Scrap Modernism:
Appropriation, Assemblage, and the Politics of Representation in Depression-era America

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That is how the past exists, phantasmagoric weskits, stray words,
random things recorded. The imagination augments,
metabolizes, feeding on all it has to feed on, such scraps.

– Hugh Kenner[1]

Introduction: Some Re-assembly Required

In the preamble to *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), a documentary work that has achieved near-iconic status as a record of the Great Depression in America, James Agee explains:

> If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest would be fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement. (10)

Unable to do so in any form fit to be published or mass produced, Agee instead combines his impressionistic narrative of the impoverished lives of three rural tenant families in the South with Walker Evans's black-and-white photographs into an experimental piece of reportage designed to represent what he called the "truth as a whole" (8). What his list of objects, sounds, and smells does articulate, however, is a desire to radically represent the "truth" in the form of the tangible; to let the physical materiality of poverty and suffering speak for itself. Agee suggests that this unadorned collection, including everything from scraps to shit, might subordinate his intervening role as author (and curator) to the coarse reality of economic hardship.[2]

This passage also envisions the ideal form of representation as collage, a composite form that brings together a number of ready-made materials removed from their original contexts and juxtaposed to create a new, paradoxically fragmented whole. Writing about the sharecroppers, Agee does not literally paste in waste nor does he "do no writing at all." The finished text is nevertheless a complex combination of memoir, factual descriptions, poetic sequences,

inventories, explanatory notes, and scissored fragments of newsprint. As a result, despite the text's claim to documentary realism and mimesis, Agee both endorses and enacts the practices of formal abstraction, and his techniques call attention to a deliberate manipulation of documentary narrative by blurring the boundaries between journalistic reportage, social science, and novelistic representation. They also resist any kind of totalizing logic and demonstrate the ways in which perception is contingent upon framing, editing, and composition. Agee's brief comment in the preamble thus offers a critical framework through which to read the text's attempt to join the real to what Jeff Allred has called "plausible fictions of the real" (10) as well as its idea of collage as the aesthetic technique best suited to represent the disparity and diversity of social experience.

This collage sensibility and interest in the material dimensions of representation is not unique to Agee's documentary photo-text. Rather, its recognizably modernist logic extends across numerous literary genres—from documentary nonfiction, ethnography, and oral history to poetry and prose—as well as artistic media, including scrapbooks and visual art. Physical collages, such as scrapbooks and assemblage constructions like those of the Cubists, are composed of tangible objects that have been removed from their original contexts and rearranged into structures of juxtaposition. Verbal collage texts similarly incorporate found materials into a new whole, but do so primarily through processes of quotation and allusion to other, often nonliterary documents and texts. Literary collage and assemblage also splice together multiple styles, linguistic registers, and modes of address and experiment with the visual design of the printed page. As a result, language acquires both a spatial dimension and unique texture, and the collage construction, to an extent greater than other hybrid or mixed-mode forms, is embedded with the material culture of its particular historical moment.

Fittingly, Agee's imaginary collection perceives representational value in the bits and pieces of everyday life that are left behind or willfully discarded. These scraps are ephemeral—the experiences and phenomena that usually elude documentation or representation—and preserving them becomes a recognizable form of memory making. Yet the scraps accrue additional meaning within the historical context of the thirties, insofar as the aesthetic economy of the scrap collection corresponds with the actual economic and social conditions of the Great Depression. During the Depression, Americans experienced high rates of unemployment, physical displacement and dislocation, and financial insecurity. During the worst years, nearly one-third of the population was out of work, and as suffering persisted the federal government faced greater demands to deal with threats of hunger and violence. Hard times called progressive narratives of American modernity into question, and as a result, the Depression produced a field of social wreckage in which scraps and other objects of refusal became emblematic of failure.

At the same time, as Jani Scandura points out, trash became a valuable commodity during the Depression, and as such, contemporary newspapers and magazines commonly "proposed salvaging rubbish as a way to yield wealth" (19). In a 1937 article published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, one scrap-picker commented, "'Junk' is merely another word for 'money' or cash," and the *Post* reporter further added that "rising prices have transmuted waste products, the junk, the scrap of an industrial civilization into a great essential world resource which is wanted very badly indeed."[3] This kind of recycling created value out of cheap, easily accessible materials and thus modeled the thrift and "make-do" logic that enabled many Americans to survive the crisis.[4] James Davison Hunter and Joshua J. Yates explain that during the Depression, thrift was "taught in schools, exhorted from the pulpits, and encouraged by the government in the form of federally supported 'thrift institutions' like the building and loan

associations" (3). Thriftiness was therefore an obligatory social ethic and somewhat banal everyday practice that stressed the importance of saving more, spending less, and reusing what once embodied the abundant wealth of American consumer capitalism.

The word "scrap" refers literally to a leftover or partial remainder; "to scrap" is to remove from service or use, or to regard as no longer necessary and useful.[5] Contrary to these standard definitions that denote disposal, what I call "scrapping" is a recuperative and transformative practice, one that makes such refuse and the various processes of refusal visible, and at the same time, reinvests them with a new kind of significance. Thinking back to Agee's scrap collection, we can see how the things he wanted to save—the fragments of cloth, bits of cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood, etc.—signify a lost presence, the voice that gave the speech or the hands that held the cotton. In this way, scrapping challenges the disposability not only of things, but also of the identities and stories that inhere in each object. The collection thus asserts the centrality of scraps to narratives of modern American life, and by calling upon the external reality of each object, it acknowledges the significance of what exists outside the representational frame—that which usually goes unnoticed and unremembered.

Agee's conscious deliberation on how and about what to write indicates the significant representational problems posed by the Great Depression, for everything from newspapers, radio speeches, and advertising to narrative fiction, photography, and poetry. How could one narrate the bleak monotony of widespread unemployment and long-term economic stagnation? Or represent suffering and unrelenting hardship? Would these stories relieve fear by invoking the forward-looking mythos of American exceptionalism, or would they expose the plight of the working classes and revolutionary movements for a more just economic order? To what degree should the literary world reveal its political commitments as well as the fractures and factions

that inevitably arose amongst writers and artists?[6] As the Depression became an inescapable factor of American life, these questions both animated and troubled the production of political and literary discourse, in large part because the politics of representation played a defining role in shaping public knowledge of and attitudes towards social problems.

Recent scholarship on the literary histories of the 1930s has focused on the development of the proletarian novel as the central and most organized response to the question of class struggle during the Depression.[7] As a result, "the 1930s" as a literary and cultural tradition has been largely associated with the political writings of the American Left, and critical discussion of thirties radicalism has analyzed and theorized its representations of class, gender, race, labor, and the complex relationships among them.[8] Following William Stott's seminal work *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (1973), critics have also examined social-realist documentary as the dominant representational mode of New Deal modernity, revealing how contemporary photography's visual grammar attempted to stage new ways of seeing, and therefore feeling about, impoverished Americans. This scholarship has been particularly interested in problematizing the relationship between observer, as the creator of and character within a photojournalistic text, and the objects of observation and in examining the ways in which such ostensibly sympathetic, activist work risks reproducing discriminatory structures of difference.[9]

Departing from these two main critical impulses, *Scrap Modernism: Appropriation, Assemblage, and the Politics of Representation in Depression-era America* argues that practices of recovery and aesthetic repurposing played a crucial role in the literary and cultural production of the thirties and forties. Exploring what I call the "scrap aesthetic" in major works by John Dos Passos, Muriel Rukeyser, and Mina Loy, alongside the lesser-known Federal Writers' Project writings of Zora Neale Hurston and the scrapbook collection of Harlem socialite L.S. Alexander

Gumby, this project stresses the significance of formal innovation within Depression-era art and literature and demonstrates its capacity to intervene in the political. These works do not cohere in a single ideology or political affiliation, or even in a particular medium. Rather, they call upon and incorporate a wide range of materials and methods—scrapping everything from newspaper headlines, advertising jingles, and congressional testimony to forgotten stories about rural black life and used rags collected on the streets, and ranging from federally-sponsored anthropological report to surrealist poetry—to recuperate, reassemble, and thus remake narratives of American life. Diverse in form, content, and purpose, these works represent an innovative set of practices in which a complex formalism, political protest, and material culture intersect to construct a discursive vision of American identity and national belonging after the 1929 economic collapse.

Lawrence H. Hanley claims that the economic crisis and massive social reorganization of the Great Depression was, crucially, a "crisis for and within 'official,' or dominant, centers of social and cultural power" (242). Eruptions of class difference and the growing visibility of the outsider, the subaltern, and other figures of exclusion threatened to overwhelm narratives of collective identity and unity, and this breakdown surfaced, Hanley argues, in cultural struggles over different versions of national life. Scrap collage and assemblage register this sense of discontinuity and disorder by disrupting the boundaries between ideology and affect, highbrow and lowbrow culture, and conventional literary forms such as fiction, poetry, reportage, and film. In this way, my concept of scrap modernism corresponds with J.M. Bernstein's idea that:

> The modernist collage is the taking of the detritus of experience, the fragments of material reality that are broken, fragmented, because the thing has been devoured by capital, and creating from those bits and pieces a second-order life, call it a fragmentary

script, that is a way of not mourning but, let's say *preserving them as fragments of a lost reality*, as if the canvas were an embalming fluid or a glass-windowed mausoleum. (188)

Bernstein characterizes capital—the exploitative commodification of labor—as a wild, destructive force and identifies modernist collage as both its field of ruins and the means by which we can recognize, preserve, and therefore remember the messy facts of contemporary history. Bernstein's Marxist reading of collage also registers the sense of trauma that the crisis of American capitalism produced and identifies aesthetic modernism as a form of coping for the loss of an old order that could not be restored.

This project suggests, however, that scrap modernism is animated just as much by the spirit of protest as it is by the melancholic desire to preserve the "fragments of a lost reality."[10] For Dos Passos and Rukeyser, scrap aesthetics enact the violence that a capitalist political economy inflicted upon the minds and bodies of working-class laborers and offer a radical means of critiquing the news, which they perceived to be a dominant and indoctrinating force of American modernity. On the other hand, Hurston and Gumby's cultural ecology raises underrepresented populations to visibility by commemorating black life in a diverse number of discarded stories, images, and documents that explicitly challenge the racial hierarchies that subordinated or erased black culture. Finally, Mina Loy's surreal, junked poetics and installation art assemblages, which she constructed out of trash collected on the streets, ironize the ways in which discourses of economic citizenship render nonworking and nonearning subjects as waste. Rather than representing the Bowery bums as responsible for their own desperate conditions, this work emphasizes their alienation from the modern spectacle—the neon lights, busy department stores, mass transit system, etc.—and satirizes the presumed power of commodity consumption.

In using scraps to represent subalterity, these works enact the ways in which social others are scrapped or refused by hegemonic narratives of American identity. Such formal choices metonymically represent structures of inequality and the unacknowledged heterogeneity of social experience and play out the conflicts between individual and group identities. At the same time, however, they produce a national record that includes models of belonging that mobilize rather than repress social difference. As Antonio Gramsci recognized, "every crisis is also a moment of reconstruction; that there is no destruction which is not, also, reconstruction; that historically nothing is dismantled without also attempting to put something new in its place" (Hall 164–65). Scrap modernism emphasizes the significance of this reconstruction by foregrounding the act of recovery within both textual and visual fields. Dos Passos, Hurston, Gumby, Rukeyser, and Loy's creative appropriation and transformation of found materials "put[s] something new" in the place of debris, and while their works do not share or endorse the same political consciousness, they nevertheless participate in a collective movement for social change by making such work a common cultural enterprise.

At the textual level, scrap aesthetics blur the boundaries between forms and genres, including fiction, poetry, journalism, visual art, and anthropology. Muriel Rukeyser, for example, a poet, journalist, and political activist, incorporates materials from congressional hearings, newspaper articles, legislative petitions, x-ray medical records, stock reports, letters, and interviews into *The Book of the Dead*, and the poem shifts between lyric and reportorial modes. Scrap aesthetics also demonstrate the convergence of literary form and new mass media such as radio, photography, and film. Dos Passos, for one, simultaneously mimics and critiques the mechanical reproduction of the news in the "Newsreels" sections of the *U.S.A.* trilogy, and Hurston's folklore reports for the Florida Federal Writers' Project demonstrate how the recording

machine she took along on her research trips changed both the collection and documentation of oral histories. Scrap modernism's complex intersection of mass culture, communication technologies, and popular practices thus reveals a distinctly vernacular literary and cultural tradition and provides an important framework for considering how everyday life in twentieth-century America created a new aesthetic system for modernist experiment.

The introduction of nonliterary materials into literary artifacts has long been recognized as a distinctly modernist practice. In her study of modernist visual art, Christine Poggi credits Pablo Picasso with making the first deliberately executed collage in 1912 when he pasted a piece of oilcloth onto a canvas representing a still life. Cubists and other avant-gardists embraced this turn away from conventional oil painting and produced a large number of collages and *papiers collés* by gluing printed paper materials and everyday bric-a-brac onto canvases. Poggi explains that the composition radically alters the texture and depth of the pictorial surface, in large part because the cut-up materials retain their former identity but are incorporated into a new and different totality. Marjorie Perloff further argues that "each element in the collage has a dual function: it refers to an external reality even as its compositional thrust is to undercut the very referentiality it seems to assert" (49). Collage thus deliberately undermines any sense of material or stylistic unity and offers in its place a system in which the "materials pasted or printed to the surface no longer function in a literal or semantically stable way" (Poggi 6).

Collage is distinguished by this tension between synthesis and fragmentation and between opacity and legibility that gives rise to new, unexpected meanings. It comes as no surprise, then, that contemporary avant-garde writers whose mantra was "make it new" adopted the collage technique and adapted it to verbal composition. Andrew Clearfield contends that modernist poets, most notably T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, wanted to reinvigorate the structure of

poetic discourse and found in collage the freshness and intensity it needed to break out from under a stultified lyrical tradition. Accordingly, both Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Pound's *Cantos* (1915–62) appropriate and allude to materials from an expansive number of sources to create the sense of radical fragmentation and opposition.[11] The poems also disrupt conventional syntactical and semantic structures as well as the physical appearance of the words on the page: lines break in unexpected places, the length of stanzas and lines vary, and atypical white spaces create visual word patterns. In narrative fiction, James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) has been likened to an archaeological dig through Western culture, shoring an epic number of cultural fragments to create a museum-like hold on history and literary tradition.[12]

In his study of Dos Passos's aesthetic repurposing, Kevin Trumpeter points out that "T.S. Eliot famously suggested that the literary artist is little more than a catalyst for re-combining fragments of extant discourse, but he also advises, in [the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent"] if not always in practice, that writers pull these fragments from a canonical literary tradition" (323). What distinguishes scrap modernist works from both avant-garde visual collage and "high" modernist collage poetry and prose, then, is that they "pull fragments" from everyday language and mass culture, not a canonical literary or cultural tradition. Michael Davidson has further argued that what differentiates 1930s hybrid texts from their early predecessors is their "documentary character, their reliance on a public record and the institutions that support and uphold that record" (139).[13] In other words, the artistic imperative concerning hybridity shifted from defying tradition to directly engaging with the more immediate and material forms of history in the making. I would add to this that scrap modernism's insistence on multiplicity—of representational modes, materials, and narrative voices—is designed to construct a plurality, tying ideas of the collection to a new and often radical collective.

The use of found, ready-made materials is an inherently appropriative technique and therefore raises important questions about ideas of authorship and original creative expression.[14] It is true that in his scrapbooks, Gumby does no writing at all, and instead cuts and pastes premade, mass-circulated printed matter into discrete collections. Moreover, Hurston's folklore collecting was in large part a matter of transcribing, rather than creating, such materials as children's games, folk songs, and town histories and then making those reports suitable for federal publication.[15] Such receptive work, however, involves the processes of collecting, curating, designing, and editing, throughout which the compiler actively reshapes and re-represents content. Scrapping is therefore an important creative and productive practice in which the meaning of found materials emerges through the process of composition. In many ways, context becomes the new content. Scrapping also regards such materials as newspapers, records of speech, and other public documents as there for the taking and available for remaking, so that the finished work shifts ideas of cultural ownership and property to a private, individualized context.[16]

Such recontextualization often challenges the integrity of the found object's original context because it can be taken *out of context*, so that when resituated as part of a new whole it reveals or becomes something that the original text didn't intend. The trace of the earlier context is not completely erased, however, and scrapping draws attention to the gap or discontinuity between its representation and what the author perceives as its reality. This deliberate form of misreading or misappropriation is usually ironic, as in Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* and Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, both of which use repurposing to subvert the authority of dominant, ostensibly objective sources of information like mainstream newspapers. Similarly, though Mina Loy's use of trash for her visual installations was in large part driven by her own poverty, recycling as a

means of representing the Bowery bum ironizes his social status as waste. In this case, material taken out of context (quite literally off the streets and out of wastebaskets) and then formally aestheticized asks viewers to scrutinize the supposed disjunction between art and squalor.

Loy's Bowery work, in particular, reveals the relationship between visual art and literary representation and demonstrates how visual methods can be employed in written ways. Throughout her long career, Loy painted handmade lampshades, constructed other decorative objects, worked as a talent scout for a Parisian art gallery, and kept up with fashion's latest trends. Conscious of the significance of the image, her poetry is informed by and enacts an interplay between text and textile by foregrounding the material dimensions of language. Writing at a time of significant change in visual culture, including the frenzied production of newsreels and the popularization of documentary photography, Dos Passos and Rukeyser likewise experimented with visual literary forms. Both *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead* manipulate white space, play with typography, and draw upon filmic modes of representation, and, of course, Gumby's scrapbooks juxtapose image and text to construct new social and historical narratives. Scrap modernism's verbo-visuality thereby produces a number of simultaneous associations that ask readers to perceive a play of surfaces and, at the same time, examine this play as a materially specific way of engaging with (and seeing) how particular people, stories, and ideas can emerge into visibility.

Scrap modernism is thus at once a material, visual, and formalist literary practice, and this project draws upon methods from cultural history, media studies, art history, and political theory to uncover its role in shaping American cultural production during the 1930s and 40s. Although it focuses on a relatively short period of time, I argue that scrap modernism can more broadly illuminate the ways in which aesthetics can be politically energized (and energizing),

and by focusing on the social dimensions of scrapping, contribute to ongoing reconfigurations of aesthetic modernism in the context of precarity. Taking into consideration narratives of American identity, this dissertation also identifies how crisis is often mapped onto individual subjectivities and reveals how scrapping challenges discriminatory configurations of national belonging. Doing so not only gives us a new critical framework for understanding the Great Depression and New Deal discourses of American modernity, but also provides a crucial lens with which to interpret contemporary scrapping practices—such as appropriation art, dumpster diving, and cut-up social media—and the ways in which they reassemble stories of modern American life.

New American Modernisms

In examining scrap-aesthetic practices and their political potential, my argument engages with several literary debates about modernism and mass culture as well as the relationships between American modernity, Depression-era politics, and the culture of waste. David Banash, for example, has argued that far from being invented by the European avant-garde, collage has deep roots in the rise of mass media, specifically newspapers and advertising. He suggests that modernist collage was never just the "affair of artists," but a medium and visual language with which advertisers, typographers, graphic designers, and other commercial workers had been responding to the explosive development of industrial capitalism and commercial culture. Bartholomew Brinkman, similarly interested in rethinking the genealogy of collage, claims that Marianne Moore's collage poems have been wrongly regarded as derivatives of the historical avant-garde and suggests that we should instead read them in relationship to her lifelong habit of collecting and scrapbooking. He argues that Moore's scrapbooks offer an "alternative history of

collage" (45) and that her poetry, which splices in quotations from everyday materials like magazine articles and political pamphlets, demonstrate her sustained engagement with mass-print culture as a form of poetic expression.

Focusing on Harlem as a scene of cultural production and identity formation, Rachel Farebrother argues in *The Collage Aesthetic in the Harlem Renaissance* (2009) that texts such as Jean Toomer's *Cane*, Alain Locke's *The New Negro* anthology, and Zora Neale Hurston's anthropological fiction represent processes of exchange across racial and geographical borders as well as mixed, hybrid, and complex racial histories and identities. Like *Scrap Modernism*, Farebrother's study examines the political investments that undergird formal experimentation, and like Banash and Brinkman's intervention into collage criticism, it identifies the convergence of vernacular culture and modernism, taking into account particular historical and cultural perspectives. None of these studies, however, consider the economic dimensions of collage and assemblage as techniques grounded in material history or the ways in which scrapping stages a recovery of discards. To address this critical lacuna, this project puts aesthetic modernism into conversation with cultural histories of Depression-era America and examines how national crisis changed both public culture and conventional literary strategies.

In *Down in the Dumps: Place, Modernity, American Depression* (2008), Jani Scandura suggests that the relationship between trash, history, and memory provides a critical framework to read the geographies of "a modernity depressed" (4). Examining such representative places as Key West, Harlem, Hollywood, and Reno, her study maps "New Deal wreckage"—the failures of Progressive fictions of American identity—through its "dumps" (6). Scandura's work is an especially helpful model of textual material analysis and offers new ways of thinking about the significance of refuse, the built environment, and political discourse for the cultural imagination

of Depression America.[17] In *New Deal Modernism: American Literature and the Invention of the Welfare State* (2000), Michael Szalay also employs a historicist approach to literature of the thirties and reveals the effects that federal intervention, particularly risk management programs such as Social Security and relief programs administered by the New Deal, had on the status of writers as artists as well as on the status of writing as a form of labor. He argues, however, that New Deal writers did not simply weather these changes, but rather, actively participated in "the reinvention of modern governance" (3). This reinvention was a form of repurposing, meaning that it put the government to new uses, and, like scrap modernism, required a rethinking of the political function of literary aesthetics.

Jeff Allred and Joseph Entin in their recent work on Depression-era photography each seek to complicate the presumed social realism and sentimentalism of documentary expression. In *American Modernism and Depression Documentary* (2010), Allred argues that such photo-texts as James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Richard Wright's *12 Million Black Voices*, and *You Have Seen Their Faces* by Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White demonstrate a critical convergence of modernism and documentary—two forms typically regarded as at odds with one another—by unsettling conventional expectations about authenticity, modes of address, and aesthetic mediation. Entin's *Sensational Modernism: Experimental Fiction and Photography in Thirties America* (2007) defines "sensational modernism" as an aesthetic designed to arouse a "new, more urgent understanding of poverty, industrial violence, and racial injustice" by using "striking images of pain, prejudice, crime, and violence" (2). Entin finds that these shock tactics demonstrate that thirties literary expression dramatically parted ways with established aesthetic modes, forms of representation that simultaneously cast the poor and dispossessed as figures of sentimental suffering and as objects

of the scrutinizing gaze of the comfortable middle and upper classes, and instead offered tabloid-like images of bodies contorted and disfigured by the capitalist political economy.

These studies are part of a larger New Formalist trend in modernist American studies that seeks to uncover the intricate connections between aesthetic complexity and the realities of contemporary history, including social distress, the rise of new mass media, changing attitudes towards popular culture, and the growing visibility of women, minorities, and the working class.[18] *Scrap Modernism* makes a significant contribution to these conversations by theorizing and explicating the political tensions of the scrap aesthetic. In each chapter, I perform close readings of texts and artifacts within the context of contemporary discourses such as New Deal reform, radical political activism, and popular models of scrapping and saving (such as those found in newspaper advice columns and scrapbooks). My analysis also pays particular attention to the scene of production and considers how outside influences, such as the Works Progress Administration's need to promote an ideology of collective national purpose as well as the lack of institutional support for an independent arts studio in Harlem, influenced each work's concept of the nation's character, value, and sense of community. As a collection of texts, scrap modernism represents a discursive and counter-hegemonic set of practices that seeks to provide new perspectives on social experience and stage alternative visions of national belonging.

Scrap Modernism

Chapter One examines the cut-and-paste practices of John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930–36) and Muriel Rukeyser's long documentary poem *The Book of the Dead* in *U.S. 1* (1938), two works that represent modernity's crisis of information. Reading *U.S.A.*, I focus on its sixty-eight "Newsreels" sections—radically discontinuous verbal collages that piece together

newspaper headlines as well as fragments of popular songs, political speeches, advertising slogans, and public announcements. The Newsreels depict the mechanization of modern life by satirizing the media's ability to pare down complex events, people, and places to a single objectifying headline and emphasize the chance or arbitrariness inherent in making sense of everyday life. They are therefore intended to defamiliarize habitual ways of reading (or, often, not reading) the mass of cheap, seemingly disposable information produced by the public sphere. By situating them within the vexed history of motion-picture newsreels as vehicles for state-sponsored propaganda and commercial advertising, this chapter shows how the Newsreels ironize the so-called objectivity of the news and register Dos Passos's deep suspicions about the ideological function of mass media.

Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead* shares *U.S.A.*'s misgivings about the coercive power of establishment sources of information, and at the same time, overlays this critique with an elegy for the dead. The poem repurposes documentary materials such as newspaper headlines, courtroom testimonies, congressional hearings, and interviews to represent a mining tragedy in West Virginia. The Hawk's Nest Incident, in which over two thousand workers contracted silicosis as the result of unhealthy working conditions, is one of America's worst industrial disasters, not only for the number of lives lost, but also because the project's parent company actively tried to cover up its liability. Designed to expose capitalist exploitation of labor and its actual human costs, Rukeyser's mixing of materials, modes of address, and styles produces a synoptic account of the disaster. In doing so, the poem draws simultaneously upon the authenticity of reported information and the affect-driven aesthetics of sympathetic witnessing. Rukeyser believed that art must bear witness to social struggle and class conflict and thereby produce alterative records of national experience. Her scrappy poetics thus attempt to

demonstrate how incorporating found materials into an interdisciplinary and boundary-crossing aesthetic can assert the ethical principles of social justice and democratic freedom.

As open radicals on the American Left, Dos Passos and Rukeyser are commonplace figures in conversations about 1930s literary radicalism and political modernism. Critics have explicitly identified *The Book of the Dead* as documentary collage poetry and examined its innovative splicing of disparate discourses and linguistic registers, including journalism, physical and social science, and poetry. And while *U.S.A.*'s Newsreels are not typically examined on their own as discrete textual artifacts, critics have also scrutinized Dos Passos's representation of the news and the political power of the newspaper headline. This chapter emphasizes, however, the importance of reading *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead* as recuperative, cut-up constructions that reinsert scrapped language and scrapped stories into a new totality resistant to the very idea of a totality; that is to say, both works represent uneasy mixtures of political agency and disempowerment as well as the tensions between acts of inclusion and exclusion. This chapter also puts *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead* into conversation with the contemporary socialist magazine *New Masses,* to which both Rukeyser and Dos Passos were frequent contributors, to demonstrate how the complex interplay of text and image was used to advance partisan agendas.

The second chapter contends that the collecting practices of Zora Neale Hurston and scrapbooker L.S. Alexander Gumby offer two revisionist histories of black life in America. From 1938 to 1939, Hurston collected folklore for the Florida Federal Writers' Project under the aegis of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a massive and highly bureaucratic effort to record American life during the Depression and more importantly, ideologically map a salable narrative of American identity. Hurston's "federal folklore" constructs a black folk culture out of ready-made tales, town histories, children's games, songs, and dances. This creative sampling of

cultural artifacts makes underrepresented racial populations visible while at the same time embedding modernist practices of appropriation and collage within the scholarly narrative of ethnographic research. Hurston's reports also actively undermine the project's objectifying and fixing gaze by refusing to exoticize blackness. Editors in the Florida office, however, chose not to publish most of her submissions, and it was not until feminist scholars recovered Hurston from relative obscurity that her federal folklore even became known. I therefore find that the bureaucratic management of racial identities offers a crucial opportunity to investigate (and contest) stories of national culture and the geographies of American experience.

This chapter puts Hurston's work into conversation with the little-known artistic efforts of L.S. Alexander Gumby. Working out of a small studio apartment in Harlem, Gumby collected a monumental amount of printed matter about black life in America and pasted these items—including everything from newspaper clippings, photographs, event programs, dinner napkins, and his own personal correspondence—into hundreds of handmade scrapbooks. These volumes, more than 150 of which are now housed at the Columbia University library, are devoted to such subjects as sports, jazz, science, theater, slavery, black education, and an ancestral Africa, among many other things that Gumby considered worth memorializing. Though the Gumby collection is typically regarded (and still used today) as an archive, doing so exclusively overlooks and neglects the significance of scrapbooking as a distinct aesthetic and historiographic practice. Instead, I argue that Gumby's formally complex scrapbooks produce a materialist understanding of African American cultural life by amassing its diversity and expansiveness in one concrete place, and like Hurston's folklore collecting, they call a collectivity into being by adding black subjectivity to a historically racist national record.

My third and final chapter examines the visibility of homelessness and joblessness during the Depression and the ways in which stories of citizenship link work and earning to ideas of personhood by exploring the rarely discussed late work of the poet and visual artist Mina Loy. Loy was a celebrated European modernist who associated with a number of avant-garde groups, including the futurists and the surrealists, throughout the 1920s. In 1936, however, she—British-born and Jewish—fled Europe in the face of Nazism and relocated to the New York City Bowery, an impoverished neighborhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I argue that Loy's representation of urban modernity in the "Compensations of Poverty" poems (1942–59) demonstrate how commercial spectacle and industrial capitalism expel what is unproductive from the social order. Her experimental poetics—which includes surreal sequences, syntactical fragmentation, minimal punctuation, and the repurposing of arcane words, images, and allusions—challenge habitual ways of seeing dereliction; the "Bowery bums" are not to be ignored nor reformed, but instead made visible within an index of disappearance.

Furthermore, Loy's *Constructions* offer a uniquely literal take on processes of recycling as a way to challenge discriminatory ideas of uselessness and social disposability. The *Constructions* are a series of visual art installations that she assembled out of trash collected on the streets, most of which depict the abject life of the Bowery bum. These assemblages enact a logic of planned incongruity, that is, the squalor of dirty materials appear in contradiction with the beatific images of the bums. Most critics interpret this work as an expression of Loy's religious beliefs and suggest that they materialize the Christian ethic of saintly suffering. Reading against this impulse to discern the sacred in the profane, however, I consider how irony undergirds and draws attention to the actual human effects of poverty and dislocation. Moreover, given the fact that Loy was making these scrap assemblages when the rest of the country readied

for the Second World War and the Great Depression was more or less declared over, her work shows the persistence of suffering despite a changing national landscape.

The coda to these chapters identifies a number of contemporary scrap aesthetics and scrapping practices to reveal an ongoing investment in the relationships between an imagined whole and its constitutive parts, particularly in regards to formations of national identity and feelings of belonging. Reading widely from such social and political movements as Freeganism and Occupy Wall Street to trash art projects and Pinterest, I discuss how the twenty-first century has shown a renewed interest in waste, its significance within the social and political economy, and the ways in which the cut-up collage collection offers a crucial means of organizing, editing, and interpreting the mass of information made available both online and in print. To be sure, the economic recession of 2008 prompted countless comparisons to the Great Depression and, once again, drew attention to the country's most vulnerable residents and to ideologically inscribed representations of precarity. It is not my intention, however, to evaluate one crisis in terms of the other. Rather, the coda focuses on scrap aesthetics and how formal innovation and experimental social practices continue to illuminate the conditions, contradictions, and unexpected assortments of modern American life.

"Clean Up, America!"

In an editorial foreword to the July 1939 issue of *Forum and Century* magazine titled "Clean Up, America!" columnist Henry Goddard Leach exhorts his fellow New Yorkers to commit to cleanliness so that "the World of Tomorrow may indeed be a world where people have time to put away their litter."[19] Leach argues that such a "consciousness of cleanup" will make the "United States look to a foreigner less like a vast public dump or gigantic back yard."

Indeed, wastelands of "dumps of dead autos," "crumpled newspapers," "empty tin cans," and "scrawny cats perched on parapets" are to be shunned and swept away, in large part by picking up and putting away scraps. Leach goes on to say that, "Periods of unemployment, like the present…are good times to cultivate the game of cleanliness. Those who occupy spare time folding newspapers, straightening pictures, putting books back on shelves, or sweeping the sidewalk find it a not unpleasant diversion …When recovery rushes in on us again, we may not have time to find ash trays for our cigarette stubs." Practicing such tidiness in both public places and domestic spaces will make "America the Beautiful" beautiful once again—a "land of order and harmony in little things"—and restore its reputation as an orderly, meticulous, and thus thoroughly civilized country.

What's remarkable about Leach's article is not just that he insists on idle hands finding work during the Depression (and rather patronizingly calls it a "game"), but also the ways in which he links trash and its need for disposal to ideas of American identity. He compares America's parks, railroads, and flowerpots to those in Europe, finds them wanting, and suggests that actual progress and prosperity can only be achieved when things are cleaned up and put into their proper places. What Leach stresses, however, is not that Americans produce less litter, but that it be less visible—that trash and other scraps stay out of sight and every person's doorstep be kept clean. He therefore praises such groups as the Appalachian Mountain Club because its hikers pack out what they pack in and "only an expert with a magnifying lens can distinguish where they pitched their tents." The imperative is to leave no trace behind, and Leach attempts to rally readers to action by ascribing moral value to such responsible waste management.

Scrap aesthetics explicitly defy this logic by focusing on the traces—the bits and pieces that cannot, and often should not, be cleaned up. Of course, Leach is talking about literal waste

and about how junk heaps, then just as much as today, are considered problems to be solved, by both municipal governments and the modern American home. His article, however, demonstrates the slippages between material and moral order as well as the nation's reluctance to face its waste. Leach makes the point that "there is nothing inherently un-American about meticulous order in small things." This dissertation takes as its starting point the idea that there is nothing inherently un-American about deliberate *dis*order in small things, and that in fact, scrap heaps have much to tell us about American life and about the people who produce them.

There is also, in any history, the buried, the wasted, the lost.

– Muriel Rukeyser, *The Life of Poetry*

Chapter One: Clipped from the Headlines—Documentary Collage as Political Protest in John Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* and Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*

When asked to demonstrate his method of producing one of his literary "cut-ups," Beat novelist and visual artist William S. Burroughs explained:

> Now for example, if I wanted to make a cut-up of this [*picking up a copy of the* Nation], there are many ways I could do it. I could read cross-column; I could say: "Today's men's nerves surround us. Each technological extension gone outside is electrical involves an act of collective environment. The human nervous environment system itself can be reprogrammed with all its private and social values because it is content. He programs logically as readily as any radio net is swallowed by the new environment. The sensory order." You find it often makes quite as much sense as the original … Somebody is reading a newspaper, and his eye follows the column in the proper Aristotelian manner, one idea and sentence at a time. But subliminally he is reading the columns on either side and is aware of the person sitting next to him. That's a cut-up. (Burroughs and Gysin 4)

Burroughs's reading of the *Nation* is a deliberate misreading, one that follows the conventional left-to-right direction of English prose but nevertheless produces what looks and sounds like nonsense by refusing to read in the "proper Aristotelian manner." Moreover, the claim that the new cut-up "often makes quite as much sense as the original" registers his skepticism about the word and its ostensible referent—the signifier and signified—having any necessary relation and emphasizes the chance or arbitrariness of our everyday ways of "sense" making.

It's critical to point out, however, that Burroughs is not actually cutting up the newspaper in this particular scene. Rather, he's offering a new, cut-up way of reading a newspaper that is already collage-like. That is to say, the newspaper is itself a cut-up; articles, bylines, and images are juxtaposed and assembled into a new collection, and the page asks readers to perceive and interpret a variety of different materials at the same time. If, as Burroughs suggests, readers disregard how they've been trained to read the newspaper—by reading against the conventional logic in which placement, capitalization, typeface size, and other element of design signify importance or relevance—the cut-up can offer new ways of thinking about and through the relationships between information. In another essay titled "The Cut-Up Method," Burroughs adds that "Cut-ups are for everyone. Any body can make cut-ups … All writing is in fact cut-ups. A collage of words read heard overheard" (Burroughs and Gysin 30). Literary composition, in this sense, is thus simply a matter of appropriating and reassembling verbal and visual materials that already exist, and Burroughs's scissors (and the violence they inflict upon the text) render such a process common and open to endless variation.[20]

Burroughs worked on cut-ups throughout the 1960s, publishing *The Nova Trilogy* between 1961 and 1964, and was outspoken in his belief about collage's ability to enact a kind of material resistance to the ideological forces of mass media.[21] Radical as this work was, however, it has a distinct precedent not just in the visual collage of the avant-garde, but also in the aesthetic literary practices of authors working thirty years before him, most notably the novelist John Dos Passos and the poet Muriel Rukeyser. Like Burroughs's cut-ups, Dos Passos's epic trilogy *U.S.A.* (1930–36) and Rukeyser's documentary poem *The Book of the Dead* in *U.S. 1* (1938) regard newspapers and other mass media as information in need of cataloguing, curating, editing, and rearranging. These works therefore incorporate a wide range of found materials—

including fragments of newspaper headlines, song lyrics, and congressional testimony—into literary discourse and deliberately blur the boundaries between journalistic reportage and aesthetic representation by juxtaposing disparate voices, stylistic modes, and narrative perspectives. These techniques are designed to call attention to the discursive practices of everyday storytelling as well as everyday reading.

Yet Dos Passos and Rukeyser's scrap materials and methods are also motivated by a commitment to political activism and avoid the planned haphazardness of Burroughs's cut-ups. For much of the first half of the twentieth century, Dos Passos lamented his fellow artists' indifference to politics, once remarking to his friend Edmund Wilson that "it was merely the first step in a process which subsequently involved the discarding of almost every other sort of interest, too, so that there was nothing left except a nonsensical Algonquin joke or an arid poem."[22] Fearing then that art would dry up or become useless wordplay in the absence of a commitment to something outside itself, Dos Passos devoted his work to representing the socioeconomic systems that he believed divided America into two nations, one of the common man and the other of the capitalist class. He was never a formal member of the Communist Party but allied himself with radicals on the Left, even amid the Red Scare of the late teens and early 1920s.[23] In the fall of 1927, for example, he gathered a group of activists in Boston to protest the trial and subsequent execution of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti and composed *Facing the Chair*—a collection of pamphlets, posters, essays, and articles about the case intended to expose what he considered a tragic example of the government's abuse of juridical authority and America's failure to protect its citizens from unwarranted prosecution and condemnation.[24]

Rukeyser also believed that art should respond to issues of social justice and political repression. She wrote for the Communist publications *New Masses* and the *Daily Worker* and

travelled around the world reporting on events like the 1936 antifascist Olympics in Barcelona, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (which cancelled the games), and in 1975, the wrongful imprisonment of South Korean poet Kim Chi-Ha. Like Dos Passos, Rukeyser was never a card-carrying member of the Communist Party nor did she serve as spokesperson for any partisan organization.[25] She did, however, openly assert the potential political function of poetry and issued a collective call for witnessing—giving firsthand testimony about lived experience in ways that remake or revise the "official" narratives produced by institutions such as the government, big business, and the mainstream press. By giving voice to the silenced and making visible forgotten communities, witnessing intervenes in the formation of a national collective memory and asserts the centrality of marginalized subjectivities to modern American identity.[26]

In this chapter, I argue that Dos Passos and Rukeyser's cut-up techniques and use of found language are designed to respond to the effects of social oppression and thus challenge America's stories about itself as a progressive nation and emergent world power. Their scrap aesthetics reveal the ways in which language and narrative are routinely manipulated and are, as in Burroughs's view, arbitrary systems of meaning susceptible to mishandling and reinterpretation. Crucially, such scrapping also exposes the mechanisms by which regimes of power are perpetuated: in particular, new mass media, as faceless forms of communication indicative of individual Americans' growing inability to narrate their own lives, and industrial capitalism's exploitation of labor. To this end, my analysis focuses on *U.S.A.*'s sixty-eight "Newsreel" sections in relation to the production of movie-theater newsreels and considers the impact of rising technologies upon literary form. I then put this work into conversation with Rukeyser's elegy to the Hawk's Nest incident—an industrial disaster in which over two thousand workers contracted silicosis due to unhealthy working conditions—and suggest that the poem's

processes of transcription and translation of found documents seek to create a new speaking subjectivity and political identity for the working class. Together *U.S.A.*'s Newsreels and *The Book of the Dead* demonstrate how the cut-up, as a formalist technique, intersects with social problems to produce alternative histories of American experience.

