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**“THE LAST OF THE GREAT BOHEMIANS”: FILM POETRY, MYTH,
AND SEXUALITY IN GREENWICH VILLAGE AND THE ATLANTIC, 1930-1975**

by

THOMAS WINFIELD HAFER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Date

Joshua Freeman, Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Helena Rosenblatt, Executive Office

David Gerstner

Daniel Hurewitz

David Nasaw

Randolph Trumbach

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

“The Last of the Great Bohemians”: Film Poetry, Myth, and Sexuality in Greenwich Village and
the Atlantic, 1930-1975

by

Thomas W. Hafer

Adviser: Joshua Freeman

In Greenwich Village, a final generation of bohemians contested the rise and trajectory of gay liberation. During the 1930s, this generation blended modernist poetry and sexuality to develop a new manifestation of bohemia. In the postwar period, they transformed modern poetry into the new artistic medium of film that was critical to shaping postwar American art and culture. This wave of bohemia was built on certain modernist principles, including a universalist understanding of sexuality and identity that was different from, and incompatible with, the growth of identity politics in the 1960s. This dissertation argues that this was a last gasp of modernist bohemian ideology that fought against identity politics and the intellectual shift towards postmodernism, but lost and died out.

This study creates a social and cultural map of this Atlantic bohemia in the decades prior to its clash with identity politics. At its center is the collaborative friendship of critical film theorist Parker Tyler and multi-media artist Charles Henri Ford. Tyler and Ford moved within artistic circles that included poets, painters, composers, avant-garde filmmakers, and writers, and they were tangential to the Surrealists, the Beats, the New American Cinema, and Andy

Warhol's Factory. While this world was anchored in Greenwich Village, Ford, Tyler, and their friends collaborated with other groups around the city, including African-American artists in Harlem, Upper East Side benefactors, and the Latino community in the Lower East side. They also built an Atlantic network to other bohemians within the United States and as they traveled to other places and communities throughout Europe, Latin America, and North Africa. They were able to use these connections to further their art and defend their world against social and cultural changes. Scholarship has often sought to trace Postmodernism from the 1970s back in the Modernist past. This project intervenes in that discourse by showing that bohemians were committed to Modernism into the 1970s and contested that intellectual shift. Their bohemian conception of identity and sexuality and the group's resistance to gay liberation also challenge the prevailing gay history narrative that focuses on a politicized gay identity in the post-Stonewall era.

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1973, Parker Tyler sat down to a magazine interview with Charles Ortleb of *The Advocate*. Tyler was a modernist poet, bohemian, and film theorist who had lived in New York's Greenwich Village since the 1920s. Ortleb began by asking Tyler if he had seen that year's gay pride parade and for his thoughts on the atmosphere of the Village's gay community. Tyler thought it was "altogether incredible," and enjoyed witnessing the changes. Ortleb then asked Tyler about his novel *The Young and Evil*, which was co-written with Charles Henri Ford in the early 1930s, and if there had been any attempt at gay liberation in his decades as a Village resident. "Not in the slightest. It was... a matter of bohemian custom and simply toleration because a homosexual—if he was artistic and intellectual—was just another bohemian." When Ortleb asked if he had seen the gay liberation movement coming in the 1960s, Tyler replied that he had not and that he had "been too much of an individualist."¹ While Tyler found the cultural, social, and political changes of the 1960s and 1970s interesting, even exciting, he made clear that he and his bohemian friends of prior decades had been part of something quite different.

In an interview meant to trace the roots of gay liberation through someone believed to be a gay pioneer or proto-gay liberationist, what unfolded was evidence of a complex collision of the Modern and Postmodern in art, sexuality, and identity. Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and their friends and fellow artists had been part of a separate social and cultural phenomenon. How did these figures get from that accepting bohemian space to become a seeming voice of caution and restraint in the midst of gay liberation? These artists, writers, poets, and filmmakers were

¹ Charles Ortleb Interview with Parker Tyler in 1973, 14.1 Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

part of a final wave of American modernism and held a different worldview of the social, cultural, and political changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The creation of their Modernist world and identity within the context of New York's bohemia from the 1930s to the 1950s and the questions of how it evolved and reacted to the rise of Postmodernism and identity politics of the 1960s and 1970s are what this work seeks to uncover and address.

This is a cultural and intellectual study of the last wave of American bohemianism. It explores poetry, film, politics, and sexuality in New York City's Greenwich Village from the creation of a new bohemia during the Great Depression through the postwar rise and fall of the film poet. Members of this milieu believed in a universalist worldview that allowed for equality of people of different races and sexes, and included an understanding of sexuality that allowed for a wide variety of relationships, including same-sex ones, without turning each variant into a distinct minority identity. Their Modernist point of view, discussed in detail later, led them to resist many elements of the rise of identity politics and the cultural shift towards Postmodernism in the arts that undermined their more formalist avant-garde aesthetics and principles.² These bohemian artists and intellectuals moved beyond earlier Modernist poets and transformed poetry into a variety of new media in the post-World War II era, principally film. Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford served as anchors of this bohemia and so this work focuses on them and the shifting circles of friends and colleagues around them. Tyler and Ford actively contributed to

² For historiography on Modernism and Postmodernism, see Russell Ferguson, William Olander, and Marcia Tucker, Eds., *Discourses: Conversations about Postmodern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), Silvio Gaggi, *Modern/Postmodern: A Study in Twentieth-Century Arts and Ideas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), Jonathan Harris, Francis Frascina, Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, Eds., *Modernism in Dispute: Art Since the Forties* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), Sylvia Harrison, *Pop-Art and the Origins of the Post-Modern* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), E. Ann Kaplan, *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices* (London: Verso Press, 1994), Terry Smith, *Making the Modern: Industry, Art, and Design in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, Eds., *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

both the artistic and intellectual production of this bohemian group and represent the Greenwich Village lynchpin and the Atlantic traveler, respectively.

Bohemia was an imagined space and community held together by artistic creation and these bohemians evoked a myth of the role of poet and artist as intellectual and cultural critic that allowed them to live a non-traditional life that reflected their poetry in the middle of the modern industrial world.³ Bohemia was, and is, a difficult thing to define because it shifted over time and place, and existed as a marginal space for poets, artists, intellectuals, and other offbeat characters.⁴ This study begins with an examination of Tyler and Ford's bohemian world in 1930s Greenwich Village. This later generation of bohemians differed from earlier waves of bohemia in New York and abroad, which have been studied by other scholars. Jerrold Seigel's *Bohemian Paris* argues that Paris's artistic bohemia in the 19th century was liberated and criticized the bourgeoisie, but was also supported by the bourgeoisie as an audience. Seigel therefore cast bohemia as the cultural underside of the new modern industrial elite.⁵ Virginia Nicholson's *Among the Bohemians* is an examination of London from 1900-1939 and draws some comparisons to Seigel's finding. Nicholson's London "haut-Bohemia" gained wealth and prestige from middle-class support, but she also found that most bohemians actively chose a less materialistic life and often tended, by choice, to live in poverty. For that reason, she found that they experimented in communal living, alternative diets, and liberated sexual arrangements that

³ For more on the concept of imagined communities, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). For more on bohemia, see Cesar Grana and Margigay Grana, eds., *On Bohemia: The Code of the Self-Exiled* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (New York: Perennial Books, 2002), William Scott and Peter Rutkoff, *New York Modern: The Arts and the City* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris* (New York: Viking Press, 1986), Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), and Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

⁴ See Hurewitz's description of bohemia using "third space" theory. Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 12-14.

⁵ Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*.

were concretely very different from broader society.⁶ These were attempts to bend and shift social and cultural forms. These studies of European bohemia found both genuine efforts at cultural and social change by artists, but also a continued reliance on bourgeoisie patronage.

Studies of bohemia in the United States take on a different tone. Christine Stansell in *American Moderns* found that bohemian life in late 19th century New York sought to create a new brand of American modernism built on masculinity, which is also supported by David Gerstner's *Manly Arts*.⁷ Modernism was intrinsically connected to bohemia and the identities its members. "Bohemia," according to Stansell, "was the self-designation of those who appointed themselves the custodians of the "new" for the nation."⁸ For artists, writers, and intellectuals, modernism was synonymous with the "new." Gerstner found that in the early 20th century, Modernists were able to solve the question of the artist's role in industrial capitalism by embracing the machine. Stansell shows that this push for the "new" allowed women to join in the manifestation of Greenwich Village bohemia in the beginning years of the 20th century. However, Stansell and Gerstner saw that many of these early female bohemians had to adopt a masculine "swagger" in order to operate within the artistic bohemian world that was built on manliness. As the years past into the 1920s, moderns played increasing with gender barriers and the "New Woman" took her place within bohemia with less pressure and expectation to live up to American manliness. As Gerstner shows by the 1930s and 1940s, this gender and sexual experimentation allowed for many bohemians to develop same-sex relationships and bohemia incorporated a larger "queer" perspective and aesthetic.⁹

⁶ Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians*.

⁷ See David Gerstner, *Manly Arts: Masculinity and Nation in Early American Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), and Stansell, *American Moderns*.

⁸ Stansell, *American Moderns*, x.

⁹ Though other scholarly works have called Tyler, Ford, and their group "queer," in this project I will not be doing so for two reasons. First, Tyler and Ford used their own terminology, such as poet, bohemian, and modern, which more accurately encompass their beliefs and identity. Second, I largely see "queer" as a Postmodernist concept and

Politics and sexuality are important elements in many of these studies. Stansell saw that radical politics played an important role in Greenwich Village in the earlier decades of the twentieth century and the sexual experimentation offered some acceptance of lesbians and gay men. There is a parallel here to the bohemian world of Edendale, Los Angeles studied by Daniel Hurewitz. He similarly found that gay men and women took an increasingly important role within L.A.'s bohemia, alongside artists and political radicals. Both Stansell in her work through the 1920s and Hurewitz for the 1910s through the 1950s emphasize the centrality of the political to their bohemian milieus. Hurewitz's central argument is that modern identity politics, in particular politicized gay identity, grew out of the bohemian intermingling of artists, gay men and women, and political radicals.

Modernism is an important part of bohemia, yet it is another concept that can be difficult to classify. Most accounts place modernism between a period of classicism, or "Premodernism," and postmodernism. The movement between these ways of thinking are marked by particular changes. Though there are complex and numerous transformations at play, it can be simplified in a few ways. Premodernism included faith in God, a search for order, and inherited identity. Modernism is a belief in the abilities of man, a search for self, and constructed identity. Postmodernism holds faith in nothing, seeks complexity and contradiction, and wants to destroy identity. So while Modernism embraced the "new" and broke with tradition, its goal was to build something. It involved a strong level of "self-scrutiny" and exploration of self, which drew upon the writings and ideas of introspective thinkers reaching back to the ancient world.¹⁰ Modernism was built on a "progressive" outlook in that it believed life, society, and art could improve over

certain elements of this Modernist group's art and ideology are lost when that term is applied. Further discussion of this project's place in queer studies is in the conclusion.

¹⁰ Gay, *Modernism*, 4-5.

time by the work and ideas of people.¹¹ Aesthetically, Modernism broke from realism and instead embraced symbolism, abstraction, and surrealism. Modernism strove for a universalism that included all of humanity and all of human behavior.¹² These elements of Modernism were critical to understanding the work and lives of the figures in this study.

Juan Suárez is one of the few scholars who has looked at the work of Tyler, Ford, and their film poet friends. Suárez addresses Postmodernist filmmakers Andy Warhol, Jack Smith, and Kenneth Anger in *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars*. Suárez argues that the aesthetics of this Postmodernist wave of film in the 1960s grew out of a gay, or queer, sensibility and the blending of mass culture into art.¹³ This is something that the modernist film poets of my project largely resisted. Suárez then takes on the early Modernist film poets in “Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943-1969.” While Suárez uses these figures in part to show their brand of Modernism as a predecessor of later postmodern film, his chief argument is that queer male aesthetics tended towards the use of mythology, while Menken as a woman developed an aesthetic based on “matter.”¹⁴ My work finds less of an aesthetic divide along lines of sex or sexuality, and instead finds that they challenged the notion of anything like a gay or queer sensibility. Lastly, Suárez looks at Tyler and Ford’s 1933 novel *The Young and Evil* in his book *Pop Modernism*. The aim of this project was to undermine the perceived divide between Modernism and Postmodernism by wresting free some elements of Postmodernism from within earlier Modernist art. This leads Suárez to see Tyler and Ford as on the fringes of the Modernist and queer (Postmodernist) groupings. This framework misses the fact that Ford and Tyler saw themselves as firmly within the Modernist

¹¹ Smith, *Making the Modern*, 4-5.

¹² Smith, *Making the Modern*, 3.

¹³ Juan Antonio Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars: Avant-garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ Juan Antonio Suárez, “Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943-1969,” *Grey Room* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 36 – Summer 2009).

movement and misses elements to their understanding of sexuality, such as its universalist nature.

The bohemia of Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford, which existed from the 1930s through the 1960s, both followed some of these earlier patterns and created new dimensions to bohemia. At the center of this bohemia was, still, artistic creation, poetry, and the blending together of marginal groups. There was a level of fantasy and fashioning of their world, their social group, and their individual personas. They were able to identify themselves and they understood identity to be based on action. Parker Tyler amplified and embellished his character when he identified himself as “the beautiful poet Parker Tyler,” but at its core was the concrete practice of writing and reciting poetry. This kind of constructed identity was a major part of Modernism and it exemplified the hyper-individualism of Modernists to need to cast oneself as such in a unique way.

Underlying Tyler and Ford’s Modernism, indeed all waves of Modernism, was that there was a formalist and correct structure by which to judge art. For Ford and Tyler, this was found in symbolism and poetics from earlier generations, not in the postwar period the intense abstractionism of many painters. Tyler and Ford maintained their Modernist universalism of identity and formalism of art against the subversive and subcultural identities that were part of Postmodernism and that shift against judgment, structure, and formalism.¹⁵

Compared to Seigel’s and Nicholson’s studies of earlier bohemias in Paris and London, Tyler similarly described the difference between low and high bohemia in his day, where low was poor and unattached and high bohemia was in large part supported by the middle and upper classes. In line with Stansell’s and Gerstner’s work, Tyler and Ford’s bohemia had continued to move beyond the earlier gender issues. These bohemians drew on both masculine and feminine

¹⁵ See Harrison and Wood, *Modernism in Dispute*, 171-173.

characteristics, women were actively included, and figures like Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Djuna Barnes served in mentorship roles to younger men and women within the Greenwich Village scene of the 1930s and 1940s. Earlier bohemians worked to open up female sexuality and allowed for sexual freedom for men and women. They were all candid about sexuality, but they were still largely centered on heterosexual relationships.¹⁶ Ford and Tyler continued this but also brought same-sex sexuality into the equation. However, though they did this, and though Ford, Tyler, and many of their friends could, and often are, labeled as gay or homosexual, these bohemians maintained and advocated a universalist understanding of sexuality that did not distinguish same-sex relationships and sexualities from others.



Figure 0.1: Drawing of Parker Tyler. By Pavel Tchelitchev. 1940

¹⁶ Gay, *Modernism*, 12.

Out of this modernist milieu developed a unique conception of sexuality and sexual identity. Bohemian sexuality was particular to this setting. In the 1930s, Ford and Tyler referred to their sexual system simply as “bohemian.” By the era of gay liberation, Tyler had recast this as “pansexuality.” In Bohemia, sexuality was pleasure not simply child-rearing. Sex was important to their art, their social lives, and to their myth and spirituality. Since bohemians had pushed for equality of the sexes and of genders, there were less barriers and many bohemians sought relationships with others regardless of such categories. While Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford’s sexual practice and identifications were not exclusively homosexual, they created a universalist understanding of sexuality that allowed for same-sex behavior. They and their friends ultimately constructed long-term committed relationships built on teaching, love, and artistic collaboration, some of which were same-sex. Most did not follow the structures of family, child-rearing, and conventional marriage. Scholars usually say that bohemia simply allowed for other sexualities within its space rather than giving credence to growth of this universalist bohemian sexuality as a system unto itself by the 1930s and beyond.

Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and their friends did not just have to confront the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism, but also the rise of identity politics and the gay rights movement. When gay liberation emerged with the Stonewall rebellion in 1969, the following years allowed for a wide variety of voices. Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and their circle participated in this new dialogue, yet as time went on they expressed concern over the direction of a politicized gay rights movement. Some gay liberationists also labeled bohemians in same-sex relationships as gay and pushed them to “come out,” something that Tyler, Ford, and others refused to do based on their universalist understanding of sexuality. Many activists, whether gay, African-American, women, or Native American, pushed for art that positively represented their

group and claimed only a group member could have an authentic voice. Modernist artists therefore felt restricted in what they could create and the characters that they could make. The diverse, yet universalist, Modernist group felt pulled, strained, and fractured, as society labeled artists in a variety of ways, by gender, sex, race, or sexuality. Amazingly, these bohemians challenged these changes in their lives, writings, and art. Some fled New York City for Europe or Asia, others adjusted and continued their push for pansexuality, and others sought remnants of their old world in new ethnic and migrant groups in the city or through travel.

The narrative of 20th century American gay history has grown out of works like George Chauncey's *Gay New York*, Allan Bérubé's *Coming Out Under Fire*, John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, and Daniel Hurewitz's *Bohemian Los Angeles*.¹⁷ This narrative has largely focused on the development of a politicized gay identity and the rise of the gay rights movement. As one of the unique elements to Tyler and Ford's bohemia was its lack of politics, they and their friends do not play a prominent role in that story, until their hands were forced during gay liberation to address those questions. In this way, my work most closely connects to Robert Corber's *Homosexuality in Cold War America*.¹⁸ Within what Corber sees as a crisis of masculinity during the capitalist growth in the postwar era, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin engaged in homosexual activities but did not identify as gay.¹⁹ These figures

¹⁷ See Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: Univ Of California Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Also, there are works on other groups of artists, including the New York School of Poets, the beats, and American modernist composers, but these tend to take gay, or queer, identity for granted and not address the questions posed here. See Philip Auslander, *The New York School Poets as Playwrights: O'Hara, Ashbery, Koch, Schuyler and the Visual Arts* (New York: Lang, 1989), Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Jonathan D. Katz, "Passive Resistance: On the Critical and Commercial Success of Queer Artists in Cold War American Art," *L'image* 3 (Paris:

identified as artists and writers and believed in a more universalist understanding of sexuality and sexual identity, much like Tyler and Ford.

Chapter 1 shows the creation of Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford's bohemian world in New York City's Greenwich Village of the 1930s built off of Modernist principles. These two poets sought out the Village due to its artistic lifestyle and freedoms. As other scholars have shown, bohemia remade itself with new generations and in new periods. In this way Tyler and Ford followed broader bohemian principles including artistic creation, laxer sexual barriers, and universalist identity, but also tailored and crafted their specific world to their own needs and ideas. They moved a more diverse sexuality to the center of Modernism and were significantly less concerned with building an American brand of Modernism off of manliness, as previous generations had. Ford traveled to Paris, Tangier, and around the Mediterranean, where he explored other bohemias and built connections to other poets, writers, and artists, and brought these Atlantic influences back into their New York bohemia. Tyler and Ford maintained contact through letters and through writing their experiences and ideas into their 1933 semi-autobiographical novel *The Young and Evil*. This joint work serves as the most significant portrayal of the world that they had made.

Chapter 2 examines the preservation of Tyler and Ford's Modernism during the violence and destruction of World War II. With Tyler anchored in New York and Ford's connections throughout Europe, these bohemians were uniquely positioned to utilize the many European refugee artists in the city after the outbreak of fighting in 1939. To resist censorship and restrictions of artistic freedoms, Ford and Tyler created the magazine *View*, which covered the

Winter, 1996), David Lehman, *The Last Avant-garde: the Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), Regina Marler, *Queer Beats: How the Beats Turned America on to Sex* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004), and Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

war “through the eyes of poets.”²⁰ The magazine was highly international in perspective and was centered on Modernist poetry. This publication was a huge undertaking for the two and was incredibly successful in preserving their bohemian world, promoting their own understandings of Modernism, and building their prestige as artists and intellectuals. Tyler used this platform to push for greater examination of film and some of his friends began thinking of poetry in terms of film. The war was a transformative point for bohemia and America more broadly. While America became the economic and military leader of the world, the artistic and cultural capital shifted from Paris to New York. Unique to Ford and Tyler’s bohemia was that they largely isolated themselves from the political sphere, from which they had felt threatened, and they remained disconnected from it for several decades.

Chapter 3 focuses on the transformation of Modernist poetry from the written word into the visual, which led to experimental “film poetry” in the postwar era. Ford and Tyler had created their bohemia in the 1930s and preserved it through the war, now they and their friends wanted to renew and reimagine art and community in the postwar era. This time around, Tyler was a mentor and leader to this group of film poets as he had stature as a film theorist and critic. Several poet friends of Tyler and Ford shifted their work into filmmaking, including Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and Maya Deren. Other new figures appeared in bohemias around the country, with Sidney Peterson and James Broughton in San Francisco and Kenneth Anger and Gregory Markopoulos from Los Angeles. Amos Vogel’s film society Cinema 16 was the most important institution in screening and promoting these experimental works. It operated from 1947 until it closed in 1963 and Tyler was on the board from the start. His position of importance was critical to the continuance of the Modernist poetic principles and creation as these artists created work in a new medium.

²⁰ This was the initial subtitle for *View* magazine. It was later changed to “The Modern Magazine.”

Chapter 4 follows the film poets in a stage of decadence as they encounter the dramatic cultural and social changes of Postmodernism in the 1960s. The personal became political, and with that came a rise in civil rights, the counterculture, the anti-war movement, feminism, and in general a challenge to authority. The film poets were excited about some of these cultural and social shifts, in that they appeared to open up room for new dialogue. However, they were not prepared for the tremendous challenge to their Modernist, formalist worldview and art from the politicization of art, identity, and sexuality in Postmodernism. The biggest threat to film poetry in this period was the shift in art towards “underground film,” which was informal, democratized, and politicized. Many of these new artists followed or worked closely with Jonas Mekas’ New American Cinema and the institutions connect to it. This group changed ideas of art and aesthetics that directly undermined the Modernist creative structures behind film poetry. Underground film and its audience sought “authenticity” and a sense of capturing life as it was. Film poetry valued creation, the artist’s hand in editing and shaping an idea, and the intent and polish that went along with that. These shifts of the 1960s also politicized sexuality, which fed the growth of a gay identity. The gay community with an identity based on sexual orientation began to alter the public’s understanding of identity and sexuality. These modernists maintained their universalist Bohemian sexuality, which included same-sex attractions, however, they were not involved in building the gay community in this period.

Chapter 5 analyzes the Modernist bohemian reaction to the Gay Liberation Movement after the Stonewall Riots and the resulting collapse of bohemia. The gay rights movement politicized sexuality and threatened the bohemian way of life by dividing the group along lines of gender, sexual orientation, and race. Yet since some bohemians engaged in same-sex activities and that was part of some of their films, poetry, and writings, many gay community leaders saw

Tyler, Ford, and other Modern artists as gay artist pioneers and forefathers, which brought a new audience and media attention to their work. Initially, Gay Liberation seemed to hold a lot of promise for the Modern poets thinking, but it increasingly became politicized as the years went on. Tyler, Ford, and the film poets resisted the outside identification and they advocated their universalized identity and sexuality in opposition to the minoritized gay identity within the dialogue of identity politics. Ultimately the weight of identity politics proved too much and Modernist bohemians had to accept these changes, continue their bohemian fight, or else leave the art scene and even the country.

This group of Modernist poets and their bohemian world were not large and much of their ideas were lost within the rise of Postmodernism and identity politics in the 1960s and 70s. Yet they were wonderfully significant for the universality of identity and sexuality and for the beautiful poetry that they left behind. This group emerged out of the growth of psychoanalytic thought and modernist art of the early twentieth-century and built a bohemian artist world where they could live and create their art. They developed a universalist sense of identity and sexuality prior to Postmodernist thinking of the 1970s. They advocated for and practiced a freer conception of self and of sexuality without the need for politicizing the personal or eliminating all barriers between public and private. Their lives represented many of the things that liberationists thought could only come after their political movement. As Tyler said, “We were both dreadfully impressed by modern poetry, and we were trying to create our own brand of it. What we didn’t realize too consciously was that we *were* (I hope this isn’t too much of a boast!) *modern poetry*.”²¹

²¹ See Steven Watson, introduction to *The Young and Evil* by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler (New York: Richard Kasak Publishing, 1988, xx.

CHAPTER 1: *YOUNG AND EVIL BOHEMIA, 1930-1939*

In 1933, Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler published their joint-novel, *The Young and Evil*, which was about a group of Modernist poets in bohemian Greenwich Village. One scene revealed all of the work's major elements of myth, sexuality, bohemians living, and Modern poetry, where Julian, a thinly veiled portrait of Ford, visited his friend Theodosia, a character based on Ford and Tyler's friend Kathleen Tankersley Young.

On his way to Theodosia's Julian felt that he had captured the myth and had not been captured by it.

She sat on the side of the bed with her eyes still big for him, wearing a cream-colored gown and Japanese slippers embroidered with birds. He said in the chair and she got up from the bed and kissed his hair, forehead and eyes. The phonograph emitted music by Brahms.

I want you to live with me he said.

She went to the window and stood with her face to it.

It was bad to him that she must cry so he stood behind her and put his hands on her soft breasts.

She asked him to kiss her so he did. Kiss my breasts too she said. They were perfumed with jasmine which was sweet.

No he said.

She asked him hadn't he ever kissed a woman's breasts and he said no. She said she wanted him. I want you so much.

He wasn't frightened as he had been before and told her he hadn't any contraceptives with him. But you'll leave here today.

She told him yes she would.

I'll help you pack. Are you hungry? He asked.

Yes she was hungry.

He went to the typewriter in the front room while she dried her eyes and dressed.

a b c d adam and eve in your own words adam pressed eve to his warmest breast and she thought whence came the fire to warm this nest whence came the bird between my breasts the red bird with the flaming crest adam told eve to lie down quietly quietly where the summer was a withheld sigh he told her to shut her eyes and not to peek and he would lie beside her and whatever came she must not arise she must not arise then to her mind came memory of the brook came memory of its chuckle and its clear fresh water and the trees that overhung the brook and that she was their daughter... but adam's hand was moving in a strange way and she must not arise and the trembling in her ankles came up to her flanks came up to her middle and the pain that still rankles broke into her mind but lying beside

adam she must not arise... with eyelids pressed together tight she wondered how the clouds looked moving in the unseen skies she wondered when adam would tell her to arise but she had just as soon lie with adam this way for the pain was not so great and if he weren't so heavy she should like him to stay till the dawn bit the hill till the trees bent over saw themselves in the water with the trailing clover...

Theodosia came in and said she was ready.

Julian rolled the paper out into a wad. Where to?¹

The scene and dialogue read as modern poetry in a prose form. The words were visual, flowing, and textured. Thoughts, narration, and dialogue all blurred together. The incorporation of poetry into the actions of the character was also how bohemians imagined their lives as modern poets. The free form, repeated words, punctuation and capitalization play, and the symbolism were all elements of modern poetry. The sexuality in the scene, and the novel more broadly, were part of Modernism, but also reflected Ford and Tyler's unique take. The nature of this relationship was based on Theodosia, an established bohemian, teaching the less experienced Julian about sex and living in Greenwich Village bohemia. They also both served as inspirations, muses, for one another's poetry. Sex and relationships led to poetry and artistic creation.

These depictions of the social environment are fictional, but they were largely based on real events and more importantly precisely represent the bohemian world that Ford and Tyler had imagined, created, and hoped to portray to broader society. The sexualities of characters were very diverse, but there was an openness, acceptance, and fluidity within bohemia. Besides this variety of sexualities, the characters were all described as artists, in particular poets, performers, writers, and painters, and they were all bohemians. Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford created the characters and the world in the *Young and Evil* in the same way as they created their real life bohemia. The novel was anchored in Greenwich Village, New York City's bohemia, but moved through the gay world that ran along Manhattan's west side and offered glimpses into the radical

¹ Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, *The Young and Evil* (New York: Richard Kasak Book Publishing, 1996), 87-89. This is a reprinting of the original novel published in 1933 by Obelisk Press, Paris, France.

communist politics of Union Square and into the African-American cultural flourishing of Harlem. Similarly, Ford and Tyler began their real lives with developing their bohemian world in Greenwich Village and expanded beyond to other bohemian locales in Europe, North Africa, and Latin America. In so doing, they created networks and connections to other Modernist artists and wove those Atlantic ideas and influences back into their Village bohemia.

Bohemia was both a physical and mental space. Elizabeth Wilson describes bohemia most simply as the attempt to find a role for artists within modern industrial society. As artists lost the backing of church and nobility, industrialization brought the rise of mass-production and consumerism. Artists envisioned and crafted bohemia as a way to live and create original work within this new environment.² While it had imagined roots in the lives of gypsies from central Europe, bohemia's twentieth-century incarnation was one that embraced the "new" in art, culture, and love.³ Bohemia emerged in big cities and small artist colonies around the Atlantic and tore down certain boundaries present in each setting, including barriers that divided men and women, friends and lovers, work, space, and home, and different religious groups, classes, and ethnicities.⁴ Thus, it intentionally and unintentionally blurred gender roles and definitions of sexuality.⁵ The main purpose of bohemia was artistic creation and, as Christine Stansell says, "Bohemians were terrific self-dramatizers and self-aggrandizers, adept at creating themselves as a cast of fascinating characters" as a way to produce their art.⁶ It was an imagined space and community and so it was constantly created and recreated by the artists, poets, and intellectuals

² See Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 2-27.

³ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1, 16-17.

⁴ See Stansell, *American Moderns*, 1, 45 for more on US bohemias. For more on London's bohemia, see Virginia Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians: Experiments in Living 1900-1939* (New York: Perennial Books, 2002) and for Paris see Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris* (New York: Viking Press, 1986).

⁵ Stansell emphasizes the assertion of women as equals as the root behind this, Stansell, 225-272. Nicholson places more emphasis on romantic and sexual living situations, Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians*, 31-66.

⁶ Stansell, *American Moderns*, 3 and 29.

that constituted it. To accomplish this, Bohemia required greater individual freedom, which unhinged the belief in and dependence on many traditional institutions like marriage, family, and child rearing. While earlier generations of Bohemia in London and Paris, as explored by Jerrold Seigel and Virginia Nicholson, broke down traditional artistic structures and social structures, Stansell has shown that Greenwich Village by the opening of the 20th century opened up sexuality and opportunities for women. By the 1930s, Tyler, Ford, and their fellow bohemians continued creating modern poetry and pushing the belief in the importance of individualism to facilitate artistic production. They also pushed sexuality to the center of art and Bohemia and included in that same-sex sexuality, into a kind of universalist bohemian sexuality, which they showcased in their novel *The Young and Evil*.

This chapter will look at the bohemian world Ford and Tyler created in New York's Greenwich Village where they lived out the events of their novel *The Young and Evil*. It will then examine the alternative sexuality they practiced. Lastly, it will look at Ford's transnational explorations in Paris and Tangier as they sought publication as well as the influences those journeys brought to their bohemia in Greenwich Village by the outbreak of World War II.

When Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford formed their Village bohemia, they entered into a space that had been transformed dramatically in the previous decades.⁷ Once a retreat from urban life to the south, Greenwich Village remained slightly removed and inaccessible as the city

⁷ For more on Greenwich Village, see Rick Beard and Leslie Cohen Berlowitz, eds., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), John Strausbaugh, *The Village: 400 Years of Beats and Bohemians, Radicals and Rogues, a History of Greenwich Village* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013), and Ross Wetzsteon, *Republic of Dreams: Greenwich Village: The American Bohemia, 1910-1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

marched northward. By 1900, this place that was known as “the ward” or “the lower west side” had become a largely working class Italian neighborhood. However, the old world charm and the availability of cheap rooms for single men and women also drew in a small artist and bohemian crowd. By the 1910s, these newcomers had brought a new distinct character to the place they now called “the Village.” They imagined a creative and poetic space for artists and intellectuals to craft their ideas and bring beauty into the world. They promoted the neighborhood through art, journalism, and word of mouth as the premiere American Bohemia, for which its reputation spread around the country.⁸

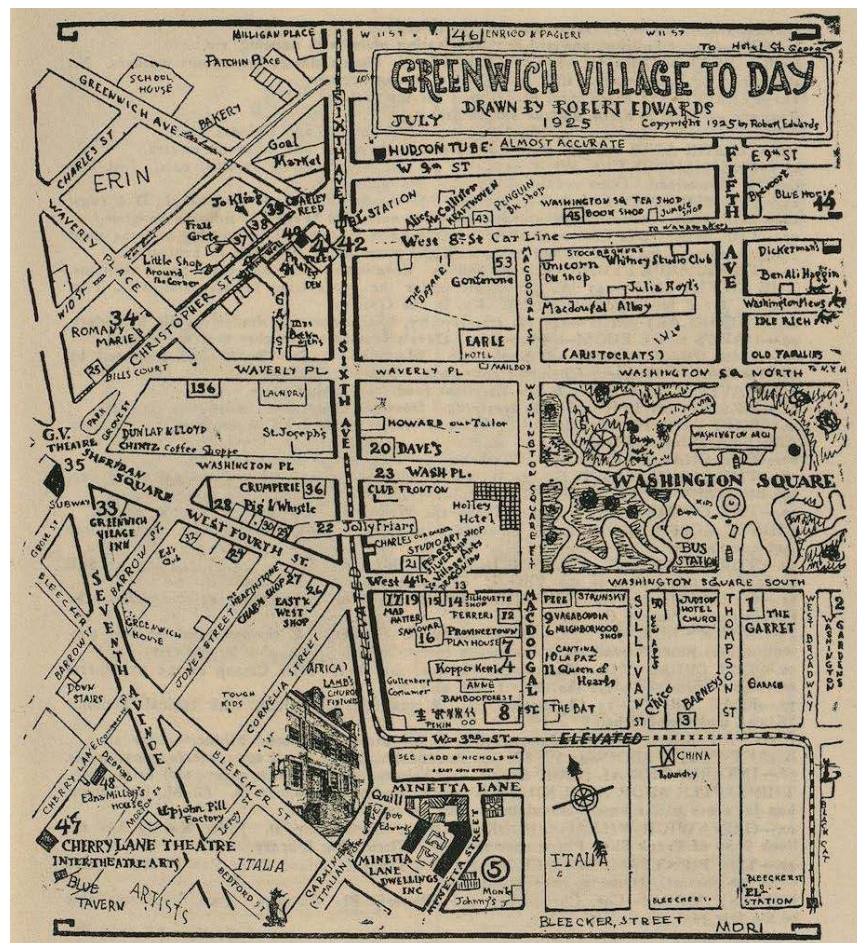


Figure 1.1: Map of Greenwich Village, with bohemian establishments. By Robert Edward, 1925.

⁸ See the description of the transformation of Greenwich Village in Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 227-9, and Stansell, *American Moderns*, 1-5, 41-55.

By 1930 Greenwich Village contained many different cultural spheres. The well-formed bohemia of Modernist artists as described by Christine Stansell in *American Moderns* was the most prominent and a gay world as explored by George Chauncey in *Gay New York* was also well established and visible. Both historians acknowledge that the unconventional visual displays of bohemia provided some forms of protection to the growing gay world and that there were some gay bohemian, but see these two as separate communities occupying the same place. Tyler and Ford have sometimes been associated with the gay world because they engaged in same-sex activity. However, Tyler and Ford and their friends were Modernist poets in bohemia and the nature of their sexuality, as discussed later, was far more complex. As part of a later generation that came of age reading Modern poetry from around the Atlantic, they set out to first join that bohemia that existed in Greenwich Village and then proceeded to recreate and transform that imagined world.⁹

Harrison Parker Tyler was born in New Orleans in 1904. His family was of modest means, though they had ties to the two presidents with whom he shared names. His father sold insurance and moved from New Orleans, to Baltimore, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Chicago. Tyler fell in love with film, poetry, and the arts at a young age and his parents were highly supportive of his interests. Instead of attending college, he moved to New York in the mid-1920s. He read as many contemporary and classic books as he could and he published and recited poetry in Greenwich Village where he developed a solid reputation as a poet.¹⁰

⁹ See Chauncey, *Gay New York*, Nicholson, *Among the Bohemians*, Stansell, *American Moderns*, and Siegel, *Bohemian Paris*.

¹⁰ Steven Watson, introduction to *The Young and Evil*, by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler (New York: Richard Kasak Book Publishing, 1996), xiii-xvii.



Figure 1.2: Left, Parker Tyler. By Carl Van Vechten, 1934. Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, UTA.
Figure 1.3: Right, Parker Tyler. Unknown photographer, 1933.



Figure 1.4: Charles Henri Ford. By Carl Van Vechten, 1934.

Charles Henri Ford was born February 10, 1910 and spent his youth in various Southern towns where his family operated hotels. His parents did not raise him with any great exposure to art but they believed in a strong education. Ford's family sent him to a good Catholic boarding school, even though they were Protestants. Ford actively sought out poetry and literary magazines and started a dormitory paper at his school. Ford had a strong relationship with both his parents and his sister, but was especially close with his mother who welcomed his artistic ambitions. After high school, they supported him as he moved to New York and Paris to build his art career.¹¹

Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford first connected in 1929 at a distance of 1,500 miles. Ford was still living in San Antonio, Texas and Tyler was already in New York. With hopes of starting a poetry magazine Ford built connections through letters to established poets, including Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein. He also developed friendships with lesser-known poets such as Kathleen Tankersley Young. It was through Young that he was introduced to Tyler. Ford met with Young in a library in San Antonio, where he talked with her for hours and later wrote in his journal, "She is the only Bohemian, aesthete, that I've met here."¹² Ford and Young read poems that she had brought from Greenwich Village, including some by Tyler. Ford was inspired and so wrote to him. Through these connections, Ford created a poetry and literary journal, titled *Blues*, and Tyler linked Ford to many of his poet and bohemian friends in New York.¹³ Art, poetry, and a desire for a bohemian existence brought

¹¹ Watson, introduction, ix-xiii.

¹² See pages 101-2 of Ford's journal *I Will Be What I Am*, 3.208, Charles Henri Ford Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, henceforth referred to as CHFPCALB.

¹³ *Blues* was a "magazine of new rhythms." It was intended to showcase young, new, and fresh poets and writers.

together Ford, Tyler, and Young, whose future experiences in the Village became the basis of their novel, but first Ford had to get there.¹⁴

Through his magazine, Ford built networks and prestige to facilitate his move to New York. *Blues* saw much success despite its remote location in Columbus, Mississippi, far from cultural centers of Modernism like New York or Paris and the writers it published in its pages. Ford was editor and Tyler came on as associate editor shortly after its launch. Several prominent poetry journals had closed in the U.S. and in Europe due to the depression and *Blues* filled the void. Ford and Tyler published writings by poets with whom they had connected, including the most prominent Modernists like Stein, Pound, and Williams, and emerging figures like Paul Bowles. The magazine also gave them space to publish their own writings. Enamored by the artistic world that he discovered through the magazine and through the personal letters he exchanged with Tyler throughout 1929, Ford made his big move to New York City in January of 1930. Ford later recalled, “Parker was the main magnet, because he described New York life in such colorful terms that I wanted to go there.”¹⁵ For this Southern youth wanted, he wanted to live the life of a bohemian poet and experience the vibrant energy of the urban centers of Modernism.

Ford’s arrival into Greenwich Village was similar to that of other bohemians. His boat docked at Pier 36 in New York, just south of the Village on the west side. Tyler, easily identifiable by his dandyish appearance, was there to meet him. Tyler let Ford stay with him at his apartment on Macdougall Street, right next to Washington Square, for the first night until they could find him a room the next day. That night’s interaction was awkward, as both Ford and

¹⁴ Steven Watson, introduction to *The Young and Evil*, by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler (New York: Richard Kasak Book Publishing, 1996), xi. See also page 3 of interview with Parker Tyler, 7.8, Parker Tyler Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, henceforth referred to as PTCHRHC.

¹⁵ Watson, introduction, xiii.

Tyler were unsure of the other's intentions and feelings. After having shared many of their hopes and feelings in their letters over the prior year, they both questioned if their meeting was supposed to be something romantic, sexual, or simply platonic. In the end, they continued just as friends.¹⁶ This meeting was the start of their joint experiences that became the foundation for their novel about bohemian life.

The most vivid portrayal of Tyler and Ford's life in Greenwich Village comes from their novel, *The Young and Evil*. Ford said of the novel, "nothing is invented."¹⁷ Both authors emphasized repeatedly throughout their lives that no events in the book were made up. Several incidents from it have been corroborated with outside evidence to show that the content of the novel was a depiction of their lives stylized as poetry.¹⁸ Therefore events and experiences from the novel repeat and overlap with many of Tyler and Ford's experiences in their Greenwich Village bohemia.

Veterans assisted newcomers through the big city's bohemia.¹⁹ Chauncey and Stansell both emphasize the importance of the role that these established guides played and in this way bohemia was reconstructed with each new addition. Tyler showed Ford how to get around, where to live, drink, and eat, and how to meet people. Tyler helped Ford rent a room through a landlord he knew, showed him where he could illegally buy gin, and introduced Ford to people he knew on the streets and in the cafes. The knowledge that Tyler passed on was critical, such as how

¹⁶ Watson, introduction, xvii-xviii.

¹⁷ Watson, introduction, ix.

¹⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 187, 419. When Tyler was asked about the factualness of *The Young and Evil*, he said, "Oh, it's absolutely true!" In particular, he mentions that the arrest scene and subsequent jail and courtroom scenes were all real; as were the relationships he and Ford had with the characters Louis and Gabriel. Interview with Parker Tyler, 7.8, PTCHRHC, 3. This was typical of bohemian artistic creation. They sought out experiences and adventures that they in turn used in their poetry and writing. See Stansell's description of the importance of self-promotion and artistic portrayals of bohemia, Stansell, *American Moderns*, 3 and 18.

¹⁹ This is in many ways a similar story to immigration experiences. See John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985) and Oscar Handlin, *Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (1951, repr; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

establishments changed nature in the late hours and became seedy or gay or dangerous.²⁰ Tyler showed Ford how to navigate the different terrains and worlds within Greenwich Village, specifically spaces that were bohemian, gay, or political.

Ford and Tyler used *The Young and Evil* to chart out this social landscape of their bohemia. Throughout the novel, they revealed the tangled web of sexual, romantic, and artistic relationships between the central characters that reflected relationships among Ford and Tyler's core group of friends. The creation of poetry, art, and writing were woven throughout the novel, despite sometimes being overshadowed by racy descriptions of nightlife, drinking, and dancing in Greenwich Village, Times Square, and Harlem. The depictions of art and sex have influenced how the work has been studied from its publication to the present.

Interpretations of this novel have evolved over time. Some contemporaries, both fans and critics, as well as more recent scholarship have dubbed it a homosexual or gay novel. Chauncey drew attention to it in *Gay New York* where he said it was a "gay novel."²¹ Joseph Allen Boone reanalyzed the text in *Libidinal Currents*. Boone saw the novel as queer and elucidating a more fluid understanding of identity and sexuality. However, this imposed a postmodernist framework on these modernist poets, and elements of their thinking, like universalist worldviews, and positive identity forming become lost.²² More recently Samuel See's article "Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in *The Young and Evil*" seeks to historicize their "queer identity" by labeling the novel "proto-queer." For all that See adds, he still misses the modernist characteristics and falls back too often on reading elements of "myth" simply as code for gay

²⁰ Watson, introduction, xvii-xviii.

²¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 242.

²² Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 251-265.

identity instead of a more important piece of Modernist writing.²³ Juan S. Suárez built off of previous works in *Pop Modernism* and painted the novel and its authors as inhabiting a marginal space between the “queer” and the “modernist” worlds. Suárez struck most closely to the core of who these people were and what their world was like, as he for the first time showed that they were situated outside of the gay, or queer, world and that they were part of, even if not at the center of, American Modernism.²⁴ The guiding idea behind Suárez work, however, is the search for Postmodernist elements in earlier modernist artists, and how they adapted popular imagery and objects into their high-art.

Through the novel, Ford and Tyler developed a concept of their identity by showing their characters’ interactions with differently identified groups and spaces in the Village. The distinctions are most evident in the socializing aspects of commercial establishments like cafés and bars, and at parties and on the streets, where the authors identified the different types of people the characters met. Most were described by their artistic occupation, such as poets, dancers, and painters. Some were described by the sexual and gendered natures, for example “wolves,” masculine men who had sex with “fairies,” effeminate homosexual men, and “Lesbians,” homosexual women.²⁵ Others were characterized by mythic terms, such as muses, satyrs, and naiads.²⁶ While all these figures interacted across group boundaries, these different kinds of identity were still seen as important and created corresponding worldviews.²⁷ Taken

²³ Samuel See, “Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in *The Young and Evil*,” *ELH* 76, No. 4 (Winter 2009), 1073-1105.

²⁴ Juan Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Champaign-Urbana: The University of Illinois, 2007), 195. See his chapter “Queer Modernism: Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler’s *The Young and Evil*, 179-207.

²⁵ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 11-12. Boone sees all of these other figures only as “leering older gay men or part of their gay entourages.” Aside from the reference to “wolves” there is no indication that any of the other bohemian types mentioned were either gay or leering. Boone, *Libidinal Currents*, 256.

²⁶ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 11-12.

²⁷ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 53-4.

together, Tyler and Ford employed *The Young and Evil* to render a world that was sexual, artistic, liberated, and spiritual all at once.

Of the bohemian community described by Ford and Tyler in their novel, five characters made up the central figures. The group was quite diverse in terms of sex, gender, and sexuality, but also in terms of their occupations and art. The character Julian was based on Ford, Karel on Tyler, and Theodosia on Kathleen Tankersley Young. Louis and Gabriel were modeled on Lionel Abel, a Jewish American playwright and theatre critic, and Joseph Rocco, a Franciscan monastery dropout and poet.²⁸ Louis and Gabriel were poets but also had ties to the mafia underworld. Through the novel, the different characters inspired each other, supported each other with writing supplies, and read and critiqued each other's work. Their art and work were heavily intertwined, as were their romantic interests.

Almost every possible romantic and sexual coupling between the central characters occurred. In the beginning, Louis and Gabriel shared a bed in a co-dependent if not exactly romantic relationship. It was never expressly described as sexual, which was not significant to the story's development, although various comparisons and clues suggest it likely was.²⁹ Despite this and relationships with other males, these two did not identify as homosexual. Louis entered into a romantic and sexual relationship with Karel, which lasted through most of the novel. Louis had a fling with Julian as well, who also attracted the attention of Gabriel and Theodosia. Julian and Theodosia lived together for a period in what was compared to a marriage. This came after she and Gabriel had sex. All the while, Julian and Karel shared a passionate bond that never

²⁸ Louis and Gabriel's real life equivalents are kept hidden during their lives, but Ford identifies them as Lionel Abel (an American playwright and theatre critic who taught at Rutgers, Columbia, and University of Buffalo) and Joseph Rocco in his memoirs Charles Henri Ford, *Water From A Bucket 1948-57* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2001), 126.

²⁹ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 194-5. Karel draws the parallels between Gabriel and Louis' former relationship and the one he had with Louis. "Louis had wanted, Karel saw plainly, to use him as Gabriel had used Louis."

turned romantic or sexual, just as Ford and Tyler did in life. These bonds were chiefly important because of the influence they had on the group's artistic output.

