based around adult literacy in Dorset. Some of their publications are now housed in the FWWCP archive at London Metropolitan University.

Works Cited

Barnes, Ron. *Coronation Cups and Jam Jars: Portrait of an East End Family through Three Generations*. Centerprise, 1976.

Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2004.

Colebrook, Claire. *Giles Deleuze*. Routledge, 2002.

DeGenaro, William. *Who Says? Working-Class Rhetoric, Class Consciousness, and Community*. U of Pittsburgh P, 2007.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. U of Minnesota P, 1989.

Diani, Mario. "Simmel to Rokkan and Beyond: Towards a Network Theory of (New) Social Movements." *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2000, pp. 387–406.

Eyerman, Ron. "How Social Movements Move: Emotions and Social Movements." *Emotions and Social Movements*, edited by Helena Flam and Debra King, Routledge, 2005, pp. 41–56.

Ferguson, Kathy E. "Anarchist Printers and Presses: Material Circuits of Politics." *Political Theory*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2014, pp. 391–414.

Flower, Linda. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Southern Illinois UP, 2008.

"FWWCP Focus Group Part 1." 9 June 2015. Trades Union Congress Library, London.

"FWWCP Focus Group Part 2" 10 June 2015. Trades Union Congress Library, London.

Jones, Owen. *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. Verso, 2012.

Kuebrich, Benjamin. "White Guys Who Send My Uncle to Prison." *College Composition and Communication*. vol. 64, no. 4, 2016, pp. 566–90.

Linkon, Sherry Lee, and John Russo. "Twenty Years of Working-Class Studies: Tensions, Values, and Core Questions." *Journal of Working-Class Studies,* vol. 1, no. 1, Dec. 2016, pp. 4–13.

Macgreggor Wise, J. 2005. "Assemblage." *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts,* edited by Charles J. Stivale, Acument, 2005, pp. 77–87.

Martin, Greg. "Conceptualizing Cultural Politics in Subcultural and Social Movement Studies." *Social Movement Studies*, vol.1, no. 1, 2002, pp. 73–78.

Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." *Surveys from Exile*, edited by David Fernbach, Penguin Press, 1981, pp. 143–249.

Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation.* Duke UP, 2002.

Melucci, Alberto. *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*. Edited by John Keane and Paul Mier, Hutchinson Radius, 1989.

———. "A Strange Kind of Newness: What's 'New' in Social Movements?" *Social Movements: A Reader,* edited by Vincenzo Ruggiero and Nicola Montagna, Routledge, 2008, pp. 218–25.

———. "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements." *Social Research*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1985, pp. 781–816.

Rice, Jenny Edbauer. "The New New: Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 94, no. 2, 200–212.

Rose, Mike. *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker*. Penguin Books, 2014.

Russo, John, and Sherry Lee Linkon. *New Working-Class Studies*, ILR P, 2005.

Thompson, E. P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Vintage, 1966.

Usherwood, Vivian. *Poems.* Centerprise, 1972.

Jenny Harding

Jenny Harding is professor in cultural studies and communications at London Metropolitan University. She researches and teaches cultural theory, media theory, research methods, and oral history. She has written about emotions, gender, and sexuality and has been involved in a number of community-based oral history projects. She is a member of the editorial board of the *Oral History Journal* and a trustee of the Oral History Society. She has also been active in women's health politics.

Jessica Pauszek

Jessica Pauszek is assistant professor of English and director of writing at Texas A&M University–Commerce. She is managing director of New City Community Press and coeditor, with Steve Parks, of the *Working and Writing for Change* series. Her dissertation, «Literacy and Labor: Archives, Networks, and Histories in Working-Class Communities,» received honorable mention for the 2018 James Berlin Memorial Outstanding Dissertation Award, focusing on the literacy practices of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in connection with labor and class identity.

Steve Parks

Steve Parks is an associate professor in the Department of Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition at Syracuse University. He is author of *Class Politics: The Movement for the Students' Right to Their Own Language* and *Gravyland: Writing beyond the Curriculum in the City of Brotherly Love*. His most recent work has been helping to cofound *Syrians for Truth and Justice* (stj-sy.com), a human rights documentation center located in Istanbul, Turkey.

Nick Pollard

Nick Pollard was formerly an executive committee member and the editor of *Federation*, the magazine of the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, and participated in three of its member groups. He now lectures at Sheffield Hallam University, where most of his teaching concerns social contexts for occupational therapy and community-based interventions. He has written and presented extensively on community-based rehabilitation and critical explorations of occupational therapy.