Many critics have examined Dos Passos and Rukeyser's documentary collage practices and the ways in which they stage a more inclusive, populist view of American democracy by foregrounding multiplicity and textual variation. Much less critical attention, however, has been paid to the significance of these works' status as collections of repurposed debris—the detritus of everyday life that would otherwise be thrown away or forgotten. Dos Passos culled most of his material for the Newsreels from newspapers and other printed ephemera, and they intervene in the easy disposal of mass communication, the language of which so significantly shapes public consciousness, by preserving its physical remainders. Likewise, Rukeyser's repurposing of public documents and oral testimonies concerning the Hawk's Nest disaster resists such processes of refusal and erasure, particularly as they extend to the company's careless treatment of its workers and attempted cover-up of corporate misconduct. In her collection of essays *The Life of Poetry*, Rukeyser remarks, "There is also, in any history, the buried, the wasted, the lost" (85). These scrap aesthetics are thus inherently recuperative as they seek to reconstitute subjectivity and identify refuse as a fundamental part of the nation's social and cultural fabric.

Both *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead* are invested in addressing ideas of national solidarity and explore the relationship between nationhood and individual identity not only through a scrap logic (which raises questions about the relationship between a fragment and its ostensible whole), but also by drawing upon modes of large-scale mapping and the narratives of

place to interrogate the spaces of belonging. In the now famous preface to the trilogy, Dos Passos explains,

> U.S.A. is a slice of a continent. U.S.A. is a group of holding companies, some aggregations of trade unions, a set of laws bound in calf, a radio network, a chain of moving picture theatres, a column of stockquotations rubbed out and written in by a Western Union boy on a blackboard, a public-library full of old newspapers and dogeared history books with protests scrawled on the margins in pencil. U.S.A. is the world's greatest rivervalley fringed with mountains and hills, U.S.A. is a set of bigmouthed officials with too many bank accounts. U.S.A. is a lot of men buried in their uniforms in Arlington Cemetery. U.S.A. is the letters at the end of an address when you are away from home. But mostly U.S.A. is the speech of the people. (xiv) [27]

This catalogue—of people, things, feelings, and places—itemizes Dos Passos's expansive vision of the nation, a vision that takes form as a seemingly incongruous collection and collective. Underlying its populist rhetoric, however, is a subtle interrogation of what "nation" signifies, particularly because the passage ironically emphasizes the differences that contradict such unity: holding companies and trade unions, bigmouthed officials and dead soldiers, etc.

The trilogy itself ranges widely over the North American continent, exploring a number of social spaces, regional identities, and cultural crannies that constitute the nation's vast geographical and political landscape. In the prose section "The Body of an American," an elegy to the Unknown Soldier buried in Arlington Cemetery that closes the second volume of the trilogy, the narrator speculates about a John Doe "raised in Brooklyn, in Memphis, near the lakefront in Cleveland, Ohio, in the stench of the stockyards in Chi, on Beacon Hill, in an old brickhouse in Alexandria, Virginia, on Telegraph Hill, in a halftimbered Tudor cottage in

Portland, the city of roses" (376). Here the soldier's anonymity allows his body to represent a national collectivity at the same time that it reveals how war strips a person of his individuality, a sense of self usually manifested by a connection to a fixed narrative and/or particular place.

Elsewhere the trilogy is thickly peopled with what Caren Irr calls "representatives of the new [technological] class" (47), including engineers, scientists, public relations men, movie stars, and petty bureaucrats. These characters, both fictional and historical, in large part organize and specify various forms of labor that range from creative to mechanical. Most of the text, however, is devoted to representing the forces of history and modernity that subordinate and sweep over the individual, and instead of a character-driven narrative, what emerges is a frictional dialectic between writer and history, individual and nation. Therefore, like the catalogue in the preface, as a collection of stories *U.S.A.* delineates ideas of identity and belonging in both generalizing and specific terms, as both the sum of disparate parts and a totality that cannot be collected into one narrowly unified or defined social order.

Rukeyser also conceived of her work as a national portrait, writing in 1938 that *U.S. 1* was to be "a summary poem of the life of the Atlantic coast of this country, nourished by the communications which run down it."[28] U.S. Route I covers more than two thousand miles between Maine and Florida and cuts through densely populated urban areas as well as rural countryside. Taking this historically and geographically vast expanse as its conceptual framework, the poem draws upon a distinctly spatialized range of people, places, and events to document American experience—not unlike the Works Progress Administration (WPA) automobile guidebook *U.S. One: From Maine to Florida* published in the same year as *U.S. 1*, one of the most popular volumes in the American Guide Series. Documentary texts produced for the WPA in the late 1930s represented the nation through the lens of New Deal nationalism,

which more often than not meant avoiding social conflict and political dissent in favor of images of American solidarity that elided differences of class, gender, and race.[29]

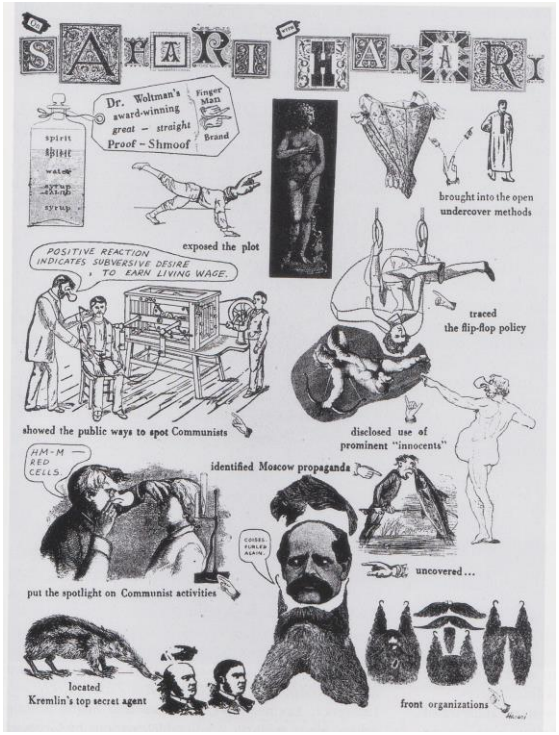
Rukeyser's decision to go inland to West Virginia, however, demonstrates her desire to include death and disaster in this "summary" and map an event that occurred within a small, industrial American town onto the national landscape. Irr argues that "U.S. proletarian fiction is premised on the projection of long-standing local conflicts on a national screen" (147). Though *The Book of the Dead* is documentary poetry, not fiction, the miners, corporate administrators, and bureaucrats represented in the poem nevertheless become what Paula Rabinowitz calls "differentially scaled"; in other words, the significance of this "local zone of collapse" shifts onto the national sociopolitical landscape, and Gauley Bridge becomes emblematic of the faults within and the potential violence of America's capitalist economic system ("Between" 25–26). *The Book of the Dead* draws explicit attention to class struggle and death, employing a number of modernist devices to do so, and thus challenges the WPA texts' tendency towards misrepresentation by way of omission and neglect.

The first and last sections of the sequence, entitled "The Road" and "The Book of the Dead" respectively, make this relationship between scenes of dispossession, space, and nationhood explicit. "The Road" begins, "These are roads to take when you think of your country / and interested bring down the maps again," and later, "These roads will take you into your own country. / Select the mountains, follow rivers back, / travel the passes" (73).[30] The section "The Book of the Dead" repeats this refrain and adds to it the poem's discovery: "These roads will take you into your own country. / Seasons and maps coming where this road comes / into a landscape mirrored in these men" (106). The nation's story, then, is to be told through "these men," by taking ownership of its human as well as geographical landscapes.[31] To this end,

invoking the mythic structure and ethos of the ancient Egyptian text *Book of the Dead*, the poem commits to making visible those who are always on the verge of subjectivity. Textual memorialization thus not only exposes an episode of industrial capitalism conspiring against workers, but also pays tribute to the dead by allowing their voices to speak for America.

Much of Dos Passos and Rukeyser's political and national consciousness, as well as their aesthetic techniques, appear to have developed, at least in part, through their involvement with such radical publications as the *New Masses*.[32] *New Masses* ran from 1926 to 1949 and was considered the principal organ of the American Left during this time. In Maxwell Geismar's view, the magazine was "not mere reportage, political propaganda, and the rest" (7), but instead, a collection of a range of artistic moods—from lyrical and nostalgic to ironic and angry—as well as literary genres, media, and styles. Similarly, Andrew Hemingway argues that "*New Masses* was more than just a magazine, it was also the focus for a social milieu and a grand project to form an alternative American culture" (12–13). Like *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead*, *New Masses* staged a provocative intersection of literary and political discourse and showcased experimental news writing as a way to creatively engage with social problems during the Depression years.

During the 1930s, Helen Langa argues, *New Masses* was unique among left and liberal magazines in publishing a large number of visual images along with "muckraking political analysis, essays on historical and cultural events, contemporary fiction, and reviews of art exhibitions, theater, and films" (25). The magazine featured work by experimental printmakers Adolf Dehn and Louis Lozowick and Cubist illustrators Stuart Davis and Jan Matulka, among many others. In the July 1, 1947 issue, *New Masses* included the following work by Hananiah Harari, titled "On Safari with Harari":



Among the numerous stylistically modernist and politically provocative images published by *New Masses*, Harari's work warrants discussion in this context because, for one, it is explicitly collage. It pieces together and rearranges illustrations cut from other magazines and newspapers and captions them, and as a whole, it satirizes contemporary attitudes towards Communism. On the left side of the page, a man is hooked up to a machine and is being examined by a doctor, whose thought bubble narrates the scene: "positive reaction indicates subversive desire to earn living wage." The man's desire for economic security is pathologized (the image just below it also identifies Communism as a problem to be diagnosed—"hmm, red cells"), and the assemblage ironizes the persecution of Communists as both unwarranted and absurd.

Harari's use of found materials also corresponds directly with Dos Passos and Rukeyser's practices of repurposing and recycling. Here, as in *U.S.A.*'s Newsreels and *The Book of the Dead*, collage stages a fighting back with the perpetrator's own weapons; for Dos Passos, these weapons included hundreds of phrases written by an anonymous horde of media hacks, and for

Rukeyser, the medical records, congressional testimonies, and newspaper articles that attempted to displace responsibility for the disaster away from Union Carbide and onto the workers. As a creative editorial practice that reinterprets such banal yet ideologically powerful material, collage thus undermines the authority of the dominant discourses and offers in their place an alternative version of collective experience. "On Safari with Harari" demonstrates that such activist work need not come at the expense of formal experimentation or humor.

These scrap aesthetics thus seek to organize the vast number of voices and visions of class struggle in America by radically remaking the relationships among them and, as collections of forgotten histories, they articulate the interrelatedness of and communication between margin and mainstream. They also reveal the discursive practices by which a national memory is constructed, not simply documented, by foregrounding processes of remediation and re-representation. As a result, the modernist devices of appropriation and assemblage come to express such subversive ideas as the power of collective action and the significance of political protest to modern American experience.

Manufacturing the News

The *U.S.A.* trilogy includes the volumes *The 42nd Parallel*, *1919*, and *The Big Money*. The first volume covers the fourteen years between the turn of the century and America's entry into World War I, the second volume focuses on the years of the war, and the third volume is concerned with the time between the end of the war and the stock market crash of 1929. Writing in 1962 about what motivated this work, Dos Passos explained that he wanted to "chronicle his age," to document modern industrial civilization and American social experience during the first thirty crisis-ridden years of the twentieth century.[33] Such an epic, Whitmanesque endeavor to

capture the ethos of a culture and its particular historical moment, he believed, required a literary structure ideally suited to the representation of multiple perspectives, vast cultural geographies, and various forms of socioeconomic discourse. As Donald Pizer notes, "If the country as a whole was to be captured, it was necessary to render not only the immense variety of the national experience, but also the equally wide range of vision necessary to understand this experience in all its dimensions" ("In the 1920s" 61). Dispensing with the single, linearly sequential structure of the realist novel, the trilogy is therefore an assemblage of four sharply distinctive modes: the "Camera Eye," "Newsreels," biography, and prose narrative. Printed as separate units and differing in title, substance, and style, these modes alternate and contrast with one another to construct a synoptic view of everyday life and of the discontinuous, shifting terrain of American modernity.

The Camera Eye sections are impressionistic, steam-of-consciousness episodes that verbalize the inner life of an unnamed observer; in the *The 42nd Parallel*, the voice belongs to a child overwhelmed with the sights and sounds of urban life, and his private understanding of the world matures as the trilogy progresses. The Newsreels, on the other hand, ground the narrative in the panoramic context of real historical and social developments taking place (including events that occurred as late as 1936). At the same time, they reflect the mechanized production of information and its impact on lived experience, ironizing what Pizer calls the "immense distance between verbal construct and actuality in twentieth-century America" (*Dos Passos' U.S.A.* 85). The biographies chronicle (and often satirically comment on) the lives of great public figures such as Henry Ford, Eugene Debs, J.P. Morgan, and screen legend Rudolph Valentino. These sections map history making onto the individual rather than national collective because, as Dos Passos explained, "their lives seem to embody so well the quality of the soil in which Americans

of these generations grew"—often embedding ideas of American-ness within forms of publicity, celebrity, and economic success.[34]

The fourth major mode of address is the more conventional, naturalistic narrative of the fictional lives of a dozen men and women, including: Joe Williams, a seaman; Mac, an itinerant laborer and Wobbly; J. Ward Moorehouse, a public relations executive; Mary French, a newspaper reporter; Ben Compton, a union organizer; and many others. The external accounts of these characters' lives are delineated in the open-ended picaresque mode, so that their stories are episodically picked up and then abruptly dropped off, and many lack a conclusive ending. Barbara Foley points out that the chronologies of particular stories are creatively juggled so that they meet the demands of history, explaining that, for example, Mac "is less a character in his own right than a vehicle for exploring the weaknesses and contradictions of a broader historical phenomenon" (93). Individual characters are thus more or less emptied of sentimental significance and instead endowed with a socially representative status, and the novels are plotted along the lines of public events such as union strikes, the Bolshevik Revolution, military campaigns in Europe, and the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. Much as these events intersect with and determine the lives of the characters, however, their stories are notably ordinary, particularly in their shared inability to find empowerment in either rebellion or resignation within vast industrial and bureaucratic systems.

Enacting the principles of simultaneity and juxtapositional irony, *U.S.A.*'s compendium of linguistic tones and registers (satiric, dramatic, and critical) as well as alternating narrative styles (documentary, realist, lyric, and the cut-up mode of the Newsreels) emphasize the tensions between fragmentation and synthesis. The trilogy weaves together several plotlines and multiple characters, and the density of this composition evokes feelings of clutter and crowding. Dos

Passos himself remarked on *U.S.A.*'s accumulative intent, explaining that "the narrative must carry a very large load. Everything must go in. Songs and slogans, political aspirations and prejudices, ideals, hopes, delusions, frauds, crack-pot notions out of the daily newspapers."[35] With this sense of radical inclusiveness in mind, Rita Barnard has suggested that the trilogy is a "veritable archive of the technological, political, and linguistic changes that shaped the nation from the turn of the century to the Great Depression" (39). *U.S.A.* is thus a novel form of historical fiction whose modernist aesthetics are both informed and produced by the modernizing forces it is designed to represent.

In each volume of *U.S.A.*, the Newsreels piece together scraps of newspaper headlines, advertising slogans, political speeches, and popular song lyrics. These fragments are removed from their original, legible contexts so that they are no longer reliably informational.[36] Instead, they are rearranged in ways that reveal the ideological and clichéd expression of the popular press. They also satirize the media's ability to pare down complex events, people, and places to a single objectifying headline. Death, violence, and crisis accumulate on the page, and reportage is reduced to a kind of mechanical equivalence; take, for example, a section of Newsreel III in *The 42nd Parallel*: "Madrid police clash with 5000 workmen carrying black flag / spectators become dizzy while dancer eats orange breaking record that made man insane" (42). Here labor agitation and constabulary violence is coupled with what could be an eating contest but unintelligibly references both performance art and mental illness. The oddly spliced arrangement refuses to privilege one item over the other, and the lack of standard punctuation makes the passage syntactically and grammatically indeterminate. Thus stripped of almost all narrative content and abruptly juxtaposed, the fragments register the profusion of voices produced by the public sphere—what Charles Marz calls "the noise of history" ("Noise" 194).[37]

Dos Passos gathered most of the material for the Newsreels from the archives of the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York World*.[38] He also kept notebooks in which he recorded fragments of speech and writing gleaned from everyday life.[39] Although tracking down the source or referent for each of these borrowed elements might reveal more of their historical significance, to do so would not only be impossible given their variety and volume, but also contrary to novels' demand upon readers to make sense of the repurposed scraps by puzzling out their relationships within the reconstructed text, not by reinserting them into their original contexts. Kevin Trumpeter further points out that the abundance of possible connections between fragments as well as the frequent lack of intelligible connections within them "ensures that some free-floating excess will inevitably remain" (322). Glossing the Newsreels therefore becomes less imperative than examining the ironies and political subversions generated by the collision of materials.[40]

These collages are the most visually oriented of the trilogy's four modes—experimenting with typography, punctuation, and white space to draw attention to the composition and constellation of parts—and illustrate how meaning is contingent upon context.[41] In this section of Newsreel XLVIII from *The Big Money*, the scraps are center-aligned on the page, as though held up by a vertical axis, but shift in content and theme without transition:

truly the Steel Corporation stands forth as a corporate colossus
both physically and financially

Now the folks in Georgia they done gone wild
Over that brand new dancin' style
Called Shake That Thing

CARBARNS BLAZE

GYPSY ARRESTED FOR TELLING THE TRUTH

Horsewhipping Hastens Wedding

That strength has long since become almost a truism as steel's ex-

panding career progressed, yet the dimensions thereof need at times
to be freshly measured to be caught in proper perspective

DAZED BY MAINE DEMOCRATS CRY FOR MONEY

shake that thing

Woman of Mystery Tries Suicide in Park Lake

shake that thing

OLIVE THOMAS DEAD FROM POISON (37)

The song lyrics are off set from the newspaper headlines by the italics, and the repetition of "shake that thing" comically, if only in its tragic absurdity, interrupts a long list of scenes of death, violence, and injustice that are explicitly framed by the "expanding career" of a "corporate colossus." This arrangement has no real sense of place—Maine and Georgia are mentioned, but its scope veers between urban industry and rural, even vagrant spaces—and while these events refer to particular people and events in time, the collage is designedly lacking in the contextualizing details that would fix them into a single or definitive narrative. Instead, scraps like "GYPSY ARRESTED FOR TELLING THE TRUTH" are presented as inescapable facts of social experience—images as symptoms of larger, ongoing problems that suggest the possibility of such events happening then, now, and in the future.

By altering the sense of temporality and location through processes of radical recontextualization, these unstable linguistic assemblages defamiliarize ways of seeing ordinary, everyday experience, primarily in order to critique conventional forms of representation and their claims on revealing reality. Rather than remaining static and authoritative, standard sources of information like newspapers are instead made dynamic, embattled, and open to transformation. As collections of information, the Newsreels also force disparate materials into uneasy proximity. For example, in Newsreel XXI from *1919*, a volume focused on the devastating

effects of the First World War, lyrics from the ragtime song "Good Morning Mr. Zip Zip Zip" are juxtaposed with headlines describing aggressive military action. "Good Morning Mr. Zip Zip Zip" was popular among soldiers for its cheerful celebration of the soldier's sacrifice "for the land we love the best" (53). Within the newsreel, however, the lyrics trivialize such feel-good patriotism in the face of actual accounts of war. Throughout the trilogy, such scraps of popular culture, as well as scraps from popular advertising and political sloganeering, effectively ironize the gap between stories of lived and imagined experience.

The American newsreel played a significant, rather paradoxical role in both responding to and deepening this credibility crisis. The newsreel combined the effects of radio, photography, and film to document the actualities of everyday people and events and was typically composed of a ten-minute sequence of footage that was released twice a week to motion-picture theaters throughout the country.[42] Theater patrons were treated to the newsreel, often along with cartoons and sports reels, with every feature they paid for, and at the height of their popularity, newsreels were seen weekly by around forty million people. As a form of graphic journalism backed by a musical score and high-speed narrator, they provided photographic news coverage long before newspapers and magazines did. Furthermore, coupled in this way to a rising entertainment phenomenon, newsreels popularized the consumption of the news, and their early successes revealed a market eager for more visual forms of communication and reportorial display.

Newsreel production was also, however, a business like any other, and producers and cameramen competed with one another to secure exclusive coverage of newsworthy material. This competition eventually lead to the sensationalizing and often outright distortion of content, and the big newsreel companies such as Fox Movietone News, Pathé News, Universal Newsreel, and the Hearst-owned Metrotone News were frequently charged with censoring and/or

mishandling information (Suárez 92). One contemporary newsreel reporter named Charles Peden explained that the "The Newsreel Public" wanted

> spectacular accidents; catastrophes such as fires and earthquakes; personality shots; racing of all kinds (horses, especially in steeplechase, are more interesting than motor cars, because the danger of spills is greater); battleships; children (babies preferred); sex—for example, bathing-beauty contests, fashion shows, night-club shows, and the like; events with a morbid interest, such as murderers' confessions; football, aviation, and skiing; animals, particularly polar bears and monkeys.[43]

Critics took issue with this idea that the news could, and in Peden's estimation should, be a form of commercial entertainment and contemptuously dismissed the newsreel's impatient, sketchy coverage of current news events as inadequate at best and lurid at worst. Moreover, because the editing of footage and sound recordings could amplify or alter content so greatly as to obscure a story's original meaning and context, newsreels occupied the shaky ground between amusement and information and between distraction and communication.

During World War I, the newsreel was a crucial means by which the government sold the war to the American public.[44] Newsreel censorship was rigorous during this time, and when military authorities did permit civilians to photograph combat scenes, they usually insisted on processing and examining the raw footage before it was released to producers and distributors. Images of violence, death, and other atrocities were therefore edited out, and in some cases newsreel exhibitors went so far as to show fake coverage created from old news segments or from staged reenactments of particularly dramatic scenes. Wartime newsreels were therefore openly regarded as state-sponsored propaganda, and the Creel Committee—President Wilson's Committee on Public Information that formed in 1917 and was charged with providing news and

information to Americans about the war—became synonymous with censorship and the not-so-free American press. As a result, both military and commercial newsreels were associated with the erosion of authenticity and veracity despite film's image, however false, as an incorruptible medium.[45]

During the 1930s, newsreels did not suffer for lack of newsworthy material. Newsreel cameras documented growing political tensions, governmental affairs, social hysteria, and acts of violence, particularly between the police and groups of agitated laborers.[46] Public interest in social unrest was growing, and newsreel companies covered the big events of the day with as much attention and investigative initiative as well-established newspapers. Newsreels had not, however, shed their reputation as being a vehicle for propaganda, and so the thirties also experienced an ongoing skepticism with respect to the ways in which purportedly documentary reportage could be manipulated to advance a specific agenda. This means that for most of the lifespan of motion-picture newsreels they consistently raised questions about the fine line between editing and outright fraud and thus the boundaries between reality and fabrication.

Some nonmainstream groups responded by producing their own newsreels. In his study of *U.S.A.*'s cinematic techniques, Juan A. Suárez points to the influence of proletarian cinema and workers' newsreels. Suárez argues that "left documentary film evoked the possibility of mobilizing a popular medium in the struggle against the interests'" (87), and his brief history of 1930s radical film culture examines how revolutionaries in the Soviet Union used new media to produce a popular appeal for the movement and to establish its antibourgeois platform. Like American newsreels, Soviet workers' newsreels made claims about the documentary and epistemological status of filmic representation but did so to produce a counternarrative to the social conservatism of mainstream media. A contributor to the Communist newspaper the *Daily*

Worker reported in 1932 that "the newsfilm is the important thing … the capitalist knows that there are certain things it cannot afford to have shown. He is afraid of some pictures" (qtd. in Suárez 92). Suárez shows, however, that by distributing footage of strikes, breadlines, police attacks, and Communist Party activities to agitate for political resistance, leftist filmmakers usually reproduced the didacticism, distortions, and political bias their newsreels ostensibly meant to oppose.

In adopting the newsreel as one of the four modes of *U.S.A.*, Dos Passos thus consciously took on its contentious cultural and political history. As Matthew Stratton shows in his reading of the news in *U.S.A.*'s narrative prose sections, there are "numerous instances in which inconvenient truths are suppressed by vested economic interests" (423). Newsreels emblematized corporate America's propensity for propagandizing and undermining the integrity of the news as well as the public's growing mistrust of the objectivity of filmic reportage.[47] Newsreels were also deeply embedded in discourses of popular culture, particularly as means of distributing information to a wide variety of audiences—audiences that did not have to be literate or capable of purchasing a newspaper in order to be informed citizens within their communities. Paradoxically, then, newsreels were in theory a populist mode of representation and instrument of knowledge and at the same time, a highly manipulable medium that most often served the interests of the groups and institutions already in power.

Newsreels also signified technological progress and the mechanization of modern-day storytelling. The newsreel is a machine designed to anonymously deliver the news, and its continual, unrelenting motion is indifferent to potential effects on viewers. William Solomon argues that America's rising "automaton culture," particularly within the context of World War I, was inherently violent and argues that "the task Dos Passos undertakes with *U.S.A.* is to invert

the existing power relations between human beings and technology, to master the machines that have achieved the status of oppressors over mankind" (186). While Solomon is primarily concerned with how the military, as a mechanizing force and disciplinary apparatus, mutilates the body and subjectivity of the soldier, we can see how Dos Passos's Newsreels acknowledge the power of the machine by mimicking its forms of mediation. The Newsreels cut up, toss around, and rearrange scraps of the real and in so doing demonstrate how manufacture and production often coincides with destruction. Dos Passos also inscribes a machine-like impersonality within the section titles, which, numbered one through sixty-eight in large roman numerals, are demonstrably uninformative.

Dos Passos believed that new mass media raised potentially ominous possibilities, writing in 1932 that "history, or the mass mind … is becoming more and more involved with the apparatus of spotlights, radio, talking pictures, newsprint, so that the image-making faculty, instead of being the concern of the individual mind, is becoming a social business."[48] This anxiety suggests that it is the manner more than the matter of telling that is significant and that commercialized, usually ideological forms of communication play a significant role in shaping political and social consciousness. Within *U.S.A.*, the Newsreels imitate cinematic newsreels by mechanically duplicating information. However, they also ironize the presumed objectivity of the machine by distorting its narrative and the facts that it claims to report. Significantly, then, the Newsreels adapt the kinetic, montage mode of the cinematic newsreel and repurpose it to create static collage objects whose seams are more significant than any notion of unity or temporality.

It is important to distinguish between montage and collage and thereby identify why the Newsreels function as collage within the montage logic of the entire work. Montage is a film

technique in which a series of shots are edited into short, specific sequences and scenes cut rapidly back and forth without transition in order to emphasize the effects of dissonance and juxtaposition. Parallel narratives progress simultaneously, and though they may present different characters or settings, they are typically unified by a common theme and gradually confer at the story's climax. Montage can thus cover a substantial amount of material and large-scale subjects in a short amount of time. Like montage, collage is characterized by the rearrangement of disparate materials that constitutes a new and surprising whole. Unlike montage, however, collage lacks the onward impulse of the sequential narrative and is instead focused on the simultaneous superimposition of materials onto a single, highly layered plane of interpretation. Collage thus produces a kind of geometric spatiality in which, as Andrew Clearfield explains while delineating the differences between the two modes, "Form tends to annihilate content, and the peripheral or extraneous aspects of a given element become more important than its intrinsic (and traditional) qualities as a portion of an artwork" (9). Collage also emphasizes the arrangement of elements more than their literal meanings and foregrounds the significance of the creator's act of artful selection.

Within *U.S.A.*, the Newsreels are held in close-up, and they are dense with the accretion of repetitious detail. As a result, they slow the pace of an otherwise accelerated narrative so that readers must process language, specifically the newspeak of mass culture and advertising, in new and more conscious ways. David Seed has argued that

> It is impossible to read the Newsreels in a simple linear fashion because discontinuities force the eye back to retrace its steps and bridge those gaps. In other words the eye ranges over the Newsreels as spatial areas where the white sections of the page suggest hidden information. Because many sentences are left incomplete and because headlines always

> imply more information than they can contain within themselves, Dos Passos constantly gives the impression that more is going on off the page. The very style of the Newsreels points towards public events which can only be glimpsed within the novel. (186)

The Newsreels therefore divest the spectacle of American modernity of its propulsive energy and suggest that it should be regarded with suspicion rather than with naïve enthusiasm or misguided idealism. Moreover, as the Newsreels pile up across the trilogy, they don't move towards a gradual convergence or sense of resolution. Instead, they appear to materialize the absence of actual change, change that might otherwise signal progress in resolving the terrible impacts of war, American imperialism, and the unchecked production of new technologies and commodities. Employing a form that is both conceptual and visual, the Newsreels ask readers to see modernity's disruptions of space and time and to register the ways in which narrative is often no longer linear.

In several of the Newsreels, scraps of song lyrics evoke the sense of circularity, a kind of refrain that stresses redundancy and unproductivity. Take Newsreel XLIV in *The Big Money* as an example:

> *Yankee Doodle that melodee*
>
> COLONEL HOUSE ARRIVES FROM EUROPE
>
> APPARENTLY A VERY SICK MAN
>
> TO CONQUER SPACE AND SEE DISTANCES
>
> but has not the time come for newspaper proprietors to join in a wholesome movement for the purpose of calming troubled minds, giving all the news but laying less stress on prospective calamities
>
> DEADLOCK UNBROKEN AS FIGHT SPREADS
>
> they permitted the Steel Trust Government to trample under-foot the democratic rights which they had so often been assured were

the heritage of the people of this country

SHIPOWNERS DEMAND PROTECTION

Yankee doodle that melodee
Yankee doodle that melodee
Makes me stand right up and cheer (7)

In this section, "Yankee doodle that melodee" contrasts with scenes of violence and unrest, including civil rights violations and union agitation. The language of "calamities" and "deadlock," coupled with imperialistic ethos of "conquer," proprietorship, and corporate monopoly effectively ironize the patriotic spirit of Yankee Doodle. Like "Good Morning Mr. Zip Zip Zip," the anthem therefore mocks rather than honors stories of progressive idealism and American solidarity. Similar critiques play out across the trilogy's other four modes, particularly as class conflict, war, and capitalist endeavor come to drown out nationalist sentiment.

In *The Big Money*, Dos Passos's engagement with mass culture and critique of conspicuous consumption become more apparent as want ads, promotions, and tourist information make an appearance. Newsreel L, for one, includes a celebration of new automobile parts:

NEWLY DESIGNED GEARS AFFORDING NOT
ONLY GREATER STRENGTH AND LONGER
LIFE BUT INCREASED SMOOTHNESS

NEW CLUTCH—AN ENGINEERING ACHIEVEMENT
THAT ADDS WONDERFUL POSITIVENESS TO
POWER TRANSMISSION THAT MAKES
GEARSHIFTING EASY AND NOISELESS

NEW AND LARGER BULLET LAMPS AFFORD THE
MOST PERFECT ILLUMINATION EVER
DEVELOPED FOR MOTOR USE (74)

Here Dos Passos's technical manipulations do a number of interesting things. First, by recontextualizing and reformatting the content of the advertisements, he makes them look like an

experimental prose-poem, one that deliberately aestheticizes found language as readymade writing. At the same time, it calls attention to the ads' own aestheticization, and in this case a seeming fetishization, of commodity capitalism, stressing such hyperbolic language as "an engineering achievement," "wonderful positiveness," the "most perfect illumination." Juxtaposed with clippings about the "purely economic laws" of supply and demand and the eight-hour workday, as well as lyrics from "Don't Blame It All on Broadway," the ads signify the commercialization of desire and the ways in which advertising—in another Newsreel, a clipping asks "ARE YOU NEW YORK'S MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL STENOGRAPHER?"—objectifies and organizes the nation's citizenry into identifiable, marketable types.

In addition to chronicling these forms of disorder, the Newsreels function as a repository of scraps, or, the used up and disposable remnants of everyday life. Marz argues that all that remains in the Newsreels is "the residue of voice, the debris of character, action, and experience … Dos Passos continues to catalogue the wreckage, the fragmentary form, the broken objects that invade and bury persons and landscapes" ("Noise" 196). By collecting its refuse, the Newsreels register how individuality and private life have been scrapped by the indifference of modernity, and this accumulation shows in compressed form the harsh effects of such a mechanized and degraded environment. At the same time, however, the Newsreels resist such devastation, in the sense that documentary forms of representation upset the status quo by making visible its hypocrisies and narrative distortions and adding them to the historical record. The Newsreels are designed to register the ways in which newspapers and other forms of public rhetoric yield tremendous power within the nation's ideological systems. A sense of protest is therefore embedded within the Newsreels' inherent cynicism, and scraps, in this case, help Dos Passos focus his leftist critique.

Dos Passos's repurposing of used and discarded items also demonstrates his regard for material waste as a potential resource for artistic production. Trumpeter calls the "ever-expanding media archive from which Dos Passos culled material" a "virtual landfill of historical information awaiting excavation" (321). Focusing on *U.S.A.*'s treatment of garbage in the context of the proliferation of printed matter in early twentieth-century America, Trumpeter argues that the trilogy offers a "uniquely literal take on the processes of textual recycling" and that Dos Passos "uses these random scraps of the century's trash to challenge his audience's passive acceptance of an instantly disposable media whose trash-like elision from consciousness encourages political complacency" (321). In other words, his appropriation of extant textual material is designed to awaken readers by presenting them with a counternarrative to that offered by establishment newspapers, and the compression of information exposes how casual, daily contact with the news might easily overlook or fail to thoughtfully process the widespread prevalence of violence and exploitation.

Similarly concerned with Dos Passos's response to modernity's "crisis of information," Stratton argues that a pedagogical impulse drives *U.S.A.* He suggests that the narrative's ironic representation of the news and mainstream journalism not only exposes the dictates of various censorships, but also instructs readers on how to be better and more thoughtful critics, creating a "public opinion that is trained and attuned to recognizing paradox and irony, and which may thus read corporate and novelistic 'literature' with a critical eye that inculcates resistant skepticism rather than tractable credulity" (428). Stratton therefore suggests that reading skeptically and for irony is capable of turning political helplessness into political praxis and creates the conditions for new political communities to emerge. While this claim rightfully acknowledges the political power of the text, it is difficult to prove beyond theory that critical engagement with the news

translates to political activism, particularly insofar as reading publics may be less credulous about the news but no more likely to take action.

Much of the criticism on *U.S.A.* has underplayed the extent to which the Newsreels produce new, alternative understandings of social experience. Marz, for example, argues that the debris-laden Newsreels register Dos Passos's profound suspicion of the "public voice" and the ways in which mass media drains significance away from individual subjectivity and private life. He thus concludes that "the public voices of the Newsreels are speakerless. They are voices over which men have no control" (*U.S.A.* 405). While this idea that the "world of the Newsreels is a lawless, violent world out of control" captures the chaos seemingly occurring on the page, it also overlooks the ways in which the Newsreels exert ownership and control over those voices. By scrapping bits of commercial culture and reinterpreting them within the space of the novel, Dos Passos denies this "noise" an inviolate authority. Instead, the Newsreels demonstrate that public discourses do not exist beyond reach or manipulation and are subject to the same kind of violence that is inflicted upon individual subjectivities. Furthermore, much like the salvaged items collected and preserved in a scrapbook, the Newsreel items become the property of the compiler, suggesting then that man is not so much "gradually replaced by his artifacts" (Marz, *U.S.A.* 407) than in need of cataloguing, curating, and repurposing that wreckage.

Almost all of the Newsreels rely on juxtapositional irony and contradiction to stage this kind of protest—or in Dos Passos's own words, to "blow aside the oratorical vapors."[49] Newsreel XLVI in *The Big Money*, for example, mixes such celebratory headlines as "BANKERS HAIL ERA OF EXPANSION / PROSPERITY FOR ALL SEEN ASSURED" with an elegiac song about hardship: "The times are hard and the wages low / Leave her Johnny leaver her / The bread is hard and the beef is salt / It's time for us to leave her" (20). Though the "her" in the refrain is

indeterminate, it very well could signify America (as a feminized entity) as much as Johnny's lover. Visions of expansion, then, come into conflict with the threat of disaffiliation, and the Newsreel foregrounds how big money's disinterest in the individual—"No one knows / No one cares if I'm weary / Oh how soon they forgot Château-Thierry"—forecloses upon feelings of civic pride and membership, in this case particularly those produced by military service. The Newsreel provides a grim view of the way things currently stand, but nevertheless provocatively identifies the widespread, hard-hitting effects of inattention to individual suffering.

This sense of agency extends to the social function of the scrap collection. Marz calls the Newsreels "museums and cemeteries (both burial grounds of objects)" (*U.S.A.* 406). Yet far from being buried, these remains are made visible, triumphantly so in the sense that they are preserved and made available to a wide variety of audiences across both time and space. Unlike museums and cemeteries, the Newsreels are capable of circulating their collections, and though they resist easy legibility, the assembled scraps articulate Dos Passos's anticapitalist critique as well as the novels' themes of dislocation and rupture. This is not to say, however, that the Newsreels should be regarded as an archive of the news. The scraps offer incomplete accounts of particular stories, and the collection is explicitly designed to undermine the authority of reportorial discourse. At the same time, however, the Newsreels provide a record of contemporary rhetoric and the discriminatory narratives of American modernity offered by the newsmakers.

The Newsreels' subversive reinterpretation of found materials exposes the mechanics and language the nation uses to construct stories about American exceptionalism. By dismantling the dominant but nevertheless deceptive narratives of America's corporate and state power, *U.S.A.* demonstrates the dysfunction of the United States and its ailing democracy and suggests that fracture precedes reconstruction. The Newsreels foreground dissonance within America as a

conceptual whole, and their syntactic and semantic slipperiness call attention to the noise of dominant discourses as well as nonconformity. This formal experimentalism divests the news and popular culture of any sense of comfort or knowledge and instead uses its own rhetorical and mechanical devices to productively politicize the facts of everyday life. In *U.S.A.*, the Newsreels demonstrate the convergence of material history, rising modern technologies, political protest, and modernist literary production. They are therefore crucial to understanding the trilogy's representation of American modernity, anticapitalist radicalism, and the promise of social transformation.

Witnessing Disaster

By the time Muriel Rukeyser travelled to Gauley Bridge, West Virginia to examine medical records and interview survivors, reports of the Hawk's Nest tunnel tragedy had made national news. In short, the three-mile tunnel from Gauley's Junction to Hawk's Nest, Virginia was intended to divert water from the New River to a hydroelectric plant. While digging, workers discovered a massive deposit of pure silica, a valuable glasslike material used in the electro-processing of steel. The hydroelectric project, which was initially licensed as a public utility, was quickly transformed into a profitable silica mine. To cut costs and maximize efficiency, the project's parent company—Union Carbide and Carbon—instructed workers to dry-drill the mine but didn't provide safety masks or proper ventilation, even though silicosis was well known at the time as an occupational hazard, an incurable and ultimately fatal respiratory disease that suffocates its victims. According to historian Martin Cherniack, less than two years after work on the tunnel had begun local attorneys had filed eighty separate claims alleging that their clients had contracted silicosis (55). Yet even in the face of legal action, Union

Carbide actively tried to cover up its liability by bribing doctors to misdiagnose the symptoms and paying a local mortician to bury the workers in an unmarked cornfield.

In *History, Memory, and the Literary Left*, John Lowney explains that reports of Hawk's Nest first emerged in radical labor tabloids with limited circulation, such as the *People's Press* out of Detroit, and in the local West Virginian paper *Fayette Tribune*. In January 1935, *New Masses* published a short story by the novelist and screenwriter Albert Maltz titled "Man on a Road." The story recounts his encounter with a hitchhiker near Gauley Bridge, who is silent about the source of his despondency until the end of the trip, when he reveals that he is dying of silicosis. The *New Masses* followed this story with a more detailed two-part article about the miners' illness by a New York social worker named Philippa Allen, whom Rukeyser quotes at length in *The Book of the Dead*. Once New York congressman Vito Marcantonio initiated a federal inquiry into the conditions of the Hawk's Nest project, silicosis made front-page headlines in mass-circulation papers and theater newsreels.

As Michael Thurston notes, the task Rukeyser set out for her investigation was complex and ambitious, particularly as it included "addressing a massive labor disaster, the excrescences of capitalism, and the paradoxically liberatory possibilities of industrial production; seeking broad-based social change; and elaborating a poetics of politicized memory" ("Documentary" 62). Not unlike Dos Passos, she therefore needed to reach out to various points on the political and aesthetic spectrum, and the poem draws upon documentary reportage, science, and social history as well as rising modern technologies such as film and x-ray as potential media for representing social experience. *The Book of the Dead*, then, emerges as a collection of diverse discourses and methods that lays bare its shifting styles and devices in the attempt to articulate a new working class collectivity shaped by tragedy and by the hope for an alternative future.