Modernist poetry and writing were central to this circle's bohemian existence. Everyone spent most of their waking hours writing, be it poetry or novels, or typing up what they had written. When out socializing they discussed important figures of the previous Modernist generation, including Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. With friends, and even with strangers, they critiqued each other's poems.³⁰ Drinking, parties, and sex were fun and also served as a means to their writing. These activities were experimentations in experience that enhanced their understanding of people and life, which also worked to improve their writing. The character Louis said, after sexual excess "is when I always write."³¹ In discussing Karel's interest in Louis, Tyler commented, "his only interest in [Louis's] body was the poem."³² Similarly, the pomp, custom, and mannerisms of the bohemian lifestyle were employed to inspire their art, as Julian explained, "I have the will to doll which is a special way of willing to live my poetry."³³ To "doll" was slang terminology which meant something similar to masquerade. The idea of living one's poetry, that these two things could be one, was a central idea to Modernist philosophy. Tyler, Ford, and their friends consciously and actively acted out what they believed bohemian poets to be until they actualized that existence.

The nightlife of drinking and dancing pervaded the novel and Ford and Tyler's lives. In *The Young and Evil*, the characters frequented a variety of bars and speakeasies in Greenwich Village. Some were simple back-alley dives and others were happening taverns with dance floors

³⁰ Such as Gertrude Stein, see Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 32, 53.

³¹ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 69.

³² Watson, introduction, xx.

³³ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 170. In the final scene of the novel, in which Louis, Tyler's character's former lover, was robbing him and about to rape him, he took advantage of a brief opportunity to take back a bag of manuscripts that Louis had stolen previously. Even in a moment of crisis, Tyler saw his writing as more important than his material belongings or his own body. Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 213.

and performances by local artists.³⁴ Social spaces like these reflected real life experience, as was the case with the swanky gay bar visited by Karel and a friend.³⁵ Scholars have documented that several bars west of Times Square were gay but considered more “orderly” and respectable than the bohemian bars in the Village or the seedy bars near Columbus Circle.³⁶ Ford and Tyler also dedicated a whole chapter to their experience at a grand Harlem drag ball. That space was filled with people of all races and sexualities, including a crowded dance-floor and an African-American orchestra. Unique to these events was the large presence of drag queens in elaborate costumes.³⁷ Bohemians enjoyed a wide variety of New York’s nightlife and reflected upon the numerous identities that they encountered to use as material to turn into Modern poetry.

The single most important qualifier used to identify oneself in the novel was as an artist or bohemian. Most new characters are introduced first by their artistic occupations. Ford and Tyler first described Louis and Gabriel simply, “They were poets.” Later, conversation told of their religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds, not their sexual identities.³⁸ In another instance, a character Edwin was first described by his outlandish clothing, which signified him as a bohemian. He was later identified as a poet, and then subsequent story revealed that he had a girlfriend.³⁹

The novel did not simply illustrate bohemian identity, but also demonstrated that Ford and Tyler were conscious of their ability to define themselves. In a scene where the group discussed identity, Louis said, “I am waiting for the day... when I can destroy all definitions,” to

³⁴ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 53, 73, 102.

³⁵ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 181.

³⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 176.

³⁷ Ford, *Water from a Bucket*, 102.

³⁸ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 30-32.

³⁹ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 42-3. Edwin is in a relationship with a person named “Geraldine.” While it would be presumed that this is a woman with a female name, it is possible that this could have been a gay male or female impersonator who used a feminine name.

which Tyler's character responded, "But until then... they are [what] matters."⁴⁰ Tyler and Ford struggled between an idealistic vision of non-constraining identity and a more pragmatic approach to identity that would combat external labels. This notion of destroying identities is something that can be picked up by queer readings of this text to say that the novel had early elements of Postmodernist thinking. However, the feelings of Tyler's character Karel actually reflects the group's Modernist thinking.

Throughout the novel, Tyler and Ford often described their bohemian characters in relation to other groups and identities present in the Village. In one scene, a radical communist friend of Julian and Karel discussed politics and artistic activism. There was division between communist thought, which advocated for the material needs of all people, and the desire by the bohemian artists for artistic freedom, a concern which they felt was above materiality. Karel gave a roundtable lecture on "political liberty and the artist." Through the speech and discussions that followed, Ford and Tyler showed their awareness of the dialogues and connectivity existing between the different worlds in the city. While the speech given by Tyler's character praised the political activism of other groups, its conclusion was that the goals of artists and bohemians were social and cultural change and were therefore separated from politics.⁴¹ In another instance, two bohemian characters visited a gay bar west of Times Square, which had a foreign atmosphere compared to that of the Village and whose clientele were contrasted sharply in manner and appearance against the two bohemians. They felt out of place and left after they finished their

⁴⁰ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 112-13.

⁴¹ Tyler and Ford both flirted briefly with Trotsky's ideas of communism in the mid-1930s, but abandoned any commitment to it for their artistic freedom. No scholarship has taken the political dialogues of the novel seriously. Suárez mentioned the political speech, however, he dismissed it, and argued that it was added to pay lip service to the increased political environment of 1933, when the book was published. Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 206. In 1970 Tyler reflected on the politics of the 1930s by saying that he was aware of and tempted by politics, but that he "couldn't take up politics because... it's a career in itself. You can't be a serious artist and a serious revolutionary too. I think Trotsky believed that and I've always subscribed to it myself." See Interview with Parker Tyler, 7.8, PTCHRHC, 1.

drinks.⁴² In these ways the artistic community created by Ford and Tyler was defined against other elements in the Village and other parts of the city. Yet, despite how this group defined themselves, the world outside bohemia often saw them differently.

In the novel, broader society increasingly saw people in terms of sexuality and so bohemians were often lumped into the gay world from outsiders' points of view. The character Gabriel, bohemian but more masculine looking than the other characters, told a story in which he left a "coffee pot"⁴³ in the Village and four gangsters yelled "hey faggot!" at him from their car. They chased Gabriel and he ducked into a nearby building and hid in a bathroom.⁴⁴ Gabriel did not identify as homosexual, rather he engaged freely in sex with both women and men. In bohemia, Gabriel's view of himself did not conflict with how anyone else saw him and his friends did not question his sexuality or identity. In another scene, Julian went to bed with a woman and a man, but he recoiled when the man told him, "You're the only sissy I ever loved."⁴⁵ Having openly acknowledged and discussed same-sex relationships and homosexuality prior to this, it was the *forced* identification that jarred the bohemian character. How these bohemians defined themselves was often at odds with a world that increasingly used sexuality as an important signifier.⁴⁶

This contrast in identity in the novel was rooted in a real-life bohemian sexual system that was different from both the transitioning mainstream system and the one in the gay world. Scholarship has shown that a major shift in sexual understanding and activity occurred in the first several decades of the twentieth century. The older gender-based system was built on the

⁴² Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 74-5.

⁴³ A cheap diner.

⁴⁴ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 46.

⁴⁵ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 105-6.

⁴⁶ In another instance, Karel described Louis as "turning queer so beautifully gradually," which raised two issues. "Queer" in this period meant to identify as gay. First, this scene emphasized the distinction between bohemian identity and gay identity, as the character is said to change from one to the other. Secondly, it points to the social construction of identity and even of sexuality. Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 123-4.

role one played, not on the sex of the desired partner. That is to say that the dividing line was between an active “normal man” and passive women, boys, or effeminate men (usually called “fairies” or “faggots”). The emerging new sexuality-based system in the early twentieth century depended on the sex of one’s partner, thereby creating a heterosexual group and a homosexual group (at the time sometimes called “gay” or “queer”⁴⁷). No longer did it matter what role one played (i.e. active or passive) but rather whether one engaged in sexual activities with one’s own sex or the opposite sex. The gay world of the 1920s in Greenwich Village was caught in many ways between these transitioning sexual systems.⁴⁸

Chauncey has argued that in this old gender-based sexual system there was an “interchangeability of fairies, women, and boys.”⁴⁹ He attributed this to the conception of sex that was held by most men as “something a man did *to* them, not *with* them.”⁵⁰ Fairies therefore took on the status of and often elements of the appearance of women, but usually not women of virtue. In the eyes of “normal men” fairies were more akin to prostitutes, whether or not they were paid for sex, which meant someone with whom you had sex but not a relationship.⁵¹

The new sexuality-based system emerged as society came to view anyone who engaged in a sexual act with someone of the same sex as “homosexual,” regardless of the role one played. The system of “normal men” and fairies began to decline as abstaining from sex with other males, fairies or otherwise, was necessary to be considered “heterosexual.” Simultaneously, and largely in response to this, many men began to understand their sexuality as separate from their

⁴⁷ The term “queer” as it was used in the 1920s and 30s was more similar to the word “gay” and was different from the use of “queer” in present queer theory.

⁴⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

⁴⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 84-5.

⁵⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 83.

⁵¹ Fairies gave names to these “normal” or active men, such as “husbands,” “wolves,” and “jockers,” and Chauncey has taken some of these terms from Tyler’s observational writings of the gay world. Outside of sexual activities, these men “abided by the conventions of masculinity.” Whether these men had sex with a fairy or other male once in their lives or regularly, so long as they played the active role they would be considered no different from a man who never engaged in sex with other males. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 87.

gender. This meant that an increasing number of men who had sex with other men came to call themselves “queer” or “gay,” which acknowledged their attraction to other men while often adopting a more typical, if not entirely masculine, male gender identity.⁵² This is how the separate gay world of Greenwich Village emerged.

The sexual system of bohemia, however, was different from both of these other systems. At the time it was simply called “bohemian,” but Tyler later retitled his understanding of it as “pansexuality” or “ambisexuality” in the 1970s.⁵³ Instead of seeing sex in terms of marriage, physical pleasure, or companionship, Tyler, Ford, and their friends believed in learning relationships. If life and poetry could be one, so too could sex and artistic creation. So the purpose of a relationship was to a reciprocal exchange, where one learned from the other, and one as an artist was inspired to create by other as a muse. Tyler and Ford believed that homosexuality was an option within this dynamic. Furthermore, these things could be found with different people, regardless of their sexuality, their sex, age, race, or their gender. This was why within their bohemian circle there existed romantic and sexual relationships between people of all genders, sexes, and statuses such as fairies, “normal men,” or queers.

Using this bohemian framework to understand this group changes how some of them have been written about in previous scholarship. Figures such as Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford emerge as Modernist bohemians who happened to engage in homosexual affairs rather than people who identified with the gay world. It was because bohemia held a different understanding of sexuality that Tyler and Ford were bohemian writers from an outside group that they had a heightened awareness when they entered into the gay world that they wrote about it and left

⁵² Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 83, 100.

⁵³ For a brief overview of Tyler’s use of the idea of pansexuality in his writing and film criticism, see Philip Lopate, ed. *American Movie Critics: An Anthology From the Silents Until Now* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Publishing, 2006), 249.

behind records. These records are part of what have been used to reconstruct the gay world in studies like Chauncey's. Much as Alexis de Tocqueville as an outsider wrote *Democracy in America*, Ford and Tyler's records of Greenwich Village's gay world did not mean they were primarily part of it.⁵⁴

Ford's real life served as a perfect example of this bohemian sexuality. Ford entered into romantic and sexual relationships with men and women who spanned the spectrums of gender and sexuality. During his time in New York, Ford had brief sexual and romantic relationships with several men, some who could be qualified as "normal men" and others as fairies. Ford also was intimately involved with Kathleen Tankersley Young for a period.⁵⁵ While in Europe, Ford developed a serious relationship with Djuna Barnes. It was romantic and sexual in nature and each also engaged in outside sexual relationships with members of both sexes. Shortly after that ended, Ford entered into a long-term relationship with Pavel Tchelitchev that lasted until Tchelitchev's death in 1957. Ford's relationships defied the sexual systems set up by Chauncey and others, but fit perfectly into the bohemian system of pansexuality.

Ford articulated the bohemian sexuality in a letter to his mother in 1934. While Ford was in Paris, his sister Ruth began dating a man in New York named Herbert Fouts.⁵⁶ Ford was unhappy that his sister was dating Fouts and candidly explained his reasoning to his mother. His chief complaint was that Fouts was a "bitch...deceitful, vain and heartless." Ford explained, "though he doesnt [sic] live in the Village his ideas about love are decidedly Bohemian." Ford knew other women whom Fouts had dated and he had sex with those women "without any

⁵⁴ It was in large part because Alexis de Tocqueville was an outside, a French aristocrat, that he was able to identify the strongest identifying elements of American life in the 1830s. See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (1835, repr.; New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).

⁵⁵ The relationship between Ford and Young is written about both in Ford and Tyler's novel as well as confirmed as happening in real life from other sources. See Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 87-107, and also Interview with Parker Tyler, 7.8, PTCHRHC, 3.

⁵⁶ Herbert Fouts was an illustrator and artist who published works in the 1920s and 1930s.

intention of marriage” and had broken their hearts. Ford believed this was Fouts aim with Ruth. He also told his mother that Fouts would “be having affairs with boys right and left before three months.” Ford’s tone was not one that condemned such behavior, but he did not believe his sister to want a bohemian love life. More interesting was that Ford added, “[Fout’s] art doesnt [sic] justify his nature.” This again linked life and art, and suggested that good art and poetry were built off of a bohemian lifestyle.⁵⁷

This understanding of sexuality was further highlighted throughout the bohemians’ writings. Ford’s character Julian in *The Young and Evil* said, “My homosexuality is just a habit to which I’m somehow bound which is little more than a habit in that it’s not love or romance but a dim hard fetich [sic] which I worship in my waking dreams... no I am not a fairy doll.”⁵⁸ In this instance, homosexuality was something he *had* not something he *was*. It did not define him as in the new gay world, nor did it determine his gender or push him into the role of a fairy as in the older system. As the shifting dominant sexual system came to see a person who engaged in homosexual behavior as being *exclusively* homosexual, Ford’s “homosexuality” and that of other bohemians did not encompass a person’s entire sexuality, though clearly Ford saw it as something that could not be ignored nor suppressed.

Tyler similarly represented the ideal of pansexuality, and expressed this notion in his writings. Tyler left fewer records of significant sexual or romantic relationships with women and in the 1920s he did at times adopt the image of a fairy. However, he entered into romantic and sexual experiences with “normal” men, effeminate men, and women. Tyler’s different perspective on sexuality can be seen in one exemplar event from a night out in the Village. While at a speakeasy that had been largely “turned out” by gay men, meaning transformed into a gay

⁵⁷ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 3 February 1934, 8.3, CHFPHRHRC.

⁵⁸ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 170.

space, Tyler was passionately kissing a woman. Several of Tyler's gay friends began teasing him, exclaiming "What! Parker kissing a female!" and "Parker! Why don't you tell this girl you're homosexual?"⁵⁹ Chauncey interpreted Tyler's feelings as embarrassment at being called out and Chauncey felt that Tyler had a problem with public homosexuality but not heterosexuality. However, it is also possible that Tyler did not think such an act was abnormal among his bohemian friends and did not feel that his attraction to men limited him from interactions with women. Along with scenes of two men kissing, Tyler and Ford portrayed men and women kissing in *The Young and Evil* as well without notice.⁶⁰ This illustrated the separation between the gay world and Ford and Tyler's bohemian world.

The divide between a profession as an artist and any other employment also has a great impact on one's identity and understanding of sexuality. For people in the gay world, they had the choice either of keeping silent about their sexuality to coworkers and bosses, or if the environment was more accepting, such as in theatre or some retail establishments, they could be relatively open.⁶¹ Bohemians who made art, as in Ford and Tyler's world, simply did not have to engage with such workplace scenarios. Writing from the gay liberation era of the late-1960s, Tyler said that Ford "neve[r] "came out" except with fleeting [sic] fireworks in the novel on which he collaborated with me, *The Young and Evil*(1933)."⁶² "Coming out" in the 1920s meant to debut into society, but by the 1960s it was the announcement of being gay. Though Tyler probably understood both of these definitions, it is more significant that he dismissed the importance of "coming out." Since bohemian society understood sexuality to be multi-faceted

⁵⁹ From a letter to a friend in May of 1929 in which Tyler recalled the events of the prior evening. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 169.

⁶⁰ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 63.

⁶¹ Chauncey illustrates the different definition of the term "coming out" prior to the 1930s crackdown on gay culture compared to the post-World War II era. He shows that gay men "came out" not of "the closet" but rather into gay society. He compares this act of coming out to a similar ritual performed by society women at debutant balls. See Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 8, 276, and 286.