In the twenty-part poetic sequence Rukeyser incorporates material from congressional hearings, newspaper articles, legislative petitions, medical records, stock reports, letters, and interviews with victims and their families. By stitching together an array of sources and points of view, the poem, Thurston argues, "deploys the generic conventions of social documentary—informant narrative and reportorial observation—to construct a community of speakers, differentiated by voice, location in the town's hierarchy, and poetic form, who provide individual views of the tunnel tragedy and those responsible for it" ("Documentary" 66). For example, notes from a committee meeting immediately follow a lyric portrait of a miner named Vivian Jones in "The Face of the Dam," and the flat, emotionless legalese of the investigation sharply contrasts with elegiac discourse. Throughout the sequence the voices of the powerful are juxtaposed with the voices of the powerless and thus set into dialogue, each informing the other of conflicting ideas about class, agency, and identity.

The poem sympathizes with the workers and their plight as it seeks to expose how Union Carbide abused its power by taking advantage of ill-defined laws and regulations regarding occupational disease: "Only eleven States have laws. / There are today one million potential victims. / 500,000 Americans have silicosis now. / These are the proportions of a war" (103). Rukeyser does so primarily by turning what might seem like authoritative stories of what happened against themselves. In his canonical study of Depression-era documentary, William Stott defines "exposé quotation" as a critical mode of representation in which a public figure is quoted verbatim in a context that ironizes the speech "to suggest something other than what the authority intended" (173). This form of quotation therefore critiques "the authority" but does so in the absence of any editorializing commentary, suggesting that no commentary is needed to reveal its unjustness or inherent irony.[50] Accordingly, Rukeyser's repurposing of found language

retains a degree of objectivity, while at the same time calling attention to the ideological field such objectivity serves—curating, editing, and rearranging materials to represent the conflicts and rhetorical maneuvers that defined the relationship between corporate power and the working class.

In the section titled "The Doctors," for example, Rukeyser quotes whole passages verbatim from a letter to the congressional committee by a company doctor named Harless. In the letter, which he submitted in lieu of attending the hearing, Harless accuses workers of exploiting the panic about silicosis to sue for damages while also claiming to have warned them that "continued work under these conditions would result in serious lung disease" (91). Immediately next to this transcript fragment is the testimony of Emory R. Hayhurst, whose credentials as a medical professional Rukeyser presents before quoting him directly: "Miner's phthisis, fibroid phthisis, / grinder's rot, potter's rot, / whatever it used to be called, / these men did not need to die" (90). When asked, "Is silicosis an occupational disease?" Hayhurst answers simply, "It is" (90). Putting Harless directly into conversation with Hayhurst thus explicitly undermines the authority of Harless's account. Even more significantly, by directly quoting the letter, Rukeyser lets Harless speak for himself but controls both the context and effect of his words. Harless writes that "In this letter I have endeavored to give you the facts which came under my observation . . . ." and "If I can supply further information . . . ." (91). Yet instead of quoting each sentence in its entirety, Rukeyser adds in ellipses after each. In place of accountability there is instead silence, and the ellipses ironize the inherent, seemingly incontrovertible incompleteness of Harless's testimony.

Like Dos Passos, Rukeyser also experimented with typography, the visual space of the page, and alternating modes of address. Within *The Book of the Dead*, interviews with such

people as Philippa Allen are presented in the conventional question-and-answer format of legal deposition, and the free-verse sequences have unconventional line breaks and syntactical arrangements. The section entitled "The Dam" includes a stock-market ticker showing Union Carbide's rising profits and is a graphic representation of the bottom line that drives industrial expansion. Rukeyser also lyrically recasts the witness testimony of local residents into various textual forms; for example, "Mearl Blankenship" is part-letter, part-impressionistic portrait whereas "George Robinson: Blues" remakes Robinson's congressional testimony into a blues lyric. These shifts signify different points of view and, literally speaking, give voice to a range of silenced stories, including those belonging to women and black workers. In doing so, they emphasize the importance of multiplicity and the power of diversity, particularly in remembering social crisis and constructing new communities out of its waste.

The individual sections of *The Book of the Dead* are collage constructions that fit into and fulfill the montage logic of the poetic sequence. In any collage, elements are removed from their original contexts and then reinterpreted, rearranged, and thus redefined by the compiler. Verbal collage, like that of *The Book of the Dead*, therefore raises important questions about processes of translation and transcription—the ways in which Rukeyser transforms found language into political poetry. The testimonies of Mearl Blankenship, Mrs. Jones, George Robinson, and Arthur Peyton, in particular, demonstrate how the poem attempts to give voice to the disaster and embody social problems in the individual. They also reveal how Rukeyser's practices of quotation, reportage, and other experimental techniques combine to perform an act of witnessing, explicitly foregrounding the political and ethical implications of representing suffering, and demonstrate how the complex relationships between disparate textual forms model acts of affiliation and disaffiliation.

In “Mearl Blankenship,” Rukeyser intersperses her lyric portrait of the sick miner—“He stood against the stove / facing the fire— / Little warmth, no words, / loud machines” (82)—with quotations from an interview and a letter in which he describes his experience in the tunnel. His first-person testimony is set in quotation marks but the letter is not:

> “I wake up choking, and my wife
> rolls me over on my left side;
> then I’m asleep in the dream I always see:
> the tunnel choked
> the dark wall coughing dust.
>
> I have written a letter.
> Send it to the city,
> maybe to a paper
> if it’s all right.”
>
> > Dear Sir, my name is Mearl Blankenship.
> > I have Worked for the rhinehart & Dennis Co
> > Many days & many nights
> > & it was so dusty you couldn’t hardly see the lights.
> > I helped nip steel for the drills
> > & helped lay the track in the tunnel
> > & done lots of drilling near the mouth of the tunnell
> > & when the shots went off the boss said
> > If you are going to work Venture back
> > & the boss was Mr. Andrews
> > & now he is dead and gone
> > But I am still here
> > a lingering along (83)

In the quoted section, Rukeyser reproduces Blankenship’s words seemingly verbatim but breaks the lines at will, adding emphasis by way of isolation to phrases like “the tunnel choked” and “the dark wall coughing dust.” In the letter, she also experiments with spacing and arrangement and creates continuity with the repeated ampersand at the beginning of successive lines. Certain unconventional marks such as the capitalization of “Worked” and “Venture,” the lack of capitalization in “rhinehart,” and the misspelling of “tunnell” (in a subsequent section Blankenship states that he is “expecting to loose my life” and refers to Rhinehart as “Rheinhart”)

make it appear as though Rukeyser is transcribing rather than translating the particular dialect of Blankenship's self-presentation.

At the same time, however, the easy rhyme of "nights" and "lights" and the highly constructed, accumulative force behind the repeated ampersands suggest that the poem is selectively rebroadcasting Blankenship's voice, perhaps with negative effects. Thurston argues that Blankenship's "class position and lack of education are typographically exposed not only for sympathy but, potentially, for a stance of superiority, for parody, for ridicule. Blankenship's 'letter' in the poem is really his, not a fabrication … Yet [Rukeyser] runs the risk of condescension in using it as she does" ("Documentary" 68). Thurston rightly calls attention to the demands placed upon social documentary—namely, to capture a subject with as much authenticity and fidelity to the original as possible but without putting that subject on display as a racial, class, or social other.[51] Moreover, aesthetic representation must appear seamless and naturalistic despite being strategically framed and presented by the documentarian.

The poem, however, avoids slipping into such risky sentimentality by reverting to the image of the x-ray as objective evidence of Blankenship's illness. Spliced between the two sections of the letter, the narrator tell us:

> He stood against the rock
> facing the river
> grey river grey face
> the rock mottled behind him
> like X-ray plate enlarged
> diffuse and stony
> his face against the stone. (83)

Blankenship's diseased, mottled lungs are made visible and "enlarged" in the "rock mottled behind him," and his dying body is absorbed into the grey, depressed landscape. Furthermore, Rukeyser draws explicit attention to the seams of the poem's constructedness and to the re-

representation rather than representation of Blankenship's subjectivity through the abrupt shifts in voice, register, and space. As a result, the text asks readers to perform of kind of double reading of these scraps: as fragments of the original that extend the frame of the page and as elements of a new whole, one that ironizes the ways in which Blankenship has been reduced down to an ailing body (signified by the x-ray) and scant words with which to communicate his hardship.

It is unclear whether Blankenship's letter was ever published in a newspaper or other public forum. The poem thus preserves this scrap and makes visible the kind of voices typically rendered silent by inattention. As a whole, *The Book of the Dead* functions as a kind of archive, a repository of information that would otherwise be lost or inaccessible to readers far removed from the scene. For example, Philippa Allen's statement is presented in the same discursive space as the snapshot of Gauley Bridge as well as transcribed x-ray reports of diseased lungs, a brief history of the region, and a blueprint tour of the engineering rooms under the dam. The representation of each of these elements has of course been mediated by Rukeyser's own subject position, and like Dos Passos's Newsreels, cannot be regarded as a complete or objective account of the event. Yet the poem nevertheless exists as an unofficial record (while also calling into question what counts as "official") and textualizes lived experience within the literary artifact.

Many of these issues concerning transcription and transformation come to the foreground in Rukeyser's representation of race and the racial discourses embedded within narratives of the disaster. By most accounts, over two-thirds of the miners were black migrant workers, men who had travelled from the South during the early years of the Great Depression to find work. Not only were black workers paid less than white workers and forced into unsanitary, segregated living conditions within the camps, they also worked the most dangerous parts of the mine,

which increased their exposure to silica dust. As a source of cheap labor lacking direct ties to the region, black workers were considered disposable. Cherniack explains that Union Carbide went so far as to blame the black workers for becoming sick, identifying their illness not as silicosis but as pneumonia resulting from their own self-destructive behavior, such as drinking or gambling outdoors before open fires in the cold (53). Such racial and moral stereotyping necessarily concealed corporate misconduct and reproduced the structures of inequality that made such silencing possible.

Rukeyser concentrates the issue of racial injustice in the section titled "George Robinson: Blues," in which she reworks Robinson's congressional testimony into a blues lyric. The poem consists of ten stanzas and employs the end rhymes and repetition conventionally associated with the blues:

> When the blast went off the boss would call out, Come, let's
> go back,
> when that heavy loaded blast went white, Come, let's go back,
> telling us hurry, hurry, into the falling rocks and muck. (88)

It is written in first person and recounts Robinson's encounter with illness, death, and the pervasiveness of the white dust. He describes it as "sprinkled flour" that found its way into the drinking water and the workers' hair and clothes and settled over all the "parks and groves" (88). Elsewhere in *The Book of the Dead*, black miners appear as static fixtures on the landscape; for example, the "Gauley Bridge" section records "the deserted Negro standing on the corner" and "the eyes of the Negro, looking down the track" (77–78). Race is also made visible as abject human labor in the testimony of Arthur Peyton, who saw "the Negroes driven with pick handles / on these other jobs I was not in tunnel work" (95).

Tim Dayton has argued that "George Robinson: Blues" is one of the poem's noticeable failures because, for one, it is overly contrived and tries unsuccessfully to convert the prose

source into verse by "padding out lines and weakening her diction to maintain a rhyme scheme" (52), and because, as a whole, *The Book of the Dead* pays insufficient attention to race given how much injustice and discrimination Rukeyser had witnessed firsthand. Dayton also points out that Rukeyser may have even gotten one of the basic and fundamental elements of the story wrong: in the transcript of House testimony from which Rukeyser quotes, the man's name is recorded as "Robison," not "Robinson"—a serious discrepancy that suggests an inattentiveness to and/or disregard of Robison's actual experience in favor of his representative status.

John Lowney, on the other hand, is more generous in his reading, arguing that Rukeyser underscores the racial politics of Gauley Bridge not only by including stories and testimony of black workers and their families, but also through the metaphor of whiteness. Indeed, whiteness proliferates in the poem—including white dust, white glass, white snow, and white water (which was often referred to as "white coal" during the Depression)—and Lowney suggests that Rukeyser accentuates the symbolic whiteness of the silica dust to critique the racist social system that permitted such negligent labor practices. He also explains that the Popular Front, of which Rukeyser was an active participant, wanted to show blacks and whites in working-class solidarity, and argues that "in foregrounding her role as witness, historian, and investigative reporter speaking for workers, especially black workers, who inherit a history in which their voices have not been recorded, Rukeyser affirms her potential to change the present through the orchestration of prior historical narratives" ("Truths" 202). Lowney therefore finds that Rukeyser's Marxist revolutionary politics were an inherently racial politics, a form of aggressive social activism that sought empowerment in diversity and collaborative political action.

In perhaps one of the most strident critiques of the poem's racial consciousness, David Kadlec focuses on the concluding passage of "George Robinson: Blues," which reads: "As dark

as I am, when I came out at morning after the tunnel at / night, / with a white man, nobody could have told which man was white. / The dust had covered us both, and the dust was white." Kadlec points out that, in fact, Robison testified to the committee that "As dark as I am, when I came out of that tunnel in the mornings, if you had been the tunnel too and come out at my side, nobody could have told which was the white man. The white man was just as black as the colored man." Kadlec argues that Robison reversed the black-and-white terms of the image (all the while knowing that silica dust literally whitens everything it touches) because he was following tacit racial conventions—that is, as Jessie Fauset explained, that white may imitate black, but black may never imitate white (24–25). He suggests that in doing so, Robison's metaphorical description of the industrial contamination made it explicit that race, as an unfixed social construct, was central to the story of the tunnel disaster. Yet by reversing the image in the poem, again whitening blackness, Rukeyser effectively erases race and "sacrifice[s] racial to class interests" (26). Kadlec also argues that Rukeyser's use of the x-ray as a medium and map for narrating the disaster likewise blinds the poem to the physical and discursive surfaces that make racial injustice visible.

This is a difficult issue to untangle. On one hand, it appears as though Rukeyser's inversion of Robison's testimony and poetic approximation of x-ray technology is designed to stress equality, that the white faces and white spotted lungs signify the workers' shared adversity as laborers and, perhaps even more straightforwardly, that she reoriented Robison's image to correspond with the empirical evidence of dust contamination—it literally makes everything white and race becomes less legible, not unlike the ways in which coal dust blackens the coal miners' hair, face, and skin. Yet at the same time, these changes suggest that this form of so-called equality requires whitewashing; that in order for black workers to become visible, even to

radicals like Rukeyser, blackness must again be erased or covered over. What Rukeyser doesn't change in the poem, however, is Robison's statement that "nobody could have told which man was white" (88), and the poem retains his account of the limits of racial coding. In the first stanza, he tells us that "Gauley Bridge is a good town for Negroes, they let us stand / around, they let us stand / around on the sidewalks if we're black or brown. / Vanetta's over the trestle, and that's our town" (87)—foregrounding the tensions between "they" and "us" and linking color explicitly to segregation and social alienation. Yet at the end of the poem, the "us" refers to "both" black and white workers, and the text reinforces, even ironizes, the awful absurdity that death is the great equalizer of all men.

Furthermore, by rewriting Robison's testimony as the blues, Rukeyser emphasizes cultural difference within the context of commonality. That is to say, "George Robinson: Blues" is different from the rest of *The Book of the Dead*; alone, the title's punctuation signifies a commutative, perhaps essentializing relationship between form, the "blues," and identity, "George Robinson," that you don't find elsewhere in the poem. Yet given that the blues was and is now regarded as a form of expression exemplary of resistance to white authority, Rukeyser's decision to write the blues seeks to affirm song and orality as tools of African American empowerment and healing. So while Kadlec and Dayton persuasively suggest that Rukeyser's errors in transcription considerably complicate the idea of how well the text allows Robison to speak for himself, they don't necessarily cancel out what appears to be her good-faith critique of racist capitalism. Moreover, by putting "George Robinson: Blues" into conversation with contemporary blues ballads, we can see how the text's formal aesthetics engage the black vernacular to give voice to black experience in written *and* sound ways.

Because of the disaster, silicosis became the subject of numerous reports in medical journals and the topic of federal conferences. It also entered mainstream culture by way of blues musician Josh White (who often used the pseudonym Pinewood Tom) when he popularized the song “Silicosis is Killin’ Me.” White was an American singer, songwriter, and civil-rights activist who performed widely throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. He was a close friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, sung at his inauguration, and gave several command performances at the President’s request. His blues songs, which include such tracks as "Uncle Sam Says," "Jim Crow Train," "Southern Exposure," and "Hard Time Blues," represent his experiences growing up in the Jim Crow South and his life in a segregated America. “Silicosis is Killin’ Me” is derived from a working-class folk ballad, which was collected by the ethnomusicologist Alan Lomax. The original lines read: “I was there diggin’ that tunnel for / six bits a day / Didn’t know I was diggin’ my own grave. / Silicosis eatin’ my lungs away. // Six bits for diggin’, diggin’ that / tunnel hole, / Take me away from my baby, / It sho’ done wrecked my soul. // Now tell all my buddies, tell all my / friends you see, / I’m going away up yonder. / Please don’t weep for me.” This version employs the vernacular—“six bits a day,” which is roughly seventy-five cents—and dialect, “sho’ done wrecked my soul,” and eulogizes the miner’s death as “going away up yonder.”

White adds lyrics that strengthen the ballad’s sense of protest, but his version similarly identifies silicosis as the unceasing agent of the miner’s demise: “I said silicosis, / you made a mighty bad break of me / Awww, silicosis made a mighty bad break of me / You robbed me of my youth and health / All you brought poor me was misery. // Now silicosis, you’re a dirty robber and a thief / Awww silicosis, dirty robber and a thief / Robbed me of my right to live and all you / brought poor me was grief.” This language—“robbed,” “thief,” and “grief”—signifies

injustice, a rhythmic/systemic taking away. The miner is paid six bits a day and in exchange must give his life; the speaker now tells us, "I'm going to meet my Jesus, God knows I'll soon be dead." Silicosis clearly stands in for the outright exploitation and racial management of manual labor, and the ballad gives voice to the human effects of such institutional corruption by combining the sounds of work songs, elegiac lament, and political commentary into a coded blues signification.

"George Robinson: Blues" includes more narrative than either the folk song or White's ballad. The poem maps the space of the disaster, including the segregated tunnel camps and the graveyard on the hill, and concretizes the wasted lives that "Silicosis is Killin' Me" eulogizes. In an address to what I take to be "you" the reader, the speaker asks: "Did you ever bury thirty-five men in a place in back of your / house, / thirty-five tunnel workers the doctor didn't attend, / died in the tunnel camps, under rocks, everywhere, world / without end" (87). This poem is not a song to be sung; its stanzas aren't conventional blues lyrics, but rather, constitute a more linear and sequential account of a particular experience. Accordingly, the voice is neither anonymous nor nameless. The "me" and "I" belong specifically to George Robinson, and the poem's lament is inscribed within the material details of Gauley Bridge, the company, and the ubiquitous white dust. Rukeyser also repeats specific words such as "tunnel," "graveyard," and "dust" rather than long phrases like "six bits for diggin', diggin' that tunnel hole," and the end rhyme scheme places stress on the progression from one stanza to the next, unlike the ballad's more circular fluidity.

As such, the poem both is and isn't the blues. It is not a direct match of the standard blues format, and it echoes rather than replicates the blues rhythms of White's song. At the same time, by calling the poem "the blues," Rukeyser provides a conceptual and auditory framework for

Robison's testimony and seeks to produce different affective registers. Rukeyser was working with a written transcript of Robison's oral testimony that she then translated into the blues to be recorded as a poem, in the absence of any instrumental music or percussive energy. The end result, then, is not the expressive, emotive performance of "Silicosis is Killin' Me." What the poem does achieve, however, is the polyphonality and multiplicity of the blues lyric, that the blues is what Houston Baker calls a "mediational site" where ideas of race, culture, experience, and belonging can be explored rather than set down into a fixed and finite form (6). Therefore, while imperfect as the blues, "George Robinson: Blues" recognizes cultural expression as a means of understanding the racialized economies and blues geographies of American experience.

The Book of the Dead also shifts into what Walter Kalaidjian has called a "distinctively feminist rendering of social empowerment" (173). In the "Absalom" section, a mother mourns the death of her three sons and her dying husband, who all worked in the tunnel and contracted silicosis from the dust. She, whom we know elsewhere in the poem as "Mrs. Jones," informs us:

> Shirley was my youngest son; the boy.
> He went into the tunnel.
>
> *My heart my mother my heart my mother*
> *My heart my coming into being*
>
> My husband is not able to work.
> He has it, according to the doctor.
> We have been having a very hard time making a living since
> This trouble come to us.
> I saw the dust in the bottom of the tub. (84)

Throughout the poem, lyric lines—which Robert Schulman has shown are quoted from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*—interrupt the mother's testimony, and in this section the extra white space emphasizes the pulse between "heart," "mother," and "coming into being." These interruptions also testify to her resilience in the face of tragedy: "*My heart is mine in the place of*

hearts, / They gave me back my heart, it lies in me" and later "*I have gained mastery over my heart*" (84–5). Shifts in tone and register alter the rhythm of the mother's narrative, blending elegy into her markedly unemotional and unsentimental condemnation of the disaster, and emphasize the relative lack of humanity in the company doctor who ensured her family's demise: "he would not see Shirley. / He did not know where his money was coming from. / I promised him half if he'd work to get compensation, / but even then he would not do anything" (84).

Yet as much as "Absalom" documents Mrs. Jones's hardship, it also makes visible her success in overcoming the limits placed upon her by poverty and suffering. While tending to her dying family, she "went on the road and begged the X-ray money" (84) and survived on two dollars a day. Once the "lung pictures" were finally made, she filed a lawsuit against Union Carbide. The poem thus fulfills her commitment to "give a mouth to my son," in part by directly quoting his urgent desire for "'them to open me up and / see if that dust killed me'" and by drawing upon ideas of maternal strength and embodiment (85). The mother, here representing Mrs. Jones and all mothers, creates life by ritually remembering the dead; near the end of the poem, she reminds us that "Shirley asked that we try to find out. / That's how they learned what the trouble was" (85), and last lyric sequence reads:

> *I open out a way, they have covered my sky with crystal*
> *I come forth by day, I am born a second time,*
> *I force a way through, and I know the gate*
> *I shall journey over the earth among the living.* (85)

This "I" couples the mother's voice to that of Shirley, the Absalom of the poem, and suggests that in Shirley's death both can find some measure of power.[52] The mother's resolve also reshapes the despair produced by the disaster by making visible a more universal ethic of revisionary transformation and empowerment.

Like "Mearl Blankenship," "Absalom" is pieced together from Mrs. Jones's testimony before the investigative committee, Rukeyser's creative transcription and rearrangement of that testimony, and in this case, portions of Philippa Allen's testimony. Thurston's graphic diagramming of these splices shows that Rukeyser's manipulations occurred not just at the paragraph level in terms of cutting and pasting documents, but also at the sentence level, editing phrases and switching back and forth between speakers to create a new poetic version of the raw materials. Thurston argues that Rukeyser's compression of materials enhances their impact and by putting the roll call of the dead—a list of names originally delivered by Mr. Jones before Congress—into Mrs. Jones's mouth, Rukeyser enables her to "take on the roll of Thoth, the Egyptian scribe god, as well as that of Isis, who gathers the fragments of Osiris and reconstitutes the god" ("Documentary" 80). Mrs. Jones's power thus extends from the mythic dimensions of Rukeyser's edits, and the poem's accumulation of "I"s—"I first discovered," "I had three sons," "I went on the road," "I shall give a mouth to my son"—establishes the mother's ability to act upon her convictions, identifies the female speaker as a site of revolutionary and redemptive potential, and thereby challenges the paternalistic rhetoric of contemporary American politics.[53]

Thinking about the poem as collaged collection, however, might enable us to also see how its convergence of complementary voices and documents constitute a new collectivity, one that acknowledges the inability of any one point of view to capture a shared history. To be sure, Rukeyser borrowed and invented language to fulfill her vision of Mrs. Jones's narrative, and her edits evince a form of control that, like the transcription of Robison's testimony in "George Robinson: Blues," raises questions about the risks of aestheticizing another individual's self-representation.[54] At the same time, it creates a community of voices that draw upon a number of speakers and styles to narrate the disaster and its human costs. In particular, the juxtaposition of

collaged testimony and quotations from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* emphasizes and brings into focus the range of languages and speech acts that can collectively wrest the powers of signification away from the authority they typically serve.

"Arthur Peyton" is the last monologue in the sequence and is in many ways the most experimental of the spoken testimonies. In this section, Rukeyser pares away narrative to reveal the tragic absurdity of the situation. It begins,

> Consumed. Eaten away. And love across the street.
> I had a letter in the mail this morning.
> Dear Sir, … pleasure … enclosing herewith our check …
> payable to you, for $21.59
> being one-half of the residue which
> we were able to collect in your behalf
> in regard to the above case.
> In winding up the various suits,
> after collecting all we could,
> we find this balance due you.
> With regards, we are
> Very truly, (94)

The repetition of the long "u" sound—*consumed*, *you*, *residue*, *suits*, *due*, *you*—creates a kind of sing-song effect that ironizes the courteous tone of the letter in relation its actual meaning: that Arthur Peyton will receive $21.59 in exchange for his life. The rest of the poem likewise juxtaposes loss with the agents of destruction, namely the company and the deadly dust, and lyric soliloquy jostles against factual description. Here, however, Arthur Peyton addresses "love," a beloved either in mind or body:

> After collecting
> The dust the failure the engineering corps
> O love consumed eaten away the foreman laughed
> they wet the drills when the inspector came
> the moon blows glassy over our native river.
>
> O love tell the committee that I know:
> never repeat you mean to marry me.
> In mines, the fans are large (2,000 men unmasked)

before his verdict the doctor asked me How long (94)

"O love consumed eaten away" echoes the first line of the poem and suggests a parallel between how the dust is consuming and eating away his lungs (and life) and how the "verdict" will likewise consume and eat away love. Love must be silenced—"never repeat that you mean to marry me" and later "—Only never again tell me you'll marry me" (95)—and Arthur Peyton will become the glass that ensures his death:

> Between us, love
> the buses at the door
> the long glass street two years, my death to yours
> my death upon your lips
> my face becoming glass
> strong challenged time making me win immortal
> the love a mirror of our valley
> our street our river a deadly glass to hold.
> Now they are feeding me into a steel mill furnace
> O love the stream of glass a stream of living fire. (95)

The accumulation of pronouns, including "us," "my," "yours," and "our," blurs the subject/object relationship and evokes a sense of intimacy. The heavy white space that precedes "the buses at the door" suggests postponement, a reluctance to travel along "the long glass street" towards death. Moreover, the accumulation of glass, as image and metaphor, reveals how the hard, material truth of the deadly silica dust interrupts poetic contemplation.

Peyton-as-glass, however, also represents the ways in which Union Carbide regarded human labor as a natural, expendable resource, and "Consumed. Eaten away" signifies the consumption of human capital in the pursuit of profit: "Now they are feeding me into a steel mill furnace." The poem thus offers a Marxist critique of how industrial capitalism reduces individual identity to labor, from active worker to raw material. Stephanie Hartman further points out that the glassy river and glassy shards of silica, as elements of power linked in the cycle of steel production, ultimately turn fatal and thus throw a "cautionary note into the celebration of the

machine that was just winding down in the thirties" (214). Industry itself is stripped of its productive potential, and in this poem it is figured as a technological force that eats the worker alive. In this way, "Arthur Peyton" and the sequence as a whole mourn not only the casualties of Hawk's Nest, but also the loss of production that might empower the worker and allow him to realize the value, both economic and social, of his labor.

The section titled "The Dam" focuses on the forces that eclipse the individual, and while it shifts away from the personal testimony of miners like Mearl Blankenship and Arthur Peyton, it bears discussion here on account of its radical collage of lyric discourse, scientific analysis, the legal language of congressional testimony, and graphic representation of stock dividends. The poem begins with a hymn to the awesome power and natural force of water: "All power is saved … Water celebrates, yielding continually / sheeted and fast in its overfall / slips down the rock, evades the pillars / building its colonnades, repairs / in stream and standing wave / retains its seaward green" (99). The profusion of verbs and short concrete objects enact the energy of falling water, the "cleanest velocity / flooding, the moulded force" (99). The water cannot be contained, and the poem rhapsodizes its "Great power flying deep" (100) by aesthetically contemplating its power to change, feed, and destroy the land through which it courses.

The poem, however, suddenly shifts register to an objective analysis of the water's power, signifying how it might be quantified and therefore controlled:

> How many feet of whirlpools?
> What is a year in terms of falling water?
> Cylinders; kilowatts; capacities.
> Continuity: $\Sigma Q = 0$
> Equations for falling water. The streaming motion.
> The balance-sheet of energy that flows
> passing along its infinite barrier. (100)

However, the discourse of civil engineering, the built monuments of which testify to man's triumph over nature, is again interrupted by finance and its pernicious effects: "Blasted, and stocks went up; / insured the base, / and limousines / wrote their own graphs upon roadbed and lifeline" (101). These ideas of loss and gain are concretized in the subsequent section, in which Rukeyser quotes from congressional testimony:

> Mrs. Griswold. "A corporation is a body without a soul."
> Mr. Dunn. When they were caught at it they resorted to the methods employed by gunmen, ordinary machine-gun racketeers. They cowardly tried to buy out the people who had the information on them.
> . . . . . .
> Miss Allen. Mr. Jesse J. Ricks, the president of the Union Carbide & Carbon Corporation, suggested that the stock-holder had better take this question up in a private conference. (101)

This dialogue seeks to reveal the soullessness of the corporation, starkly rendered in the ticker tape of stock profits included just below. The graph, which interrupts the textual and physical space of the page, renders everything else—human suffering, the majesty of the water's power—worthless, albeit momentarily. For as much as capitalism exploits resources, both human and natural, the water persists, and the poem concludes by returning to the hymn-like tribute to the water's regenerative energies: "Collecting eternally power. Spender of power,/ … Be born again. / Nothing is lost, even among the wars, / imperfect flow, confusion of force. / It will rise" (102). The poem redeems the power of the water and suggests that such acts of witnessing can conserve and positively transform sites of destruction into an opportunity for healing.

Revolution and Responsibility

Throughout the 1930s, the *New Masses* published articles that addressed the struggles of workers, labor organizing and unrest, and the civil war that was waging in Spain. The magazine

increasingly came to include visual art in the issues that addressed labor problems, in part because of the availability of lithographic, woodblock, and linoleum cut prints and paintings contributed by leftist artists employed by the Works Progress Administration's Federal Arts Project, particularly the Graphic Arts Division (Langa 37). One such image is Joseph Vogel's lithograph titled "Scrapheap," which appeared in the January 19, 1937 issue. Enacting the geometric angularity and abstraction of Cubism, the image depicts unemployed men scavenging in an industrial camp.

Joseph Vogel, "Scrapheap," lithograph
New Masses 22:4 (January 19, 1937)

The image's two-dimensionality and shading makes it difficult to distinguish the men from the scraps, and the beams in the top half of the frame tower over them, suggesting a sense of powerlessness and subordination. Of the three figures, one appears asleep on the scrapheap,

another weeps, and the third is looking directly straight ahead, as though to meet the gaze of the viewer. Moreover, the pile of scraps looks more like gears and tools than the trash that typically collects on the street, such as bits of paper and food items.

"Scrapheap" conveys the idea that capitalist industry discards human workers just like outdated machinery. These men are no longer useful, so they become part of the scrapheap. This image makes explicit the relationship between waste and labor that Rukeyser represents in *The Book of the Dead*, calling attention both to the embodiment of work and its easy disposability.[55] Openly Marxist in their critique of capitalism, these works make visible the burden on workers and represent it as social injustice. Though *U.S.A.*'s Newsreels are less focused on labor as such and more on the tangled relationships between war, modern American governance, and popular culture, they similarly seek to represent contemporary issues that are more often that not scrapped or willfully forgotten.

Through processes of dialogic juxtaposition and rearrangement, *U.S.A.* and *The Book of the Dead* create new connections between text and texts (and the group identities they come to represent) and seek to transform the nation's historical consciousness. They scrutinize the news and the newsmakers and demonstrate how the reorganization of extant materials becomes a way to respond to and push back against the structuring forces of modernity. As forms of scrap collage, *U.S.A.*'s Newsreels and *The Book of the Dead* demonstrate how the modernist devices of appropriation, assemblage, and radical recontextualization can engage with the effects of capitalism and reshape the contours of official U.S. nationalism. For Rukeyser, this was a moral endeavor as much as an artistic one, and by bearing witness to the Hawk's Nest incident, her work redefines what she often referred to as "the idea of America" by modeling inclusion across differences in class, race, gender, and regional culture.[56]

Revision is at the core of all collecting—whether centered in libraries and archives, photograph albums, blank books, scrapbooks, shoe boxes, or any other number of repositories.

– Susan Tucker, *The Scrapbook in American Life*

Chapter Two: Otherwise Lost or Forgotten—Collecting Black History in Zora Neale Hurston's Federal Folklore and L.S. Alexander Gumby's "Negroana" Scrapbooks

In his study of modernism and the ways in which modernist aesthetics and politics became identifiable *as* modernism, Jeremy Braddock argues that collections played a central role in both the development and legitimization of particular social practices and aesthetic forms. Focusing specifically on the art collection and the literary anthology, Braddock suggests that these markedly material systems of meaning helped create a public identity for new collective subjectivities, such as the avant-garde group of imagists and the Harlem Renaissance. Braddock therefore identifies the collection as both a form of mediation, in its construction of relationships between audience and artwork as well as its negotiation of cultural and economic value, and as a social mode of representation that engages directly with questions of aesthetic arrangement, sets of affiliation, and commodification as a mechanism of institutionalization under capitalism. In this way, the collection exerts agency within the hegemonic field of cultural production and consumption, and the work of assembling, editing, and curating signifies new forms of authorship, textual sociality, and artistic opportunity.

This chapter takes up the idea of collecting as an interventionist modernist practice to consider the work of Zora Neale Hurston and Harlem socialite L.S. Alexander Gumby, two modern collectors whose accumulative narrative strategies, documentary practices, and cut-and-paste aesthetics assembled the unwritten histories of black subjectivity in early twentieth century America. Braddock, similarly interested in the relationship between collections, the collectivities

they call into being, and discourses of race and cultural nationalism, argues that "the anthology could reasonably be claimed as the preeminent black literary form of the twenties, enacting as it did a performance of collectivity and interpellation, political demand and representation, and also, in some cases, canon formation" (23). He therefore examines Alain Locke's renowned anthology *The New Negro* and argues that it publically legitimized the Harlem Renaissance's heterogeneous aesthetic sensibility and cultural modernity. Anne Elizabeth Carroll similarly regards *The New Negro,* as well as illustrated magazines such as *The Crisis* and *Opportunity*, as assemblage, collectivist texts and argues that they strategically draw upon a diverse assortment of literary and visual materials to produce complex images of black subjectivity. Hurston herself contributed a short story to *The New Negro,* and Gumby associated with many of the movement's well-known figures.

Given Braddock and Carroll's focus on the institutional development of artistic culture and new literary publics, however, alternative, less publicly recognized scenes of collecting and aesthetic repurposing go unexamined. Yet Hurston and Gumby's collections raise new and important questions about African American subject formation and group identification, processes of refusal and recovery, documentary practices and technologies, and revisionist historiography. This chapter therefore examines the role that Hurston's folklore collecting for the Federal Writers' Project and Gumby's production of scrapbooks played in the making and recording of black modernity. Though Hurston's collecting aesthetic spans her fiction and folklore (and often blurs the line that separates the two), her federal work is of particular interest when considering the social force and political implications of the collection because its narrative project cannot be disentangled from the bureaucratic structures that both financed and constrained her creative labor. On the other hand, Gumby's commemoration of black life in his

scrapbooks shows how editing and privately interpreting mass print media can become a highly textured and material form of historiography. I therefore argue that Hurston and Gumby's collections are critical to our understanding of modernism, its vernacular aesthetics and practices, and the ways in which collecting can recuperate and revise forgotten stories of American life.

Hurston, whose fiction has long since been canonized for its representation of African American modernity and female subjectivity, was a formally trained anthropologist and collected folklore for most of her career.[57] In 1938, having exhausted funds from research grants and private patronage, she went "on relief" and worked until 1939 for the Florida Federal Writers' Project (FWP), an arts program under Roosevelt's Work Progress Administration (WPA) that was designed to put jobless musicians, writers, playwrights, actors, and artists to work during the Great Depression.[58] As a field writer, Hurston gathered material for the Florida guidebook, which was officially titled *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State* (1939) and published as part of the American Guide Series, and for *The Florida Negro* (compiled from 1936 to 1939, but unpublished until 1993), a collection of African American histories, geographies, and folklore.[59] Her FWP writings describe and report on a diverse mixture of folk tales, songs, town histories, religious practices, and children's games and include essays on the meanings of folklore—all of which document Florida's vanishing folk traditions as well as her own anthropological and literary career.

As a state-sponsored documentary project, the American Guide Series was born of the need to rebuild America and fortify nationalist pride during a time of devastating economic crisis and widespread personal suffering. Christine Bold explains that its 378 books and pamphlets attempted to do so by "introducing Americans (selectively) to their histories, mapping social categories for them, and brokering cultural identities" (4). Offering what Grace Overmyer calls a

"sort of road map for the cultural rediscovery of America from within" (qtd. in Stott 118), this collection of information performs collectivity by casting a sweeping, populist gaze across the nation as a whole and thus attempting to galvanize feelings of belonging. With slogans such as "Take pride in your country" and "See America," the guidebooks invite readers to indulge their wanderlust, in either the automobile or the armchair, and in doing so, exert a kind of individual ownership over America's vast cultural geography.[60]

At the same time, however, the guidebooks enact hierarchies of control and selectivity, particularly in terms of racial representation and display. Sonnet Retman explains that "perpetuating an already robust nostalgia for 'authentic' culture in the thirties, many of the guides derived specificity from segregation and other forms of federal and state-mandated exclusions to create a marketable dichotomy created on the modern white collective and its 'colored' and colorful folk past" (114). Practices of inclusion and exclusion varied widely from state to state, and only a handful of FWP offices had "Negro Units" created specifically to document black history, Virginia, Illinois, and Florida among them. While on the one hand the Negro guides demonstrate a growing interest in the nation's diverse racial identity, they also signify an othering of blackness by largely segregating considerations of race from the broader mapping of space and citizenship. Considering that Jim Crow was still very much the law of the land when Hurston was gathering material, this means that the WPA failed in its ostensible purpose to unify disparate populations. Moreover, as Retman suggests, by representing racialized folkways as a particular region's "native" history, the guidebooks often produced what Michael Rogin describes as "a black past and a white present" (49), effectively splitting America's imagined collective along temporal, spatial, and racial lines.

Edited to be as inoffensive as possible to anticipated audiences, the guidebooks subordinated contributors' creative agency and social consciousness to the federal agenda of liberal New Deal reform as well as more localized state interests. David Kadlec points out, for example, that Florida's "history and culture are introduced and discussed as a kind of currency for the contemporary tourist trade" (473) and suggests that these openly commercial interests required the suppression of commentaries on economic hardship and racial conflict—an editing out that effectively erased black subjects. More generally, Michael Szalay explains that the Federal Writers' Project reconfigured an author's relationship to the textual artifact, as a salable commodity, by instituting a wage. The FWP writer was paid for her time and labor regardless of the quality of work or how well it eventually sold, thus protecting her financial security from the vicissitudes of an unpredictable market. In exchange, however, she forfeited managerial control over the work, including its final editing and marketing, and was not cited as an author. Hurston's depiction of black folk life therefore not only anonymously documents African American experience and history, but also reflects the bureaucratization of culture and the program's mediation of racial, regional, and national identities. As a result, many critics have come to question the "authenticity" of the guidebooks as well as the guide authors' complicity in producing a rather unrepresentative representation of black life in America.

Significantly, and even surprisingly given her celebrity, *none* of Hurston's contributions to the Florida project appear in the manuscript version of *The Florida Negro* and only a handful made their way into the state guidebook.[61] The 1937 publication of *American Stuff*, an anthology of FWP writings and illustrated prints from the Federal Art Project, similarly omitted her work. In the introduction to her recuperative collection of Hurston's federal writings *Go Gator and Muddy the Water* (1999), Pamela Bordelon explains that Hurston's defiant personality and

unconventional research methods often found her at odds with project editors and points out that, as a black woman, she was not allowed to visit the Jacksonville project headquarters without supervision (20). Robert Hemenway reports that she often spent her time in the office working on her second novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain* or simply disappeared for long stretches of time (252). These workplace tensions are cited as the primary reason for Hurston's omission. Yet the refusal and scrapping of her work demonstrates how the project's editorial practices regulated and managed the truth claims of the collection and often relied on discriminatory social practices to do so. It also raises important questions about the project's embattled contestations between federal, state, and individual agents over narratives of black subjectivity and the government's ideological shaping of modern American culture.

To best address and respond to these questions, this chapter examines Hurston's federal writings both as individual pieces and as fragments of a larger collection and historically situates them within the agenda and management of New Deal reform. I also consider her controversial race politics and modernist literary practices as an important interpretative context. To this end, though they predate her federal folklore by about ten years, I use Hurston's assemblage short story "The Eatonville Anthology" (1926) and her essay "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928) to identify and conceptually frame her distinctive collecting aesthetic and its relationship to racial consciousness. These selections demonstrate how her work blurs the conventional, generic boundaries between anthropological research and fiction writing. In articulating these texts, I argue that Hurston's scrap modernism models a kind of experimental reportage in which found art—the previously unpublished folk stories, songs, and histories she collected—is reclaimed and repurposed in order to document black cultural history. Furthermore, I identify how Hurston conceives of the "folk" not as any one thing to be collected, but as an experience and process to

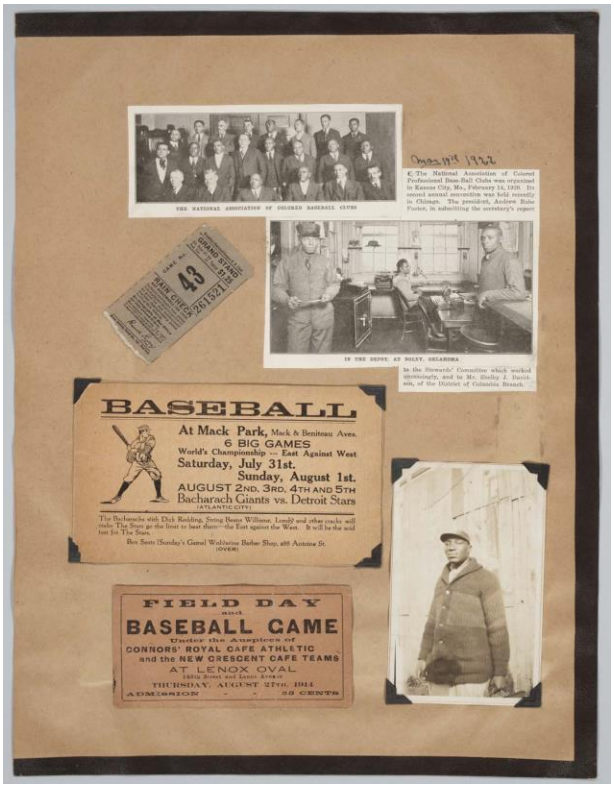
be represented as "always in the making."[62] I therefore examine her techniques of stylized transcription and consider how the government-owned recording machine she took along on collecting trips simultaneously enhanced and constrained her production of African American folk culture.

Throughout the 1920s and 30s, Alexander Gumby also collected black history and pasted its material remnants into the pages of his handmade scrapbooks. His collecting was prolific, and the scrapbooks, more than 150 of which are now housed at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library, contain a wide range of printed ephemera: everything from newspaper clippings, magazine articles, event flyers, photographs, and ticket stubs to Gumby's personal correspondence and the editorial proof of the one and only issue of his short-lived magazine *The Gumby Studio Quarterly*—all of which he claimed recorded the "History of the Negro from 1850 to 1960" (qtd. in Kadlecek). This collection of what he called "Negroana" represents a lifetime of work, more than forty years devoted to collecting, curating, and preserving scraps of African American life and culture.[63] Today the scrapbooks are used primarily as an archive and offer scholars a meticulously organized source of information about such diverse subjects as the boxer Joe Louis, lynching and race violence, education, jazz, sports, Africa, politics, and the social life of Harlem, among many others.

Despite enjoying considerable popularity amongst the Harlem literati of the early twentieth century, Gumby's work occupies a small, usually subordinate place in accounts of the Harlem Renaissance.[64] His scrapbooks are rarely examined on their own as artistic artifacts or self-contained textual worlds that identify scrapping as a unique form of cultural production.[65] Thinking about the Gumby collection exclusively as an archive, however, overlooks and neglects the significance of scrapbooking as a distinct aesthetic and creative curatorial practice.[66] Rather

than simply preserving collections of ephemera for posterity, the scrapbooks piece together narratives of black history and contemporary experience by shuffling, editing, and recombining the coordinates of time, space, voice, and location. They also critique the politics of representation by revealing acts of inclusion and exclusion, particularly through the ironic juxtaposition of contradictory items.

Take, for example, a page from scrapbook 88, a volume titled "Negro in Baseball." The page features a ticket stub, a clipping about the National Association of Colored Baseball Clubs, a photograph of a player, and two advertisements for games.



Page 11 from Scrapbook 88, "Negro in Baseball"
Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

This page does a number of important things. First, the pasted items reveal a collectivity emerging in institutional forms such as clubs and athletic performances that recognize the

contributions of African Americans to national sports; the photograph of the player in the lower right quite literally puts a face on the "Negro in Baseball" (although, unfortunately, he remains nameless). Secondly, in constellating these items across time and space, the page itself helps constitute that collectivity. The newspaper clipping states that the Association formed on February 14, 1920; above the photo of the men in the depot Gumby has handwritten May 19, 1922, to indicate the date of its publication; and the advertisement in the lower left is for a game on August 27, 1914. Moreover, the Association was formed in St. Louis, Missouri; its second annual convention was held in Chicago; the depot men are in Boley, Oklahoma; the Bacharach Giants vs. Detroit Stars game was played at Mack Park (the original home field of Detroit's Negro National League baseball franchise); and the Field Day was held in the heart of Harlem. This arrangement thus not only demonstrates Gumby's process of composition—namely, preserving materials through and recontextualizing them in time—but also distills the nation's vast cultural and physical geographies onto a single page, delineating race as a distinct point of communication and connection.[67]

Significantly, this page asserts the centrality of the Negro leagues to American sports culture well in advance of a more organized civil rights movement—the end of the decades-long segregation of baseball would not arrive until Jackie Robinson joined the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947—and demonstrates that Robinson's break through the color line had a historical precedent. The "Negro in Baseball" volume, like most of the Negroana collection, doesn't situate black culture in relation to white hegemony. The page does not seem motivated by the need for comparison or equivalence, but instead by a desire for black players to be seen in their own right as professionals. At the same time, by juxtaposing the article about the National Association of Colored Baseball Clubs with the game advertisements, Gumby draws attention to de facto

segregation, though in the absence of any written commentary. The scrap collection therefore performs a certain kind of editorializing work that a catalogue or inventory cannot, and does so, I argue, to simultaneously document the race-based hierarchies endemic to American life at this time and to construct a future in which African American achievement could be more readily recognized and celebrated.

Other major figures of the Harlem Renaissance kept scrapbooks, most notably Arthur Schomburg, Carl Van Vechten, Alice Dunbar Nelson, and Claude McKay.[68] By cutting and pasting their historical moment, these collectors participated in a substantial, collectivist-minded scrapbooking tradition. In her study of American newspaper scrapbooks, for example, Ellen Gruber Garvey explains that African American scrapbooks can be traced as far back as 1854, when Frederick Douglass instructed readers to clip newspaper articles about African American soldiers and save them in scrapbooks so that they could be later used as evidence that they had fought bravely and were thus good citizens. Taking this incident as a key example of the scrapbook's political agency, Garvey identifies African American scrapbooks as "alternative histories" (131) that were designed to fill gaps in mainstream accounts of the nation's history, primarily those distributed by the white press, and she demonstrates how scrapbooks became a "mode of struggle against white oppressors" (153). Her analysis focuses on the scrapbooks of Joseph W.H. Cathcart, William H. Dorsey, and Gumby—African American men whose monumental projects (each containing more than a hundred volumes) reinterpreted and archived the historical contexts of black experience in order to revise racist narratives of America's past.[69]

While Garvey emphasizes the importance of newspaper clipping scrapbooks and the ways in which black scrapbooks critique the white press through processes of radical recontextualization, my study of Gumby's collection also considers his engagement with popular

culture such as music, sports, and theater to reveal his efforts to present African Americans as good economic citizens, as agents in both the production and consumption of culture. Items like ticket stubs and event programs materially signify marketplace exchange, and Gumby's original arrangement and reinterpretation of these materials makes consumption look like an active and creative process. The scrapbooks also present prominent business leaders, performers, and celebrities in ways that suggest commercial enterprise and success offered another way to make alternative narratives of black subjectivity in America. In this context, ideas of community and recognition take on a specifically economic charge, and the scrapbooks draw attention to the circuits of value and exchange.

One such volume features the stage production of *Porgy* and foregrounds popular culture as a discursive site of economic and cultural exchange specifically within the context of black experience. The 1927 play, which tells the story of poor African Americans living near the wharf in Charleston, South Carolina, was based a novel by DuBose Heyward and cowritten by Dorothy Heyward. The show ran for 367 performances and was the basis of George and Ira Gershwin's production of *Porgy and Bess* that came out in 1935. On this page Gumby includes two ticket stubs, two booklets fitted into individual sleeves, and three newspaper clippings, one of which is an illustration of the play townsfolk (complete with exaggerated facial features to index race) raising their hands in what at first glance looks like prayer, but whose shadows create animal-like silhouettes on the light background.

Page 59 from Scrapbook 109, "Porgy"
Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

Despite being two of the smaller items on the page, the orange ticket stubs draw attention to the price of admission and the seat assignments, in many ways reinscribing the presence and economic agency of the patrons on the page. Moreover, the small newspaper announcements, one of which is nearly covered over by the "Porgy" booklet, are subordinate to the tickets and booklets in size and location and are there seemingly only to identify the time and place of the performances. What the page therefore stages, by way of the material remainders of a particular experience, is the mutually constitutive relationship between production and consumption; that is to say, as a commodity the play cannot exist apart from its audience, and future productions of similarly race-related plays likely depend on its economic success. The ticket stubs, like those on the "Negro in Baseball" page, thus demonstrate and model a proactive engagement with the arts just as much as they document Gumby's attendance at the play.

In another volume titled "Breaking the Bonds of Slavery," Gumby includes nineteenth-century essays on slavery, photographs of famous statesmen, and an entire collection of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* memorabilia, including profiles of the actress who played Little Eva, sheet music from the 1852 stage production, and reviews of various performances. This volume is particularly interesting because it not only credits a white woman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, with "breaking the bonds of slavery," but also makes visible the layers of mediation and the processes of recontextualization that occur within the scrapbooks. The *Uncle Tom's Cabin* article, for example, is about an actress who performed in a play that was based on a novel. The article then signifies how Stowe's work was adapted and appropriated for public use, and the novel becomes less an autonomous literary object than an opportunity for interpreting a shared racial and cultural history. Within this context, how and by whom the novel was performed—on stage, on film, or musically—says as much about its collective meanings and social function as does the original text, and as a result, the novel recedes from view. As a whole, the collection of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* memorabilia celebrates material culture, ultimately translating the ethos of a fictional text into a set of objects able to be held and possessed.

Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker, and Patricia P. Buckler explain in the introduction to *The Scrapbook in American Life* that scrapbooking typically demonstrates the desire to understand oneself through possessions, a kind of materialism that suggests the dominance of the commodity in processes of subject formation. However, they go on to argue that "compilers, through the continual action of separation and reconstitution, undermined the alienation that often characterized social relations under capitalism. Objects may have originated in the prevailing and impersonal marketplace, but individuals converted the unfamiliar into the familiar by cutting up the materials of capitalism and turning them into gifts to themselves" (18).

Scrapbooking can therefore become a form of creative control that reconfigures the compiler's relationship to the social and political economy and to the objects themselves. Accordingly, in the case of "Breaking the Bonds of Slavery," Gumby effectively transforms the commercialization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into a narrative of racial emancipation and distinct cultural exhibition. The scrapbook's compositional freedoms further demonstrate how ideas of ownership and property shift onto the consumer within the alternative value system of the collection.[70]

By selecting such disposable paper items for preservation, Gumby acted as a kind of culture broker and custodian, turning valueless materials into a now priceless collection of African American history and making explicit the fact that African American culture was worth saving. As artifacts that reuse material waste as ready-made art, the scrapbooks are embedded in these market relations as well as in the tensions between avant-garde and vernacular forms of artistic production, particularly in their use of mass print media and the illustrated press. The scrapbooks fashion a distinct visual language out of disparate images, texts, and objects that document and experiment with changing modes of representation. Like the collage of avant-garde modernism, this work is driven by the desire to remake narratives of modernity through the fragmentation, reconstruction, and recuperation of meaning. At the same time, however, the scrapbooks are uniquely grounded in the practices of everyday life and make claims on the signifying potential of vernacular culture and its processes of textual recycling.

In his study of Marianne Moore's collage poetry, Bartholomew Brinkman argues that her "scrapping practices" (50)—which quote from everyday language and materials and play with the white space of the page—have been wrongly regarded as derivatives of the visual avant-garde. He suggests that we should instead read them in relationship to her lifelong practice of

collecting and scrapbooking and, in doing so, locate an alternative history of collage within mass print culture. Similarly, Mike Chasar has shown how the intersections between poetry, everyday life, and American mass media trouble the easy binaries between "high" and "low" culture as well as between avant-garde and affect-driven aesthetics. He argues that instead of belonging solely to the domain of avant-garde elitism and highbrow literary culture, early twentieth-century poetry was an everyday phenomenon, one that "ordinary readers" (9) actively engaged in by clipping and pasting poems into scrapbooks, entering poetry-writing contests, performing poetry in such venues as classrooms and churches, and critically and creatively studying poetry for its aesthetic representation of experience.[71]

This chapter is similarly motivated by a desire to reveal the significance of everyday artistic practices and the ways in which homemade artifacts like scrapbooks raise questions about what Chasar calls "different aesthetic systems and expectations" (8). The collage and assemblage art of avant-garde visual artists like Picasso and Braque, for example, redeployed found materials in radically unfamiliar and disorienting contexts, and this defiance of tradition has long been regarded as worthy of artistic and academic notice. Scrapbooks are also collage and assemblage, but because of their association with the commonplace and the domestic, as well as their ubiquity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a cheap, often sentimental form of entertainment or hobby, they have long been the subject of critical neglect. What distinguishes scrapbook collage from that of the visual avant-garde, I argue, is not just its mode of composition and method of circulation, but also its sociopolitical potential. Scrapbooks, particularly those like Gumby and Douglass's that actively seek to define new group identities and memorialize examples of good cultural and economic citizenship, challenge discriminatory ideas about race and belonging by materializing the more immediate and varied textures of everyday life.

For Gumby, this sense of protest is both visionary and corrective. He once explained that "there are so many surprising and startling historical events pertaining to, or relating to the American Negro that are not recorded in the Standard Histories, dictionaries and school text-books, or if so, they are shaded so that they sound like a Ripley's 'Believe It or Not'" (qtd. in Kadlecek). The Negroana collection thus emerged from this desire to create more authentic and complete narratives of black subjectivity and assemble the "Unwritten History" he suggested his collection could be called. In doing so, the scrapbooks call into question the credibility and representativeness of the "Standard Histories, dictionaries and school text-books" and offer new resources for black Americans to access and investigate information by and about black people. Though Gumby regularly clipped from mainstream publications like the *New York Times* and the *New York Post*, he also drew heavily from black newspapers like the *New York Amsterdam News* and *Colored American Review*. This sustained juxtaposition of the white and black press, as Garvey has persuasively shown, reveals the ideological discourses of the news.[72]

Hurston also feared that "the greatest cultural wealth of the continent was disappearing without realizing that it had even been" and regarded her folklore collecting as a way to preserve African American histories under threat of erasure.[73] Likewise acting as a culture broker and custodian, she fought back against the under- and misrepresentation of black subjectivity by documenting the ordinary practices of everyday life. In her essay, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," Hurston explains that "Negro folklore is not a thing of the past. It is still in the making. Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too odd or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low for his use" (*Negro* 42). Her work therefore avoids adding to "The American Museum of Unnatural History"—what she called mainstream literature's commercial exploitation of such racial stereotypes as the "shuffling feet and eye popping

Negro"—by producing "a true picture of Negro life in America" based on "how the average behaves and lives" ("What White Publishers" 173). As John Edgar Wideman points out, "Hurston is not curating a museum of odd, humorous negroisms. She's updating by looking backward, forward, and all around" (xviii). In fact, Hurston's work effectively uncouples folkloric ethnography from the institutional space of the museum and locates it in the materially and socially discursive spaces of the porch, jook joint, and town square out of which her communal concepts of African American identity emerge.

In the late 1920s, Gumby showcased his scrapbooks during "Negro History" weeks in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City. He also put them on display at the Gumby Book Studio in Harlem, where he invited guests to explore and talk about the collection. Gumby's studio, which was used alternately as a salon, art gallery, workroom, and performance space, brought an audience to the scrapbooks in the same way that libraries and museums attract visitors to the concentration of disparate and varied materials. This shared communal space was therefore critical in his efforts to circulate the scrapbooks and perpetuate Harlem's reputation as a black cultural capital and artists' community. [74] For many such reasons, Clare Corbould acknowledges Gumby's scrapbook collection and the Gumby Book Studio in her study of black civic life's "process of becoming African American" (88), namely the ways in which black historians, writers, and community leaders intervened in the politics of racial representation by actively publicizing new, progressive ideas about African American identity and its cultural and ancestral history.

By the mid-1930s, however, much of Harlem's energy for protest and cultural reinvention had slackened, and the devastating effects of the Great Depression registered in the ways black history was both addressed and produced. In her study of the Depression, its refuse,

and the fractured narratives of New Deal progressivism, for example, Jani Scandura argues that for black writers at the end of Harlem's renaissance, "Depressive Harlem is not just the Harlem that remembers; it is the Harlem that is haunted by and produced spectrally though an *inability to forget* what has been" (134). Scandura cites both Hurston and Gumby as two of Depression Harlem's most important "rememberers" and argues that their historical moment "possessed a kind of double vision. It looked outside and inside simultaneously, saving itself from hell while preserving itself for posthumous posterity" (134). Her analysis of the ways in which remembrance inscribes the past within the present, as it is enacted in texts like Gumby's scrapbooks or Hurston's folk histories, persuasively reveals how the Depression informed and influenced contemporary modes of aesthetic production. However, her elegiac emphasis on death, mourning, ghostly remains, and depression (the melancholy blues that came from the economic downturn and all its unhappy "endings") tends to overshadow the inherent productiveness of scrap collecting, the renovation that comes with reclamation and reconstruction. I therefore focus more on how Hurston and Gumby's collections are inherently revisionary and offer new ways of seeing a living "museum" of both the past and the present.

By examining Hurston and Gumby's recovery of the vernacular and their rediscovery of the folk, this chapter offers a corrective interpretation of 1930s modernism. It explores Hurston's oft-neglected federal folklore as a critical nexus between the political economy of the Great Depression and modernist collecting aesthetics and recognizes the ways in which Gumby's scrapbooks are endowed with collective social meaning and intervene in the politics of representation. I also show how their experimental ethnographic and documentary modes of representation make mimetic claims about reality at the same time that they enact processes of formal abstraction, particularly through cut-up storytelling and Hurston's subjective framing and

interpretation of found material. In so doing, this chapter recovers two narratives of American modernity that I argue are critical to our understanding of Depression-era modernism and the Harlem Renaissance.

Let those who consider the keeping of scrap-books a children's pastime
pay attention to this story of Alexander Gumby.

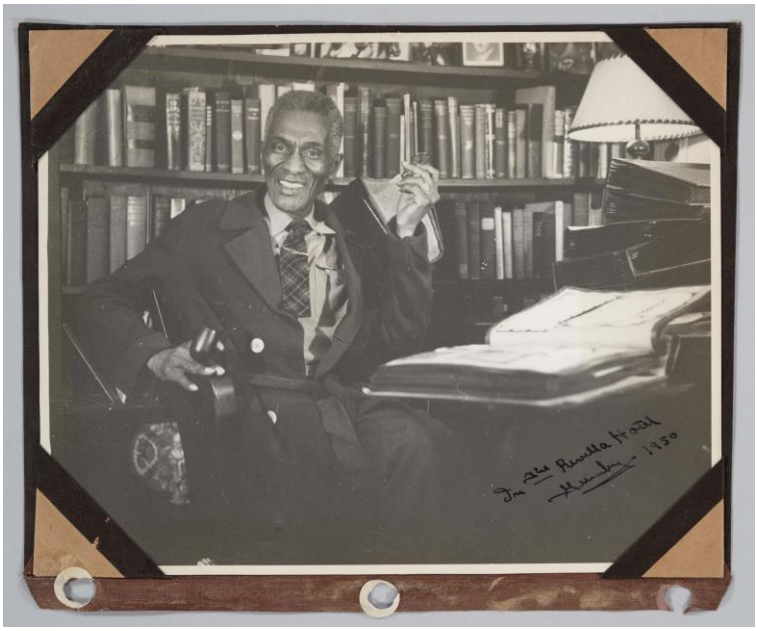
– John W. Douglas

The Great God Gumby

Levi Sandy Alexander Gumby was born on February 1, 1885, to a middle-class family in Maryland.[75] He made his first scrapbook at the age of sixteen with some old wallpaper, a paste made of flour and water, and clippings of President McKinley's assassination in 1901. He spent the next year at Dover State College in Delaware studying law but soon dropped out to move to Philadelphia and shortly thereafter to New York City, where he remained until his death in 1960. Gumby worked as a butler and later as a waiter at Columbia University, though he explained that during this time "the scrapbook-making urge was never far from my mind" ("Adventures" 20). By 1910, he was devoting most of his time to rare book collecting, making scrapbooks, and travelling to libraries across the United States and Canada to study renowned collections and manuscripts. Gumby's collections became so well known that he was registered in the 1922 edition of "Who's Who in Book Collecting."

Around 1925, Gumby worked with the help of a wealthy friend to turn his Harlem apartment on 2144 Fifth Avenue into a studio. The Gumby Book Studio quickly grew popular as a gathering place for actors, artists, musicians, intellectuals, and gays and lesbians of the Harlem Renaissance, leading Gumby to proclaim, "I dare say that the Gumby Book Studio was the first unpremeditated interracial movement in Harlem" ("Adventures" 20). In claiming this historical

"first" (and exhibiting some shameless self-promotion), Gumby reveals how his work as a collector was deeply tied to the idea of a collective, an idealized group identity that, in this case, transcended the color line.



Page 54 from "Gumby's Autobiography in Scrapbooks: Number 5,"
featuring a portrait of Gumby seated before one of his scrapbooks.
Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

Known around town as "The Count" and "Mr. Scrapbook," Gumby continued collecting and scrapbooking until 1929, when the economic crash caused his main patron to lose millions and discontinue support of the Studio. Shortly thereafter, Gumby, suffering from exhaustion and tuberculosis, went into Riverside Hospital in the Bronx and then to Randall's Island Hospital where he spent the next four years. During this time, he stored his scrapbooks and a collection of first editions in the basement of an acquaintance who promised to take care of them while he convalesced. This acquaintance, however, gave away or sold a number of Gumby's most valuable books, and a flood destroyed most of the scrapbooks. When Gumby was released from the hospital and went to retrieve his belongings in 1934, he found most of them in ruin, but,

determined to begin again, set about restoring the scrapbooks' condition and adding to the collection. He worked steadily until 1950, at which point he donated the collection to Columbia University. In 1951, Columbia hired him for eight months to curate the file.[76]

In his introduction to a collection of poet Richard Bruce Nugent's work, Thomas Wirth groups Gumby amongst Nugent's network of fashionable gay friends, calling him an "autodidact and a truly memorable personality" (28). Nugent's own brief biographical profile of Gumby, which he wrote for the Federal Writers' Project while working under Roi Ottley in New York City, paints Gumby as an aesthete, a dandy, and gentleman who "worshipped 'Art-with-a-capital-A'" (223). Moving beyond the allure of personality, however, Nugent pays tribute to Gumby's lifelong work of collecting and preservation:

> He had a hobby, as all gentlemen do—a hobby apart from the collecting of artists. He collected rare books. He had a flair for this activity that amounted practically to genius. His instincts were nearly infallible. He also collected newspaper clippings, which he kept in many file boxes. In his spare moments he mounted them carefully in scrapbooks of mammoth size and meticulous organization. (224)

While on one hand the use of the word "hobby" appears to trivialize Gumby's productivity, relegating it to the domain of the domestic and amateur, Nugent's simultaneous use of the word "genius" recasts Gumby's aptitude for collecting—including people, books, and scraps—as uncommon and of particular, unassailable value. Moreover, he acknowledges that this genius is both instinctual and hard won, requiring "an amazing ability to garner every little news item about anything" (224), thus subtly challenging the regimes of value that depreciate hard work or "meticulousness" as anti-artistic.

Nugent's essay in large part seeks to publicly acknowledge and legitimate Gumby as an artist rather than simply an admirer or "collector" of artists. In another rhetorical flourish, Nugent calls his friend the "Great God Gumby—God of his studio, God of all he surveyed" and claims that "God could do no wrong" (225). Neatly and playfully alliterative, and perhaps a bit tongue-in-cheek, the epithet "Great God Gumby" again attributes mastery and worldliness to someone whose work often went unnoticed outside of Harlem. It also evokes ideas of omniscience, a knowledge that reaches beyond the everyday as well as a form of control delineated by the social space of his salon and the finite frames of his scrapbook pages. Furthermore, claiming that this God "could do no wrong" implicitly suggests that Gumby was right—right to document his era, right to do so in the form of scraps, and right to claim the value of doing so. Nugent therefore validates Gumby's belief that "there was nothing too small, there was nothing too large" (224) to be worth admiring and suggests that the scrapbooks' epic will-to-completeness raises them to the level of art.[77]

These efforts at publicity, however, were largely unsuccessful in ensuring a lasting reputation for Gumby's work. In her cultural and historical study of Harlem, Sharifa Rhodes-Pitts aptly notes that "Gumby's story, when it is told at all, is usually mentioned as a minor footnote to other more celebrated queer lives of the Harlem Renaissance" (121) and goes on to suggest that this critical silence might be due to Gumby's open homosexuality and the issue of white patronage. For nearly thirty years, Gumby was involved with Charles W. Newman, a white man presumed to be Gumby's lover and whose financial support helped him amass his rare book collection and run his studio. Rhodes-Pitts acknowledges that there were other gay and lesbian artists such as Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, and A'Lelia Walker living and working in Harlem at this time, but distinguishes their lives from that of Gumby in terms of the ways in

which stories of their sexuality were circulated. She argues, "Those rumors [about people like Hughes and Cullen] serve a purpose for the history of love that mirrors a similar tendency in black history to insist upon its 'firsts'" (121), suggesting, then, that Gumby was largely overlooked because his cross-class, interracial relationship didn't traffic in secrets and made no claim on being a "first." His relationship with Newman, moreover, was openly economic, and Rhodes-Pitts implies that because this problematic combination of money and sex didn't fit the emerging narrative of a Harlem renaissance, he disappeared from its history.

In this account of Gumby's neglect, however, Rhodes-Pitts subordinates his work to social politics; implicit in this move seems to be the belief that the scrapbooks, as a form of cultural production, are relatively unintellectual and uncreative. For example, while Rhodes-Pitts laments the fact that "the scrapbook pages are promoted more as secondary sources on the celebrated figures and important topics that Gumby catalogued, rather than seen holistically as the brilliant and strange production of the man himself" (133), she also argues that "crucially, the art of the scrapbook is an act of preservation rather than creation" and that "the production of scrapbooks is a private endeavor, rather different from the intellectual heroics of his contemporaries" (127). Such demarcations between preservation and creation and between a "heroic" public and an unheroic private, however, fail to account for the ways in which scrapbooking is a creative and productive practice, if not a type of writing—an aesthetic assemblage by means of selection, artful juxtaposition and recombination, placement, and recontextualization. In all scrapbook making, the compiler acts as curator, designer, and editor and is thus able to assert ownership of the artistic artifact. As a result, as Brinkman suggests, "the scrapbooker is not simply a conduit for information, but an active participant in reshaping and re-presenting content. She highlights and exploits thematic or formal connections and differences,

becoming a salient example of what Roland Barthes has pointed to as the death of the author and the rise of the scriptor" (47).

Scrapbooking further calls to mind Derrida's evocation of Lévi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*, an intellectual activity that involves using the "means at hand," the "instruments he [the bricoleur] finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there" and then recombining, adapting, or otherwise changing them to create something new (285). In the historical context of the 1930s when Gumby was rebuilding his Negroana collection, using the means at hand carries a specifically economic valence as it evokes the make-do logic of the Great Depression, a time when ordinary American citizens became salvagers and constructed new things out of cheap, easily accessible, and reusable materials, often turning something like old bed linens, for example, into children's clothes. Although Gumby's scrapbooking began before this economic crisis, his work directly felt the impact of widespread financial instability. More importantly, his assemblage practices emblematize Depression-era America's recuperation and transformation of value, in this case turning valueless materials—newspaper clippings, brochures, ticket stubs, etc.—into a monumental collection of African American history.

In the 1931 essay "Unpacking My Library," Walter Benjamin valorizes what he sees as the heroic role of such a collector, and in *The Arcades Project* calls collecting "a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, expressly devised historical system" (205). Benjamin suggests that for the "true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge of the epoch" and collecting becomes, quite simply, a "form of practical memory" (205). Accordingly, Gumby's scrapbooks strike creative order into the disorder of modernity—its countless things, contexts, arrangements, and spaces—and his work as a collector, in Benjamin's

words, "brings together what belongs together" (211). Moreover, Gumby's scrapbook collection, as an "expressly devised historical system" and "form of practical memory," models ways of remembering insofar as the scrapbook pages articulate sets of affiliation between people, places, and events and provide readers with more inclusive, almost panoramic view of a particular issue or subject, as we have seen with the "Negro in Baseball" page discussed earlier.

In a move somewhat similar to Rhodes-Pitts, Scandura acknowledges that Gumby's scrapbooks were collaborative projects, in that friends and acquaintances often sent him newspaper clippings and kept up the production of new volumes when he was sick, but argues that they can't be considered "collectivist works in the sense that we might read Nancy Cunard's encyclopedic and self-consciously Socialist *Negro* anthology from the same period" (160). In other words, Scandura suggests that the scrapbooks do not interpellate a group identity defined primarily by racial affiliation because they are not the product of a collective effort. Instead, she suggests that Gumby, whom she calls an "elitist, a dandy" participated more in a "particular little group" (161) that was organized around homoerotic companionship and promiscuous artistic exchange. Collaboration, in this case, is explicitly sexualized, and Scandura argues that Gumby's work as both a collector and Harlem socialite "depended upon and commemorated a series of successful seductions" (162).

To be sure, the literary anthology and scrap collection differ significantly in terms of the means of assemblage, authorship, and—particularly regarding Cunard's publication of *Negro*—overt ideological intent. Focusing on Gumby's homosexuality and identifying his scrapbook making as a "queer art" of "mysterious relationships" (160), however, overlooks the ways in which the scrapbooks mediate and produce new forms of black identity across historical, social, and sexual boundaries. Moreover, it unnecessarily circumscribes their range of influence.

Gumby's collecting was nearly all-inclusive, and scrapbooks' wide range of subject matter testifies to his deliberate articulation of a diverse set of correspondences between people, histories, and places that extend far beyond the coterie of gay Harlem. The community Gumby gathered around his salon and scrapbook making thus seems to exemplify more of Raymond Williams's concept of a "formation." Quoting Williams, Braddock explains that such social formations may be "'most recognizable as conscious movements and tendencies (literary, artistic, philosophical or scientific)' but they may also attain a looser and not directly collaborative character as a 'mode of specialized [intellectual or cultural] practice'" (57).

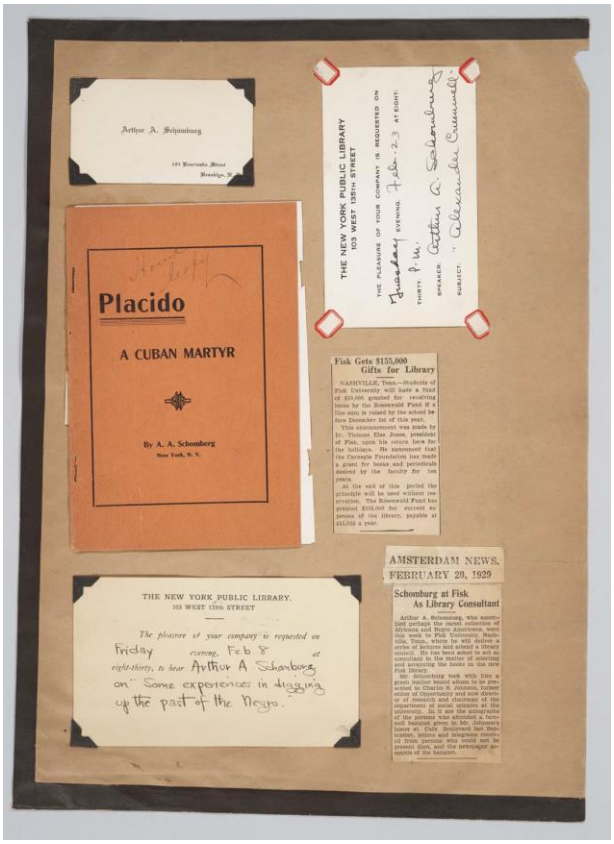
Accordingly, Gumby's collage approach to representation resonates with the work of many of his Harlem Renaissance contemporaries. Rachel Farebrother has shown that Harlem Renaissance collage texts—specifically *The New Negro*, Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Zora Neale Hurston's cross-cultural novels—represent mixed, hybrid, and complex racial identities and demonstrate processes of exchange across racial and geographical borders. These works, like Gumby's scrapbooks, engage with "high modernist" aesthetic practices such as quotation and other discursive experimentation without disavowing vernacular tradition. Yet whereas Toomer and Hurston collected a vanishing folk culture and *The New Negro* assembled a complex range of voices, materials, and affiliations into the anthology, Gumby collaged scraps. The term "scrap" signifies a physical remainder, something left over after the greater part has been used. It also refers to processes of removal or refusal—the scrapping of things, ideas, and in many cases, groups of people. The "scrap-book" thus uniquely foregrounds the act of recuperation, and Gumby's re-representation of black cultural life emphasizes the importance of critically engaging with both the dominant and scrapped stories of American experience.[78]

Cutting and Pasting America's "Unwritten History"

Gumby's scrapbooks are oversized, most measuring approximately sixteen by eleven inches. They are made out of light brown mounting paper the color of cardboard, and the pages appear to be hand-cut from larger sheets of seemingly inexpensive material. Each page is hand-trimmed in dark brown, leather-grained bookbinder's tape that protects the now-brittle edges from tearing and gives the varying page sizes the look of uniformity. The paper collectibles are thematically grouped and organized, and the newspaper clippings, in particular, are neatly cut out in their entirety and include the date of publication and the name of the newspaper. Gumby also fashioned pockets for unscissored materials such as playbills, sheet music, booklets, and brochures that he wanted to preserve unaltered and thus still charged with aura, and each pocket is precisely cut to their dimensions. Visually, the scrapbooks are neatly framed, orderly, and indicative of Gumby's fastidiousness as a documentarian.

They are also, however, inherently unstable and unfixed as narrative forms. Jennifer Jolly explains that "the narrative of a scrapbook combines the nonlinear experience of collage—the visual juxtaposition of artifacts—with the linear experience of turning the pages and reading textual excerpts" (91). Page 30 from the scrapbook entitled "Libraries," for example, illustrates how scrapbooks reorient the conventional spatial arrangement of the textual page and, in turn, the reading process. Likely orienting itself in the upper left-hand corner, the reader's eye moves across Arthur Schomburg's calling card and down vertically to the pamphlet, at which point the reader may open the pamphlet and flip horizontally through its pages. The pamphlet effectively opens up and gives depth to the surface of the page and asks the reader to interact with the text as a physical object. Moving then to the right side of the page, the eye must turn ninety degrees to the left in order to read an event announcement from the New York Public Library that, like the

one at the bottom left of the page, shifts abruptly from typescript to handwriting thereby inscribing another writer's presence on the collaged page.[79] The final two newspaper clippings appear to round out Gumby's interpretation of Schomburg's relationship to the library as a cultural institution. The story that this arrangement of scraps suggests is that Gumby and Schomburg were on intimate terms, that Gumby participated in and was audience to his work as a historian and collector (though it is indeterminate whether he actually attended the lectures), and by documenting these relationships, that Gumby deemed them worthy of recognition.



Page 30 from Scrapbook 52, "Libraries"
Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

It is essential to note, however, that such a conventionally directional reading is not the only way to read the page. The reader can focus on any one element and move in any direction at

any time. I'd like to suggest that the page even encourages such a disorderly reading in order to allow the reader to orchestrate a number of possible relationships among the pasted elements and to see the collage as a paradoxically fragmented whole. In all collage projects, the meanings of individual objects change when they are moved from one context to another so that their contents require multiple readings: as individual items, as part of a collection of items, and as objects removed from their original contexts and redefined by the collector. Taking the "Libraries" page as an example, the "Placido: A Cuban Martyr" pamphlet is Schomburg's brief 1909 biography of the poet Gabriel de la Concepción Valdez. Within the space of the scrapbook page, however, it testifies more to Schomburg's political activism than Valdez's martyrdom because it is framed, and to a certain degree, defined by the Schomburg materials. Elsewhere and/or on its own, the pamphlet would produce different registers of meaning and affective responses. In this way, readers of Gumby's scrapbooks are assigned an active interpretative role and must think through the implications and significance of particular arrangements.

The "Libraries" volume, like almost all of Gumby's scrapbooks, is made of unbound loose-leaf pages that can be shuffled, rearranged, or removed, and traces of dried glue indicate that materials were lifted and repasted from elsewhere in the collection. The scrapbooks were designed for improvisation and change, division and expansion, and as Gumby assembled them, they were constantly changing. In the autobiographical essay, "The Adventures of My Scrapbooks," which he wrote at the request of the Columbia University Library to help publicize the collection, Gumby explains his system of classification and composition:

> Without experience in the arranging of such a vast amount of miscellaneous material, I naturally made a botch of it in my first efforts. When I finally admitted to myself that it would all have to be done over, I decided to classify the material into groups. I soon

> found, however, as my collections continued to grow, that even this arrangement was unsatisfactory, for it was impossible to interfile new material. It was not until I adopted the looseleaf method that I found a satisfactory answer to my problem. That, of course, meant remounting my material once more. After sorting it into master subjects, I found that I had enough Negro items for that subject alone. This Negro scrapbook in turn I divided into master subjects; and because the leaves could be shifted, I was able to break the master subjects into chapters. I arranged chronologically the clippings that were not too badly damaged by their repeated mountings. I soon had a bulging volume of Negro items, whereupon I broke the chapters into separate books. Thus began my Negro Scrapbook collection. (21)

While Gumby is rather practical and matter of fact about the logistics of scrapbooking, his work signifies what Brinkman calls "a productive accumulation that need not strive for symbolic closure."[80] The scrapbooks are physically and creatively open-ended and represent the negotiation over time, rather than a strict delineation, of personal and political identities as well as changing historical contexts.[81] Moreover, Gumby's bookish language, referring to scrapbook "volumes," "chapters," and "books," implies a mindfulness of narrative and the stories his scrapbooks might tell, but these are narratives that can be shifted, broken, remounted, and begun again and again.

Volume 41, entitled "Harlem: Part II," for example, shows how Gumby pieced together stories in order to commemorate black modern life. Most of the volume contains newspaper clippings about the "Negro problem," including race riots, incidents of crime and vandalism, the lack of jobs for blacks, and problematic zoning restrictions that constrained the development of black neighborhoods. It also, however, documents the life of Madame C. J. Walker, a black

entrepreneur who made millions after she invented an "antikink tonic" for women's hair. Within the space of about twenty loose pages, Gumby includes photographs and clippings about her sudden death in 1919, her granddaughter's marriage in 1923 and subsequent divorce in 1926, and in 1932, the remodeling of her estate into a rest home for "tired mothers." Madame Walker's clippings cover over ten years, and while they are presented chronologically, they demonstrate how historical continuity and coherence is assembled, not simply presented or reproduced. The temporal gaps show that Gumby anticipated and left blank space for additional clippings on Madame Walker's pages, gathered materials over the years, and went back to further document her story. The scrapbook thus looks to the past and to the future as a way of keeping history.