⁶² Manuscript of Tyler review of *Poster Poems* by Charles Henri Ford, 9.10, PTCHRHC, 3.

and changing, it was unnecessary to either hide or to debut one's sexual identity and poets addressed sexuality in their work without the need of such labels.

Aside from the novel, Tyler and Ford regularly published poems in leading literary and poetry journals. The inward-looking content, the fractured structure, and the visuals and musicality of the writing were all very Modernist. They wrote about beauty, how they viewed the world, and their expressions of sexuality. In some even, like Tyler's 1933 poem "Sight Complement,"⁶³ alluded to the visuals of cinema and film, like the "mind's film" and "gaze," that would come to dominant their Modernist poetry in decades to follow:

I awake and gaze-
the sounds not stilling-
beyond where the player
sits to the window
pane,
and there, as numerous
as notes, and moving as
with sleep-bewildered minds,
goes snow-more marvelously
musical, now, than
rain.

Similarly, in Ford's 1931 "Left Instantly Designs,"⁶⁴ he utilized other Modernist techniques and elements, such as speaking of dreams, symbols, and some of his social tensions in the world:

if the dream
cries, let
the moon mother
it, encircled
with goodbyes
mist
cannot
smother,
explain your circles
to the sun
and, but for the dark,
run.

⁶³ Parker Tyler, "Sight Complement" in *Poetry*, vol. 42, no. 6 (Sept., 1933), 313.

⁶⁴ Charles Henri Ford, "Left Instantly Designs" in *Poetry*, vol. 37, no. 5 (Feb., 1931), 286-7.

And Tyler expressed his sexuality in “Hymn.”⁶⁵ This overlapping of sexuality and religious imagery was a central tenet of Modernism as it challenged the rigidness of religion, and explored earlier civilizations’ ideas of spirituality, sexuality, and art:

for one proud moment
is the lid rolled back and fran-
tically the birth of springs releases
hood of the humble hour, in which
growth of the sensual face
creeps from the creamy white stalk
like wrinkles of a spring wound
in a faultless conformity up to
the head
no where, when men decide
lust is a moment for shock will this
momentless jack-in-the-box fail

Tyler said some of their poems were “gratuitous” and said “the images of these poems are not representative... all that is desired is an experience which is not subject to the continuous or historical premise; the poem is an object.” The editor of *Poetry* agreed with Tyler’s explanations of his work, and said his and Ford’s poems were “printed here for their objectivity of cadence and for their frequently marked powers in the use of the word as symbol for the object, rather than for their attainments as hallucinations.” Through these early publications, Tyler and Ford gained recognition for their talents.

Tyler, Ford, and their cohort of newer Modernists connected with older, more established Modern poets in the Greenwich Village bohemia. They included Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and Djuna Barnes. These relationships ranged from friendships to apprenticeships to romantic affairs, but all the older Modernists served as artistic mentors and as entry points into the broader bohemian Atlantic world. Often bohemians first connected through friendly letters or by requesting artistic collaboration in some form. Ford and Tyler became

⁶⁵ Parker Tyler, “Hymn” in *Poetry*, vol. 37, no. 5 (Feb., 1931), 285-6.

friends with Djuna Barnes and her lover Thelma Woods in part because Ford had reviewed Barnes' 1929 work *A Night Among Horses* in *Blues* magazine. He used that as a pretext to visit the Greenwich Village home Barnes shared with Woods.⁶⁶



Figure 1.5: Djuna Barnes. By Berenice Abbott, 1926.

Through these more experienced and well-traveled bohemians, Ford, Tyler, and their friends learned about various other bohemian communities around the Atlantic. For writers and artists, Europe, and Paris in particular, was seen as the pinnacle of culture and art. They believed that to improve their own art, they had to see and experience European art and culture first hand. Furthermore, networks built with other bohemians provided greater opportunity for collaboration. Tyler supported himself financially and did not have the means to travel until the 1950s. Ford received funds from his parents and so traveled to Europe and North Africa in the 1930s. Ford brought new experiences, people, and art into the New York bohemian world that he created with Tyler. All the while, they worked on transforming their experiences and memories

⁶⁶ Phillip Herring, *Djuna: The Life and Work of Djuna Barnes* (New York: Viking Press, 1995), 172-176.

into the novel. They wrote together while in New York and exchanged letters and manuscripts while Ford was in Mississippi, Paris, and Tangier.⁶⁷ The experiences from traveling and the connections made to publishers and other writers were critical to creating and finishing the novel, which was their largest work of art to that point.

Djuna Barnes was a crucial element to producing the novel. She was a central romantic interest for Ford for several years through his European travels and guided him through Paris' bohemian world. Ford and Barnes first met at her home in Greenwich Village and they were immediately attracted to one another, much to the displeasure of Barnes' partner, Thelma Woods. Gaging the possibility of a real romantic connection, the two spent a night out alone in Harlem, drinking and dancing, and they kissed in a taxi back down to the Village. Ford had by that time procured his passport, some funds for living expenses, and a boat ticket to Paris for May 29, 1931.⁶⁸ Barnes was familiar with Paris and intended to return, as she had important social, artistic, and financial connections there. The couple saw each other one last time on the day Ford left for France, and the sparks were still there. Barnes set sail six weeks later. The romance that started in New York blossomed in Paris over the next couple years.⁶⁹

Ford reunited with Barnes shortly after she arrived in the City of Lights. Barnes became sick with appendicitis and Ford moved into her home in order to take care of her as she recovered from her hospital stay. The two came to trust each other and fell in love. The fact that they were both writers working on novels gave the two a great deal in common. After Barnes'

⁶⁷ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to "mama cato", 20 July 1930, 7.6, Charles Henri Ford Papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, henceforth referred to as CHFPHRHRC.

⁶⁸ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to Mama Cato, 5 April 1931, 7.6, CHFPHRHRC.

⁶⁹ For more on bohemian Paris, see Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1986).

health improved, they spent their days writing and exploring the wonders of Parisian life. At night, they drank, dined, and danced as bohemian socialites at spots around the city.⁷⁰

Parisian bohemia offered many new experiences when compared to the New York bohemia Ford had known. More of the socializing in this world took place in private homes and parties. Commercial establishments, like cafés, bars, jazz clubs, and art galleries, were also still important. Ford learned about the financial structure of bohemia in Paris more clearly than he had in New York and he used that knowledge to support his artistic activities and bohemian lifestyle for the rest of his life. Money from philanthropists and wealthy benefactors flowed into the pockets of artists and writers to support their work and livelihood.⁷¹

Part of this distinction was not just between New York and Paris, but also between different types of bohemia within each city. Ford, Tyler, and their circle referred to these as “low bohemia,” “high bohemia,” and “the international set.” These categories were ones of money and class. Low bohemians were poorer, struggling artists, often from less well-off backgrounds. High bohemians could include aristocracy or the nouveau riche, or artists that had achieved a level of prestige and financial support. Access to certain cultural institutions and information also came with money. The international set referred to those that traveled abroad or were at least knowledgeable of and attuned to what was happening on the global stage, a subsection of both low and high bohemia and included others outside the bohemian milieu.⁷² So Ford’s move to Paris was also a move from low bohemia to high bohemia, and when he returned to New York he was able to move within Gotham’s high bohemia as well. Tyler also made that transition over the course of the 1930s, in part on his own but also aided by Ford’s connections.

⁷⁰ Herring, *Djuna*, 172-176.

⁷¹ In some cases for wealthy Americans this was due in part to the good exchange rate of dollars to francs during the 1930s.

⁷² Even Tyler, who had not traveled to Europe and only spoke English, read European literature and read journals from London and Paris to keep abreast of news and art from across the Atlantic.

Bohemian Paris was a mix of socialites, artists, intellectuals, writers, and wealthy American ex-patriots.⁷³ Regular parties took place in people's homes that brought together artists and patrons. A typical party included wealthy Americans such as Peggy Guggenheim, writers such as Ford Madox Ford, intellectuals and political activists like Emma Goldman, French painters and a circle of Polish and Russian refugee artists, American and European surrealists like Man Ray and Andre Breton,⁷⁴ salon hosts like Gertrude Stein,⁷⁵ and bohemians including Djuna Barnes, Charles Henri Ford, Glenway Westcott, and even William Seabrook.⁷⁶ With his poetics, charm, and youthful good looks, Ford was able to draw a considerable amount of attention in these prestigious crowds.⁷⁷ This brought Ford into the private social spaces, as well as to galleries, theatres, poetry clubs and cafes, exhibitions of photography and African art, and screenings of avant-garde film.⁷⁸ Ford, Barnes, and their friends also spent a fair amount of time into Montmartre to experience the famous jazz orchestras.⁷⁹

Through Barnes, Ford uncovered the financial underpinnings of Parisian bohemia, knowledge of which he later brought to support his bohemian lifestyle back in New York. Ford found that high society in Paris was split in two; the top half was "old money" and with little interest in bohemia and the second "newer money" half was very interested in art, fashion, and anything avant-garde. This part of society entered into the bohemian world, connecting with artists, buying their works, and occasionally serving as benefactors. In the smallest way, the

⁷³ For more on bohemia beyond Ford, see Seigel, *Bohemian Paris*.

⁷⁴ At one party of the eastern European artists, Ford was the only American present.

⁷⁵ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated "saint gregoire's day" 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁷⁶ Seabrook was a journalist, explorer, and traveled through Europe, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, and was interested in Haitian Vodou. He reported ate human meat among cannibals in Africa and his book *The Magic Island* is created with bringing zombies into popular culture.

⁷⁷ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 5 January 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁷⁸ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 2 February 1932 and letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated "saint gregoire's day" 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁷⁹ See letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 25 March 1932, letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 5 January 1932, and letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated "saint gregoire's day" 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

wealthy provided artists with food and alcohol and were in return entertained with art, writing, and conversation.⁸⁰ Barnes had Peggy Guggenheim as a benefactor, who paid her rent and a monthly stipend, along with other expenses. This went on for close to a year, though the regularity and end date of support was never clear, but it did indirectly benefit Ford.⁸¹

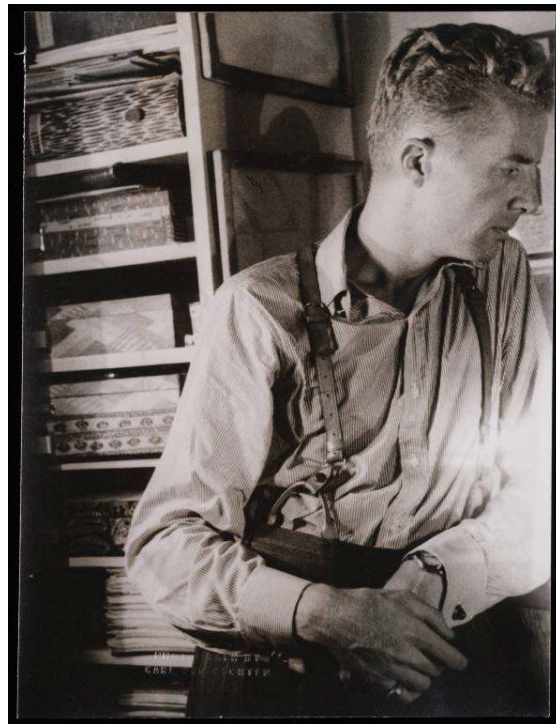


Figure 1.6: Paul Bowles. By Carl Van Vechten, 1944.

Beyond a cultural destination in and of itself, Paris was a conduit to various other artistically and culturally significant places. Ford learned of these other places and met bohemians with access to them. Ford traveled to Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Spain with his friend Carmen Mariño, a Spanish bohemian socialite who had lived throughout Europe and the Caribbean. They rented rooms, lodged in hotels, and stayed at the homes of friends from

⁸⁰ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his father, 26 February 1934 Ford, 7.8, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸¹ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 18 April 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC. Ford and Barnes supplemented their budget with income of their own, in addition to money from Guggenheim and Ford's family. They were paid for poetry and articles Ford wrote once to his mother "im completely broke and djuna is just about so." His family often sent money for art supplies and necessities. A strong majority of the surviving letters that Ford wrote to his mother and father contain either a request for money or gratitude for having already sent some to him. Overall, Paris was cheaper than New York. See Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated "saint ignace's day" 1932, Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 25 March 1932, and Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 18 April 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

Paris, seeing sights, enjoying the countryside, and visiting places with great art.⁸² Paul Bowles pushed Ford to visit bohemian Tangier. Bowles was an American writer and composer who lived in New York, Paris, and after a trip to Morocco in the early 1930s, spent most of his life in Tangier. In much the same vein that Parker Tyler had drawn exciting images of Greenwich Village that enticed Ford to go there himself, Bowles' drew Ford's interest into another bohemian world, distinct from both Paris and New York. Bowles described the various sights of North Africa, including El Oued, Algeria as "a city one has dreamt about some time just before waking, and whose sweetness is prolonged into waking," and told Ford of unusual things like wonderful mountains of red grasshoppers for sale in the markets.⁸³ While Bowles thought the cities of Algeria were "so good and so different from anything in Morocco," they did not have the bohemia that Tangier had.

Ford explored Morocco with a varied group of bohemian friends. On November 16, 1932, he traveled to Tangier with Carmen Mariño and Felix Pita Rodriquez, a Cuban artist that Ford knew through Tyler.⁸⁴ The three stayed in Tangier through the following Spring. In April of 1933, Mariño and Rodriquez left Tangier to travel more and Ford was joined by Djuna Barnes, Paul Bowles, Claude McKay, and other friends from Paris. While Barnes wrote her novel, Ford worked on his poetry and on finding a publisher for *The Young and Evil*.⁸⁵ Though their main attention was towards writing, they explored the multiple layers of society in Tangier.

Within the city of Tangier there were three separate, yet often complimentary, worlds. There was the large Moroccan Muslim community, a presence of European imperialists and

⁸² See Tangier Journal, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸³ Letter from Paul Bowles to Charles Henri Ford, 23 March 1932, 12.6, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸⁴ Félix Pita Rodríguez, a famous Cuban poet and a socialist, and Carmen "Carmita" Mariño visited Europe while Charles Henri Ford was there and traveled through Italy, France, and Spain prior to Morocco, see Herring *Djuna*, 180-1. Ford was also connected to a friend of Rodríguez, Carlos Enríquez Gómez, who was a Cuban Painter in Europe at that time as well, see letters from Gomez to Ford from 1933 and 1938, 12.7, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸⁵ Letter from Claude McKay to Charles Henri Ford, 12 April 1935, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

tourists, and the Tangier bohemia, which was in ways both tangential to and a blending of these two others. The sultan held nominal power, but France and Spain controlled much of the coastal areas and important cities under a protectorate. Large European populations lived in separate neighborhoods in the urban areas and worked in resource extraction or administration.⁸⁶ Tourists and bohemians lived either in the European neighborhoods or in porous areas between European and Moroccan communities.

When Ford first arrived with Mariño and Rodriquez, they tried to grasp as much of Moroccan life as they could but had trouble breaking beyond the tourist barrier. They rented a comfortable villa in the European zone, which was safe and large enough to allow them to entertain guests.⁸⁷ They went on guided tours of the city on “burros” and saw the Sultan’s palace, famous mosques, the Kasbah, and more. Ford loved the unique architecture and tile-work, noting “everything was pretty where it was... and should not be imitated anywhere else.”⁸⁸ They navigated the markets, went to the beach together, met new people, and sometimes they caught glimpses of life beyond the touristic veil.⁸⁹ Ford witnessed a wedding procession with the bride being carried in a giant box to conceal her from the groom before the ceremony, which both shocked and intrigued him.⁹⁰ Within their home, they entertained Moroccan and European friends and through their Moroccan friends they learned more about the culture including tea ceremonies and dress.⁹¹ When Barnes and Bowles joined Ford later, the three moved to a flat in the Kasbah, a space at the crossroads of the Moroccan, European, and bohemian communities.