"Harlem: Part II" also identifies the kind of history Gumby wanted to make, in terms of the events, people, ideas, and things he considered worth memorializing. In this instance, Madame Walker's clippings offer a kind of counternarrative to the "Negro problem" by documenting success, as it's made socially legible in wealth, prestige, and celebrity. In one newspaper clipping dated May 31, 1919, for example, an unnamed contributor eulogizes the community's loss upon Madame Walker's death: "The world mourns; mourns, for in the passing of Mme. Walker we have lost the one woman in our racial group who has by her life, her deeds and her achievements given us a concrete example of 'where there's a will there's a way.'" Within the scrapbook, Madame Walker's story demonstrates how fame and entrepreneurial success can become concrete, which in this case is visual and permanent as long as the pages remain intact. At the same time, the assembled collection highlights the constructedness of such a narrative. There are no doubt articles about Madame Walker that didn't make the cut or couldn't be fit into the space Gumby allotted for her story. Readers must then read beyond the

frame of the scrapbook page and supply contexts, either invented or remembered, for each of the pasted fragments.[82]

Most of the scrapbooks pay similar tribute to individuals, events, and histories worthy of celebration, and by exerting ownership over the material scraps, Gumby makes claims on the feelings of racial pride the items metonymically represent. In the volume "They Broke through Discrimination," a page with the heading "Your History" features capsule biographies of Rice Porter, Marcos Lopez, Marian Anderson, Lt. Clarence Samuels, and Hiram S. Thomas, a kind of "Who's Who" of notable black leaders. Published in newspapers like the Baltimore *Afro-American* and New York's black *Amsterdam News*, these biographies recognized achievement in fields as diverse as potato-chip making and military service.

Page 33 from Scrapbook 127, "They Broke Through Discrimination"
Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

Gumby's assemblage of these clippings documents and makes visible black success stories as well as the importance of business and civic leadership within the community. What's key here is that these things are grouped under "Your History." The possessive pronoun "your" implies a "you," the reader, who can, and should, claim the sense of accomplishment that the page manifests. Moreover, "your" could refer to a single individual or an entire group of people, and this sense of shared, acquirable history becomes the basis of a collective formation by asking readers to unite around concepts like racial pride and entrepreneurial initiative.

This page, as well as the scrapbook collection as a whole, demonstrates how a sense of identity can be enacted through a process of mediation. Scrapbook items are clipped from their original contexts and the rest is discarded, and what gets included is entirely determined by the compiler. Scrapbook composition is therefore fundamentally rhetorical and performative in character and reveals not only the personal preferences of the compiler, but also the cultural construction of memory and feelings of belonging. In their study of autobiographical scrapbooks, cultural anthropologists Tamar Katriel and Thomas Farrell argue that the scrapbook represents a social construction of the self, a process by which the scrapbook maker can "witness and appreciate distant qualities and experiences in a concrete, present sense" (4). The same can certainly be said of Gumby's scrapbooks. Not only do his scrapbooks memorialize past events and feelings of happiness and pride, they also identify Gumby as a participant in a process of identification by materializing his membership within a particular group.

Acts of memory and display are thus mutually informing. By saving and organizing the items for preservation, the scrapbooks concretize the social bonds and sets of affiliation Gumby thought constituted black experience and cultural identity. By contemplating and then sharing these assemblages, Gumby's—as well as his reader's—sense of self is reinforced, and

remembering becomes a way to practice and sustain feelings of belonging, accomplishment, and authorship over one's own history. As Garvey notes, because Gumby's collecting was so extensive and inclusive, there was a good chance that a visitor to the studio could find something of herself in one of the scrapbooks (168). Even if she didn't, however, the scrapbooks tie readers to a community by making such moments of recognition possible, by modeling civic engagement and providing tangible examples of productive counterhegemonic activities, and by inviting readers to appreciate the close relationships that make up the complex and heterogeneous subjectivities of modern African American life.

Given its engagement with economic discourse, the politics of racial representation, scrap aesthetics, and vernacular culture, the Gumby scrapbook collection is an invaluable part of the history and critical interpretation of the Harlem Renaissance and early-twentieth-century American modernity. Though today it's hard to imagine living in a world without a digital trail (for better or for worse), we can see how the scrapbooks push back against the threat of erasure by collecting and saving the seemingly valueless or useless scraps of everyday life. In a sign of the belated recognition of this achievement, profiles of Gumby in recent studies of Harlem, New Deal progressivism, and American scrapbooks have done much to recover the forgotten scraps of his life and work.[83] New critical volumes on scrapbooks further suggest that they are now, more than ever before, being treated as unique objects of history in the making rather than relics of the past.[84]

As such, one of the most interesting things about Gumby's scrapbooks is that they ask to be visited and revisited and then revisited again, and no one reading can be considered complete or exhaustive. Rather, different configurations and interpretations of the scrapbook pages continually yield new views of early-twentieth-century black life, its changing ideas of American

experience, and the ways in which we shape our own life stories. Like Hurston's folklore collections, Gumby's scrapbooks are a veritable treasure trove of black Americana. They demonstrate how he actively participated in the production of culture by recording and reshaping African American subjectivity and by aesthetically mapping its relationship to a national collective on the assemblage pages of the scrap collection.

Hurston's Folklife

Before examining Hurston's writings for the Florida FWP, it's worth considering how her short story "The Eatonville Anthology," which appeared serially in the *Messenger* in 1926, stages her strategic employment of the collection as a mode of representation and as an individually authored text. The "Anthology" contains fourteen numbered sections, twelve of which present a verbal snapshot of a member of the real-life Eatonville community, as well as a folk story and a report on local dance halls. Readers are introduced to Tippy, the Sykes family's mischievous and intractable dog; Mrs. Tony Roberts, the "pleading woman" who begs for scraps of food from her neighbors despite her husband's best efforts to provide for her; Coon Taylor, who "never did any real stealing" except for melons, chickens, and sugar cane; and Sewell, a "man who lives all to himself," among others. Each of these passages is clear and simply written yet lyrically describes the town's residents in terms other than the excessive factuality of the anthropological report. Evoking the sense of knowingness and intimacy, for example, the narrator's editorializing commentary often directs readers on how to see them. Consider the story of Becky Moore, a young woman who

> has eleven children of assorted colors and sizes. She has never been married, but that is not her fault. She has never stopped any of the fathers from proposing, so if she has no father for her children it's not her fault. The men round about are entirely to blame. The other mothers of the town are afraid that it is catching. They won't let their children play with hers. (*I Love Myself* 178)

The narrator's repetition of "not her fault" expresses sympathy for Becky Moore as does the irony of the word "catching," considering that her abandonment is not a disease or malady to be spread. The narrator also finds fault with the town's communal morality and assigns blame to Becky's profligate partners. Yet despite the provocativeness of this image, this is all we learn of Becky, and the brevity of her story, as well as that of most of the anthology's numbered sections, speaks to Hurston's desire to present Eatonville at a glimpse, as a strategic juxtaposition of disparate, recontextualized parts that make up a greater and collective whole.[85]

In this way, the "Anthology" simultaneously isolates and synthesizes particular people and more abstract ideas about such things as love, solitude, and domestic discord. There is no plot to speak of, and the sections have no connection with each other apart from the characters' relationship to Eatonville, though a handful of recurring characters create some continuity. Instead, Hurston juxtaposes concrete images of Eatonville life to express a range of perspectives, voices, and histories that inevitably accumulate and intersect within small-town life. The passage "Turpentine Love," for example, begins simply: "Jim Merchant is always in a good humor—even with his wife … She has had all her teeth pulled out, but they still get along splendidly" (178). There is an economy of words but also emotional complexity, including a great deal of humor and wit. Stylistically, the distinctiveness of Hurston's language—she uses standard English for the narrator and represents the speech of Eatonville residents in dialect—as well as

the folk traditions it transcribes grounds this collection in the distinct vernacular culture of contemporary African American life.

In the section entitled "Double-Shuffle," Hurston's anthropological gaze becomes more visible, and the sketch reads more like a research report than gossip about townsfolk. Here the narrator discusses the town's love of dance and describes where dances are held, the difference of opinion between young and old people about what dances are best, and the sheer energy of these performances: "Feet dragged shhlap, shhlap! to beat out the time. No orchestra needed. Round and round! Back again, parse-me-la! shlap! shlap! Strut! Strut! Seaboard! Shlap! Shlap! Tiddy bumm! Mr. Clarke in the lead with Mrs. Moseley" (182). These short declarative phrases, onomatopoetic sound words, and sharp punctuation rupture the linearity of the text and make it multisensory, inviting readers to hear and feel dance as much as read about it. To this end, Hurston emphasizes the physicality of the dancers and includes a transcription of a double-shuffle song written in dialect, to which the "deacons clapping as hard as the rest" and "the blind man" guitarist Lizzimore provides accompaniment (182). Dance is thus a fully embodied and sensuous experience, not simply a series of moves or musical counts. Within the logic of the anthology, the sketch reproduces the kind of vibrant cultural environment in which ordinary townspeople like Mr. Clarke and Mrs. Moseley could be found.[86]

In her brief introduction to "The Eatonville Anthology," Alice Walker identifies it as "apparently the written version of stories Hurston told to entertain at parties during the Harlem Renaissance" (175). Taking into account the fact that the publication of the "Anthology" predates Hurston's first sponsored trip to collect folklore by about one year, this means that she likely reproduced the Eatonville stories from memory, rather than from a report, and embellished them as she saw fit.[87] It is also highly suggestive of the text's sense of performance as well as its

transformation of found material from lived experience to oral tale to written narrative. The stories, which were no doubt enlivened by Hurston's fiery personality and flair for the dramatic, were designed with an audience in mind, and in rallying people around her storytelling, Hurston modeled the kind of community building it could create. Robert Hemenway suggests that the "anthology is just that, a series of self-contained stories as they might be told in a night's lying session at Joe Clarke's store or at a meeting of the Niggerati at Hurston's apartment" (70). In either case—on the porch or at an apartment party—the stories link listeners to an African American past and bring it into a shared moment of modernity.

Alice Gambrell calls Hurston's well-known recycling techniques "versioning," referring namely to the retelling of one story in different and often divergent contexts. Gambrell cites a particular story about a "small-town rivalry between a male hoodoo practitioner and his female competitor" and points out that it appears in five variations within Hurston's body of work, "written in a range of modes including fiction, scholarly and popular folklore, and autobiographical anecdote" (116). She suggests that in each instance Hurston made changes to the story to make it more "palatable to her anticipated audiences" (117) and identifies significant shifts in emphasis and tone. Many of her contemporaries regarded Hurston's versioning practices as a lack of scholarly integrity, and with proof of this artistic license in mind, some critics have suggested that the material she presented to the Florida FWP may have been collected at a different time. Her mindfulness of audience and willingness to revise, however, raises important questions about performance, the slippery boundaries between mimesis and artifice, and thus what counts as "authentic." It also demonstrates how editing a collection could effect important changes on both the level of form and thematic significance.

Hurston's aesthetic formalism, however, has often been overlooked in favor of discussing how her work engages with black cultural history. For example, Hemenway argues that "the [Eatonville] anthology succeeds despite its lack of form" because it is Hurston's "most effective attempt at representing the original tale-telling context" (70). Yet this critique of formlessness wrongly disregards the collection as a distinct and strategic mode of representation. Hurston could have presented these folk characters in a single linear storyline but consciously chose not to. Instead, she selected, organized, and constructed the tales as a composite text situated within the historical and psychological homespace of Eatonville. Theoretically, a reader could start anywhere and read around the collection as desired, and as Trinna S. Ferver explains, "the narrative itself is parallel to the real-life community, in that it embraces the narratives of individuals within its collective framework."[88] Moreover, by calling it an "anthology," Hurston instructs readers to regard it explicitly as a collection, and the title draws attention to the heterogeneity of her subjects, the imagined transactions between them, and the collection's promotional capabilities. In many ways, "The Eatonville Anthology" makes black life and folklore easily available for unfamiliar readers, and its structural elements emphasize variety within a particular regional and racial milieu.

This kind of collecting aesthetic is enacted in Hurston's other folkloric fictions and within her ideas about racial identity and social consciousness.[89] In her 1928 essay, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," a vexing and deeply contradictory manifesto of racial selfhood, Hurston proclaims:

> I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool,

> bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knife-blade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows? (155)

Evoking ideas of multiplicity, mixing, and the vernacular, this passage metaphorically figures identity as a "brown bag of miscellany" that is filled entirely with *things*; a haphazard collection of junk and treasure that calls to mind the hoarder's trove. The used and often disposable objects of everyday life—bits of broken glass, old shoes, a bent nail, and a dried flower, etc.—as well as the rare and precious gem are fragments of a larger whole, and Hurston suggests that this disordered, oddly assorted jumble can be rearranged, emptied, sorted, and refilled without losing meaning or significance.[90] These objects are not to be thrown away or sold, but rather preserved as intrinsic and important pieces that signify the "weight of things." Her reference to "the Great Stuffer of Bags," a playful epithet for God or some other organizing force, ironizes any sense of grand design and purpose because there is no grand design or purpose; variable colorations and individual identities are part of the jumble and may change without changing anything at all.

This jumble reduces distinctive individuality to a kind of material determinism in which "more or less color," and perhaps by implication gender, class, and other conventional markers of identity, "would not matter." The collection, then, doesn't bring a collectivity into being as much as it relates ideas about race, in particular her view of blackness, to the structural principles

of reconstruction and rearrangement. Like any collection, identity is inherently composite, and Hurston challenges the assumption that individuals can be defined according to rigid categories such as black and white, priceless and worthless. Rather, the brown bag of miscellany stages a jarring discordance between elements and does not attempt to resolve the contradictions inscribed within it. Furthermore, these elements, apart from the "first-water diamond," are typically regarded as junk—scraps with little aesthetic or use value. Once they are integrated into a new and organic whole, however, they take on distinct representational significance. Notions of recovery and reevaluation are therefore embedded within the brown bag's scrap aesthetics, and Hurston's creative metaphor for subjectivity foregrounds the significance of repurposing and reinterpreting "small things priceless and worthless."

With this kind of compositional logic in mind, I consciously use the term "scrap" rather than "fragment" to discuss Hurston's assemblage aesthetics. While the stories, songs, and other folk materials she collected were not considered waste nor were they designed for easy disposal like newspapers and other ephemera, I consider the scrap more evocative of the processes of refusal Hurston's anthropological and literary work encountered, particularly in the context of Federal Writers' Project management, as well as her attempt to recuperate and reconstruct unwritten histories of black life in America.[91] As a discrete unit of discourse, the scrap also corresponds with the purpose and methodology of her fieldwork. Gambrell explains that under the mentorship of Franz Boas, Hurston practiced "salvage ethnography," the "collection of materials from a culture before it disappeared completely" and a recovery process anthropologist Margaret Mead referred to as "rescue operations" (102). These "vanishing" objects, people, and places gained currency once they were documented, and in this way, Hurston's collecting makes visible the transformations of value, much like Gumby's scrapbook making. Also like the

scrapbooks, her preservationist practices were designedly multimedia, and she recorded folk culture by drawing upon a diverse collection of written reports, photographs, transcribed oral testimonies, audio recordings, and amateur film footage.

Unlike many traditional folklorists, Hurston did not distance herself from the people or places she studied, and as a result, the "I" of the ethnographer often became intertwined with the "we" of collective memory.[92] Her brown bag sense of self is therefore important in constructing an interpretative framework for her folklore because she often figures prominently as both the narrator of and a character within the stories she collected. Consciously reflecting on the reporter's objectifying gaze, her research thus often describes her own identity formation and reveals how she "versions" herself with regard to particular communities and histories. Accordingly, in his foreword to the Hurston's 1935 folklore collection *Mules and Men*, Arnold Rampersad suggests that "the key to [the text] is precisely Hurston's finding of herself in the black folk world she described, and finding that black folk world … to be an unmistakable, ineradicable part of herself" (xxiii). This form of self-writing is especially important to keep in mind when regarding the Federal Writers' Project and its subordination of individual identities in favor of documenting a coherent national collectivity.

Many critics have studied Hurston's diverse body of work and have considered how it negotiates the complex relationships between folklore collecting, ethnography, African American modernity, and literary modernism.[93] Scant attention, however, has been paid to these issues with regard to her contributions to *The Florida Negro* and *Florida: A Guide to the Southernmost State*, though Pamela Bordelon's 1999 publication of *Go Gator and Muddy the Water* has significantly increased their visibility.[94] In one of the few studies of Hurston's work for *The Florida Negro*, Christopher D. Felker acknowledges the ethnocentric messages of

African American folklore and argues that while Hurston advanced a cultural agenda of "Afro-centrism," she usually erred on the side of cultural assimilation by attempting to inscribe a black aesthetic into the larger base of American culture. In teasing out Hurston's relationship to state sponsorship, Felker suggests that she was divided between her desire to authentically represent black culture and the need to make it attractive to a mass audience. He therefore groups her among other FWP writers who "gently exploited" (155) their sources to satisfy the project's agenda. Felker thus calls her time in Florida a "colonial venture—a profitable (re)discovery of native territory" but regards it positively as an effort to "stabilize the decline of the communal context of communicable experience" (156–57)—in other words, to challenge the divisions, either real or perceived, between the ethnocentric traditions of black Floridians and mainstream mass culture.

Valerie Levy, on the other hand, focuses on Hurston's role as a nature writer for the project and argues that her federal folklore "shows how the people's lives have been informed by the environment and also how, conversely, the people have affected the character of the land through their close contact with it" (86). She attributes Hurston's variety of writing styles and topics to the "investigation of the many intersections of place and culture that contribute to Florida's inimitable flavor" and suggests that her FWP work is driven by the desire to "augment the connection she sees between land and lore" (86–87). Levy therefore focuses her close readings on the representation of Florida's natural resources, landscape, and regional industries; all of which she suggests determine and give shape to the state's cultural production. Levy also claims that Hurston's language "grows out of the landscape and ecosystem" (91) and gives examples of her organic imagery, metaphors, and other rhetorical devices drawn from the natural

world. Such a specific context necessarily fashions Hurston into an environmentalist and conservationist and identifies nature as a main character in her storytelling.

David Kadlec, like Felker, frames Hurston's federal folklore in terms of bureaucratic management and similarly claims that her "conceptions of culture" clashed with those fostered by the government (471). Kadlec makes specific note of how the Florida FWP served its commercial purposes by muting racial unrest and instead publicized the state's lush landscape and idyllic climate to lure tourists. He uses the Alabama guide to illustrate the kind of unsparing social work the Florida project could have done but chose not to. His reading of Hurston focuses on the genesis of a particular folk song included in the "Music and Theater" section of the Florida guidebook. He suggests that her contributions to the project were not the native Florida material she represented it to be, but rather a compilation and mingling of rural southern and northern urban folk-art forms, specifically the blues poem and blues song. Although the implications of these cross-regional, high/low assemblage practices are not fully explored, Kadlec suggests that this lyric exemplifies Hurston's belief in "the folk" as a process to be experienced rather than a thing to be documented.

Despite its thoughtfulness about lines of cultural contact and influence, I find this analysis to be overly speculative in terms of tracing Hurston's representations of the folk to their origins, particularly because almost all contributions to the Florida FWP are unattributed and because Kadlec depends largely on a number of textual resemblances rather than actual transmissions. Felker makes an interesting point about the FWP's sense of imagined conquest over Florida's native populations but underplays the extent to which Hurston actively resists the colonialist imperative by ironizing the so-called authenticity of the project. Levy's ecocriticism also narrows the significance of Hurston's work to nature writing without acknowledging its

scene of production or the external management of its content. My analysis of Hurston's federal folklore is not interested in such particular genealogies or limited contexts and instead focuses more on how she represents the folk and rural black culture, both aesthetically and politically, and the kinds of arguments her collection makes about racial documentation and display.

In her study of the Florida's "official populism," for example, Sonnet Retman argues that the state guide draws distinctions between the "common man" (wealthy, white, mostly male tourists) and native folk (poor whites, African Americans, and Native Americans) and suggests that the transactions between them demonstrate a kind of "inclusive exclusion" in which "blackness is presented in its capacity to be subordinated" (128). In other words, the guide consistently juxtaposes Florida's African American population with the more privileged white population of the state and does so to deny the "coevalness—the shared contemporary time" (130) of folk subjects during the thirties, instead relegating them to a rural, pastoral, preindustrial South. Retman regards the Florida guidebook primarily as a piece of travel writing and focuses on its iconography, rhetorical enticements, and promotion of the state's untamed terrain, which included both exotic flora and fauna and the native folk population. She presents this analysis, in part, to set up a discussion of how Hurston's performance of the folk in *Mules and Men* "subverts the very project of the guidebook altogether, upending its static depictions of place and people" (152). Yet surprisingly, Retman spends very little time discussing Hurston's contributions to the Florida guidebook or *The Florida Negro* and their own politically motivated subversions. Instead, she examines how the guidebook erects boundaries between tourist and the laboring classes by drawing more broadly upon its economy of commercial exchanges, including a marketing of racialized folk types and the stitching together of tourist production and consumption with discourses of citizenship.

To address these critical oversights, the following section offers careful close readings of a number of Hurston's federal writings to reveal her ideas about identity and the politics of place as well as her stylized mode of storytelling, with all its unique linguistic and methodological crossings. Given the FWP's heavy-handed editorial practices, I also compare Hurston's submissions with the published version of the guidebook to determine the kind of approaches and commentaries deemed fit for a federal publication and its concept of a national collective. In a letter to Alain Locke describing an early collecting trip, Hurston remarked, "I am using the vacuum method, grabbing everything I see" (qtd. in Hemenway 118). Her "vacuum" was primarily her gift for stockpiling details in her memory (as well as her creative license with collected materials), but considering the fact that she began using a government-owned recording machine to help document her findings, I also consider how certain technologies purported to satisfy the realist imperatives of the WPA guide series and yet altered the transmission of culture between observer and subject in the field, making visible Hurston's negotiation of her insider/outsider status as both native informant and federally-sponsored ethnographer.

Seeing America, Seeing Hurston's Florida

FWP guide instructions advised field writers "to survey their districts with 'fresh eyes' and recognize the lore and customs known to them all their lives" and encouraged them to collect materials that could be tied to "one place, one section, or one object" (qtd. in Bordelon 26). If thus done correctly, the field specialists' gaze needed to perceive value "as is" as well as "could be," recognizing what was worth preserving; it also needed to defamiliarize the thing under scrutiny and see the old anew, as an outsider looking inside for the first time. In terms of mapping particular geographies, cultures, and regional identities, this means that the field

writer's gaze should be informative, revealing to readers parts of everyday life that might otherwise go unnoticed, and would be ideological, in its indexing of the value of particular lore and customs. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls this process "self-nativising," which he defines as "the juxtaposition of the all-too-familiar and the wildly exotic in such a way that they change places" (106). For Hurston working in Florida, self-nativising would thus require her to assume the role of stranger in her own community and appropriate its native culture.

However, in "Eatonville When You Look at It," which was published as part of the "Tour 2" in the state guidebook, Hurston resists this pressure to ventriloquize outsiderness. Instead, she offers travellers a glimpse of the town's inner life and the feeling of being there, as only one intimately familiar with the place could do.[95] In her description of Eatonville, the familiar remains familiar even when put on display and "looked" at. Her entry begins:

> Maitland is Maitland until it gets to Hurst's corner, and then it is Eatonville. Right in front of Willie Sewell's yellow-painted house the hard road quits being the hard road for a generous mile and becomes the heart of Eatonville. Or from a stranger's point of view, you could say that the road just bursts through on its way from Highway #71 to #441 scattering Eatonville right and left. (*FL* 362)

Here and throughout the essay, Hurston personalizes Eatonville's geography by identifying its landmarks in terms of the town's citizens: Willie Sewell's yellow-painted house, Joe Clarke's store, Widow Dash's orange grove, Claude Mann's filling station, and Armetta Jones' backyard where townspeople play croquet, among many others. Logistically speaking, it would be possible to get around such a small town by recognizing its store, church, and filling station described in the essay. However, Hurston's directions deliberately avoid offering the kind of concrete navigational details found in most guidebooks, except of course when she identifies "the

stranger's point of view." With the exception of Highways 71 and 411, the two main conduits of tourism that signify both business and conquest, this space is essentially unmappable. In this ironic sleight of hand, Hurston thus strategically occupies the liminal space between insider and outsider and presents Eatonville as a self-contained community.

She also seems to be signifying, in Henry Louis Gate's sense of the word, on the American Guide Series' objectifying and fixing gaze.[96] Examining the Florida guidebook's economy of sightseeing, Retman argues that "for the touring motorist, black laborers are transformed into static place markers—tourist sites, 'local color,' as it were—commodified as folk coordinates in the guide's mapping of the region" (137). On the other hand, Hurston's account of Eatonville is not the distanced, presumably white view out of the window of a speeding car, but instead, a picture of a community intimately tied to and at home within an autonomous space. It's important to acknowledge that Hurston points out Willie Sewell's yellow-painted house, not Willie Sewell himself. In this way, Hurston refuses to make black people the object of scrutiny and refocuses the tourist's gaze on Eatonville's buildings and its natural landscape—as if to say, you may look at Eatonville, but you may not have the town itself.[97] In this way, the essay actively defies the forms of management and control handed down by the guidebooks by refusing to exoticize blackness.

Differentiating her literary style from the dry, sociological federalese of the rest of the guidebook, Hurston also includes folk sayings, witty tautologies, and regional vernacular in her tour of Eatonville. Houses on the back streets are old and "made of the town's first dreams" and "west of it all, beyond village and school, everybody knows that the sun makes his nest in some lonesome lake in the woods back there and gets his night's rest" (*FL* 362). Hurston also introduces readers to Eatonville's "most celebrated resident," the world's largest alligator.

Within the guidebook, a short paragraph appended to the essay, presumably authored by one of her FWP editors, explains the animal's significance:

> This legendary alligator, it is said, is no other than a slave who escaped from a Georgia plantation and joined the Indians during the Seminole War. When the Indians retreated, he did not follow but instead made "big medicine" on the lake shore, for he had been a celebrated conjuring man in Africa. He transformed himself into an alligator, the god of his tribe, and slipped into the water. Now and then he resumes human form, so people say, and roams the country about Eatonville. (*FL* 362)

Hurston's allusion to this folk tale in the town's profile demonstrates her desire to represent the community through its collective mythologies. The alligator's story illustrates strength and resilience in the face of outright oppression and calls upon an African heritage to celebrate the alligator man's rebellion. The phrases "it is said" and "so people say" identifies the external position of the speaker and therefore differentiate the gloss from Hurston's own impressionistic rendering of her hometown. Hurston's decision not to explain the reference herself, moreover, seems to indicate her desire to let the mythic imaginary and its relationship to place speak for itself.

Also of considerable importance is the fact that she never mentions what Eatonville was then most famous for—being one of the first towns incorporated by blacks in the United States. Looking at Eatonville, then, does not involve seeing race, nor does it document the social life of the town in terms of racial difference. In her collection of folklore *Mules and Men*, Hurston also talks about Eatonville (it is where she begins her research trip) and describes it as "the city of five lakes, three croquet courts, three hundred brown skins, three hundred good swimmers, plenty guavas, two schools, and no jail-house" (4). Here she does mention color, the "three

hundred brown skins," but gives it no more importance than the town's amenities and presumable lack of crime. What does matter is Eatonville's atmosphere, and like the entry for the Florida guidebook, Hurston describes it in ways that make visible the processes of memory and mediation.

When we consider "Eatonville When You Look at It" alongside another town profile "Goldsborough," however, it becomes clear that Hurston was interested in pointing out the differences between regional communities and often reported on race issues to do so. When she set out to writing about Goldsborough, the town had not existed for nearly three decades. Unlike Eatonville, it had not remained all black and self-governing after it was incorporated by the nearby and predominantly white town of Sanford for use of its land. Hurston's report does not include the warm evocations of Eatonville's collective homespace. Instead, it matter-of-factly lists key events and people in the town's history: "On the first Monday in December 1891, Walter Williams was elected mayor of the town, with John Wesley Small, clerk of the court, William Clark, policeman. The next year the town opened a school, with Katie Stubbins as the first teacher" (*Go Gator* 126). These informational details do more than provide a historical record of the town's development. They clearly identify its administrative independence and self-sufficiency and represent Sanford's underhanded acquisition of the town, for which it failed to fairly compensate Goldsborough residents as promised, as an act of injustice. While Hurston refrains from outright condemnation of Sanford's ruin of Goldsborough, the essay's sardonic tone and subtle political edge demonstrate her desire to document the suppression of black autonomy in pursuit of economic gain for white communities.

"Goldsborough" was not published in either the Florida guidebook or *The Florida Negro*, a fact suggestive of the FWP's desire to keep racial tensions under cover. Similarly, the Florida

office also scrapped Hurston's version of "The Ocoee Riot" that she submitted for publication. The essay reports on a race riot that broke out on an election day in 1920 in Ocoee, a small town not far from Eatonville, when black residents turned out en masse at the polls despite being told to stay away. Hurston tells the story from the perspective of the town's black residents and describes the mob of white men burning down Negro houses, individually names the men, women, and children they brutalized, and quietly eulogizes the lynching of July Perry, a man who tried to protect himself, his family, and his home once the mob fixed on him as one of the main agitators. While the Florida guidebook's official entry for Ocoee states that "all versions of the conflict agree on what ensued," it reports that "July Perry, Negro foreman of a large orange grove, appeared at the polls intoxicated, brandishing a shotgun, and killed two officers sent to arrest him at his home" (*FL* 457). In this federally sanctioned version, Ocoee's black residents are determined responsible for instigating the violence, and the entry makes visible how racial conflict could be pointed to in passing but emptied of the provocative specifics about polling-place discrimination, information that would politicize or make the guidebook appear inappropriate to white audiences.

In response to this censorship of agitational material, Hurston appears to have found ways to situate critique in the presentation, rather than explicit analysis, of her observations. In late spring 1939, the Florida office sent her to Cross City, a small town in northwestern Florida where lumber and turpentine for the state was most heavily produced. At the time thousands of Floridians, most of whom were uneducated, lived and worked in the remote piney woods without running water or other modern conveniences. Bordelon explains that in addition to scouting informants for the soon-to-arrive WPA Joint Committee on Folk Art, Hurston was instructed to obtain life histories of turpentine workers for the newly inaugurated life history program (*Go*

Gator 128). The essay "Turpentine" thus describes "riding the woods" with John McFarlin, an employee of the Aycock and Lindsay Company that had a reputation for highly dangerous and exploitative working conditions. Here Hurston narrates the visit from her point of view, so she could "see for myself instead of asking him so many questions" (*Go Gator* 129).

Though there is some pretense to collecting folk songs, Hurston reports on Foreman McFarlin's usual workday by describing the look and feel of the woods and by glossing the turpentiners' job-specific jargon and their routine tasks. The essay stresses the difficulty of chipping, pulling, and dipping the trees, and Hurston is careful to make note of how much the workers are paid for this labor: "The foreman gets $12.50 a week, the foreman's house, all the firewood he wants, and all the gardening space he wants" (*Go Gator* 130).[98] McFarlin's low pay is supposedly supplemented by a housing, firewood, and gardening-space allowance, but the passage's subtly ironic undertone—particularly in the repetition of "all he wants"—suggests a critique of the camp's exploitative practices. The report itself brings the topic of debased labor into the modern present, implicitly asking readers to recognize the perils of Florida's agricultural economy and the turpentine industry's system of debt peonage.[99]

Several of Hurston's less controversial contributions to the Florida FWP transcribe folk tales, tunes, characters, and games into written form and generally lack the commentary, both explicit and implied, of her reports on labor and race relations. However, the project also chose not to publish her draft of the folklore and music chapter, "Go Gator and Muddy the Water," a collection and creative analysis of African American folklore. Unlike most FWP reports, the essay offers insight into the origins of folklore across both racial and geographical boundaries and theorizes the relationship between aesthetic forms. With characteristic lyricism and wit, Hurston begins, "Folklore is the boiled-down juice of human living" (*Go Gator* 69). The folk

form is drained of excess, specifically "formal education" and "mechanical inventions," and preserves the essential "flavor" of a place and its people. She continues, "In folklore, as in everything else that people create, the world is a great big old serving platter, and all the local places are like eating plates. Whatever is on the plate comes out of the platter, but each plate has a flavor of its own because the people take the universal stuff and season it to suit themselves on the plate" (*Go Gator* 69). This culinary metaphor seems to serve two purposes: one, to familiarize folklore as a source of cultural production close to home, and two, to conceptualize the difference between local and "universal" identities. The local is not derived from the universal nor is it a part simply extracted from the whole. Rather, it is autonomous by virtue of its collective authorship, the particular "seasoning" of the plate, which results not only from a diverse group of people, but also the artifact's autotelic status as always "still in the making" (*Go Gator* 69). Such reasoning delineates boundaries between Florida folklore—here, as a kind of culture and cultural identity—and the rest of the world, suggesting an organic form contained within itself.

In the same passage, Hurston abruptly switches register from the folk to the social sciences in order to rationalize the origins of folklore. She argues that "Daddy Mention," "another incarnation of Big John De Conquer, that hero of slavery days who could outsmart Ole Massa, God and the Devil" is "the wish-fulfillment projection" of the prison camps, someone who "compensated for the helplessness of the slave in the hands of the masters" (*Go Gator* 69). These psychoanalytic concepts—"wish-fulfillment," "projection," and "compensation"—however apt they may be, effectively depersonalize the folk form as an abstraction to be diagnosed rather than a natural human expression, something "cooked-up" rather than "boiled-down." Yet it's the idea of naturalness or ordinariness that Hurston turns to yet again. Assuming

a more anthropological voice, she suggests, "Thinking of the beginnings of things in a general way, it could be said that folklore is the first thing that man makes out of the natural laws that he finds around him … After all, culture and discovery are forced marches on the near and obvious" and identifies folklore as "art of the people before they find out that there is any such thing as art" (*Go Gator* 70). Contradictory and culturally distant though they may seem, both explanations represent folklore as a process of sense making which coheres in the primitive art object.

In the sections that follow, Hurston continues in an analytic mode as she sketches the structural genealogy of the folk form, from percussive sound to lyric song to narrative ballad, and finally to prose tale. Her formalist analysis, especially of prosody in the folk-song section, transcribes traditionally oral expressions into fixed and recognizable literary forms: three-line stanzas, rhymed couplets, ballads, etc. This process of translation, however, tends to subordinate the folk form's cultural significance to the issue of legibility. She tells us, for example, that "Uncle Bud" is "that best-loved of Negro working songs" and notable for its "swinging refrain," but says nothing of its rhythms or sounds, who sang it, or how the song articulates the black man's troubled relationship with the land upon which he labors. And while the songs show the irregular syntax and grammar of a black vernacular, they are not written in dialect. Here, form displaces voice, and the aesthetic appears simply as a function of composition rather than a unique cultural history.

The development of folklore from these "more primitive forms" is then described as a process of accumulation. The ballad takes sound and rhythm and adds "characterization and action," importantly, in Hurston's estimation, shifting a listener's focus from music to language; in a ballad, the "music has become the servant of the words" and "the words make the tune" (*Go*

Gator 74). Coupled with her idea that songs pave "the road to prose" and repeated use of organic growth metaphors, this attention to the function of language suggests that prose is the most "civilized" folk form. As a vehicle for storytelling, prose combines "sound and sense," thus representing the complete process of sense making she identifies earlier. Somewhat ironically, the folk tale then becomes the narrative space in which the civilized form meets up with vernacular (meaning nonstandard) speech acts. The longer tales, "Big John De Conquer" and "Daddy Mention," are the only pieces in the essay written in dialect, "Daddy Mention and the Mule" almost exclusively so; it bears mentioning here that "Daddy Mention" was originally reported on by FWP field writer Martin Richardson, not Hurston. With an unfamiliar audience in mind, Hurston translates particular words in "Big John"—"liked" is bracketed next to "lakted"—but, unlike the songs, the tales' cultural content is not separated out from the aesthetic form. Rather, black folklore reaches its fullest expression through dialect prose, a merging of cultural languages and narrative discourses into a distinct linguistic aesthetic.

The Florida Negro folklore chapter doesn't come close to this level of analysis or sophisticated treatment of form. Most of it, in fact, lists "old superstitions" to which "a surprisingly large number of Negroes still cling," including cures for common ailments like poor eyesight or hiccoughs, as well as superstitions about bolita (a type of lottery game played with balls), ghostly superstitions, and child-birth superstitions (*FL Negro* 71). There is clearly a racist bent towards simultaneously exoticizing and caricaturing black folk life as a display of racial otherness. The second half of the chapter includes Martin Richardson's versions of the two Daddy Mention tales and his prefatory remarks that Hurston reproduced in "Go Gator." On one hand, this shows how Hurston appropriated FWP material for her own use. At the same time, it illustrates how the text's anonymous authorship made the issue of borrowing or plagiarism more

or less irrelevant. More importantly, however, the omission of Hurston's drafted chapter points to a lack of interest in black folklore's form and meaning beyond the spectacle of difference.

One of the most important documents in uncovering the relationship between Hurston's folklore collecting and FWP project management is her "Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas," a detailed outline of recording possibilities across the state. On May 23, 1939, Director of the Florida FWP Dr. Carita Doggett Corse included Hurston's report in a letter to the Joint Committee on Folk Art in Washington, DC, a division supervised by Benjamin A. Botkin, the FWP's first full-time folklore director. In the "Proposed Recording," Hurston divides Florida into four distinct areas: the agrarian cotton-corn-tobacco region of the west where "the new is hurling itself, not so effectually, against the old and feudal life" (*Go Gator* 63); the maritime and shipping region of the east; the industrial and vegetable-growing lands of central Florida; and the "foreign culture area" of the south that "really should be designated as a collection of areas" (*Go Gator* 66). In each description, Hurston explains the value of documenting the region's people and customs. In "Area I," for example, she argues that

> the material is plentiful. There are men and women still alive who know and can tell of the struggles of four different groups of people [the Spanish, French, English, and Native American] to control this area. There are the Creole songs and customs of Pensacola and surrounding area. There are the African American Negro folk tales in abundance and the religious and secular songs in plenty. This is a sort of culture pocket that is not being drained off so rapidly as other sections of the State. (*Go Gator* 63)

Here and in the other descriptions Hurston cites the availability of native informants and emphasizes the abundance of cultural material to be collected. In eastern Florida, for example, there are people like old "Pap" Drummond of Fernandina, a man who tells tales of pirates and

buried treasure and lives in shack with his "family" of rattlesnakes; more importantly for the FWP, he's a source of authentic, "untouched" information. Throughout the proposal, Hurston also identifies the origins of the area's folkloric elements and prefaces each section with a folk song indigenous to that region. The description of Area II includes a tune about an illiterate "Cap'n" sung by Willie Joe Roberts of Jacksonville, Florida, and Hurston explains that "occupation, the matrix of culture creation among peoples" has produced "the lusty material of the sea folk" (*Go Gator* 64), thereby conveying her belief in the connection between land and the sea, its resources, and the people who live and work there as the dominant shaper of culture.

Hurston thus makes her pitch by personalizing the folk and by producing a folkloric narrative for Florida's unique social, economic, and cultural histories. Her report contains previously collected material that gives voice to various locales, yet the inclusion of specific names and their residences seem designed to remind readers that these are in fact living traditions rooted not just in the land, but in the citizens who call it home. This move is also suggestive of Hurston's interest in presenting informants as active narrators rather than passive repositories of information, though of course this cannot be fully realized in the perfunctory narrative space of the proposal.

In the document's summary section, Hurston makes a final appeal for the recording project and proclaims that "There is not a state in the Union with as much to record in a musical, folklore, social-ethnic way as Florida has … Nowhere else is there such a variety of materials. Florida is still a frontier with its varying elements still unassimilated. There is still an opportunity to observe the wombs of folk culture still heavy with life … Florida, the inner melting pot of the great melting pot America" (*Go Gator* 66–67). Here Hurston sounds less like herself than someone trying to please her audience. The hyperbole and heavy-handed metaphorical

language—Florida is a frontier, Florida is a womb, Florida is a melting pot—are designed to appeal to the government's interests: to chart uncharted territory, make it exciting, and put cultural diversity on display within the safe, homogenizing homespace of America. Even more directly in "Area III," Hurston states, "It would be profitable in this region to make a series of recordings on John, Jack, Big John de Conquer(or)" (*Go Gator* 65). "Proposed Recording Expedition into the Floridas" thus epitomizes Hurston's role as an employee of the state and reveals her negotiation of the transactions between folk culture, bureaucratic management, and a national audience.

Hurston's proposal was successful insofar as she obtained a government-issue recording device and began taking it along on collecting trips, but less so because very little of the material she suggested was ever recorded. Hurston had travelled with recording equipment before, but had generally been inclined to gather and record data from memory. In a letter to her supervisor Carita Doggett Corse, Hurston explains that "the difficulty in collecting them [folk songs] is that it is hard to set them down correctly at one sitting, and the informant usually grows self-conscious if asked to sing them over and over again so that they may be set down so that one does not secure the same thing as when they are sung naturally. The answer is a recording machine" (*Life in Letters* 415). Hurston wanted to collect folklore as close to the source as possible, not an affected or alienated performance of it, and to record spontaneous improvisation if it occurred. Recording equipment is also able to capture a speaker's voice, including its intonation, pitch, accent, and the sonorities of rhythm and rhyme that aurally distinguish his or her storytelling and regional identity.

Given the FWP's interest in documenting "real American folks" through democratic mimesis, this kind of technology presents itself as the best way to guard against errors in

transmission or translation. The recording machine, however, undoubtedly changed Hurston's relationship to the objects under her study. As many scholars and biographers of Hurston have noted, her early collecting techniques were rather unorthodox for the time. Rather than observe at a distance and make objective note of her findings, Hurston came into close contact and communicated directly with people, usually participating in whatever activity she was observing, and, as previously discussed, she usually wrote herself into the report. Hemenway explains that when fellow folklorist Alan Lomax asked her, in 1935, how she gathered folk songs, Hurston responded:

> I just get in the crowd with the people and if they sing it I listen as best I can and then I start to joinin' in with a phrase or two and then finally I get so I can sing a verse. And then I keep on until I learn all the verses and then I sing 'em back to the people until they tell me that I can sing 'em just like them. And then I take part and I try it out on different people who already know the song until they are quite satisfied that I know it. Then I carry it in my memory. (168)

In other words, her technique was to become one of the folk, to erase the boundaries between observer and subject and engage in a process of dialogue and exchange and to transcribe oral culture by documenting her own aural memory and performance of the songs. Inserting a recording device into the space of a face-to-face encounter, however, would eliminate the need for Hurston to act as intermediary and would likely remind the informant of Hurston's status as outsider, perhaps contributing to feelings of unease. Furthermore, while the recordings confer authority to Hurston's fieldwork by ensuring discipline and objectivity, for the lack of which she was constantly under fire, the machine forecloses upon any creative retelling, interpretation, or "versioning" that came to be characteristic of Hurston's folk aesthetic.

Most of the sound recordings now on file come from a June 1939 session in Jacksonville in which folklorist Herbert Halpert, as well as FWP director Dr. Corse, interviewed Hurston and recorded her performance of a number of folk songs.[100] These recordings are particularly interesting because Hurston assumes the role of informant and speaks confidently about such things as children's songs and railroad track lining, in this instance describing both the physical movements and rhythmic call-and-response songs of the workers; listening to it, you get the sense that she is miming the workers' actions as she speaks. Before performing the songs, Hurston identifies where she collected the material, though details are often scant. In the introduction to song "Halimufack," for example, she explains "I heard 'Halimufack' down on the east coast" but when pressed to identify the source she says, "I don't remember, I was in a big crowd and I learned it in the evenin' during and I just can't exactly remember who did teach it to me, but I learned it from the crowd mostly." She then gives a hearty performance of the song and sometimes claps to keep rhythm. In some reports, like the song "Wake Up, Jacob" about work camps, she also changes the pitch and tone of her voice to perform multiple speakers in dialogue.

In these recordings, ethnographic research and its registers of meaning and representation cohere within Hurston's performance of folk material. Like her written reports, they interpret folklore for listeners, and Hurston presents herself as a vehicle for transmission, more or less overriding the ostensible purpose of using the machine in the first place. During other collecting trips, Hurston often used a camera to film her subjects.[101] Yet Elaine S. Charnov argues that, like the sound recordings, Hurston's anthropological filmmaking does not simply record observed activities, but experiments with the camera to interpret material for viewers and to "captur[e] the dynamics of ritualized performativity on the level of daily, commonplace performance" (41). In both media, Hurston thus stylizes the folk by participating in its production and in doing so,

enacts her belief in folklore as a process and shared collective experience rather than a static object simply waiting to be recorded. These technologies, moreover, raised new possibilities for the dissemination of African American folklife, and Hurston, much like Gumby, appears sensitive to the ways in which mass media can be used to represent the various verbal, visual, and aural elements of folklore often lost in translation of oral culture to written text.

At the same time, technologically enhanced recording, as an empirical documentary method, raises important questions about intellectual property, cultural ownership, and control, particularly considering that the device belonged to the government. As long as Hurston gathered and stored material in her memory, it belonged to her and was available for reuse whenever and wherever she deemed fit. This is not to say that she couldn't use the machine and remember the materials at the same time, but recordings collected for the FWP belonged then and now to the government, an external entity that controls the accessibility and availability of all WPA research. This stewardship of the recordings, however, has also ensured their preservation as well as the continued dissemination of African American culture and Florida folklore. Due to the digitization of sound recordings, photographs, life histories, interview manuscripts, and other materials, many of which were never published elsewhere, you can now access WPA files online without having to visit the Library of Congress or the state's own historical society. In this way, Hurston's work has reached a far wider audience than she probably could have ever imagined, and the Florida site makes visible the ways in which a collection imposes unity upon a group of disparate materials that may have individual value but gain significance when viewed in context of the collective.

Heaps of Fantastic Things[102]

When Gumby was sick in the hospital, his friends threw a benefit ball to raise money for his medical expenses. On the event poster, Hurston's name is listed next to the event's other main patrons, though the absence of her signature from the guest registry suggests she did not actually attend the party.

Alexander Gumby Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University

Gumby's scrapbooks don't contain much else to indicate that he and Hurston were more than acquaintances. Hurston had, and still has, a reputation as a rebel, an outsider who left Harlem for Florida and who refused to play politics with her contemporaries. Yet her sponsorship of his recovery reveals a relationship between them as members of a shared community as well as the lines of support that sustained the Harlem Renaissance. Moreover, Hurston's work, like that of Gumby, is deeply tied to ideas of a collective and organizes its sense of unity around the cultural

distinctiveness of black culture. Both engage in collecting as both a narrative strategy and aesthetic focus, and their collections—of printed ephemera, folk tales, and other cultural scraps—negotiate ideas of black identity and community. Though their media and methods differed, both Hurston and Gumby produced material repositories of culture in which Americans could encounter a shared history and their contemporary moment, and their work reveals how black culture is a complex and integral part of America's national history.

My true environment is a dustbin.

– Mina Loy

Chapter Three: Waste, Wastrels, and the Politics of Seeing Poverty—Mina Loy's Bowery Poems and Trash *Constructions*

For most of her artistic and literary career, British-born poet and artist Mina Loy moved between Paris, Florence, London, and Berlin, participating in multiple avant-garde movements including futurism, Dada, and surrealism amongst the likes of F.T. Marinetti, Ezra Pound, and Arthur Cravan.[103] In 1936, however, she left Europe under the threat of Nazism and immigrated to New York City, where she lived until 1954. She became an American citizen in 1946, and shortly thereafter moved into a boarding house on the Bowery, an impoverished neighborhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. With little income and no direct familial support, Loy struggled to earn money by selling her inventions and art pieces. She began creating found-object collages made of trash collected on the streets and writing free-verse poems about the lives of the outcast Bowery residents. The poems have since been collected under the title "Compensations of Poverty" and were first published as a series in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996).[104] Marcel Duchamp, with the help of art dealer David Mann, eventually collected the assemblages into an exhibit entitled *Constructions* and presented them at the Bodley Gallery in New York City in April 1959. Realizing the fragility of her materials, Loy also asked friend and fellow artist Berenice Abbott to photograph them.

As an archetypal skid row, the Bowery has been much photographed and artistically represented in works Martha Rosler identifies as veering between "outraged moral sensitivity and sheer slumming spectacle" (303). Reginald Marsh's Depression-era etchings, paintings, and photographs, for example, depict disheveled bodies and scenes of disorder among crowds of poor people because, as he claimed, "well-bred people are no fun to paint" (qtd. in Cohen 14).

On the other hand, Office of War Information (OWI) documentarian Marjory Collins's photographs of Bowery streets and Bowery men (1942–43) show despair and the loss of dignity as the inevitable result of economic disenfranchisement. These works, among many others, raise important questions about the ethics and politics of seeing poverty, and in the case of the Bowery, seeing poor, homeless people who the public believed were responsible for their own degradation. The aestheticization of the down-and-out risks exploiting and to some degree reproduces the state of difference between the artistic subject and viewer; as Rosler suggests, "One can handle imagery by leaving it behind," thus reaffirming that "it is them, not us" (306). At the same time, however, these scenes of discomfort make poverty and powerlessness visible, thereby making enforced social marginality concrete and insisting on the presence of underprivileged populations as part of an ordered American reality.

In this chapter, I examine Mina Loy's scrap representations of urban modernity and the Bowery (1942–59) and argue that her work critiques the ways in which nonworking and nonearning subjects, such as the poor and homeless, are discarded as waste. The poems, in particular, identify how the commercial spectacle alienates inutility from the social order and makes it difficult to distinguish between truth and appearance, the promise of industrial progress and its reality. Like contemporary documentary and activist art, the poems depict the suffering of the dispossessed. I argue, however, that Loy's modernist poetics—which includes surreal sequences, syntactical fragmentation, minimal punctuation, and the repurposing of arcane words, images, and allusions—defamiliarizes habitual ways of seeing dereliction; the Bowery men are not to be ignored nor reformed, but instead made visible within an index of disappearance. The poems thus illustrate the effects of mass culture on modern subjectivity, including the rise of commodity identities and the systematic disempowerment of the nonconforming other.

Loy's material assemblages, on the other hand, reclaim waste, in the literal form of trash collected on the streets and more figuratively in the image of the Bowery bum. Not unlike her neighbors, Loy perceived value in the things other people threw away and wasted nothing. Her scavenging was in large part motivated by her own poverty, yet it also demonstrates a desire to document an urban landscape through its detritus.[105] Specifically, representations of the bums are assembled out of an odd assortment of material fragments that retain recognizable traces of their former identity within the new composition. By staging the recuperation of waste in this way, I argue that Loy's scrap aesthetics call attention to the bums' social status as waste and materialize the ways in which individuals and objects are discarded and rendered useless. The assemblages are thus a particularly interesting and provocative point of intersection between the economic conditions of production, Loy's experimental aesthetics, and material culture. As a result, I suggest that they offer a conceptual framework for interpreting her literary techniques and read the poems through the idea of waste management and assemblage as political statement.

These aesthetics and politics are particular to the Bowery, as a singular urban space whose history and economic culture inform Loy's vision of modernity and her understanding of the tensions between social belonging and poverty. Not unlike William Carlos Williams's Paterson or Langston Hughes's Harlem, the Bowery for Loy is more than simple background or inspiration. Rather, it provides the subject and shapes the form of her poetics. It is therefore necessary to examine the poems and assemblages within a particular historical context, including social attitudes towards the nonworking poor and persistent dereliction, the complicated boundaries between individual dwellings and the conceptual homespace of city, and contemporary discourses of economic citizenship. I also identify how changes in Bowery demographics register the effects of national crisis and recovery as well as the area's seeming

resistance to lasting reform. Doing so reveals the social conflicts embedded within Loy's work as well as her desire to deny the Bowery a single, pejorative narrative.

This chapter thus contributes to the growing body of criticism on Loy's poetry and visual art in a number of important ways: it considers the Bowery poems and assemblages not as a coda to her earlier avant-garde work or, as Mary Jane Leach-Rudawski suggests, a fall from artistic grace, but rather, as a historically specific and socially significant modernism that ascribes explicit political agency to an experimental scrap aesthetics. Furthermore, while many critics acknowledge that Loy was making trash assemblages during this time, none identify the aesthetic and conceptual relationship between the assemblages and poems, particularly as they stage alternative ways of seeing poverty and imaginatively refigure waste. This chapter therefore recuperates the assemblages from the periphery and uses them to identify and situate Loy's artistic enactment of the processes of scrapping. Such a multimedia approach not only reflects Loy's own aesthetic understanding of the material conditions of poverty, but also identifies the inherent materiality and historicity of representation as well as the ways in which the economic politics of the Bowery are made visible.

On the Bowery

The New York Bowery has a long history as an image of decline. Once a thriving entertainment district for the working classes in the mid-nineteenth century, the Bowery eventually became home to Manhattan's poorer populations as immigrant families moved in, prominent businesses relocated uptown, and local theatres made the switch from vaudeville to cabaret. By the early 1900s, the Bowery had become a well-established slum, a socially segregated space defined primarily by homelessness and joblessness. Cultural historian Luc

Sante estimates that in 1909, over twenty-five thousand people were on the Bowery, residing in hotels, lodging houses, flophouses, and missions and sleeping on chairs, in barrels, on saloon floors, in doorways, in stairwells, and on fire escapes (316). This number dropped during the approach of World War I, due mostly to the 1917 "Work or Fight" order that conscripted anyone not demonstrably employed into the armed forces, but rose again during the Great Depression, when high numbers of the unemployed turned to skid-row areas as a last resort to starvation and isolation.

During the worst years of the Depression, nearly 25 percent of the nation's population was out of work and in financial peril. Yet despite the ubiquity of hardship, many of the nonworking poor, like those residing on the Bowery, were still subject to the scrutinizing, regulatory gaze of the work-based ethics of American life. Writing in 1931, Alvin F. Harlow, for example, eulogizes the passing of the old Bowery and laments its current state:

> Whatever the spell was—that subtle essence, gay, raffish, and imprudent, but with its spice of romance and mystery, adventure, and vagabondry, it is gone, and the Bowery to-day is a sober, humdrum business street, pestered only—much to the annoyance of its business men—by the crowd of wastrels and unfortunates who haunt the missions and labor agencies, some seeking work and a chance, many seeking only free board and lodging on the easiest possible terms. (529)

Invoking the rhetoric of discriminatory welfare practices, Harlow distinguishes between the "deserving" poor, those "seeking work and a chance," and the "undeserving" poor, those seeking assistance on the "easiest possible terms" and thus lacking the freely obtained initiative to work hard and prosper. Despite this conciliatory gesture towards jobseekers, both groups of nonworkers are an annoyance to Harlow because they represent failure. By the sheer mass of

bodies taking up space on the street, their presence interferes with daily commerce, but more importantly, makes poverty visible.

The undeserving poor, in particular unskilled, unemployed, unattached, and usually alcoholic white men, came to be known as "Bowery bums." Carl Cohen and Jay Sokolovsky explain that around the time of the Great Depression, skid-row populations of migratory workers, mostly "hoboes" and "tramps" identifiable by their labor-based mobility, were replaced by a "homeguard" of the homeless (53). This settling resulted from the rising mechanization of labor, the widespread lack of jobs, and a surplus of available workers and eventually led to increased states of dependency and apathy. What may have been most disquieting to Harlow, then, is not that men were out of work and in need of help, but that many appeared to be a permanent feature of the city: they weren't going anywhere. Cohen and Sokolovsky also point out that this changing demographic corresponded with growing social attitudes that the homeless were "defective personality types," namely drunks, misfits, criminals, the feebleminded, and the undersocialized (55). This pejorative stereotyping meant that bums weren't simply unemployed but also unemployable. As a result, the Bowery bum came to symbolize waste and outright social uselessness.

In his sociological study of the Bowery's subculture, Benedict Giamo ascribes power to this vexed form of visibility and suggests that "the very appearance of a Bowery man offers a critique regarding the prevailing pattern of social order (with its host of structural forms and relations), which aims toward efficiency, productivity, bureaucratization, and incorporation" (181). The bum is alienated from the exchange process, neither working, earning, buying, nor reproducing the daily social life of the dominant classes. His existence, then, points to fissures in a system that doesn't allow room for deviation, resistance, or failure. As a result, he is

paradoxically invisible to most citizens as the anonymous face of poverty, as one more body in the bread line, and highly visible as a threat to the authority of administrative structures and the ideological organization of economic life. The erasure of individual identities of the homeless, nonworking poor largely results from the fear they instill in those who are better off.

The Bowery man's nonconformity also makes visible the complicated boundaries between private and public spaces. Cohen and Sokolovsky argue that early-twentieth-century skid-row men were "labeled deviant not only for their alcoholism, their disheveled appearance and lack of employment, but also for the spilling of their private lives into public spaces" and conclude that "if the American ideal was a large private home to protect the family from public scrutiny, then the lowest form of degradation was to be a 'bum on the streets'" (15). By eating, sleeping, and drinking on the streets, Bowery men create a domestic space within full view of the public, and as Leonard Feldman explains, punitive policies towards homelessness largely result from the "ideology of public space as 'owned' by a normatively enshrined 'we' of home-dwelling citizens" (3). In other words, homeowners assert a claim to public spaces as public spaces rather than the public/private dwelling space of the homeless, and do so to simultaneously constitute the public identity of the citizen and secure it from the threatening presence of a disorderly, homeless other. "Bumhood," as a scene of dispossession and form of disenfranchisement, thus carries within it a repressed discourse on the socially legitimizing power of work and home ownership as conditions of American citizenship.

The national narrative of crisis and deprivation underwent significant shifts in the early 1940s, when preparations for entry into the Second World War jumpstarted the economy and pulled the country out of the Depression. According to Kenneth Kusmer, in one two-month period in 1943, one hundred Bowery residents joined the armed forces, while another two

hundred acquired jobs in hospitals, restaurants, or on the railroads (224). Unemployment rates across the country dropped to 4.7 percent in 1942, a nearly 20 percent decrease from ten years earlier. There were, however, many men who remained on the Bowery, men whose homelessness and poverty were not circumstantial to the Depression. Furthermore, the Bowery persisted as a skid row, despite improvements in the conditions of labor driven by the New Deal and the stabilization of market forces. This period of American history marked the aftermath of crisis. Residual homelessness and joblessness, then, appeared as the failure of failure, or, the unsavory and obsolete refuse of a passing age.

Many artists during this time, especially those commissioned by the government under the Office of War Information initiative, envisioned an America happy and hard at work, a nation economically healthy and ready to protect its citizens' freedoms from foreign threat. In 1941, Loy herself wrote a poem entitled, "America * A Miracle," which salutes the United States as a "stroke of genius" and a "homeland of hope in flower."[106] At the same time, however, her sustained attention to the Bowery sees beyond the patriotic spirit of the war effort and focuses on present lived experience, particularly as it is made materially recognizable. Trash is the discarded remnants of the present, but once picked up, stashed, and reassembled, it establishes a newly processed and rearticulated presence fully imbued with its past. Loy's scrapped renderings of the Bowery thus bring what seems like the past back into the present, inventing a new context for old circumstances, and do so, I argue, to show the persistence of dereliction and suffering despite a changing national landscape. These aesthetic significations, what Loy called her "experiments in junk" (qtd. in Conover lxxviii), thus identify her as a ragpicker and as a collector of marginal histories. They also give three-dimensional form and context to the bums' degradation and to the crisis of social invisibility.

Scrapping Subjectivity

Loy's scrap assemblages are literally made out of garbage, discarded everyday objects like paper cups, bottles, metal wires, and used rags collected on the street and out of trashcans. As a name for these found-art objects, Loy suggested "'Refusees'—a punning blend of *refuse*, *Refusés*, and *refugees*" (Burke 420), words that signify exile, rejection, and waste and suggest their uneasy proximity.[107] Though Loy ultimately went with the more neutral and less descriptive title "Constructions," her proposal suggestively identifies the constitutive relationship between aesthetic form, material culture, and narratives of refusal as well as what Christine Smedley calls the collapse of the verbal and visual plane (229). On a poster he designed for the show, Marcel Duchamp also renamed the constructions, calling them "Haut-Reliefs et Bas-Fonds," which translates roughly as "High Reliefs and Lower Depths." This title describes Loy's style of sculpture, "high relief" being a technique in which materials are raised from the background plane, and uses the contrast between high and low to evoke the multidimensionality of the assemblages. At the same time, it ironically plays on the supposed incongruity of "high" art and the "low" outcast lives of the Bowery bums, "les bas fonds" colloquially meaning "the low life" or "underworld." While neither was formally used for publicity purposes, both "Refusees" and "Haut-Reliefs et Bas-Fonds" thus stage the constructions as an encounter with the so-called gutter as well as the social perspectives that consign derelict subjectivities to the junk heap.

The exhibition was held at the Bodley Gallery on East 60th Street from April 14–25, 1959, and received notices in both the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*. Loy did not attend the opening, although many of her old friends did, including Joseph Cornell, Djuna Barnes, Robert Coates, and William Copley. Julian Levy, Loy's former son-in-law and colleague in Paris, introduced the exhibition:

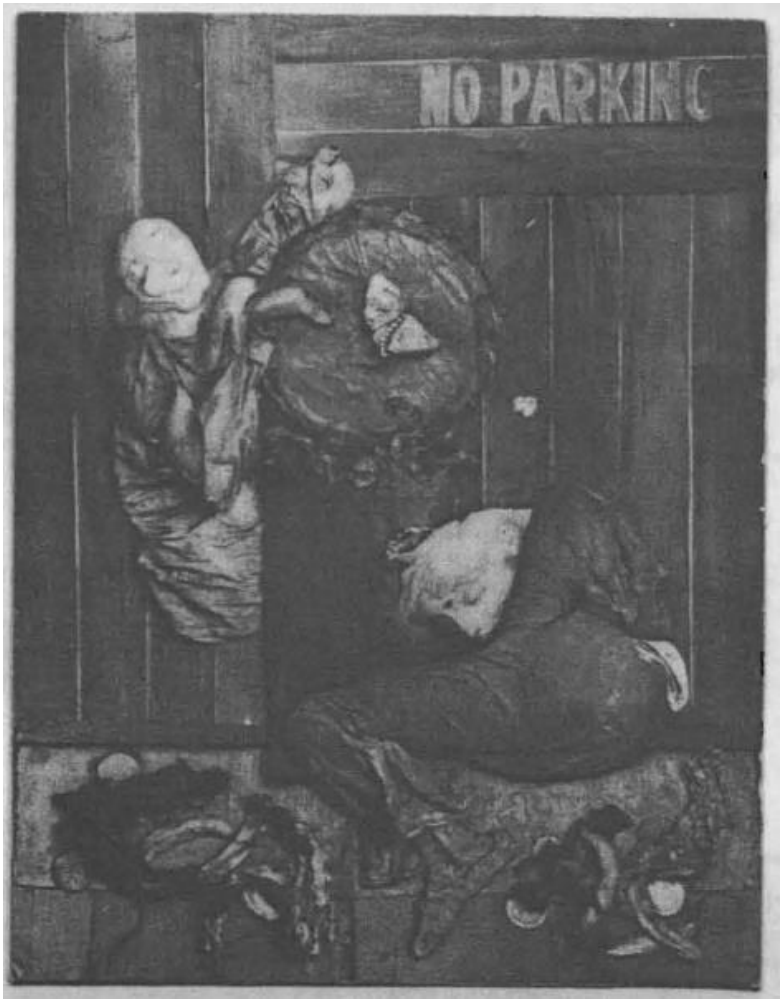
> MINA LOY, AN ENGLISH POETESS OF A VANISHING GENERATION, LIVED FOR SEVERAL YEARS IN LOWER MANHATTAN NEAR THE BOWERY; WHERE SHE SAW THE FRUSTRATED EXCESS OF LOVE WHICH THE DERELICT HAS DRUNK, DREAMED AND DIED.
>
> CONTRARY PICTURES, THESE CONSTRUCTIONS ARE LYRIC IN THEIR DRABNESS, WHOLE IN THEIR FRAGMENTATION. WITH UNABASHED VICTORIAN SUGAR MINA LOY HAS CONFECTED, NOT THE POOR AND HUMBLE, BUT THE BEATIFIC AND INTOXICATED, BUMS; THOSE WHO ARE, TOGETHER WITH POETS, "LEPERS OF THE MOON, ALL MAGICALLY DISEASED", THE ARISTOCRATS OF THE DISPOSSESSED – NOW GLORIFIED.
>
> THIS INCREMENT OF "PULVEROUS PASTURES OF POVERTY" … WHAT JEWELS TO HAVE BEEN DISCOVERED IN THE ALMOST EXTINCT ASHCANS OF THE BOWERY.[108]

In this grandiose and somewhat saccharine description of Loy's achievement, Levy twice quotes from "Apology of Genius," a poem Loy wrote over thirty years before and one in which she represents the poet as an revolutionary outcast, imaginatively associating poverty, dispossession, and social alienation with ideas of anarchistic freedom. Following Loy's own rhetorical lead, then, Levy figures their relationship as one of "glorified" togetherness. Perhaps ironically, perhaps not, Levy thus sweetens dereliction: the bum has drunk too much of "love," not alcohol, and Loy has "confected" the bums' reality, literally meaning "assembled" but suggestive of the more ornamental "confection" and "confectionary," thus transforming poverty into a thing of beauty both lovely and digestible.

In the last sentence—"what jewels to have been discovered in the almost extinct ashcans of the Bowery"—Levy seems to allude to the Ashcan School, a realist art movement that sought to depict New York's poorer populations. Far from sugaring the material reality of poverty, Ashcan works by artists such as Jacob Riis and Edward Hopper attempt to collapse the aesthetic distance between art and everyday life. Similarly, rather than romanticize exclusion, I argue that Loy's assemblages consciously problematize the easy association of artistic rebellion and destitution by identifying many of the discriminatory apparatuses that generate the bums' social disenfranchisement and by fully materializing the formerly "pulverous pastures of poverty"

within scenes of embodiment. Furthermore, although the assemblages cannot be categorized as realist, as they tend to distort and oftentimes disfigure the forms of the bums, they directly engage with social issues by depicting the constraints of capitalist values, the illusion of social freedom, and the inherent ugliness of poverty.

One of the pieces in the collection recreates a scene Loy often encountered outside her apartment. *No Parking* depicts two Bowery men sleeping on the street, curled into fetal positions around a garbage can and surrounded by a heap of its spilled contents.



No Parking, ca. 1950

The facial features of the figure on the left are faintly outlined on a single piece of molded, fabric-like material while the face of the figure in the lower right is enlarged and distorted, accenting an element of the grotesque. There is little color differentiation between the various materials, as if to suggest that the bums have become indistinguishable from the ground upon which they rest. Carolyn Burke argues that, "the careful observer \\ could not help feeling assaulted by the contrast between the delicate modeling of the derelicts' features and the squalor of the materials used to depict them" (420). This sense of planned incongruity also occurs at the level of spatial organization. The figures are prostrate, but the structure is positioned vertically, making it so that the scene one would have encountered while looking down is now at eye level. This reorientation requires the observer to consume the image of poverty head-on, and any feelings of "assault" it produces appear designed to evoke the uncomfortable sense of recognition.

The words "No Parking," which are painted on the structure above and to the right of the garbage can, also draw attention to the bums' relationship to the law.[109] The words clearly refer to municipal signs that are addressed to vehicular traffic and thus to the moneyed classes who own and operate cars. Of course by lacking such property, the men are in violation of the warning by "parking"—in this case sleeping—on the street. The painted sign, while a seemingly simple addition to the more laborious construction of the two sleepers, thus explicitly politicizes the act of representation by ironizing the ways in which regulatory policies and restrictions apply to the bums even though they don't participate in the social and economic system those regulations govern. Moreover, the construction illustrates how the homeless can exert no legitimate (as recognized by the law) claim on public spaces and how their mere presence on the

street, which in this case is both silent and unaware, challenges the authority of administrative social structures by making visible their conditional effectiveness.

Another construction titled *Communal Cot* also addresses the issue of homelessness and public sleeping.[110] Nine adults and what appears to be a child are curled up alongside one another, their bodies turning inward but faces looking outward and upward. The figures are sculpted out of intricately twisted, painted rags and affixed to a papier maché surface that reproduces the appearance of concrete city streets.

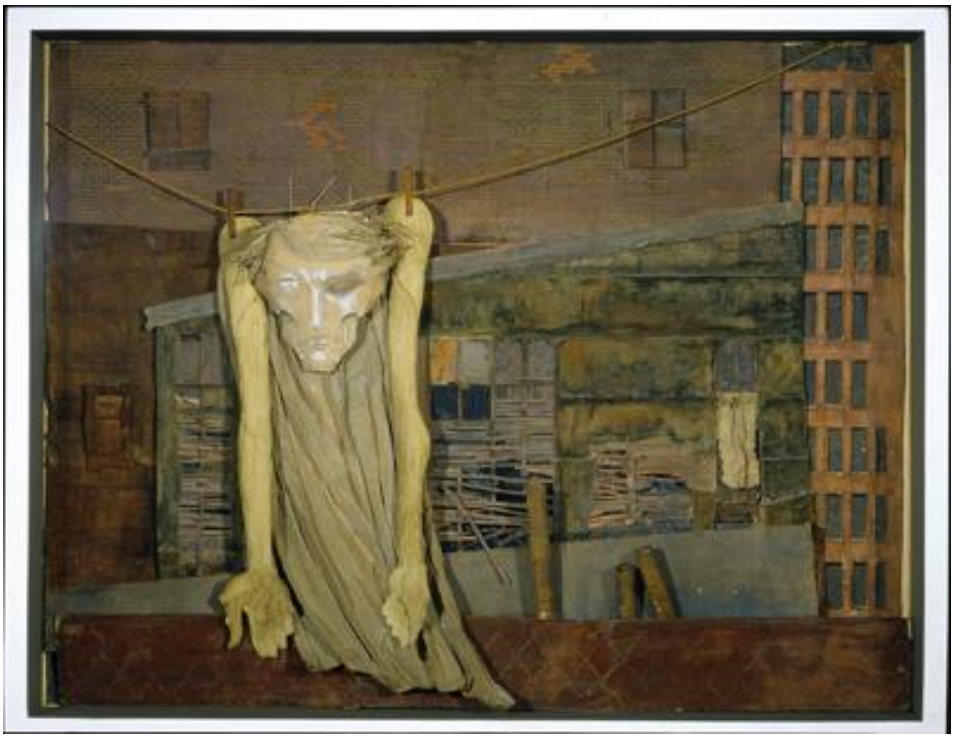
Communal Cot, ca. 1950

While clearly evoking a sense of vulnerability and quiet degradation, this piece also shows how the street-dwelling homeless complicate and thus destabilize the boundaries between communal and domestic spaces. Like the bums in *No Parking*, the figures on the concrete cots must sleep publicly and their homes are, in effect, the streets upon which they dwell. But this image also

suggests something of an interior space: there is no garbage can or trash as in *No Parking*, and the arrangement of the sleepers and the scored surface make it look like they could be sleeping on closely gathered cots, like those you might find in a shelter or mission for urban indigents. Accordingly, the title of the construction ironically joins a signifier of the public, "communal," directly to a form of the private domestic, "cot," and in doing so, identifies a particular public-private space that reincorporates the sleepers into a larger community and a kind of pedestrian ecology despite their demonstrable lack of privacy, property, and social wealth. The image thus depicts the paradoxical simultaneity of exclusion and inclusion.

Like that of the bums depicted in *No Parking*, the undisturbed repose of the *Communal Cot* sleepers is beatific, an image of unobtrusive, silent suffering. In her review of the show in *Arts* magazine (April 1959), Anita Ventura comments that the curled figures, "with arms clasped between their legs as though fettered … plead to be released from the squared gray court." The pleading of the figure second from the left on the lower half, however, looks more like praying, as his upward-turning palms join together in a conventional prayer position. This gesture raises questions about the ways in which Loy envisions the relationship between poverty, hardship, and religion as well as how many of the assemblages appear designed to bear sympathetic witness to the suffering of the down-and-out. Loy was an active member of the Church of Christian Science, and with this biographical detail in mind, many critics have interpreted her disquieting representations of the bums as an expression of her faith in the promise of spiritual salvation. The assemblages also, however, provocatively politicize this idea of sacred suffering by grounding spiritual outrage in the inequities of material existence and in waste as a sign of economic dispossession.

Christ on a Clothesline, for example, depicts a Jesus made of rags and used paper hung by his shoulders from a piece of rope strung lengthwise across the structure. Behind him is a run-down tenement building assembled out of odd scraps of wood.



Christ on a Clothesline, ca. 1955–59

This grotesque Christ is all head and arms, with palms turned upward in supplication and a face more demonic than benign. Inhabiting the impoverished landscape of the Bowery, his body has been disfigured by poverty, and in parodying the Crucifixion, the assemblage enacts the violence that modernity inflicts upon the bodies of the poor. This image of bodily harm and spiritual redemption asks us to see "Christ" "on a clothesline," or rather, to recast Christian ethics into the body of the dispossessed (Entin 193). His somewhat accusatory gaze is one of the few moments in Loy's work that suggests the viewer's complicity in this degradation.

The clothesline and tenement, moreover, identify something of a homespace and liken the Christ to a piece of clothing hung up to dry. On one hand likely referring to the tattered garments of the poor, Christ-as-clothing also essentially turns something inside out; faith or spirituality, as embodied and represented in Jesus but located within the self, can be put on and worn, made exterior and visible. While this image identifies the poor as saintly, it also implies a subtle critique of the hypocrisy of religious people who neglect the poor; like clothing, religious devotion can be put on, taken off, and left out on the clothesline. Furthermore, as it's designed to illustrate the paradoxical sense of material immateriality, the construction, much like *No Parking* and *Communal Cot*, identifies the ways in which scraps give shape to such abstract ideas as economic subalterity and religious recompense. Here these things can be seen and acknowledged as concrete manifestations of that which is manifestly elusive and illusive.

This idea of exhibition and visibility, together with Loy's interest in the permeable boundaries between the personal and the public, is explicitly enacted in *Househunting*.[111] The assemblage depicts a statuesque feminine figure looking straight ahead, with a collection of domestic objects gathered in a circular crown-like frame above her head. Within the crown, there is a ball of yarn, knitting needles, and a dollhouse-sized ladder, laundry basket, teapot and dishes, among other miniatures. On the background surface, images of old buildings with variegated stone facades, which are cut from cardboard and painted, surround the woman. Both the building images and objects identify the home as a material space; the buildings represent the walls behind which we live our lives, and the collected objects constitute the tangible aspects of that existence.

Househunting, ca. 1950

The placement of the dollhouse upon her head, however, fashions the domestic as an extension or projection of the mind and body. The home is as she remembers, thinks, and believes it to be, and the collage suggests that, to a certain extent, we are all scrap pickers and junk collectors trying to piece together (by hunting for) whole, or at least provisionally complete, images of home and the self within it.

Of all the constructions in this series, *Househunting* is least about the Bowery and the figure of the bum and refrains from the trenchant social commentary of *No Parking*, *Communal Cot*, and *Christ on a Clothesline*. It is, however, similarly concerned with homelessness and the individual torn between states of interiority and exteriority. Homeless people are, in a sense, forced to make a home in their minds that they then carry with them, and the construction depicts the more psychological dimensions of this kind of creative production. The construction also models the form, process, and significance of scrapping that I consider key to understanding

Loy's Bowery aesthetics. All of the pieces in this collection identify scrap collage not just as a kind of abstract formalism, but rather, as a material modernism constructed out of and therefore representative of particular social and economic practices, most notably acts of refusal such as the policing and segregation of homelessness. By recycling, reconstructing, and thus recuperating that which is refused, the assemblages stage alternatives to seeing dereliction, homelessness (as both the lack of a fixed domicile and feelings of unbelonging and alienation), dispossession, and poverty as signs of social waste. Instead, by virtue of its very materiality and creative rearrangement, trash materializes and gives form to invisibility, thereby ascribing artistic and cultural value to waste and its social significance.

As critics have noted, Loy's Bowery constructions share certain affinities with the found-object work of the visual artist Joseph Cornell. Cornell and Loy were well acquainted, having been both involved in Julien Levy's gallery exhibition of surrealist art in Paris in 1932 and by frequently socializing in many of the same circles.[112] They were also both followers of Christian Science and eventually became close friends, finding a kinship in art and faith once Loy moved to New York City. Carolyn Burke describes this relationship as deeply spiritual and credits Loy with inspiring, mentoring, and awakening Cornell to his creative talents (405). Like Loy's trash assemblages, Cornell's collages and box installations foreground the processes of accretion and appropriation as the means for producing art and concentrate on the material textures of representation. His boxes are composed of disparate, everyday materials, including household objects like thimbles, seashells, and glass items as well as images and texts cut from mass print media and mechanical reproductions of famous artworks. Moreover, Cornell's three-dimensional work emphasizes the significance of the collection within a particular frame, literally in terms of

the small wood cases that housed the constructions as well as more abstract notions of a conceptual or symbolic logic.

Cornell's assemblages are composed of ephemeral materials that visualize what Lynda Roscoe Hartigan calls the "poetic associations he sensed among all manner of experiences, ideas, people, things, and places" (12). His multimedia projects make sense out of accumulation by ordering and classifying a multitude of things, and his boxes are like little museums clustered around dominant motifs and subjects as wide-ranging as soap bubbles, the Medici family, Lauren Bacall, and animal habitats. These collages create environments in which disparate materials and repurposed parts can exist simultaneously and create new, surprising scenarios. His elastic interpretation also emphasizes the ways in which objects have representational value and plays with scale, often including miniatures and compressing compositional space, to evoke the sense of magnification and control. In many ways, Cornell's interpretation of found objects creates an archive of obscure materials and their forgotten meanings.

No. 47 *L'Humeur Vagabonde*, 1955

Cornell and Loy's aesthetic practices both deal with the specificity of the material world and employ techniques of collage and assemblage to recycle the world around them. Incidentally, they both had a propensity for hoarding and surrounded themselves with tremendous volumes of stuff. Unlike Loy's trash assemblages, however, Cornell's boxes do not display collected objects as junk or communicate ideas about the effects of disposability. Rather, within the boxes the original purpose of each appropriated object recedes and its aesthetic and spiritual value becomes visible; in other words, the ordinary becomes extraordinary and reclamation is staged as a process of transformation. As we've seen with the construction *No Parking*, on the other hand, Loy uses found materials to concretize the costs of subalterity, and though objects change form—a used rag becomes a sleeping body, for example—they are still recognizable as trash. As a result, while their formalism is similar, their politics are not, and Loy's commitment to documenting social problems becomes more evident when viewed in comparison with one of her closest contemporaries.

"Angel-bums" and the Question of Representation

The *Constructions*, although they generally succeeded the composition of the poems, offer critical insight into her lyrical examination of urban modernity. Like the assemblages, the poems depict life on the Bowery and the shadowy presence of the Bowery bum and are interested in the ways in which waste accumulates meaning.[113] They also, however, identify the relationship between waste and a rising commodity culture, in particular how processes of commodification and consumption make distinctions of value, usefulness, and belonging. Reading the poems with the assemblages as a conceptual framework therefore allows us to better understand how Loy enacts a critique of capitalist ideologies through scrapping, which in this

case means the representation (and recuperation) of economic otherness as well as a linguistic experimentalism in which words resist ontological fixity. Not unlike the scraps that make up the assemblages, words are for Loy discrete, pliable units that once redesigned and rearranged can produce new and unexpected meanings.[114]

This section therefore examines several poems from the "Compensations of Poverty" series that best illustrate Loy's engagement with consumerism and dereliction as well as the political economy in which one cannot be disentangled from the other. Specifically, "On Third Avenue," "Mass Production on 14th Street," "Chiffon Velours," "Hot Cross Bum," and "Property of Pigeons" illustrate how individual identity is collapsed into larger social practices such as working and shopping, and for the bums, how nonparticipation is associated with waste, outsiderness, and invisibility. The poems depict both the excesses and failures of market capitalism and illustrate Loy's interest in transforming its waste—material, linguistic, and conceptual—into objects of cultural value. My attention to the poems' economic valences and scrap aesthetics thus addresses a lacuna in critical studies of Loy's Bowery poetry that have tended to overlook the ways in which the poems comment on and critique discourses of economic citizenship as well as their conceptual and aesthetic relationship to the material assemblages.

Much of the scholarship on Loy's late poetry (roughly 1936–62) has read her representations of the Bowery bum as either a form of bearing witness or as a modernist reformulation of Baudelairean aesthetics. In her analysis of Loy's "polarities of vision," for example, Virginia Kouidis suggests that Loy, the poet who alone possesses the "vision for intuiting the essence of life's chaos and the skill to shape his intuitions into form," saw the bum as the "emblem of timid or failed vision, who seeks transcendence of worldly care in false

Elysiums and Nirvanas" (109). The poet and the bum thus "establish the boundaries of human possibility," and Kouidis suggests that the poems demonstrate Loy's desire to "bestow significance on suffering and failure, to raise mankind above its clownishness by finding beauty in the cosmic struggle" (134). Referring to the homeless and the habitually drunk as "the city's human refuse" and figures of "self-willed delusion," Kouidis stresses how Loy's transcendent vision transforms the harsh reality of poverty and suffering into a thing of beauty, thereby raising "forgotten specimens of failed human aspiration to visibility and significance" (126). Loy's lyric examination of otherness is thus an act of recovery that effectively beatifies the bum, suggesting that "to see" the bum is to see beauty hidden in the "ugly or commonplace" (116).