⁸⁶ For more on the general history of Morocco in this period, see C.R. Pennell, *Morocco: From Empire to Independence*, (London: Oneworld Publications, 2009).

⁸⁷ Tangier Journal, 22 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸⁸ Tangier Journal, 17 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸⁹ Tangier Journal, 18 November 1932 and 29 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹⁰ Tangier Journal, 17 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹¹ Tangier Journal, 18 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

Many Europeans and Americans in Tangier exoticized the Arab world. Paul Bowles, however, spent most of his life there and he forged deep bonds and roots in all the places he visited. These relationships with Moroccan friends offered Bowles, Ford, and their bohemian friends greater insight into the lives of the people there. Not untypical for Bowles, one night he stayed with the family of “an Arab boy whom I met on the train.” The family was “frightfully amusing” and he was welcomed in very warmly, where he was even allowed “right into the circle, with the women unveiled and so on,” something unusual for outsiders and strangers.⁹² While Ford created connections with male youths and adults, he was not as able to break through the gender barrier to engage with Arab women. Even so, this was the way in which bohemia served as a transitional space and it illustrated the boundary-breaking element to the bohemian lifestyle that connected it to so many other segments of society.

Bohemia challenged various boundaries within the city. A single place in the city could shift into various spaces over the course of the day or night. The Kasbah was a fluid area that catered to Europeans, Moroccans, and bohemians during the day and at night. Ford and his bohemian friends often explored the nightlife and one evening visited an ex-pat bar. As they socialized and danced, they transformed it into a bohemian spot. However when a group of Moroccans arrived at the establishment, the bartender quickly ended the dancing because it was taboo for a man and woman to dance together in public.⁹³ The social structures limited some activities but also opened opportunities for others.

Tangier’s bohemia had a more liberal atmosphere towards and greater availability of drugs compared to Paris and New York. Bowles had told Ford prior to his arrival, “the principal pastime here is to sit in a dark café in the casbah smoking kif and playing dominoes. Haschich

⁹² Letter from Paul Bowles to Charles Henri Ford, 23 March 1932, 12.6, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹³ Tangier Journal, 22 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

also.”⁹⁴ On their second day in Morocco, Mariño bought a pipe while out shopping, and they smoked keef with their guides.⁹⁵ Ford smoked some of the mixture, though claimed it “gave [him] no kick.” Mariño told him, “you don’t react to drugs,” and Ford responded, “I suppose not.”⁹⁶ On several occasions they also used snuff, which was powdered tobacco that one snorted giving a prolonged and more intense sensation than smoking cigarettes.⁹⁷ Mariño and Rodriquez also looked to buy cocaine, however it is not clear if they ever found or used any.⁹⁸ They were also able to drink real absinthe, which was outlawed in France and the United States.⁹⁹ Ford, when he had first arrived in Paris, wrote to Tyler and said that the people there had not heard of marijuana and asked Tyler to mail him some. So marijuana was more popular in Greenwich Village than Paris or perhaps used more in low bohemia than in high bohemia, but all of this was timid compared to Tangier.¹⁰⁰ Tangier’s bohemia showed Ford a more liberated attitude towards drugs and may even have influenced the novel *The Young and Evil*, which mentioned marijuana several times and which Ford worked on while in Tangier.¹⁰¹

All three of the worlds in Tangier had corresponding, yet sometimes overlapping and complementary, sexual systems. In Muslim Moroccan society, sexuality was not divided between heterosexuality and homosexuality, rather it was a gender and age-based system, with active and passive partners that were divided either by the masculine and feminine roles or by age. Parts of Moroccan society catered to Europeans interested in sex, which included prostitution, cross-cultural marriages, and everything in-between. Tangier’s bohemia practiced

⁹⁴ Letter from Paul Bowles to Charles Henri Ford, 23 March 1932, 12.6, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹⁵ Keef was a product derived from marijuana, and sometimes mixed with tobacco.

⁹⁶ Tangier Journal, 17 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹⁷ Tangier Journal, 17 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁹⁸ Tangier Journal, 10 December 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC. See also Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). While this book focuses primarily on Iran (Persia), it offers some information about the broader Islamic world.

⁹⁹ Tangier Journal, 22 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁰⁰ See page 155 in copy of *I Will Be What I Am*, 3.208, CHFPCALB.

¹⁰¹ Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, 59, 61.

the same sexuality as in other bohemias, one based on sexual interest, artistic inspiration, and collaboration regardless of gender, sex, or sexual preference. Where there was complimentary interests, or in cases exploitations, these systems also bled into one another.¹⁰²

Ford was exposed to an age-based sexual system for the first time, which was different from that of the bohemian world of New York or Paris. In this setting, Ford was both perceived as a man looking for youths and Ford's gaze seemed to also turn more specifically towards youths on the beaches and in the streets of the city. This added to his understanding of sexuality and to his practices as he returned to similar sexual systems many times over the course of his life.¹⁰³

Within his first weeks in Tangier, Ford had a detailed understanding of the sexual topography of the city. Ford learned of a network of bathhouses from an 18-year-old youth named Absolom, who directed traffic to such establishments. In the Moorish Quarter, there were bathhouses for Moroccans only, and in other sectors of the city were Spanish and French bathhouses that tourists were allowed to visit. Ford was also told of a "Jewish house" where "little girls" danced without clothes and there was also a similar house with boys in place of girls. Ford was told that to visit the house with girls was 80 francs and Spaniards went there, and the house with boys was 100 francs and Frenchmen went there. Ford and Absolom walked throughout the Moorish and Spanish Quarters, and Ford gave him five francs to get him home safely, which Absolom did.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² See Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009) and Joseph Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

¹⁰³ Ford kept journals from his time in North Africa. Most entries are quite detailed and appear to be written daily. Two journals have survived. Ford began his Tangier journal by writing "If I say things in this account that may seem too personal or too private my only excuse is that a hundred years from now they will hurt no one and still make amusing reading," his intent being to create as accurate a record as possible. Tangier Journal, 16 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁰⁴ Tangier Journal, 19 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

Tied to the sexual system in Morocco was also public sex and nudity. Bowles described to Ford several beaches and islands to visit in answering Ford's questions about "naked places." Bowles said that in Agadir, in southern Morocco, "you can go naked there for twenty miles along the beach, and what a beach!" and suggested "Cabo Verde is., which are certainly naked" and "Fernando Po," present day Bioko in the Gulf of Guinea.¹⁰⁵ Considering other activities on public beaches around the Mediterranean from throughout Ford's life,¹⁰⁶ these bohemians understood "naked places" as a liberating experience and space, but also as a space to potentially have sex in public. Ford made no mention of sex in public in New York. He did once mention sex in "pissairs," the public urinals in Paris, in the 1930s and 40s, but public nudity and sex on beaches was a unexplored terrain.¹⁰⁷ In searching out new sexual experiences, they traveled to various places where such things were acceptable and learned of new sexual systems unavailable to them in urban bohemia or in America.

Ford absorbed much of the different attitude toward sex that was present in Tangier's bohemia. The division between sexes seemed to allow for more flirtation and interaction between Moroccan youths and white adults like Ford. He often watched, conversed with, and flirted with young men on the streets, on the beaches, and in the markets.¹⁰⁸ There were several sexual encounters suggested in his journal, voyeuristic activities where Ford simply watched youths in his travels or sometimes flirted with them, though none are written with any sexual detail.¹⁰⁹ He also wrote in letters to friends, such as Tyler, about sexual activities and partners, like an "Arab

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Paul Bowles to Ford, 23 March 1932, 12.6, CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁰⁶ See Ford's Greece Journal 28.2, CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁰⁷ See Ford, *Water From a Bucket*, 52. William Peniston, *Pederasts and Others: Urban Culture and Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2004), 95.

¹⁰⁸ Tangier Journal, 17 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC. For more on the sexual interaction between Europeans and Arabs, see Massad, *Desiring Arabs*. Also, for accounts of Englishmen visiting Tangier and their sexual experiences, see Russel Davies, ed., *The Kenneth Williams Diaries* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 280-303, and John Lahr, ed., *The Orton Diaries* (London: Methuen Press, 1986), 189-196. See also El-Rouayheb, *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World*.

¹⁰⁹ Tangier Journal, 22 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

lover” named Mohamed who had a body like “an idol.”¹¹⁰ Overall, it was clear that Morocco offered something that even Greenwich Village and Paris did not.



Figure 1.7: Charles Henri Ford at a Parisian Pissoir. By Henri Cartier Bresson, 1933. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.¹¹¹

The group’s time in Tangier came to an end with the close of Barnes and Ford’s relationship. Barnes felt lonely and mentally checked out of the city when she found out that she was pregnant. The child was not Ford’s, but a French painter Jean Oberlé’s. Ford suggested that they could marry and keep the child, but Barnes did not want either. She borrowed money from a friend to return to Paris and had an abortion. Though Ford and Barnes maintained their friendship, writing letters and seeing one another in New York, these events ended the romance.¹¹² At the same time, Ford had finally found a publisher for the novel, necessitating his

¹¹⁰ Tangier Journal, 4 December 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC. There is a servant mentioned who works at the villa Ford rents also with the name Mohamed, however there is nothing that suggests these two are the same person.

¹¹¹ Juan Suárez has pointed out that his photo was likely a joke, as Ford is zipping his pants at a pissoir with an advertisement of a tongue on it. See Suárez, *Pop Modernism*, 179-207.

¹¹² Herring, *Djuna*, 183-4.

return to Paris. Still, the time in Tangier proved to be a tremendously culturally informative experience and the city inspired both Barnes and Ford's current work and later projects.¹¹³

Djuna Barnes' pregnancy and Charles Henri Ford's subsequent proposal of marriage brought to the forefront the question of what a bohemian relationship was. Ford and Barnes' definition of relationships did not necessarily equal the notion of marriage. Any long-term relationship, including marriage, was generally open to outside sexual relations. Marriage to them would have provided much of what they sought in the relationship: social standing, companionship, and artistic support, but also carried the expectation of raising children.¹¹⁴ However, as Ford wrote to his mother after a previous failed proposal, "thered be no point in marrying her as she doesnt want a baby" and "she cant see herself a MRS."¹¹⁵ For bohemians, child-rearing, i.e. procreation or reproduction, was not a goal. Rather, art-making, i.e. creation or production, was the main point of their lives and their relationships. Many within this group of bohemians entered into long-term committed relationships, but legal marriage and child rearing were not expected nor the norm.

Ford never married nor had any children, but after his split with Barnes he began a two-and-a-half decade long relationship with the Russian-born painter Pavel Tchelitchew. In this, Ford found a companion and a social partner, as well as mutual artistic support. Ford had spent the summer and fall of 1931 moving throughout Polish and Russian artist parties and worked his way closer to Gertrude Stein's inner circle. He likely met Tchelitchew somewhere through these journeys, as Tchelitchew was close with Stein as well. Ford first mentioned that he knew

¹¹³ Letter from Djuna Barnes to Ford, 17 July 1934, 12.3, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁴ This thought had been on Ford's mind already, as months earlier and prior to Barnes' arrival in Tangier, Ford wrote in his diary "I want to marry some day and have children." This line in the journal, which was written in ink, was subsequently crossed out in pencil. It is possible that at some point Ford either changed his mind, that he crossed it out after Barnes' rejection. Tangier Journal, 26 November 1932, 20.1, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁵ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated "saint ignace's day" 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC. It should be noted that Barnes was close with Ford's mother and sister Ruth when she moved to New York City after leaving Paris.

Tchelitchew in December 1931 when he attended the holiday party thrown by Ford and Barnes. In a letter to his mother, Ford said of Tchelitchew “his portrait of Edith Sitwell is marvelous, they were in love is maybe why.”¹¹⁶ Soon thereafter the same could be said of portraits done of Ford.



Figure 1.8: Pavel Tchelitchew. By Carl Van Vechten, 1934.

Pavel Tchelitchew was born in 1898 in Kaluga, Russia, not far from Moscow. His family was aristocracy and so from a young age Tchelitchew was educated and exposed to art and ballet. Following the Bolshevik revolution, his family fled the country, and he lived in Berlin and then Paris. He developed into a renowned painter on the Paris art scene and became close friends with Gertrude Stein, Edith Sitwell, and the Surrealists including Andre Breton.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 5 January 1932, 8.2, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁷ For more information on Pavel Tchelitchew, see Parker Tyler, *The Divine Comedy of Pavel Tchelitchew: A Biography* (New York: Fleet, 1967).

Ford returned to Paris from Morocco and his friend Allan Ross Macdouglass arranged immediately for Ford and Tchelitchew to have dinner, after which they began seeing each other regularly.¹¹⁸ Simple conversations over tea and dinner dates sparked a deeper love in the matter of a couple months. Tchelitchew had plans to spend the summer in Guermantes, a small town 15 miles east of Paris.¹¹⁹ Ford promised to visit and the two wrote frequent letters to each other. Soon after their separation, Tchelitchew wrote to Ford, “You know that night and day always its only you in my mind and heart.”¹²⁰

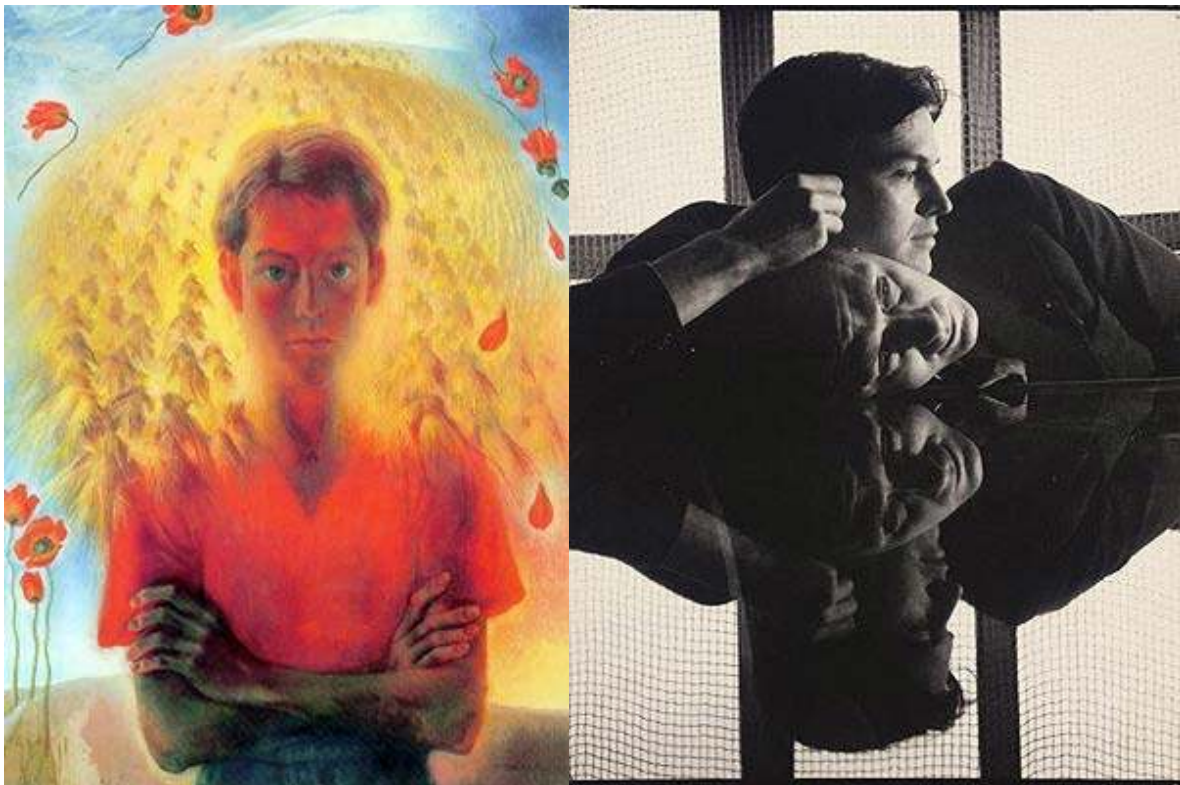


Figure 1.9: Left, Portrait of Charles Henri Ford in a Poppy Field. By Pavel Tchelitchew, 1933.
Figure 1.10: Right, Charles Henri Ford and Pavel Tchelitchew. By Cecil Beaton, 1941.