Like Levy's introduction to the assemblages, Kouidis frames this reading of visionary didacticism with Loy's "Apology of Genius" (1923), a poem that imagines the artist as an outcast besieged by an unforgiving public. Reading the Bowery poems in this way, however, necessarily objectifies the bums insofar as they inspire and are the subject of Loy's poetry and vision but appear more as "emblems" than as individuals who suffer. It also subordinates the political significance of Loy's attention to the homeless and their post-Depression social environs, which differed significantly from the European avant-garde community in which "Apology of Genius" was produced, to a genealogy of aesthetic principles organized around ways of seeing modern culture. To be sure, the poems find meaning in the streets and raise the bums to visibility. However, I argue that they do so not to transcend and thus transform the material conditions of modernity, nor to indict the bums' debasement. Rather, I suggest that Loy makes visible the bums' social status as waste by foregrounding that materiality, thereby commenting on the exclusionary politics of American consumerism and productively politicizing the aesthetic objectification of the bums' social otherness. The Bowery poems therefore revise

much of Loy's earlier elitism and artistic antagonism as they refocus the question of representation on suffering and economic disenfranchisement rather than the poet's quest for and articulation of "genius."

Another current of Loy criticism has focused on the poems' embedded spiritual discourse and identifies a relationship between religion, particularly the doctrines of Christian Science adopted by Loy in 1913, and modernist aesthetics.[115] Maeera Shreiber, for example, argues that "Loy's poems [propose] that holiness is necessarily a broken thing—to be found in the bodies and in the faces of society's outcasts, otherwise known to her as 'angel-bums'" (468). She claims that Loy's late "devotional" verse sets out to "bear witness to the divine presence in the earth's poor and disdained" (472) and accounts for this imperative to testify in terms of Christian ethics. Visionary poems about the "angel-bums," Shreiber argues, demonstrate Loy's interest in revealing illusory human figures and things and convey her enthusiasm for the revelatory beauty of "brokenness." Deirdre Egan joins this idea of spiritual mysticism to the question of female identity and suggests that Loy's transformation of poverty into divinity is orchestrated by the "goddess figure" of the poem (2), and as such, the poems identify a site for female empowerment and autonomous artistic creativity. Rather than trouble the relationship between homelessness and spirituality, both Shreiber and Egan thus argue that Loy's poetic "seeing" replaces suffering with a transfigured, newly spiritualized reality.

This focus on Loy's feminism and personal religious life tends to read the "sacred" literally, as an expression of her faith in divine providence and its relationship to personal agency. Doing so exclusively, however, overlooks alternative meanings and manifestations of the sacred that I argue are critical to understanding the social politics of the Bowery poems. In "On Third Avenue," for example, the speaker describes the dazzling spectacle of the modern

urban thoroughfare in grand, extravagant terms, but does so not to sanctify the scene. Rather, such fervent exaltation mocks the gaudiness and falsity of mass consumer culture by revealing its tackiness and banality. Drawing upon Guy Debord's theory of the "commodity as spectacle," I argue that the poems allude to the ways in which consumer culture, while undeniably attractive and ubiquitous, replaces reality (that which is directly lived) with images of the real (that which you should want and could have) and results in a loss of unity amongst classes, further problematizing the presence of the nonparticipating poor.[116] Seeing, which for Loy is simultaneously spiritual and suspicious, thus becomes a field of contestation, or at least negotiation, between mass culture and marginalized economic identities.[117]

Rachel Potter also takes up this issue of representation and argues that the poems demonstrate how modernity makes the nature of common suffering "illegible" (253). She frames this reading in terms of an ethical imperative to bear witness, derived from Sartre's political philosophy about the ethical function of art, and claims that Loy's work is animated by a desire to disclose how economic, rather than human, categories control social action, understanding, and recognition (265).[118] Potter generally refrains, however, from identifying this sense of injustice as the form and function of capitalism, and her readings of the poems imply that disclosure is not necessarily synonymous with outright critique. I argue instead that ethics and politics are mutually constitutive and suggest that the poems protest, just as much as they reveal, the commodification of modern subjectivities as well as the exclusion of individuals beyond the reach of the commodity. Moreover, while she makes an interesting argument about the relationship between ordinary language and the issue of legibility, I suggest that the poems' textual aesthetics are better understood within the material culture of waste.

The poems have a distinct linguistic materiality. Written in free verse, they mix disparate linguistic registers, fashion new and misuse old words, make puns and witty caricatures, disorder conventional syntactical arrangements, and unfix elaborate and arcane words from their usual contexts. Typographical innovations such as the long dash, the manipulation of white space, and unconventional punctuation and line breaks also demonstrate textual plasticity and contribute to the sense that each poem is itself an object carefully pieced together and arranged. While many of these techniques preceded the Bowery poems and characterize much of Loy's career-long experimentalism, I argue that the vocabulary of the Bowery poems is distinct for its reference to debris and systems of waste and suggest that this "junked" language inscribes notions of refuse and recovery within the textures of representation. This deployment of heavily stylized and abject language fashions a distinct system of signification. Moreover, although the poems are not strictly collage, in that they don't mix media or incorporate unaltered quotations from other texts, I suggest that Loy's handling of obscure and arcane language mirrors her material engagement with broken and dejected objects, thus foregrounding literary detritus to model a form of poetic scrapping.[119]

The poems also demonstrate Loy's interest in a language that draws upon on the popular and the everyday. In the essay "Modern Poetry," she argues that American poetry proceeds out of a "composite language," an idiom culled from public sites such as the newspaper, the streets, and the marketplace, a loosening of modern literature's tongue "in the melting-pot" of voices overheard on the "baser avenues of Manhattan" as well as the "low-brow" speech of "an adolescent Slav who has speculated in a wholesale job-lot of mandarines [sic] and is trying to sell them in a retail market on First Avenue" (*Lost* 159). Such a social language necessarily appropriates and synthesizes scraps of a modern urban discourse, fashioning the sense of a

collective in its collection of disparate sounds and self-expressions. Although she was born in England and spent most of her career in Europe, Loy was naturalized as an American citizen in 1946 and is often anthologized in collections of American poetry on the grounds that her free-verse modernism bears a resemblance to the radical literary revolt of her American contemporaries like William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore.[120]

More significant to this discussion, we can see in the Bowery poems this democratizing ethos and linguistically composite logic. The poem, "Hot Cross Bum," for example, incorporates into verse Bowery slang and satirizes multiple moral discourses, such as psychiatry and religion, that attempt to deal with the problem of dereliction by appropriating their language and then revealing the inherent contradictions and ethical fault lines within it. The poems also consistently muddle registers of the high and low, radically juxtaposing and mixing the more erudite and abstract with the colloquial and concrete. These linguistic subversions not only generate irony and heighten the sense of the materiality of words, but also propose a new representational mode in which the aesthetic is embedded within the social, and subjectivity is scrapped together from the "flexibility of phrases" (*Lost* 159).

Suzanne Zelazo is one of the few critics to discuss the materiality of Loy's poetry, suggesting that "in some sense it is possible to read all of Loy's work as installation pieces, various forms of collage that act as an interface between the viewer, or reader, and her fourth dimension [the dissolution of the separation between time and space]" (65). Zelazo focuses on how Loy's collage, or "multisensual," aesthetics are designed to "make the viewer/listener/reader sense as she did" (49) and thus advance a feminist agenda of self-realization and autonomous creative expression (54). Persuasively identifying the correspondences between Loy's poetry and assemblages as both aesthetic and conceptual, Zelazo nevertheless subordinates the reality of

poverty and commercial spectacle they depict to the ways in which they illustrate Loy's "heightened sensory perceptions" and "profound ability to enter into her subject" (68). Not unlike some of the critics previously mentioned, Zelazo thus privileges a consideration of the author to the neglect of the particular social and historical conditions that ascribe particular political meaning to these aesthetic practices.

My readings of Loy's poems thus focus on the ways in which a language of waste, textual materiality, sympathetic witnessing, and political commentary and critique cohere within the scrap logic of the Bowery, as a place symbolic of waste and a scene in which to reveal narratives of refusal. As Loy once told a photographer while posing for a portrait sitting atop a disreputable shack, "My true environment is a dustbin" (qtd. in Conover xxvii). Feeling at home amidst refuse and the dusty remains of everyday life, Loy identified herself as a deject artist. Perhaps more significantly, her quip fashions an identity for her work that challenges conventional ideas of artistic worthiness in its attempt to recuperate waste and represent the discarded, so-called worthless lives of the underprivileged and dispossessed. The poems further suggest that the possibility of political and social change resides in the margins of both literary and economic discourse.

"Compensations of Poverty"

"On Third Avenue" is the opening poem in the "Compensations of Poverty" series and in many ways stages Loy's vision of the relationship between modernity and figures of impoverishment. The poem begins with the anonymous admonition, "'You should have disappeared years ago' —— " and a desultory response:

so disappear

on Third Avenue

to share the heedless incognito

of shuffling shadow-bodies

animate with frustration (2–6)

Simultaneously evoking a concrete sense of place "on Third Avenue" and placelessness in the repetition of "disappear," the poem records invisibility by evoking a sense of absent presence. The speaker envisions the "heedless incognito" as a group of "shuffling shadow-bodies," a contradictory image that identifies physical form, the body, as something insubstantial, fleeting, and obscure. In the subsequent stanza, the shadow-bodies' presence, which is that of the street's poor and homeless, is made similarly spectral:

whose silence' only potence is

respiration

preceding the eroded bronze contours

of their other aromas (7–10)

The heavy white space after "silence'" visually represents the exhalation of breath that makes respiration "potent," a word that signifies power but here likely refers to their odorous breath.[121] These "aromas," with their "eroded bronze contours," give a kind of opaque but identifiable shape to the bums, as something worn down and seemingly antique, but the image is nevertheless one of silence and invisibility.

The speaker goes on to juxtapose this paradoxical sense of visible invisibility with the aggressive glare of modern outdoor advertising: the "saturnine / neon-signs" (14–15) of "this red-lit thoroughfare" (12),

set afire

a feature

on their hueless overcast

of down-cast countenances. (16–19)

The alliterative phrase "set afire / a feature," with the repetition of the "af" sound," increases the tempo of the passage and evokes the excitement of sudden illumination. However, the words "saturnine" and "overcast" signify darkness or gloom rather than effulgence, and despite the lights, the faces of the shadow-bodies remain "down-cast" and colorless; they do not see and therefore cannot be brought into being by the blanketing glow of the commercial spectacle.

As a result, "for their ornateness" (20), the bums are ironically figured as outside of but nevertheless defined by this social system. They are "irreparable dummies" (25) clothed by "Time, the contortive tailor" (21) in the "eerie undress / of mummies / half unwound" (26–28). The words "tailor," "cloth," and "press" refer to fashion, and in particular, the garment industry. The bums, however, are distinctly unfashionable. Their tattered clothes are sculpted by age and sweat (23), and like dummies (an image that calls to mind shop-window mannequins) and mummies, are made legible only by their outward appearances, namely clothing. Moreover, mummies and dummies are both casts of the human body, empty likenesses given concrete yet hollow material form, and the sequence of negations—"irreparable," "undress," and "unwound"—evokes the sense of undoing or erasure. This image suggests that the bums have been made insubstantial by the pressures placed upon their destitution, the social forces represented by the neon lights under which they must live.

In the second half of the poem, Loy ironizes the idea that the tawdry glitter of the city might "compensate" for this lack of subjectivity. The open-ended refrain, "Such are the

compensations of poverty, / to see ——" is followed by a series of elaborate images scrapped together and compressed into the tight space of the poem. The speaker sees light reflected in the spilled waste of the street, likening it to "electric fungus" (31) and "intercircled jewellery" (33), as well as used, discarded furniture, a "reliquary sedan-chair / out of a legend, dumped there" (33–36). This is a world filled with objects and images of objects, and the poem mocks the seemingly sacred aura of these material "mirages." Looking at a "ten-cent Cinema," the speaker sees it as

> a sugar-coated box-office
> enjail a Goddess
> aglitter, in her runt of a tower,
> with ritual claustrophobia. (38–41)

This overwrought description of a theater ticket-taker suggests a kind of pseudo-erotic containment imposed by the rites of consumption and ironizes the supposed glamour of the cinema with bathos, juxtaposing ideas of saintliness (the "Goddess") with forms of debasement (her "runt of a tower"). The words "sugar-coated" and "aglitter," moreover, identify the gaudiness of mass culture, effectively trivializing the spectacular as something inherently tacky and artificial.

My reading of this scene assumes the bums' perspective, suggesting that modernity offers little of substance to the poor. Many critics, however, have argued that the line "Such are the compensations of poverty, / to see ——" identifies the speaker's observer position in relation to the Bowery and suggest that her poetic gaze enacts the transformation of detritus into something beautiful, and therefore, compensatory. It is true that the infinitive "to see ——," lacking such identifying pronouns as "you," "me," or "they," makes the phrase somewhat ambiguous; who is

doing the seeing is unclear. Similarly, the first line of the poem, "'You should have disappeared years ago'——" enacts a play of semantic possibilities as the "you" is indeterminate; it could be an address to you the bums, you the reader, or even you the writer's self. As the poem proceeds these possibilities are not resolved. This deliberate uncertainty, however, closes in on the distance between the speaker and the bums and suggests that both exist inside a system in which spectacle is presumed to have value, economic or otherwise. Yet what is seen is not the real, but instead, images of the real in the shimmering surfaces of artificial things. The cheap cinema house, in particular, signifies a kind of escapism into images that create the illusion of intimacy, belonging, and a better life.

Accordingly, the stanzas following the second iteration of "Such are the compensations of poverty, / to see ——" echo the sense of disembodiment and ephemerality identified in the first half of the poem: a moving trolley "loaded with luminous busts" (47) is "transient in the dust" (44), and

> lovely in anonymity
> they vanish
> with the mirage
> of their passage. (48–51)

Inanimate, anonymous "busts," like the dummies and mummies, suggest a presence defined by absence. And here again, the "mirage" of brilliancy, luminosity, and loveliness is fleeting, and like the bums, the figures on the trolley disappear. The poem thus begins and ends with scenes of invisibility. The elongated hyphen after "to see" stretches the pause to create an atmosphere of doubt and suggests that "seeing" is a matter of realizing the false promise of the spectacle of modernity.

These haunting and seemingly hallucinatory images of the bums and of the city are, as Elizabeth Arnold suggests about Loy's surrealist prose, "hammered out of the hard physical matter of language" (179). More specifically, the poem is loaded with junked diction and phrasing: words such as "eroded," "dumped," "runt," and "fungus" which call to mind disuse and refuse, and also "mummies," "saturnine," "reliquary," and "legend" which suggest a sense of outdated or worn-out "ornateness." This language is evocative of waste and associates the bums' landscape with the materiality of refusal, in terms of both forgetting and disposal. Furthermore, while on one hand the poem's metaphors for the bums—"shadow-bodies," "dummies," and "mummies"—seem to reproduce the pejorative idea of derelicts as automatons or heedless, unthinking bodies, Loy's linguistic subversion, particularly the blurring and overlapping of corporeality and absence, suggests that there are no absolutes. The bums are both shadows and bodies, and like the "ten-cent cinema" and "loaded trolley," the dummy/mummy/bust is a counterfeit, an image of empty subjectivity at the same time that it signifies an inescapable social system. The poem thus calls attention to the ambiguous spaces where material culture, bodies, and discourses of destitution intersect and juxtaposes disjunctive images and temporal moments to represent the alienation and fragmentation of modern life on the Bowery.

The poem, "Mass-Production on 14th Street," similarly explores the ways in which artificiality accumulates meaning under capitalism and traces the effects of commercialism on female subjectivity.[122] Among thronging crowds near Union Square, the speaker watches female shoppers (and perhaps workers and shopgirls now off duty) flood the streets near closing hour. The poem is rife with metaphors that join nature to everyday commerce: the seeing eye is a "commodious bee" (9) gathering the "infinite facets" (11) of faces, garments on a rack form "hanging gardens" (18) of "Eros' produce" (20), and the "iris circus of Industry" (8) generates

"orgies of orchid" (23) "among a foliage of mass-production" (25). Fourteenth Street is all excess and sensuous embodiment, a "carnal caravan / for Carnevale" (27–28) energized and eroticized by the act of consumption. In the opening sequence, Loy's floral, carnivalesque, and heavily alliterative diction offers us a landscape of aesthetic abundance that materializes out of "mass-production" and the sheer multiplicity of "Industry," the capital "I" signifying institutionalized economic activity rather than individual skill or hard work.

The poem's ironic juxtaposition of natural and synthetic forms, however, also comments on how Industry automatizes both labor and the perception of beauty. In the second half of the poem, "conservatories of commerce" (36) turn the women into "mobile simulacra" (43), "walking dolls" (53) with a "robot turn" (56) that reflect the "chic paralysis" (39) of the mannequins in the shop windows; these consumers can no longer be distinguished from the commodities they consume and are thus dehumanized. Mass production also, however, results in the erasure of agent who made the clothes and the alienation of labor from the commodity. Accordingly, the poem evokes the tension between production, the "hand-labor" (35) of the "garment-worker" (19), and consumption, the consumer's "jostling" of "her auxiliary creator / the sempstress" (30–31). Industry is thus a scene of uneasy relations, and the sexual energy of the "iris circus" is replaced with images of sterile mechanization and automation. Femininity, embodied in the phrase "Femina / of the thoroughfare" (48–49), is stripped down to surface and appearance, and the mannequins and dolls, like the dummy/mummy/bust in "On Third Avenue," are hollow props of human likeness, a cheaply reproducible and seemingly ready-made disguise.

In another echo of "On Third Avenue," the last passage of the poem depicts Industry's after-hours and the red glare of neon streetlights. A woman and her lover embrace on the street, which now "returns to stone" (59) in the "sedative descent of dusk" (58), and together they

point at the ecru and ivory

replica of the dress she has on,

doused in a reservoir of ruby neon;

only — — her buttons are clothespins

the mannequin's, harlequins. (64–68)

The neon lights create a doubling effect, making the woman's dress and that of the mannequin's into one image differentiated "only — —" by the buttons holding their garments together. The clothespins reveal the woman's poverty whereas the mannequin's harlequin buttons, which are made of a patchwork pattern of colored diamond shapes, are elaborate embellishments suggestive of both wealth and imitation.[123] This passage turns, however, on the word "replica." It suggests that while the poor woman is outside the fashion system the rest of the poem has described, her clothing is the only original creation and the red-lit dress is its copy, a commodity that can only ever be an inauthentic appendage to the self. While this image acknowledges the lure of such a commodity, as the couple is unquestionably drawn to the illuminated window and together speculate about "Fashion's humour" (63), it nevertheless critiques mass production and orgiastic commodity consumption as organizing principles for and narratives of individual identity.

The poem "Chiffon Velours" further articulates Loy's suspicion of regulatory social regimes, that of the fashion industry in particular. The poem is an elegant portrait of an old and presumably homeless woman and begins simply with the short, declarative phrase: "She is sere." "Sere," meaning arid or parched, is used here to give a kind of material texture to the woman's age and physical appearance. A "web of wrinkles" (6) on her face show the approach of "death"

(5), and she's dried up sexually: the "site of vanished breasts / is marked by a safety-pin" (7–8). Like the clothespins holding together the woman's ivory dress, the safety-pin identifies the old woman's poverty, and the poem acknowledges the power of fashion to mark social and economic status. Alone and unguarded, she stands "Rigid / at rest against the cornerstone / of a department store" (9–11). "At rest," the woman is not caught up in the traffic of the street, but she is also "rigid," suggesting the sense of discomfort and unease. Moreover, her location on the street, not unlike that of the bums on Third Avenue, identifies her relationship to the social and economic forces that effectively disenfranchise the poor.

The department store signifies more than a building on the street or wall upon which to lean. In *The Gender of Modernity*, Rita Felski argues that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century "the department store provide[d] a new kind of urban public space which catered primarily to women" and suggests that the process of consumption became an activity which "helped shape new forms of subjectivity for women" (61). Seeing what's for sale, in this case, becomes just as important as buying insofar that seeing creates and enacts desire, for both the things themselves and the social economy created by their consumption. Accordingly, in *Just Looking*, Rachel Bowlby demonstrates the ways in which early department stores made shopping visually spectacular, including the introduction of large expanses of transparent display windows, elaborate architecture, and artificial electric lighting, and explains that this theatrical excess created an environment in which functional and financial considerations gave way to novelty and attractiveness (3). In this way, the commercial spectacle is characterized by its separation from the ordinariness of everyday life and by the commodification of pleasure. The place of Loy's old woman on the street, outside but proximal to the department store, thus

signifies her exclusion from a distinctly feminine economy, making her appear both less powerful and less female, and identifies her alienation from modern sociocultural production.

At the same time, her presence reveals conspicuous consumption, as symbolized by and enacted within the department store, to be a highly public and discriminatory means of manifesting social power and prestige. Susan Buck-Morss, for example, identifies the American "bag lady" as a figure of intimately public suffering and suggests that she has literally been consumed by the very society that makes a woman the prototypical consumer. Buck-Morss makes this idea of waste and refusal visually recognizable by including a photograph of a woman sleeping in a seated position atop an egg crate, hunched over several bags strategically positioned between her legs. Her head is wrapped in a scarf, blankets cover her legs, and the department store window behind her reflects a busy urban street. Buck-Morss argues that, by reproducing a domestic space around their bodies, "their [the bag ladies'] appearance, in rags and carrying their worldly possessions in worn bags, is the grotesquely ironic gesture that they have just returned from a shopping spree" (347). Shopping bags typically signify acquisition and possession, but here, they put the women's poverty on display. The bag lady thus emblematizes the oppressive consequences of consumer capitalism, namely its creation of an oppositional system of existence—poor/not poor—as well as its failure to protect oppressed classes from state surveillance, public censure, and political powerlessness.

Loy's old woman is likewise subject to our scrutinizing gaze although "sere," a punning homophone for "seer," suggests that she offers new ways of seeing. The street, and its association with impoverishment and lack, is mapped onto the woman's derelict body, and her sterility signifies the unproductivity of destitution. The final image of the poem, however, shifts its line of vision to the illusory quality of her clothing:

Trimmed with one sudden burst

of flowery cotton

half her black skirt

glows as a soiled mirror;

reflects the gutter –

a yard of chiffon velours. (18–23)

The "sudden burst / of flowery cotton" restores a sense of fecundity to the woman, and her dirty skirt reflects the gutter, the place where trash collects and the space over which consumers must step in order to enter a store. Rather than associate the woman with waste, however, the gutter reflects an image of "chiffon velours," a high quality, luxury fabric. By becoming an image of a commodity, poverty is made illegible, and the old woman is thus liberated from fashion's notions of social belonging.

Furthermore, as Susan Dunn points out in her study of Loy's fashion aesthetics, the poem attributes creative agency to the old woman. Her ready-made fashion is "Hers alone to model / the last creation, // original design / of destitution" (12–15). Unlike the shoppers on Fourteenth Street, she is not a simulacrum of the mannequin in the window. Instead, "[c]lothed in memorial scraps / skimpy even for a skeleton" (16–17) she has fashioned herself from the reality of her poverty. Like Loy's own collection and assembly of scraps, the poem suggests that the woman's fashion is a subversive act that unfixes "original design" from wealth and inclusion (the department store), and instead works with the material conditions of everyday life to challenge the power of the commodity. While this idea of destitution as a scene of production glosses over the fact scrappy clothing is almost always motivated by necessity, not by design or choice, it also empowers figures of impoverishment and identifies forms of resistance. The irony is that the

woman, by virtue of being outside the system of commercialized production, can make the falsity and inauthenticity of consumer culture visible.

"On Third Avenue," "Mass-Production on 14th Street," and "Chiffon Velours" sardonically examine the consumer spectacle and illustrate the jarring juxtapositions of wealth and poverty, excess and deprivation that are present within the modern city. The long poem "Hot Cross Bum," on the other hand, leaves the lights behind and fully enters the world of waste produced by modern culture. The poem depicts the homeless drunks on the Bowery and maps the social, physical, and psychological spaces inhabited by dereliction:

> Beyond a hell-vermilion
> curtain of neon
> lies the Bowery
>
> a lurid lane
> leading misfortune's monsters
>
> the human … race
> altered to irrhythmic stagger
>
> along the alcoholic's
> exit to Ecstasia. (1–9)

The poem's opening sequences quickly establish the public image of the Bowery bums. They exist in a kind of urban hell in search of happiness at the bottom of a bottle, and "[i]mpersonal as wind astray" (10), they are "disoriented" static figures who "loiter / in non-resistance calm" (13)

and “in lazy anguish” (20). In subsequent passages, Loy’s diction recreates the hazy stupor of the bums’ drunkenness, “exchanging / an inobvious real / for over-obvious irreal” (32–34), and her creative semantic negation—words like “irrhythmic,” “inideate,” “indirective,” “inobvious,” and “irreal”—stresses the sense of blockage as well as the unreality of this liminal space. The bums can neither see nor perceive the world around them, and their “Bum-bungling of actuality” (21) reduces individual subjectivity to a mass of “sailing, flailing limbs / of disequilibrium” (52–53).

The speaker mocks the bums’ faith in alcohol, calling them “faces of Inferno” (35), “raffish saints” (38), and “blowsy angels” (40) all stumbling towards “Elysium” (55). Coupling arcane words like “raffish,” meaning rakish and disreputable, and “blowsy,” meaning coarse and rowdy, to figures of the divine emphasizes fleshy, almost profane embodiment, and much like “On Third Avenue,” ironically juxtaposes seemingly disparate moral registers. In another instance, however, Loy’s use of biblical allusions satirizes the idea that religion, or ideology for that matter, can be a source of collective ethical discourse. A figure in the crowd, “one wry heckler / of an averse universe” (58–59), is dubbed “a prophet of Babble-on” who “shouts and mutters / to earless gutters” (69–71). As Rachel Potter suggests, the pun on “Babylon” identifies the illegibility of the bum’s suffering; he speaks but no one listens, and he cannot be incorporated into a world to which “he is ideologically deceased” (60, 260). Here ideology likely refers to the economic order, the “intentional trend of busymen” that the bums must “shift through” (51) and that which represents a capitalistic system that alienates inutility.[124] The bums’ “death,” therefore, signifies a kind of social death that manifests itself in silence, invisibility, and the loss of citizenship.

Loy’s critical engagement with the moral, religious, and social discourses that problematize the presence of the bum also converges within the poem’s title. “Hot Cross Bum” is

a pun on "hot cross buns," rolls topped with crosses made of icing that are baked for Easter. Within the poem, loaves of bread are distributed to the bums by "some passing church / or social worker" (123–24). On one hand, the bread represents the bums' lack of financial autonomy and apparent laziness; the speaker describes the handout as "an onfall / of somewhat heavenly loaves / for your loafing / is the fashion" (111–14), the homophone "loaf" signifying both an uncut piece of bread and the verb "to idle." The bread also, as Danette DiMarco points out, implies that the bums will be expected to pay in other ways—either through affirming their dependence and therefore submitting to social exclusion, or by some kind of spiritual recompense (92).[125] The poem, however, questions the promise of salvation: the church's charity is motivated by "conditional compassion: / appreciation / of your publicity value / to the Bowery" (115–18), and the bums find "flight into celestial resort" (141) via cheap wine, which is represented in slang as "creepy Pete" (139), not good Christian fellowship. "Hot cross bum" thus denotes the bums' vexed social subjectivity. They are objects "of pity" (100) whose helplessness constitutes the power of the people, regulatory discourses, and institutions that objectify them, and the phrase represents the "oppositional altars / of cross and carousal" (186–87) that seek but fail to accommodate their existence.

Beyond the reach of civil society and the church, which is complicit in seeing the bums as an undifferentiated mass rather than as individuals ill fit for its "envelopes of rigidity" (170), the bums are cast out, much like garbage. Accordingly, the bums' social status as waste is made most manifest in the final sequence of the poem. The speaker watches an elaborate funeral procession in which a "consecrated corpse // dross of the soul / gross of the soil" (267–69) is delivered to an ornate hearse. At the same time, a garbage truck pulls up before the church and

> Collecting refuse more profuse than man

the City's circulatory

sanitary apostles

a-leap to ash-cans

apply their profane ritual

to offal (276–81)

"Dust to dust," death is likened to the removal of rubbish, of the body that has been released from the soul. The speaker tells us, "scrapped are remains / empty cans remain" (286–87), "remains" denoting both bodily ruins and lingering presence. This scene is then juxtaposed with the death-like, "always on the trodden street" (288) existence of the bums who are "embalmed in rum" (290). The street is a "communal cot" (289) and the "sore cemetery of the Comatose" (300) upon which "lies the body of the flop / where'er he drop" (296–97). A denizen of this concrete world, the bum lives as though he is already dead. He represents failure, deprivation, and "under an unseen / baldachin of dream" (291-92), is unknown and unloved.

Rather than rest within this elegiac moment, however, the poem goes on to satirically sexualize the bums' relationship with the street. Bringing the real body of the bum back into play, the speaker describes one amorous, writhing drunk as,

a folly-wise scab of Metropolis

pounding with caressive jollity

a breastless slab

. . . . . .

decorously garbed

he's lovin'up the pavement

. . . . . .

A vagabond in delirium

aping the rise and fall

of ocean

of inhalation

of coition. (313–28; my ellipses)

This profane image revises the cold sterility of the "empty cans" and "cemetery" in the previous scene; the bum, well-dressed in rags and more or less delusional, is alive amidst his poverty even though his lovemaking is a rather pathetic scene of imagined communion. Despite this sardonic depiction of the bum's deviance, however, the final lines evoke the harsh reality of this life: rather than living it, he is "aping the rise and fall" of "ocean," "inhalation," and "coition," all metonyms for regeneration or rebirth. "Vagabond delirium" is thus presented as an imitation of life, a sense of stasis and bodily impotence, and suggests that the bum stands little chance of being seen as anything other than waste.

"Hot Cross Bum" thus articulates a complex vision of the Bowery and the bums whose presence defines it as a unique economic, social, and geographical space. It holds destitution up to be intensely scrutinized and, at times, appears to caricature the bums as helpless sots. At the same time, the poem critiques specific systems and ideological structures, such as consumer capitalism and Christian doctrine, which render the bums invisible and silent. By doing both, it recognizes the bums' reality and stages a way of seeing poverty that neither excuses the bums for their deviance nor excludes them from the existing moral order. Like the women dressed in rags, they are worthy of subjectivity, and the poem avoids making a one-dimensional—and therefore disciplinary in its easy legibility—representation of the Bowery by insisting that modernity is

best represented in the odd juxtapositions and contradictions within urban culture and in the ever-shrinking boundaries of the poor and homeless' social space.

The ubiquity of these forms of suffering and invisibility is made manifest in "Property of Pigeons." Pigeons, not unlike the bums, must eat, live, and love publicly, and their presence is usually regarded as an obtrusive annoyance. As such, they are disposable:

> all that is shown to us
> of bird-economies,
> financeless,
> inobvious as the disposal
> of their corpses. (14–18)

The pigeons' lack of value is here made specifically economic although they, unlike the bums, have no way of making money or being useful. Their "property," a term that identifies ownership and possession, thus consists of the "shallow / sill of a factory window" (5–6), "vertical bases / of civic brick" (9–10), and a "slice of concrete / fallen on a cornice / leading into darkness" (37–39). As denizens of the city, these hidden spaces are their "concrete cots," and ironically figured, they signify the inherent homelessness of the unwanted.

The poem does not, however, reside within the dark underworld of the bums. Rather, the pigeons "arise / alight" (7–8) and make "irritant, alluring / music;"

> quilled solfeggios
> of shrill wings winnowing
> their rejoicing, cooing
> fanaticism for wooing. (19–24)

"Irritant," "quilled," and "shrill" are sharp words seemingly antithetical to the pleasures usually associated with music, but this image finds a kind of joy, seemingly religious in its "rejoicing" and "fanaticism," in the common sounds of annoying birds. The pigeons are thus endowed with spiritual value, what some critics identify as the "holy spirit," and represent an innocence unduly beleaguered with notions of economy and property.

Though the poem employs language of the divine—the pigeons' excrements make it look, somewhat jokingly, "as if an angel had been sick" (13) and they "dive for the altar-stair / to their privacies ——" (35–36)—it grounds the divine within the coarse materiality of a life lived as waste. "Excrements" and "corpses" evoke embodiment in waste, and "factory window," "civic brick," and the "slit adjacence of houses" erect immovable, tangible structures around the pigeons' already narrow lives. Moreover, the poem emphasizes not visionary transformation, but the negotiation of visibility. Taking only the first line of several subsequent stanzas, the poem reads: "Pigeons doze"; "Pigeons arise"; "Pigeons make irritant, alluring / music"; "Pigeons disappear"; "Pigeons through some conjurous procedure // appear to reappear." This process of "appearing to reappear," while seemingly unknowable and ambiguous ("appear" signifying both the act of becoming visible and the less sure sense or impression of being), implies a kind of resistance, a failure to stay hidden despite the obligation to "disappear." "Property of Pigeons" thus recasts the problem of the bum into the pigeon, and does so, I argue, to show the senseless prejudice against the dispossessed.

Suffering and Resolution

This chapter has argued that Loy's Bowery poems and assemblages aspire to express a state of crisis and expose scenes of discrimination, segregation, and conflict. Any such

discussion of the representation of subalterity, however, necessarily raises questions about the ethics of aesthetic objectification and appropriation. It is true that Loy did not identify herself as an activist or campaign for social reform, nor did she think of her work as particularly political. Carolyn Burke explains that she maintained friendly relations with her Bowery neighbors, often giving them spare change and employing them to do odd jobs for her. She also gave the men bottles of wine on the understanding that the empties would be returned for her collection.[126] While generous considering the problem of her own poverty, this conditional reciprocity suggests that Loy's charity was, at least in part, motivated by a desire to manufacture authenticity for her assemblages.

Her work was also a moneymaking venture. The constructions that sold at the Bodley show went for $2,000 a piece, a considerable sum considering that being made of cheap materials they were not made to last. *No Parking* was also displayed in the window of the Gotham Book Market to help publicize the republication of her book of poetry *Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables*. Furthermore, while the poems defy and thus avoid sentimental literature's overwrought identification with the poor, many of them, particularly "Hot Cross Bum," offer grotesque representations of dereliction that often seem more akin to disorienting surrealist dreamscapes than the boiled-down realism of contemporary urban fiction and photography.

However, the socially and economically determined scrap aesthetics of the poems and assemblages are designed to generate "astonishment *and* empathy, estrangement *and* recognition," to borrow a phrase from Joseph Entin, and this chapter suggests that these two seemingly competing impulses come together to productively question hegemonic values and viewpoints. The objectification of the bums, moreover, is put into service of the critique she's making about a discriminatory political economy and the invisibility of suffering. Devoid of the

acerbic wit characteristic of so much of Loy's work, "Show Me a Saint Who Suffered," a poem published just four years before her death in 1966, articulates a response to this question of ethics:

> Show me a saint who suffered in humility;
> I will show you one and again another
> who suffered more and in deeper humility
> than he.
>
> I who have lived among many of the unfortunate
> claim that of the martyr to have been
> a satisfactory career, his agony
> being well-advertised.[127]

This short verse is probably one of Loy's most syntactically conventional poems and foregoes her usual strategy of negation and dislocation in favor of clarity and precision. The speaker comes to the defense of the "unfortunate" and ironizes the fact that poverty, being "well-advertised" and thus a commodity for class tourists, enables him (who is demonstrably unemployed) to make a career out of his pain and suffering. The speaker intimates a proximity to and personal investment in this scene, having "lived among many of the unfortunate." Yet she "lived among," not "as one" of the unfortunate, a position which simultaneously evokes a sense of identification and difference. Furthermore, while the poem critiques the commodification of poverty, in a sense it similarly advertises martyrdom by publicizing his suffering.

The last stanza does not resolve this sense of contradiction. It does, however, reiterate a concern about the visibility of suffering and distinguishes between ideas of "heroic" and "common" suffering:

> Is not the sacrifice of security to renown
> conventional for the heroic?
> The common tragedy is to have suffered
> without having "appeared."

The unfortunate are not heroic; they cannot sacrifice "security to renown" if they do not have security in the first place, and there is no return on or value to their suffering. Rhetorically yoking the "conventional" to the "heroic," however, the passage minimizes the significance of heroic sacrifice and emphasizes the "common tragedy" of silent, invisible, and thus unheroic suffering. The poem thus has identifiable political effects: it discloses a scene of injustice in which suffering is ignored or overlooked and challenges the logic that legitimates heroism as a form of chosen suffering. The poem also implies a kind of ethical imperative in which art must reveal and respond to social conditions. The effects of Loy's "astonishment *and* empathy, estrangement *and* recognition" is thus to make the bum "appear" by retrieving him from obscurity and thus recording his tragedy.

Doing so in the medium and metaphor of trash, which is materially and socially legible, makes the most illegible of circumstances a site of meaning making and political change. Loy's work recycles useless and senseless forms of experience into a new poetic language, fashioning a mode of verbo-visual representation that challenges conventional determinations of value and political agency. These aesthetics and politics are best understood within the contexts of their historical moment: a time when the first World War had proven to avant-gardists to be violently

destructive and devastating, not artistically liberating, and the second promised to do much of the same; when the Depression had very recently thrown America into utter disarray and questioned the ideological fabric of a country predicated upon the health of its economy; and when Loy herself was forced from her European home on account of racial difference and discarded by American narratives of inclusion due to her poverty and unwillingness—derived in large part from an economic inability—to distance herself from scenes of abjection. The scrap thus signifies and gives texture to failure and exclusion at the same time that it suggests the regenerative promise of recovery, reintegration, and transformation.

Coda: Scrap Aesthetics and Waste Management in the Twenty-first Century

This dissertation has argued that scrap aesthetics performed important political work during the Great Depression, a time when widespread economic scarcity required, and oftentimes forced, Americans to reevaluate the value of the objects, discourses, and physical remainders of everyday life. Scrap modernism sees representational value in that which is typically thrown away or discarded—be it old newspapers, empty wine bottles, or rags but crucially, stories about underrepresented, disenfranchised groups that challenge narratives of national belonging and ideological authority. By adding exploited laborers, African Americans living in both Harlem and rural Florida, and Bowery bums to the historical record, scrap aesthetics remake America as a conceptual homespace, one in which subalterity is not the basis for exclusion, but rather, inclusion. Scrap aesthetics also demonstrate the need to scrutinize the powerful forces of American modernity, including the mainstream news, industrial capitalism, and the federal government, suggesting that only when subjugated groups take apart and reassemble these forces do they reclaim some autonomy as activist American citizens.

Scrap practices and other acts of resistance become particularly significant during times of crisis, continuing into the twenty-first century.[128] We can see examples of this occurring in a number of social and cultural contexts. "Freeganism," for example, has developed in direct response to the misuse and abuse of food resources. Most estimates indicate that we waste about forty percent of our food, from the time it is harvested, transported, and sold in stores to when it's discarded in household trash bins. Rather than contribute to his problem, freegans live off of what other people throw away, dumpster diving to find edible, usually still-packaged food discarded by grocery stores and restaurants; bartering within the freegan community for goods and services; and recycling trash such as aluminum cans and car parts either to sell for a small

profit or reassemble into something useful. Practitioners define freeganism as a "total boycott of an economic system where the profit motive has eclipsed ethical considerations" and claim that their taboo and sometimes illegal practices counteract the devastating consequences of unchecked conspicuous consumption.[129] Interestingly, by minimizing consumption, freegans also reduce the demand for what they call "total employment," and working in excess of actual need comes to signify further enslavement to a corrupt system. Thus, not unlike the Bowery bums whom Mina Loy lived amongst and represented in her work, freegans exist outside of, by refusing to participate within, the conventional work economy. Yet here the object of scrutiny and scorn is a throwaway society, not its throwaways. Instead, freegans consider themselves good citizens, of both the country and the planet, and insist that such scrapping practices fulfill what is now an ethical imperative to reuse and recycle.