As in most bohemian relationships, the dynamic was one of lover and beloved, and mentor and mentee. They were both active agents in a reciprocal association that was mutually

¹¹⁸ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 102.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Pavel Tchelitchew to Charles Henri Ford, “Saturday” [July 15, 1933], 15.4, CHFPHRHRC.

¹²⁰ Letter from Pavel Tchelitchew to Charles Henri Ford, “Saturday Night Guermantes” 1933, 15.4, CHFPHRHRC.

beneficial. Tchelitchev, over a decade older, intensely pursued Ford, who greatly enjoyed the attention and interest showered on him.¹²¹ Ford was more than a sexual or romantic interest to Tchelitchev; he was also a muse. Tchelitchev said that he worked better when they were together and he painted, photographed, and drew portraits of Ford when they were.¹²²

Tchelitchev provided Ford with great moral support and guidance on how to succeed as an artist.

Ford and Tchelitchev's relationship grew and solidified over the next year, even when they were in separate places. Despite the fact that it was Ford in the big city, Tchelitchev had to talk down Ford's paranoia several times. Tchelitchev wrote to Ford, "I love you for you, for what you are and will be, for your beauty and your heart" and signed it with his familial nickname, "Your Pavlik."¹²³ Any feelings of jealousy were not about sexual interactions, but rather about potential other loves. When Tchelitchev returned to Paris for the fall, their relationship intensified. The two saw each other nearly everyday, usually with Ford visiting Tchelitchev's apartment for lunch, tea, or dinner. Ford wrote about Tchelitchev to his father, just saying that Tchelitchev was his "best friend" now, and that he was "the most marvelous of the younger painters (hes 34)." Ford also mentioned the numerous paintings and drawings that Tchelitchev had done of him.¹²⁴ Later on in his life, Ford said, "Pavlik gave me everything that one person could possibly give another[.] And mother did too [.]"¹²⁵ This long-term relationship between Ford and Tchelitchev was both pioneering and emblematic of the relationships to

¹²¹ Tchelitchev stayed in Guermantes from July through September. It is unclear if Tchelitchev was in Guermantes the whole time or if it was several trips over this period. They wrote each other often, sometimes daily, and through their letters the bond between the two grew stronger. They discussed family and friends, art and work, and Tchelitchev often extolled the virtues of spending time outside the busy city of Paris, attempts to get Ford to visit.

¹²² Letter from Pavel Tchelitchev to Charles Henri Ford, "24 September Guermantes" 1933, 15.4, CHFPHRHRC.

¹²³ Letter from Pavel Tchelitchev to Charles Henri Ford, "Saturday Night Guermantes" 1933, 15.4, CHFPHRHRC. Everyone close to Tchelitchev called him "Pavlik," and soon that included not just Ford but Ford's family as well. This showed both how close Tchelitchev was to Ford's family but also that they knew of the intimate relationship between he and their son.

¹²⁴ Letter to his father from Ford, 18 Nov 1933, 7.8, CHFPHRHRC.

¹²⁵ Greece Journal VI: 46, 28.2, CHFPHRHRC. This was not the only time that Ford alluded to a similarity between his relationship with his mother or father and his relationship with Tchelitchev. As Martha Vicinus has pointed out in *Intimate Friends* that romantic relationships were sometimes modeled off of a parent/child dynamic.

follow in this group of bohemians. In the decade that followed, many of the group's closest friends, including Tyler, Bowles, Maya Deren, and Willard Maas also entered into long-term relationships. Meanwhile, as Ford and Tchelitchev's relationship blossomed, Ford also saw advances in the publication of his and Tyler's novel.

Ford and Tyler completed their novel early in the spring of 1932. Ford had sent the final typed manuscript to publishing contacts he had made in New York, London, and Paris. Despite some excitement and interest, rejection after rejection came through. Perhaps the most telling came from Horace Liveright in New York, who wrote, "I read with infinite pleasure your brilliant novel "Love and Jump Back" [the working title] but I could not think of publishing it as a book - life is too short and jails are unsanitary. But it was a pleasure to read it."¹²⁶ Liveright ended by saying he would look forward to future work by the two.

Ford finally found success in an obscure publisher in Paris, Obelisk Press. This press published English and American works that were too risqué for other houses and had put out other controversial novels including Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*.¹²⁷ *The Young and Evil* had finally found a proper home. The first printing was of 2500 copies and the dust jacket bore praise from Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes. Stein's quote said, "The Young and Evil creates this generation as *This Side of Paradise* by Fitzgerald created his generation."¹²⁸

The Young and Evil received much acclaim from within bohemia, but this was certainly not the case everywhere. As expected, the book was banned in the United States and Great Britain. British customs seized and burned 500 copies.¹²⁹ Condemnations of the book tended to focus on the homosexuality and promiscuity of the novel and the ban prevented the book from

¹²⁶ See Watson, introduction, xx, and a letter from Horace Liveright to Parker Tyler, 7.8, PTCHRHRC.

¹²⁷ *The Well of Loneliness* was a English novel published in 1928. It portrayed a lesbian relationship as natural but as sparking isolation and hostility from society. It is often considered to be one of the first "lesbian novels."

¹²⁸ See Watson, introduction, *The Young and Evil*.

¹²⁹ Watson, introduction, xxv.

being republished for almost three decades. Copies were sold in several cities throughout Europe, even using the ban to give the novel more allure, as a bookshop in Venice advertised, “banned in England + America.”¹³⁰ Despite the obstacles, the novel made it into the United States illegally, and picked up a cult following where readers passed copies along to friends.¹³¹

Critiques and criticisms of the novel came from all places, but perhaps one of the most interesting ones has not previously been discussed: Claude McKay’s. McKay was a famed writer of the Harlem Renaissance and bohemian friend of Ford and his circle.¹³² After mentioning telling Ford that he passed the book on to several of his friends, McKay recalled a conversation he had had with Ford in Morocco. McKay remembered Ford saying that he was not interested in the “moral” aspects of the incidents in the book. McKay continued:

“what I got from *The Young and Evil* after putting it down and thinking of it as a piece of creative expression was a very depressing impression of the author being obsessed with the idea of morality- social morality... It seems to me an indictment of homosexuality and most terribly real in that the indictment is unconscious, none of your characters show that they get any physical or emotional joy out of what they do, they all seem hopelessly sticking together in a mucilage of malaise. My God, it’s a shame that such a book should be censored in a country like this!... I’d surely decree that your *Young and Evil* should be put in the hands of all adolescents- as a warning! I think that the interesting thing about creative expression, is not so much what the artists think they are or pretend to be- but that what they actually are has a mysterious way of showing through the implications- to those that are aware.”¹³³

McKay’s criticism was rather unique for the time. While champions and opponents of the novel usually focused on the mere presence of homosexuality in *The Young and Evil*, McKay analyzed

¹³⁰ Letter from Djuna Barnes to Charles Henri Ford, September 1933, 12.3, CHFPHRHRC. Barnes tells Ford in the postscript of her letter: “Y+E (Young and Evil) selling in Venice as ‘banned in England + America’.”

¹³¹ Letter from Djuna Barnes to Charles Henri Ford, 20 August 1933, 12.3, CHFPHRHRC, and Letter from Claude McKay to Charles Henri Ford 12 April 1935, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC. In both of these cases, Barnes and McKay mention passing the book on to someone else who then passed it along to another person, showing that one copy could have been read by many people.

¹³² Author of *Home to Harlem* (1928), *Banjo* (1929), and *Banana Bottom* (1933). His novel *Banjo* is known to portray queer sexuality in 1920s Marseilles and *Banana Bottom* contained positive depictions of same-sex relationships.

¹³³ Letter from Claude McKay to Charles Henri Ford, 12 April 1935, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

its portrayal. Being no stranger to the bohemian life himself, McKay did not say that homosexuality was inherently immoral, rather that characters beyond their sexuality might be immoral, as he implied Ford might be as well. Djuna Barnes made a similar comment, and pinned it on the rejection of “Victorian... dignity,” and said, “Their utter lack of emotional values-so entire that it is frightening...their unresolved acceptance of any happening is both evil and ‘pure’ in the sense that it is unconscious.”¹³⁴ Critical as both McKay and Barnes were, it was remarkable that two fellow bohemians found something so jarring and *new* in this novel, and that was in no small way an acknowledgement of its Modernist value. They do not condemn it for aesthetics or modernism. Their complaints, though not a minor one, was in the morals of the characters.

With the publication of *The Young and Evil*, Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford had established their artistic viewpoint, brand, and understanding of bohemia. Theirs was a step forward in Modernist poetry. Being the author of a novel held a great deal more cache within the bohemian world than their previous work with *Blues* magazine and their poems published in magazines. This was a large, solid creative production. This gave them the prestige to publish more of their work down the line, eventually enough to support their lives as bohemian writers.

By 1933, the Great Depression had placed financial stresses on Ford and Tyler’s bohemian world. In Paris, no longer able to stay with Barnes, Ford rented a room, which increased his expenses. Tchelitchew lent Ford 1000 Francs to continue his stay in Paris, but both struggled to maintain a living in the city.¹³⁵ To Ford’s credit, he repaid loans that he took from friends and colleagues. Gertrude Stein called him “honest” because most artists to whom she had

¹³⁴ Watson, introduction, vii.

¹³⁵ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his father, 18 Nov 1933, 7.8 CHFPHRHRC. Ford asked his father for money again, but said that once his father was able to send enough money for a boat ticket he would return to the United States, finally doing so in spring of 1934.

lent money never returned it.¹³⁶ Ford and Tchelitchev moved to New York in 1934, where Ford was able to help his family more and Tchelitchev sold his paintings in the New York and Chicago markets. Ford's parents lived separately and the hotel business struggled in the economy.¹³⁷ Ford's sister, who had aspirations of being a model and actress, moved to New York but could not find work.¹³⁸ Ford was able to use his industry friends and connections to help his sister find jobs. The siblings began to move through New York's social scene and they made a big impression in high-society and the art world. Ford had moved from the high bohemia of Paris into the high bohemia in New York. Photos of the two found their way into magazines like Harper's Bazaar.¹³⁹ Ford actively used the experiences, connections, and skills he gained from his time in Paris to his benefit and to that of his family when back in New York.

The move to New York was also a turning point for Ford and Tchelitchev's relationship. Ford left Paris by himself. In his words, "That was the only way to be sure of uprooting [Tchelitchev] from Paris - to leave first so he would follow."¹⁴⁰ For Ford, this was assurance that Tchelitchev chose their bond over the Paris art scene. For Tchelitchev, this meant that the trip was his own choice and he could not resent Ford for it. Ford spent the first winter living with his sister in Greenwich Village and Tchelitchev stayed in hotels and his own painting studio.¹⁴¹ After that transition, they lived together and remained in a committed union until Tchelitchev's death.

¹³⁶ From Greek Journals VI: pp. 57-8, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC.

¹³⁷ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 16 Oct 1929, 81. CHFPHRHRC. It is not clear if Ford's parents ever legally were divorced, but the two were threatening to divorce and each side sought legal council regarding it. Also see descriptions of Ford's mother and sister's employment in the letter from Djuna Barnes to Charles Henri Ford, 17 March 1934, 12.3 CHFPHRHRC.

¹³⁸ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 18 April 1932, 8.2 CHFPHRHRC. The restaurant part of the hotel that Ford's father ran was losing money because of the depression. He had to weigh cutting hours and cutting staff as capital were drying up.

¹³⁹ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his father, 18 April 1935, 7.8 CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁴⁰ Ford's Greece Journal VI: 46, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

Tyler's life was also forced to change by the Depression. Tyler's financial situation was very different from Ford's as his family was not as well off. He continued his poetry but increasingly found less financial support for it. Where Tyler had received some help from his parents in the early 1930s,¹⁴² he needed to help them by the middle of the decade and did so by paying utilities¹⁴³ and sending them money when he did receive paychecks for his poetry.¹⁴⁴ So Tyler felt a much larger burden to find new ways to make ends meet while continuing in his artistic pursuits.

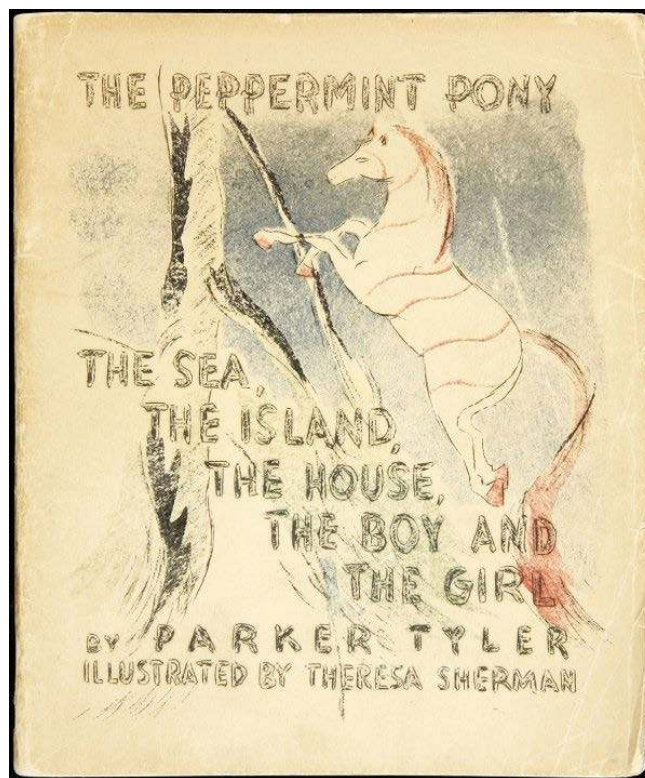


Figure 1.11: Parker Tyler. *The Peppermint Pony*, 1936. Project 1552, Works Progress Administration.

In 1934 Tyler turned to the Works Progress Administration for a more stable source of income. A New Deal program that was designed to help employ artists and writers, Tyler did a

¹⁴² Tyler's parents helped out both Tyler and Ford when he was in the city, treating the two young artists to dinner occasionally and sending them groceries every week. Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his father, 17 March 1930, 7.7, CHFPHRHRC. This letter came from New York City before Ford's Paris trip.

¹⁴³ Letter to his sister Phyllis from Parker Tyler, Oct 17 1967, 50.1 PTCHRHRC.

¹⁴⁴ Letter to his sister Phyllis from Parker Tyler, July 3 1957, 50.1 PTCHRHRC.

variety of WPA work throughout the 1930s. He started as an "Information Writer" in 1934, was a "Jr. Typist" in 1939, and later a "Writer" in 1940.¹⁴⁵ His more artistic project was writing children's books. Published by the "'U. S. Works Progress Administration: New Reading Materials Program, Board of Education, City of New York," Tyler wrote stories that included a spooky tale about a boy in New Orleans, an animal fable about kings and nations, a story about an ostracized pony, and two historical accounts about Hernando de Soto and Ponce de Leon. All the books were slightly grim and all had clear moralistic elements. Tyler was able to work some interesting themes into his books. He included myths and folklore and dealt with struggles of being ostracized and finding acceptance, all of which were ideas he also explored in his other work.¹⁴⁶ The WPA provided the poor artist with some creative outlet that helped to pay his bills during the depression and was also helpful in socializing and networking with other artists. He likely met his friend Orson Welles through the WPA, who directed several theatre projects through the agency prior to his breakthrough in Hollywood with "Citizen Kane" in 1941.

Ford and Tyler's activities through the 1930s complemented one another's and added tremendously to their Modernist art and bohemian networks. Ford maintained his friendships with people he had met through Tyler like Glenway Westcott, others from his *Blues* magazine days like William Carlos Williams, and those from his European trip like Peggy Guggenheim. They also branched out to other artists and industry people, such as future gallery owner Julien Levy, painter Paul Cadmus, and composer Virgil Thomson. These were all figures of varying artistic disciplines but that all fell under the canopy of American Modernism. Tyler grew more and more interested in film during the 1930s and so he sought out artists and bohemians who shared that interest, like Orson Welles, George Hoyningen-Huene, Maya Deren, and Willard

¹⁴⁵ Tyler Works Progress Administration identification card, 21.1 PTCHRHC.