In September 2011, similarly agitated groups started gathering in New York City's financial district to protest the perceived undue influence of corporations on the government. The movement, which soon became known as Occupy Wall Street, organized itself around accumulation and visibility; that is, by physically taking up space in parks and other public areas, a consensus-based mass of protestors could be seen and heard. The Occupy Wall Street slogan, "We are the 99%," referred to income disparity in America and the fact that affluent Americans own most of the nation's wealth; according to a report published by a nonpartisan congressional research service in July 2012, the share of total net worth held by the wealthiest one percent of American households hit 34.5 percent in 2010, and the top 10 percent's share was 74.5 percent.[130] The campaign grew in both strength and numbers, and over the course of the next several months, OWS rallies were held across the country, in public parks, college campuses, urban financial districts, and state capitols.

Critiques of the movement veered between alarmist warnings of the dangers of a socialist uprising and representations of the 99 percenters as unkempt and unclean anarchists who used the movement to incite civic unrest. By November 2011, OWS had factionalized, incidents of crime and drug abuse within the camps proliferated, and the movement came to an unofficial close when NYC officers evicted protesters from Zuccotti Park. Several years later, it's up for debate about how successful OWS was in demanding accountability on the part of banks and other financial institutions and bringing them to justice. Nevertheless, as a movement without formal leadership and one that enabled marginalized groups of people to speak out against the dominant class, it made visible the ways in which refused and forgotten groups can advocate for social change. OWS also focused the nation's attention on acts of inclusion and exclusion, rather than any imposed notion of coherence or unity, and asked Americans to acknowledge a populist uprising that wasn't popular amongst all groups.

Freeganism and Occupy Wall Street are just two examples of what I consider scrapping as social protest and the ways in which radically recuperative practices attempt to shift the boundaries between margin and mainstream. Scrapping has also persisted in more formalist terms, as a mode of composition that uses found materials to construct new, often disorienting assemblages. In Austin, Texas, Vince Hannemann began constructing his backyard "Cathedral of Junk" in 1988. The Cathedral is assembled out of a wide range and monumental amount of objects (an estimated sixty tons!), including everything from used tires, telephones, and bicycle gears to rubber duckies, glass bottles, toilets, and a treasure trove of American kitsch. The items have been connected to a metal frame, heaped upon one another, and assembled into collections. The structure includes three levels, and visitors are encouraged to move through the main dome

room with vaulted ceilings and then ascend a winding staircase, made out of tires set into concrete, to the upper-level observation platforms.[131]

"Cathedral of Junk" (author's photographs)

In recent years, the Cathedral of Junk has become popular as a tourist destination and has even played host to weddings, parties, and school field trips. It's regarded as an essential monument to and model of the local "Keep Austin Weird" culture and has weathered several attempts by Hannemann's neighbors and city officials to have the structure dismantled as a safety hazard and neighborhood eyesore.

When I visited the Cathedral last December, I tried to interview Hannemann about what motivated his work and what he thought it represented in today's political and cultural environment. Although he was not particularly forthcoming, Hannemann told me that it was just something he wanted to do. He regards the Cathedral less as a political project about waste and

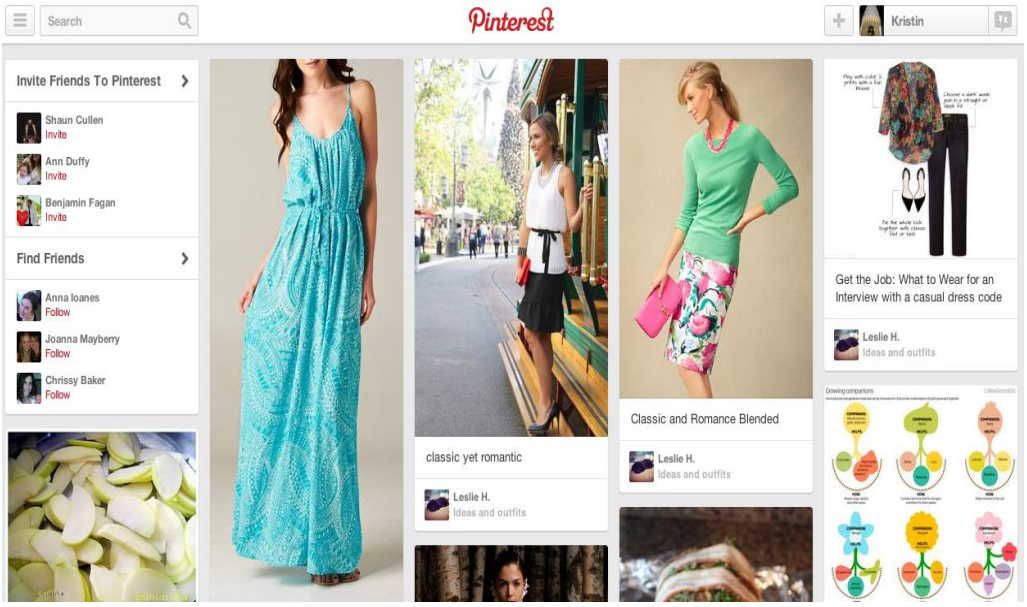
artistic repurposing and more as a clubhouse, a place to enjoy the sheer multitude of things. Yet despite Hannemann's attempt to minimize the significance of such work, the Cathedral is nevertheless suggestive of the transformative potential of the scrap. The structure is literally in a backyard in a suburban part of Austin (from the street it's invisible), and its accumulation of junk—most of which he collected and some of which was added by enthusiastic visitors over the last twenty-six years—has changed a domestic space into a public forum for seeing and interacting with material textures of our everyday lives. The prodigious size of the collection also remakes the scrap heap into a kind of historical archive; one table of telephones, for example, includes the rotary, speakerphone, and cordless models, as well as a few cell phones and kids' toys. The collection thus reveals processes of change (and the acts of refusal embedded within them), and collecting becomes a way of remembering the past.

One of the most notable literary examples of scrap aesthetics in recent years is the poet Anne Carson's *Nox* (2010).[132] *Nox* is Carson's tribute to her older brother Michael, who died unexpectedly in 2000. Its contents are presented not between two covers but in a box about the size of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Inside the box is an accordion-style, full-color reproduction of Carson's notebook of memories, which incorporates pasted-in photographs, poems, collages, paintings, and a letter Michael once wrote home, along with fragments typed by Carson. *Nox* calls upon and bears traces of the physicality of the scrapbook and the keepsake box; it is an artifact that asks readers to see as well as to read the cut-up ways of remembering. Here memory is materialized, and like Muriel Rukeyser's *The Book of the Dead*, Carson's memorialization of the dead refrains from privileging any one textual form or mode of address. Instead, elegy takes shape in the tangled relationships between history, memory, and mourning and through the process of assembling the remnants of a lost presence.

Nox is difficult to read, in large part because of its physical design. The accordion construction makes it so that you can turn the pages (two sections held back to back) one at a time, as you would a bound book, or, unfold the pages into one long horizontal scroll (though to do so would cover the length of a living room and perhaps double back again). The text thus simultaneously evokes the sense of continuity and fragmentation, and the collaged narrative of Michael's life unfolds over time and through space, radically rescripting the reader's relationship to the text. I found myself using the floor as the only space that could accommodate even a small portion of the unfolded text and then walking back and forth alongside it as I read and reread the pages. In this way, the poem reminded me of a physical monument or memorial with its wall of text at the same time that it functioned as a museum of everyday things.

Nox is also deeply allusive and illusive; most of the left-hand pages include cut-and-pasted lexicographical entries that define each word in Catullus's poem 101 (an elegy to his dead brother, or, strictly speaking, to the "mute ashes" which are the only remaining evidence of his brother's body), and Carson invokes Herodotus as her guide to mourning.[133] Moreover, the personal details about Michael's life that Carson chooses to include, very sparingly, are suggestive of incompleteness. On note 3.3, she writes, "We want other people to have a centre, a history, an account that makes sense. We want to be able to say This is what he did and Here's why. It forms a lock against oblivion. Does it?" Here, "does it?" pushes back against "we want," and Carson later comments that "the relation of the parts of this sentence, of this project, to one another is obscure." The text thus rests in this obscurity—its attempt (successful or not) to "make sense"—and draws upon the scrap assemblage as a way to expose the seams between autobiography and elegy, classical literature and a visual language of grief, and poetry and the wide swath of personal detritus.

Scrap aesthetics have even entered the domain of social media and digital networking. Pinterest is a website where users can build collections by "pinning" images to self-created "pinboards," and these images typically link to external websites. Boards are frequently organized around specific planned events, such as a children's party, and the board includes ideas for food, decorations, games, etc. Recipe boards are also common, as well as shopping and decorating (the "I want") boards. Pinterest is organized by an entirely visual logic, one that encourages users to find meaning in a particular image that has been culled from online browsing.[134] Scraps, in this case, signify less the physical remainders of the past than a vision of an alternate future, one that is public, shareable, and founded on the implicit suggestion that what we saved from yesterday might not be as important as what we buy or become tomorrow. As a result, Pinterest appears far from performing the kind of countercultural work of Gumby's scrapbooks or Loy's trash assemblages, and instead, seems to encourage a kind of conspicuous consumerism in which desire becomes the thing worth documenting.



At the same time, however, as more and more institutions like academic libraries are using Pinterest to publicize their collections, share information, and enable users to visually navigate content that can be continuously updated, Pinterest acquires a different and potentially more productive use as an electronic archival tool.[135] This kind of digital scrapbooking then becomes a way to plan, organize, and circulate an institutional identity. Pinterest also creates communities in which the act of making certain visual choices becomes a social activity, and Pinterest users can "follow" other pinners, co-curate particular boards, and perhaps most importantly, identify themselves and others as capable of a creative act. So while Pinterest occupies a decidedly public realm, it also creates a space for self-examination and original expression, and its phenomenal success (in terms of unique visitors and net worth) is suggestive of the ways in which twenty-first-century readers/users desire both a technique and a forum for aesthetically organizing the things of everyday life.[136]

My overview of contemporary scrapping practices is not intended to be exhaustive or complete. Rather, these select examples demonstrate how scrap aesthetics have raised important questions about visibility and acts of inclusion and exclusion, both during the Great Depression and in the twenty-first century. The use of such varied materials, particularly within literary and cultural production, does more than provide texture to historical themes. Rather, because what is at stake in most of these works is national narrative and feelings of belonging, scrapping participates directly in the writing of history by exposing the institutional venues through which history is written.[137] Such work will continue to be both urgent and necessary as long as a multitude of marginalized voices and histories need to be seen and heard despite efforts to silence them. Formal innovation allows for this kind of intervention and encourages citizens to take up, remake, and thus redefine ideas of American identity and collective experience.

Notes

[1] *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), 5.

[2] It is well known that certain forms of representation—photography in particular—may appear to document a subject without mediation, but of course, they do not. In this sense, it's generally more apt to discuss mimetic effects rather than mimesis.

[3] Atwood, "Out of the Scrap Heap," 97. Quoted in Scandura, 19.

[4] In his theory about the creation and destruction of value, Michael Thompson argues that "things" fall into one of three categories: durable, transient, and rubbish. Durable things have value that doesn't decrease over time because the object isn't destroyed over time, something like a famous painting that is scrupulously cared for. A transient thing is an everyday object that, gradually declining in value, can slide into the category of rubbish where it becomes valueless and unwanted. Rubbish, however, can move into the category of durable by being saved by a collector, an act that transforms its social identity and use as an object. Value, therefore, is created through processes of rediscovery and exchange, and Thompson highlights the importance of thinking about value in terms of flow and circulation.

[5] More informally, "scrap" may also mean a fight or quarrel or to engage in one. In this way, scrapping may also imply a sense of resistance.

[6] Barnaby Haran argues that "the Great Depression exposed the illusion that modernism, technology, industry, radicalism and the spiritual might all be coterminous … Cultural practice became factional, as different groups, and sometimes members of a single group, contested the way forward following a shock that seemed to augur the collapse of capitalism" ("Machine, Montage, Myth" 563).

[7] Canonical Left novels of the decade include Mike Gold's *Jews Without Money* (1930), Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933), and Robert Cantwell's *Land of Plenty* (1934).

[8] Such criticism includes Cary Nelson's *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory 1910-1945*; Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction in Depression America*; Paula Rabinowitz's *Labor and Desire: Women's Revolutionary Fiction in Depression America* (1991); and *Radical Revisions: Rereading 1930s Culture*, edited by Bill Mullen and Sherry Lee Linkon, among many others.

[9] See, for example, Paula Rabinowitz, "Margaret Bourke-White's Red Coat; or, Slumming in the Thirties" in *Radical Revisions*, 187–207, and *They Must Be Represented* (1994). Jeff Allred also provides an excellent overview of such photographic criticism in *American Modernism and Depression Documentary*, 3–25.

[10] For an excellent discussion of mourning and melancholia (and the literary modes used to represent them) within Depression-era literature, see Seth Moglen's *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[11] Janine Utell has even called Pound a "grave robber," a poet who "plundered history for his poetry, then, like a Frankenstein, made it new, reinvented and revised it to speak to his era" (103).

[12] The "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses* is most explicitly collage-like in its recontextualization and juxtaposition of newspaper headlines with fictional narrative.

[13] Among Davidson's list of such "hybrid texts" are James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, Margaret Bourke White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces*, Hart Crane's *The Bridge*, William Carlos

Williams's *Paterson*, Marianne Moore's pastiche poems, and Langston Hughes's *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. See *Ghostlier Demarcations*, 138–39.

[14] Most critics credit Marcel Duchamp for introducing appropriation art and the concept of the "ready-made" when he submitted *Fountain*, a urinal set atop a pedestal and signed "R. Mutt 1917," to the Society of Independent Artists exhibition in 1917.

[15] Hurston also repurposed this work for her own folklore anthologies and was known for revising and embellishing stories and tales across her various collections.

[16] Appropriation art has resulted in contentious copyright issues, particularly as copyright legislation became more restrictive in the second half of the twentieth century. These cases are typically determined by whether the artwork is transformative or derivative, calling attention to the tenuous boundaries between borrowing and reproducing as well as parody and plagiarism.

[17] Interestingly, this work takes the form of collage and is composed of penciled notes, multiple forms of prose narrative (journalism, autobiography, ethnography), photographs, and previously unpublished archival materials. Scandura's criticism thus simultaneously comments on and models scrapped assemblage aesthetics.

[18] In addition to the revisionist scholarship on American modernism I have discussed here, there is also Michael Trask's *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (2003); Paula Rabinowitz's *Black and White and Noir: America's Pulp Modernism* (2002); Michael Suárez's *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (2007); Delia Caparoso Konzett's *Ethnic Modernisms: Anzia Yezierska, Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, and the Aesthetics of Dislocation* (2002); and *Bad Modernisms* (2006), edited by Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowtiz, among many others. As this list makes clear,

Scrap Modernism participates in a tradition of defining and redefining modernism and makes its critical investments legible in the title.

[19] *Forum and Century*; July 1939; VOL. CII, I.

[20] Though Burroughs goes on to defend the cut-up against charges of uncreativity: "People say to me, 'Oh, this is all very good, but you got it by cutting up.' I say that has nothing to do with it, how I got it. What is any writing but a cut-up? Somebody has to program the machine; somebody has to do the cutting up. Remember that I first made selections. Out of hundreds of possible sentences that I might have used, I chose one" (Burroughs and Gysin 8).

[21] *The Soft Machine* (1961), the first volume in the trilogy, is considered Burroughs's most successful cut-up novel after *Naked Lunch* (1959).

[22] Quoted in Townsend Ludington's biography of Dos Passos, *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 264.

[23] For an excellent discussion of Dos Passos's relationship to the Communist Party and to other anticapitalist formations during the 1920s and 30s, as well as his turn to nativist anti-Semitism in response to the crisis of Stalinism, see Seth Moglen, *Mourning Modernity: Literary Modernism and the Injuries of American Capitalism*, 95–122.

[24] Most radicals at the time believed that their political prosecution was also fueled by ethnic hatred. *Facing the Chair* was first published in 1927 by the Sacco-Vanzetti Defense Committee and later reprinted by De Capo Press in 1970.

[25] Incidentally, both Dos Passos and Rukeyser were connected to the *Student Review*—the main organ of a Communist-affiliated student organization; Dos Passos as a contributing editor and Rukeyser as editor from 1932–33.

[26] Michael Davidson argues that "what links the documentary imperative to acts of testimony is the fact that eyewitness reports retain some vestige of the unique individual; they testify that someone was actually present when such-and-such happened, and *this* document is its record" (149, italics in original). The term "witnessing" also carries an overtone of responsibility.

[27] All parenthetical citations of *U.S.A.* refer to the Mariner Book series (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000).

[28] "Note," at the end of *U.S. 1* (New York: Covici and Friede, 1938), the volume in which *The Book of the Dead* is included.

[29] See Chapter Two for a full discussion of the American Guide Series' ideological aims and the contestations over who and what would be represented.

[30] Unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical citations of *The Book of the Dead* refer to *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*, Ed. Janet E. Kaufman and Anne F. Herzog (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005).

[31] Stacy Alaimo argues that Rukeyser presents a "transcorporeal landscape," that is, a land (both the industrial and natural environment) that has been invaded by the human body and human bodies that have been invaded by the land (namely, silica dust). See *Bodily Natures*, 48.

[32] Dos Passos's contributions include "The Unemployed Report," published in the February 13, 1934 issue. Rukeyser published "Movie" and "The Cornfield" (which was later rewritten into a section of *The Book of the Dead*) in the June 12, 1934 and December 7, 1937 issues, respectively. See *New Masses: An Anthology of the Rebel Thirties*, ed. Joseph North (New York: International Publishers, 1969).

[33] See David Sanders's interview with Dos Passos for the *Paris Review*, July 1962. Reprinted in *John Dos Passos: The Major Nonfictional Prose* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988),

241–52. Dos Passos repeatedly used the term "chronicle" throughout this time to refer to his literary methodology.

[34] Introduction to the Modern Library edition of *U.S.A.* (New York: Random House, 1937).

[35] See "What Makes a Novelist," Dos Passos's address on being awarded the Feltinelli Prize by the National Academy of Lynxes in Rome, November 14, 1967. Reprinted in *The Major Nonfictional Prose*, 268–75.

[36] In this way, the Newsreels bear distinct resemblance to the "Aeolus" chapter of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

[37] For a good discussion of *U.S.A.*'s soundscape and the pervasiveness of "external racket" like the clattering of trains, ringing of telephones, wails of sirens, etc., see Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 104–8.

[38] *The Fourteenth Chronicle*, edited by Townsend Ludington (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), 377.

[39] Townsend Ludington has transcribed several of these notebook pages in *John Dos Passos: A Twentieth Century Odyssey* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1980), 257–60.

[40] This kind of annotative project has been taken up by digital scholarship. The online site "Digital Dos Passos" provides a detailed historical context for newsreels in *1919*, specifically Newsreels XX and XLIII. The archive is searchable, and media files gloss the newsreel fragments with accompanying photographs, original song lyrics, and newspaper articles.

[41] In many ways, the Newsreels recall Tristan Tzara's instructions to a would be Dadaist in "Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love" (reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, 92):

To make a Dadaist poem
Take a newspaper.
Take a pair of scissors.
Choose an article as long as you are planning to
make your poem.
Cut out the article.
Then cut out each of the words that make up this
article and put them in a bag.
Shake it gently.
Then take out the scraps one after another in the
order in which they left the bag.
Copy conscientiously.
The poem will be like you. And here you are a
writer, infinitely original and endowed with a
sensibility that is charming beyond the
understanding of the vulgar.

[42] For this and other historical details about newsreels, I am deeply indebted to Raymond Fielding's *The American Newsreel, 1911–1967* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1972) and *The March of Time, 1935–1951* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

[43] Quoted in Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented*, 91.

[44] Fielding, *The American Newsreel*, 109–26.

[45] British Pathé has recently digitized its entire archive of World War I footage, and videos are available for viewing on their homepage and on youtube.com.

[46] Not all newsreels dealt with such serious subject matter. Some companies covered the latest women's fashions and Hollywood gossip.

[47] Fielding reports that hostility towards the Hearst organization became so strong that by the 1930s audiences frequently booed the newsreels and picketed the theaters to stop running them. A number of motion picture theaters eventually dropped Hearst newsreels altogether (*The American Newsreel*, 248).

[48] "Washington and Chicago II: Spotlights and Microphones," *New Republic* (June 29, 1932).

[49] "There is Only One Freedom," in *The Major Nonfictional* Prose, 210.

[50] A modern-day equivalent to this form of satire might be the humor magazine *The Onion* or the cable-news satire *The Daily Show*. It is commonplace for *The Daily Show* to compile clips about a specific person or news topic, and by showing them in quick, heavily edited succession, the sequence exposes and ridicules any contradictions, inaccuracies, or, in some cases, outright mistruths.

[51] Such charges of sensational and outright sentimental condescension were leveled at Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's phototext *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) as well as at James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941).

[52] Absalom was the rebellious third son of David, King of Israel, and was killed in the Battle of Ephraim Wood.

[53] For example, in his 1938 *Poetry* magazine review of "The Book of the Dead," Willard Maas argues that Muriel Rukeyser had ventured into fields that "have been more adequately explored and more tersely recorded by journalists," and that in the poem, which he felt was "modeled after leaflets," Rukeyser sounds like "Carrie Nation with a political hatchet on a Cook's tour."

[54] Thurston points out that Rukeyser chose to omit the part of Philippa Allen's testimony in which she claimed that Shirley was Mrs. Jones's favorite son—a change suggestive of Rukeyser's desire to make Mrs. Jones as sympathetic as possible; see *Making Something Happen*, 197.

[55] This work corresponds in many important ways to Mina Loy's trash constructions, which I address in Chapter Three.

[56] Quoted in Green, *The Social Life of Poetry*, 169.

[57] Many critics consider Hurston a pioneer in the field of formal folklore research. Mary Helen Washington credits her with being the first black scholar to study Eatonville, Florida, and other areas of the South; see "A Woman Half in Shadow." Robert Hemenway, Hurston's biographer, also calls her the "most important collector of Afro-American folklore in America."

[58] The FWP's roster of participants includes many of the most famous names in modern literature: Sterling Brown, Richard Wright, Conrad Aiken, Nelson Algren, Margaret Walker, Saul Bellow, Kenneth Fearing, John Cheever, Ralph Ellison, and Kenneth Rexroth, among many others. Despite this fact, Hurston kept her employment a secret and never publicly acknowledged her affiliation with the program.

[59] There is some debate over how much authority Hurston yielded during her time with the Florida FWP. Robert Hemenway reports that she was an editor for the Jacksonville "Negro Unit" whereas Pamela Bordelon insists that Hurston never held a supervisory role in any capacity; a fact she calls a "clear-cut case of racial discrimination" that contributed to Hurston's financial insecurity and tension with the project (15). In part accounting for this confusion, Bordelon explains that while other writers addressed Hurston as editor and she herself used the title in correspondence, she never had the formal position or its salary. Valerie Boyd also contends that Hurston was not compensated in a manner commensurate with her writing experience; see *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003).

[60] Library of Congress, American Memory; see "By the People, For the People: Posters from the WPA, 1936–43" in the Prints and Photographs Division.

[61] Entries in *The Florida Negro* are unattributed. In her introduction to *Go Gator and Muddy the Water*, Bordelon argues that several entries in *The Florida Negro* have wrongly been credited to Hurston and thus claims to correct several mistakes in early Hurston scholarship, such as

Hemenway's 1977 biography. However, identifying some characteristics of Hurston's "distinctive voice," David Kadlec finds strong resemblances between sections of the Florida guidebook and *The Florida Negro* and believes these entries to be authored by Hurston (478).

[62] See "Characteristics of Negro Expression."

[63] In addition to these volumes, Gumby made scrapbooks devoted to Broadway Theater, white celebrities such as Jimmy Stewart, popular American presidents, and his eccentric cat Tony P., among many other "odd and curious" things he considered worth documenting. He also made scrapbooks upon request for the actress Frances White and for Rose McClendon. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I focus exclusively on his collection of Negroana.

[64] While his scrapbooks are not well studied, Gumby is generally acknowledged as an interesting personality within surveys of the period. See entries for the "Gumby Book Studio" in the *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume One*, ed. Cary D. and Paul Finkelman (New York: Routledge, 2004), 455–56; "Gumby Book Studio Quarterly" in *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Literary Renaissance: The Essential Guide to the Lives and Works of the Harlem Renaissance Writers*, ed. Lois Brown (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 207–8; and, "Levi Sandy Alexander Gumby" in *Harlem Renaissance Lives: From the African American National Biography*, eds. Henry Louis and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), 230–32.

[65] It should be noted that the recent online exhibit of the Gumby collection, entitled *"The Unwritten History": Alexander Gumby's African America* and curated by Nicholas Osborne, is much more than a catalogue of the library's holdings. It instead seeks to contextualize both Gumby's methodology and artistic influence. This exhibit offers readers a vital point of access to the collection, and digitization of the scrapbook pages helps protect them from wear and tear.

[66] That is not to say, however, that the archive is or should be exempt from critical scrutiny. In his study of scrapbooks as performance archives, Glen McGillivray argues that "archives are not and have never been impartial repositories and these 'struggles for power' are fundamentally about who or what will be included in a particular archive and how" (13).

[67] Some readers might assume that the assembly of items is haphazard or made simply on the basis that they are all about baseball. As I discuss in the second part of this essay, however, Gumby was constantly revising the scrapbooks—pasting, lifting, and repasting items as the volumes grew in size and scope. This kind of revision and the complex chronology on display evince meaningful deliberation and design.

[68] In 1926, Schomburg donated his collection of African American materials—which included more than five thousand books, three thousand manuscripts, two thousand etchings and paintings, and several thousand pamphlets—to the New York Public Library.

[69] For an excellent list of other prominent African Americans who made scrapbooks during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, see Garvey, 132–33.

[70] These pages also demonstrate the fact that scrapbookers generally believe they have a right to use materials however they see fit. While Gumby nearly always included the name of the source publication and the date of clippings, his collecting was nevertheless an appropriative activity that privatized public media.

[71] Chasar devotes a chapter of his study to poetry scrapbooks and identifies scrapbooking as "a method of thinking that people used to process, articulate, and remake their life experiences" and as an expressive mode of composition with a distinct literary precedent (18).

[72] Garvey explains that because black newspapers were rarely archived in libraries, scrapbooks became a vital repository of African American material culture and non-mainstream

publications. Saving created a public record that could be used both as information and evidence (153).

[73] Zora Neale Hurston to Thomas E. Jones, October 12, 1934. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. Carla Kaplan (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

[74] It's important to note that as material objects, scrapbooks are highly ephemeral and, in most cases, incapable of being mechanically reproduced, thereby making them inaccessible to a wide reading audience. This irreproducibility, however, is now changing as more and more scrapbooks are being preserved in libraries and archives. Gumby's scrapbooks, for example, have been converted to microfilm, and nearly all the articles, images, and paper objects can be photocopied. Digital archives are also changing the practices and politics of preservation.

[75] This and the following biographical details are drawn from Gumby, "The Adventures of My Scrapbooks," 19–23 and from Jo Kadlecek, "Black History Remains Alive in Alexander Gumby's Popular Scrapbooks."

[76] In addition to the scrapbooks, the Gumby collection includes sixteen boxes of manuscripts, Gumby's personal correspondence, and holograph manuscripts from notable historic figures.

[77] Nugent also goes so far as to claim that Gumby's newspaper clippings and scrapbooks are "more complete than even the Schomburg Collection at the 135th Street Public Library" (226), hinting at what may have been a competitive bid for prestige between the two collectors.

[78] Highlighting this relationship between scraps and ideologically inflected processes of scrapping, Chasar argues that within American literature "the scrap often becomes literary shorthand for figuring capitalism's dispossessed: the physically, geographically, institutionally, or literarily homeless person who doesn't have a blank book but only a pocket in which to store and maintain the literary capital of modern life" (55).

[79] Interestingly, the announcement on the lower left advertises a public reading by Schomburg about "some experience digging up the past of the Negro." In the essay version of this talk, which was published in Alain Locke's *The New Negro* anthology, Schomburg argues, "The American Negro must remake his past in order to make his future." This idea of remaking and collective retrospection corresponds with Gumby's own ideas of race documentation and material historiography; see "The Negro Digs Up His Past" in *The New Negro*, ed. Alain Locke (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 231–37.

[80] Bartholomew Brinkman, in his online book description of *Poetic Modernism in the Culture of Mass Print*.

[81] Benjamin writes of such interminable work: "As far as the collector is concerned, his collection is never complete; for let him discover just a single piece missing, and everything he's collected remains a patchwork" (*Arcades* [H4a, 1]).

[82] This means that readers today will experience the scrapbooks in very different ways than Gumby's original audience. However, I would suggest that even without firsthand access to complete historical contexts, modern readers are able to recognize Gumby's attempts to celebrate achievement as a direct challenge to contemporary race-based hierarchies.

[83] Beyond the three studies by Rhodes-Pitts, Scandura, and Garvey, there is little published criticism on Gumby or his scrapbook collection.

[84] See, for example, Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler, *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 2006), and Jessica Helfand, *Scrapbooks: An American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2008).

[85] In this way, "The Eatonville Anthology" resembles other contemporaneous works such as the short-story cycle of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919).

[86] Interestingly, the sketch also demonstrates a historical consciousness by recounting "the good old days before World War" and expressing regret over the loss of such carefree forms of sociability.

[87] These stories are thus composed of "memorates," the folklorist's term for belief tales based on memories of actual events.

[88] "'Mah Story Ends,' or Does It? Orality in Zora Neale Hurston's 'The Eatonville Anthology,'" *Journal of the Short Story in English* 47 (Autumn 2006): n. pag. Web. 21 May 2013.

[89] Rachel Farebrother focuses her discussion of Hurston's cross-cultural collage aesthetics on the essay "Characteristics of Negro Expression," in which Hurston describes the appropriative, culturally distinct practices of African American artistic production and claims that black writers "think in hieroglyphics." This essay was first published in Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology in 1934.

[90] This restlessness of objects distinguishes Hurston's sense of assemblage from that of Gumby's scrapbooks—compositions that fix fragments into place, quite literally, through the application of glue.

[91] Carla Kaplan explains that much of the folklore Hurston collected during the twenties and thirties settled anonymously into a basement storage room at Columbia University for over thirty years. Her volume of Hurston's southern folklore, *Every Tongue Got to Confess*, like Bordelon's collection of the federal folklore, presents the missing texts for the first time.

[92] In her introduction to *Mules and Men,* for example, Hurston describes the difficulties of collecting folklore and notably shifts between "they," "the Negro," and "we" in identifying her subjects: "They are most reluctant at times to reveal that which the soul lives by. And the Negro, in spite of his open-faced laughter, his seeming acquiescence, is particularly evasive. You see we

are a polite people and we do not say to our questioner, 'Get out of here!' We smile and tell him or her something that satisfies the white person because, knowing so little about us, he doesn't know what he is missing" (2).

[93] See, for example, Deborah Gordon, "The Politics of Ethnographic Authority: Race and Writing in the Ethnography of Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston," in *Modernist Anthropology: From Fieldwork to Text*, ed. Marc Manganaro (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); Brian Carr and Tova Cooper, "Zora Neale Hurston and Modernism at the Critical Limit," in *Modern Fiction Studies* 48.2 (Summer 2002); *"The Inside Light": New Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Deborah Plant (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010) is a helpful new collection of writings about Hurston's wide body of work, as is *Zora in Florida*, eds. Steve Glassman and Kathryn Lee Seidel (Orlando: Univ. of Central Florida Press, 1991).

[94] Part of this critical silence around Hurston's federal folklore may be due to her own refusal to talk about her time "on relief." Her autobiography, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), written just after she left the project, makes no mention of it, nor did contemporary biographical sketches. Hemenway's 1977 biography devotes only two paragraphs to Hurston's brief tenure with the Florida project.

[95] Hurston always claimed Eatonville as her birthplace though most biographers now agree that she was actually born in a farming community in Alabama. In accounting for this lie, Bordelon argues that "being identified with the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, rather than the sharecropping and tenant-farming plains of rural Alabama was more in keeping with the image of herself that she was trying to create" (4).

[96] As Gates describes it, signifying deploys "the use of repetition and reversal" to make "an implicit parody of a subject's own complicity in illusion." See *Figures in Black*.

[97] In *Mules and Men,* Hurston discusses the evasive tactics by which the "Negro offers a feather-bed resistance" to the probing curiosity of the white observer. She explains, "the theory behind our tactics: 'The white man is always trying to know into somebody else's business. All right, I'll set something outside the door on my mind for him to play with and handle. He can read my writing but he sho' can't read my mind. I'll put this play toy in his hand, and he will seize it and go away. Then I'll say my say and sing my song'" (2–3).

[98] For a point of comparison, Hurston was earning $79.80 a month from the WPA, or roughly $20 a week, at the time of this trip (Boyd 323).

[99] Boyd reports that Hurston was so troubled by the abuses she found at the turpentine camps—which ranged from underpaying workers to sexual violence upon women to beating uncooperative workers to death—that she wrote to white FWP staffers to help her expose the company (323).

[100] These recordings have now been digitized and are available online at the Library of Congress American Memory Project, "Florida Folklife from the WPA Collections, 1937–1942." All subsequent citations refer to these files.

[101] These short films have since been collected and presented in the biographical film *Jump at the Sun* (2008).

[102] The phrase belongs to Charles Dickens and is quoted by Walter Benjamin when he describes his fascination with the splendor of the curiosity dealer's warehouse. See *The Arcades Project*, 208.

[103] For these and other biographical details, I am indebted to Carolyn Burke's biography of Loy, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996).

[104] *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996). All parenthetical citations hereafter will refer to this edition unless otherwise noted.

[105] Roger Conover explains that "When she scavenged the back alleys for flattened cans and abandoned mopheads, it was not to fashion a shelter but to create a poignant vision of shelterless existence" ("Notes on the Text," 208).

[106] *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover. (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982), 227–31.

[107] Loy may also have been alluding to the 1863 art exhibition devoted to artists rejected by the established Academy entitled "Salon des Refusés." See Macleod, "The Visual Arts."

[108] "Constructions," April 14-25, 1959. New York: Bodley Gallery, 1959. I have reproduced the catalogue's original typeface.

[109] It may also simply reflect public hostility towards and intolerance of subalterity. In August 2013, a shopping center in Texas made national news by installing "No Muslim Parking" signs in the parking lot, a move indicative of rising Islamaphobia and the exclusionary tactics of fear-based discrimination.

[110] William N. Copley Collection.

[111] Personal collection of Carolyn Burke.

[112] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, 377–79. See also pages 404–8.

[113] Incidentally, Marcel Duchamp, in the same show poster discussed in the previous section, identifies the assemblages as "Mina's poems à 9 dimensions ½" or, "Mina's poems in 9 ½ dimensions," thus explicitly drawing an aesthetic and conceptual relationship between the poems and assemblages.

[114] As Mary Galvin points out, Loy "drew from her knowledge of the visual arts a concrete notion of the word as medium, as a plastic entity that could be isolated and elevated for its own sake, manipulated not by the ancient associational baggage of meaning it may carry but by its placement in a new context" (56). The words "isolated," "manipulated," and "placement in a new context" suggestively call to mind collage. Noting that Loy saw herself as a "painter called to language," Carolyn Burke similarly identifies her work's assemblage sensibility and suggests that "Mina put poems together as one would assemble a stained-glass window," and that "her vision of fulfillment is also suggested in the many poetic images assembled from fragments—a method of construction that gave body to the developing modern consciousness while carrying private meanings at once erotic, aesthetic, and spiritual" (viii).

[115] See also Burke, *Becoming Modern;* Tim Amstrong, "Loy and Cornell: Christian Science and the Destruction of the World"; Suzanne Hobson, "Mina Loy's 'Conversion' and the Profane Religion of her Poetry."

[116] *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

[117] Seeing is of particular importance in Debord's formulation of the spectacle: "Since the spectacle's job is to cause a world that is no longer directly perceptible to be *seen* via different specialized mediations, it is inevitable that it should elevate the human sense of sight to the special place once occupied by touch; the most abstract of senses, and the most easily deceived, sight is naturally the most readily adaptable to present-day society's generalized abstraction" (17).

[118] Danette DiMarco similarly explores the economic valences of the Bowery poems and identifies Loy's work as a "critical poetry of isolation" and "critique of poverty." While she gives a historical overview of contemporary attitudes towards poverty and identifies failed New

Deal reform as a critical context for the poems, DiMarco's main objective is to trace correspondences between Loy's poetry and late-twentieth-century Nuyorican poetry, thus establishing a lineage of female-authored poetry that is primarily concerned with "urban deprivation and lifestyle more than a feminized experience" (79).

[119] In her study of modernism's "dirty language," Christine Smedley offers a suggestive reading of Loy's linguistic recuperation of the abject, impure, and discarded, particularly in her representation of bodily function and sexual desire in the long poem, *Love Songs*. Her analysis is especially helpful in terms of thinking about the ways in which such language emphasizes the materiality of the bodily and the personal.

[120] See Steven Axelrod et al., *New Anthology of American Poetry, Volume 2* (2005); Cary Nelson, *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (2000); and Robert Haas et al., *American Poetry: The Twentieth Century, Volume 1* (2000).

[121] In the *Last Lunar Baedeker* version, there is neither the apostrophe after "silence" nor the white space. The poem also has different line breaks and formatting.

[122] For an excellent reading of this poem, particularly its floral imagery and language, see Geoff Gilbert, "Adolescent Prosody."

[123] The word "harlequins" may also allude to the commedia dell'arte, and in which case implies a kind of absurd performance.

[124] As Althusser argues, it is impossible to escape or exist outside of ideology and not be subjected to it; even that which seems relegated to the outside in reality takes place within ideology.

[125] The pun might also allude to the children's rhyme "Hot Cross Buns," which focuses on the buying and selling of food.

[126] *Becoming Modern*, 424

[127] *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, 223 (first published as "Untitled" in *Between Worlds* 2/1 [Autumn–Winter 1962]). This poem was not republished in the subsequent edition of Loy's works, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. In *Becoming Modern*, Carolyn Burke refers to it as "In Extremis."

[128] The cut-up, postmodernist work of William S. Burroughs also bears mentioning here as a part of scrap modernism's literary legacy. One of his most renowned works, *Naked Lunch* (1959), randomly collages sections of text into a form of haphazard narrative fiction, and Burroughs explained that he intended for the loosely connected vignettes (what he called "routines") to be read in any order. Burroughs also made scrapbooks as he developed his visual art; see Morgan Falconer, "Cut and Paste," in *The Guardian*, August 24, 2005. For a discussion of Burroughs's use of (and conspiracy theories about) collage as a subversive technique designed to disrupt the ideological functions of mass media, see David Banash's "From Advertising to the Avant-Garde: Rethinking the Invention of Collage," in *Postmodern Culture* 14.2 (2004).

[129] See http://freegan.info/ for more information about freeganism as an ethical philosophy and a practical means of sustainable living.

[130] "An Analysis of the Distribution of Wealth Across Households, 1989–2010" prepared for the Congressional Research Service by Linda Levine, Specialist in Economics, July 17. 2012. http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33433.pdf

[131] In order to see the Cathedral, you have to make an appointment. Visitors are also asked to make a $10 donation per group, which Hannemann says goes towards paying his legal fees.

[132] Though certainly scrap methodologies are far from unusual. Hilary Mantel, author of the historical fiction novels *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*, once remarked: "For myself, the only way I know how to make a book is to construct it like a collage: a bit of dialogue here, a

scrap of narrative, an isolated description of a common object, an elaborate running metaphor which threads between the sequences and holds different narrative lines together" ("Love Your Stationery," in *Write*, ed. Phil Daoust [London: Guardian Books, 2012]).

[133] In fragment 1.3, Carson writes: "Herodotus is an historian who trains you as you read. It is a process of asking, searching, collecting, doubting, striving, testing, blaming and above all standing amazed at the strange things humans do. Now by far the strangest thing that humans do – he is firm on this – is history. This asking."

[134] In my own browsing of the site, I've often found that images fail to link to any useful information, so that the "pins" are less of a resource than a static image.

[135] For an interesting article about library "pinboards," see Cynthia Dudenhoffer's "Pin It! Pinterest as a Library Marketing and Information Literacy Tool," in *College & Research Library News* 73.6 (June 2012): 328–32.

[136] In terms of thinking about national narrative, when I entered the search words "America" on the Pinterest homepage, it lead me to boards with iconic images of American patriotism like the U.S. flag, the bald eagle, and quotes from the Pledge of Allegiance. The collection is decidedly militaristic and features images of wounded soldiers and the text of Christian prayers. In this context, "America" invokes concepts of freedom and sacrifice and leans decidedly to the right as it defends the Second Amendment, Ronald Reagan, and the nation's Christian majority.

[137] It is important to note that Anne Carson is Canadian, not American, though I imagine that identity, belonging, and record making are concerns of most people regardless of nationality.

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