¹⁴⁶ Tyler WPA books, filed in the "Uncategorized boxes" under folder "Children's Books" PTCHRHC.

Maas.¹⁴⁷ Tchelitchev after joining New York bohemia also brought in a variety of other European artists, including photographer Henri Cartier Bresson.¹⁴⁸ While Ford had been in Paris, Tyler had also worked his way into the echelons of high bohemia, and brought figures like photographer and writer Carl Van Vechten, the eccentric businesswoman Helena Rubinstein, and composer Nicolas Nabokov into their bohemian network. Ford's understanding of high bohemia from Paris impacted Tyler, who began to socialize at places like the Russian Tea Room. When Ford was back in the city, he and Tyler collaborated. Every week Ford and his sister Ruth hosted a martini party on Saturday night and they "invit[ed] Village friends and Parker would bring friends of his."¹⁴⁹ All of this social activity was pivotal to Tyler and Ford's next big project after the outbreak of World War II.

While Tyler continued the group's efforts of building relationships in New York, Ford continued to branch out to Europe. Tchelitchev paid for Ford and himself to return to Paris in the summer of 1935. Ford also succeeded in bringing his sister Ruth and his mother over to the French capital in 1936, largely due to Ruth's rising stardom as a model in New York and Europe.¹⁵⁰ Tchelitchev and Ruth both traveled back to New York over the next couple years for various projects, while Ford and his mother spent most of the next few years in Europe. Ruth broke into acting through Orson Welles, whom she had met through Tyler, and she worked in both theatre and film in the late 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵¹

By the end of the 1930s, Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford had created a bohemia that was anchored in Greenwich Village and connected by a web around the Atlantic. This not only

¹⁴⁷ See Tyler's 1937 Engagement Book, 17.2 PTCHRHC and Ford's Greece Journal VI: 46, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁴⁸ Ford's Greece Journal VI: 46, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁴⁹ Ford's Greece Journal VI: 48-49, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his father, 6 August 1936, 7.8 CHFPHRHRC.

¹⁵¹ Greece Journal VI: 48-49, 28.2 CHFPHRHRC

expanded their social and work networks, it broadened their cultural horizons and added to their art. Through two different avenues, Tyler within Greenwich Village and Ford through Europe, these bohemians were able to move from the low bohemia of starving artists to the high bohemia with cultural and financial opportunities. For Ford, this meant changes not just in spaces but in places, where he continued to travel and lived in the East 50s and the Upper West Side while in New York. Tyler remained in the Village for the rest of his life, but still moved in high bohemian circles and spaces. These shifts in the 1930s and their firmly established art and statuses by the end of the decade set Tyler, Ford, and their friends up for much larger projects in the years to follow.

After they published their novel *The Young and Evil*, Tyler and Ford returned to their own individual artistic pursuits. They each published poetry, including Ford's 1938 book of poems *The Garden of Disorder*.¹⁵² The visuals and gaze that Tyler addressed in his poetry brought him more and more to thinking and writing about film, which would be a major piece of his life and art in the future. W. H. Auden perhaps best described the Modernist poet mentality of the period, when he wrote "Human beings are, necessarily, actors who cannot become something before they have first pretended to be it; and they can be divided, not into the hypocritical and the sincere, but into the sane who know they are acting and the mad who do not."¹⁵³ Tyler and Ford had acted and pretended to be their bohemian selves in order to create and become bohemia. After all that work, they next faced the war and had to fight to preserve all that they had built.

¹⁵² Charles Henri Ford, *The Garden of Disorder and Other Poems* (London: Europa Press, 1938).

¹⁵³ W. H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety* (New York: Random House, 1947), 87.

CHAPTER 2: VIEWING THE WAR, 1939-1947

Charles Henri Ford and Pavel Tchelitchev returned to Europe in the summer of 1938 after a few years in New York. They traveled on a steam-liner to Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia and then sailed to Venice where they spent a few days. They traveled by train to Paris to return to their work and their artistic bohemian community. Ford's mother was set to arrive a month after they did, taking the same route through Dubrovnik and Venice. The three spent most of the next year in Paris and then moved to the French Alps during the heat of the following summer.¹

It was in this remote locale that in the beginning of September Charles Henri Ford, his mother, and Pavel Tchelitchev found themselves with a letter from the US consulate in Paris urging them to leave the country. The Nazis had invaded Poland on September 1, 1939 and France had declared war against Germany. The consul in the U.S. embassy took the precaution of telling all American citizens to immediately return to the states before actual conflict broke out in France.² Ford and his companions prepared to leave at once, but found that the trains were sold out and were stuck for three days. When they arrived in Paris, it was in hysterics. They “found the city in semi-darkness,” food, taxis, and amenities were scarce, and rumors abounded that no boats were sailing. Ford's mother “began to feel upset” for she found Paris overwhelming “even during peace,” but she now feared for her life. They found a place to spend the night and the following day went to French Line in the hopes of finding tickets for the United States. It was their extreme fortune that Tchelitchev knew the recently appointed Minister of Propaganda for France, “equivalent to Goebbells [sic] position in Germany.” Tchelitchev telephoned Jean

¹ Three letters from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, dated 22 August 1938, 28 August 1938, and 2 Sept 1938, 8.7, Charles Henri Ford Papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, henceforth referred to as CHFPHRHRC.

² Charles Glass, *Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010).

Giraudoux, a playwright before his new appointment, and was able to get three tickets aboard the ship *Champlain* leaving the very next day. “Literally thousands of people had been refused bookings before we got ours. How lucky we were!” It was lucky for them, but unfortunate for others. Three people had been bumped from the list to make room for them.³

On board the *Champlain*, the air was tense. The ship took the most northern route to avoid enemy ships and at night the entire vessel “was blacked out so torpedo boats wouldn[']t see us.” They filled the ship with as many passengers as possible, with people sleeping in the gymnasium and other open areas. One night the foghorn blew at 3am and panicked passengers who thought it was a call to evacuate scrambled to the lifeboats, only to be told by stewards to return to their beds. After this harrowing escape from the European continent as it was engulfed in total war, the *Champlain* arrived safely in New York.⁴ Ford, his mother, and Tchelitchew were left to start their lives up once again in New York and to make sense of the seemingly impending collapse of the Modernist bohemia that they had helped to create around the Atlantic.

The war in Europe displaced many more than just Ford and Tchelitchew. Artists, intellectuals, and persecuted ethnic and religious groups fled from Europe, to seek refuge in the United States, Latin America, Vichy France, and North Africa. Many Modern artists with their Atlantic connections went to New York, as it seemed to have the most promise and potential for rebuilding their lives. There had been a hostile atmosphere in the city due to slow economic recovery and the crisis spilling over from Europe. Opportunities for artists were few and highly competitive. Paul Bowles wrote to Ford just months before his return that America was “hissing like a nest of ants.” In New York, “stabblings on the streets are becoming more frequent. Disorders take place each day at Times and Union Squares. Lines of Coughlinites harass Jews...

³ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his Father, 4 October 1939, 7.8 CHFPHRHRC.

⁴ Ibid.

Cops leer, but when they disappear people somehow get stabbed and are found lying on the sidewalk bleeding and accusing Coughlin.”⁵ People feared that “a new war will unleash widespread fascist activity in the States.” In regards to the arts and work, Bowles said, “Prospects look very black. The coming season sad,” adding that a friend of his said, “there are no [good] shows opening in the fall.”⁶ It would be tough not just for Ford and Tchelitchev to find work and rebuild, but even more difficult for all the other bohemians who had fled Europe.

At this pivotal moment however, Charles Henri Ford, Parker Tyler, Pavel Tchelitchev, and their friends and colleagues sought to safeguard Modernism and the bohemian world that they had created in New York and to utilize the transformative air around the globe to advance their art and ideas. In the 1930s, Ford, Tyler, and their friends sought out a mythic bohemia, and in turn actualized it through their art and community. Events of the late 1930s showed them how easily that could all be swept away. They wanted to carve out a safe space for bohemian life and art while maintaining the artistic independence that was central to their Modernist ideology. They undertook this through the creation of a new magazine, which they titled *View*, dedicated to the perspective of the poet. The magazine has been categorized as an art review and a Surrealist magazine, yet at its core was the poetic bohemian way of life and tenets of Modernism that Ford, Tyler, and their friends had developed.

Using the artistic networks that the bohemians built over the previous decade, *View* served as a critical point of transfer for European art and artists to America. It also brought forth and exhibited American art to the exiled European artists and to the world at large. Ford, Tyler, and their circle were positioned well to make these connections as European artists arrived in

⁵ This referred to the followers of the anti-Semitic Father Charles Coughlin. During the year 1939, supporters of Coughlin engaged in numerous attacks targeted against Jewish people around the city.

⁶ Letter from Paul Bowles to Charles Henri Ford, undated, from address “1116 Woodrow Rd, S.I.N.Y.”, 12.6 CHFPHRHRC.

New York. They used the disruption of war and the surplus of artists in the city to launch a project that showcased their art, lifestyle, and sexuality to a broader swath of the public. On a larger scale, they aided in the transfer of the global art capital from Paris to New York. This shift in place was not just temporary; it continued after the end of the war. Due to this transformation, the bohemians were able to create a space for the emerging new avant-garde art form, film, and Tyler moved into the center of film theory and criticism along with the rise of film poetry in the years after the war.⁷

Amidst these adjustments in the art world, there were also significant changes for Modernism and bohemian sexuality. In the late 1930s, many within this group explored political thought, communism and Socialism in particular, as an avenue for their art. This was not peculiar, as work by Christine Stansell and Daniel Hurewitz have shown that politics played a part in many bohemias. What was different for this group was that after a brief period, Tyler, Ford, and friends like Willard Maas and Maya Deren all severed their ties to the political world. They had found their artistic freedom restricted in a number of ways and they came to shun politics of all kinds and political identity for the artist and poet. This act separated the bohemians from political changes in the post-war era until the rise of identity politics in the late 1960s. Additionally, during and following the war many of this group of bohemian artists entered into long-term committed relationships similar to that of Ford and Tchelitchev. Some of these were marriages, others unofficial unions, lasting from five to thirty years. This was not simply due to aging and settling down, rather it was likely connected to the same factors that produced the

⁷ Film as art was not new. In European cities, particularly Paris, artists produced avant-garde films in the 1920s and into the 1930s. In the United States however, film was dominated by commercial Hollywood productions until a wave of small production, short art films were created starting in the 1940s. This is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

baby boom after the war, but these relationships were still based on the model of learning and artistic production and not familial reproduction.

While many transformations took place during the war, this was chiefly a period of preservation for Tyler and Ford's bohemia. First this chapter will look at the group's brief involvement with the political world. Then it will examine the development of *View* magazine, including analysis of its readership, its influence, content, and contributors. The publication will be contextualized within the wartime atmosphere in the city and around the globe. Next, the chapter will explore *View*'s emphasis on Modernism, its connection to other artistic groups, and its work to build an institution. It will then investigate Tyler's work as a film critic and theorist, with his articles in *View* and his first book of film theory, *Hollywood Hallucination*. Finally, the chapter will look at the collapse of the magazine.

The bohemians made a brief foray into the political realm in the late 1930s through their most significant art world connection: the Surrealists. Tyler and Ford wrote about the political in *The Young and Evil*, where they said that artists' concerns were social and cultural, separate from economics and politics, and that the political must not infringe upon artistic freedom. André Breton offered an interesting bridge between the cultural and political by calling for a communist revolution that guaranteed artistic freedom and supported production of art. After Ford became acquainted with Breton in the late 1930s, Ford, Tyler, and their friends explored the possibilities of political involvement through Breton's organization, but eventually found complete distaste with politics.

Ford and Tyler were interested in the ideas and art of André Breton and the Surrealist group since the early 1930s.⁸ Surrealism was an artistic and cultural movement beginning in the 1920s and fell within Modern art, though many Postmodernist artists decades later would claim that they were influenced by elements of Surrealism. The official group advocated a cultural and political revolution against bourgeoisie values and reason. It did this chiefly through art and writing that tried to tap into subconscious thoughts and dreams. The center of the Surrealist movement was located in Paris and the Surrealists were a formal club led by Breton. In New York, Tyler and Ford had exposure to some surrealist art and writing through galleries in the city and European magazines, especially the writings of Eugene Jolas.⁹ While Ford lived in Paris, he connected with the Surrealists there. First he met Man Ray and Jacques Baron, who were more peripheral and unofficial Surrealists, and eventually he gained the attention of Breton.¹⁰ Once the two met, they shared a number of interesting artistic exchanges.

Ford and Breton worked together in a few different capacities both in Paris in the 1930s and in New York in the 1940s. Breton had allied himself to Leon Trotsky and together they promoted an artistic revolution supportive of, but removed from, Socialism. To advance his side of the work, Breton created the International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Art (IFIRA, or the French acronym FIARI) in 1939. The group's agenda opposed not only capitalism, but also fascism and Stalinism.¹¹ Ford attended preliminary meetings with Breton in

⁸ Surrealism was an official artistic and revolutionary movement led by André Breton and formalized with the publication of the Surrealist Manifesto in 1924. When referring to the official group and its work, I will use "Surrealism" as a proper noun and when I talk about the artistic principles as they apply more broadly I will use the term "surrealism" as a common noun.

⁹ For more information on surrealism and the official Surrealist Movement, as led by André Breton, see Breton, André, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), and Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

¹⁰ Dickran Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920-1950* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 157.

¹¹ Helena Lewis, *The Politics of Surrealism* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 1988), 146-60. Raymond Spiteri and Donald LaCoss, *Surrealism, Politics and Culture* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2003), 158-9.

Paris, and was connected to an American affiliate group, which included Parker Tyler and Dwight MacDonald. Ford proved to be an invaluable tool for Breton to build ties across the Atlantic. The leverage Ford held in this situation was not lost on him, as he noted to a friend in March of 1939 that he could play sides to meet people, as "Paris is full of quarrels between Breton and his former colleagues."¹² Ford acted as a recruiter and a liaison between the FIARI in Europe and the United States for part of 1939. Despite these initial endeavors together with the new organization, Ford and Breton temporarily split ways. Ford found Trotsky's political beliefs unpersuasive for American artists and he questioned the reality of artistic freedom within this model. Furthermore, all of those efforts fell apart with the outbreak of war in Europe.¹³

While Ford explored Marxist thought in Paris and Tyler in New York, other bohemian friends did the same separately. Politics had a place within other bohemia in other eras. So while most Modern art was not political, this foray into the political was not out of the ordinary. Filmmaker Maya Deren joined the Young People's Socialist League while at Syracuse University in the mid 1930s. There she met Gregory Bardacke, whom she married, and together they moved to New York. In and around Greenwich Village, the couple was involved in various Socialist causes.¹⁴ Filmmaker Willard Maas was also interested and supportive of communism in the mid- to late-1930s. While working for *Alcestis Quarterly*, Maas partly geared the journal towards political leftism, supposedly against the wishes of his colleagues who preferred the apolitical. Maas wrote poems that were published by numerous journals, including *New Masses* and *The New Republic*, some of which were leftist in nature. During the end of the decade, many within this bohemian network had considered joining the political world.

¹² Letter from Charles Henri Ford to George Reavey 16 Mar 1939, 2.152, Charles Henri Ford Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, henceforth referred to as CHFPYCALB.

¹³ Tashjian, *A Boatload of Madmen*, 164-72.

¹⁴ Bill Nichols, *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

The war was a point of rupture for bohemians' interest in politics. Within the highly politicized wartime climate, artists felt they did not have the artistic liberty and freedom of speech and thought which communism had promised. Furthermore, the chief stance almost all bohemians took was one of opposing the war. At the start, the Socialist Party did oppose the war, however various other leftist groups were divided over this and felt it necessary to either oppose fascism or to support the Soviet Union. Willard Maas best reflected this stance. Maas defended his sympathies for communism, but more importantly advocated his right to question and criticize communism, its leaders, and Russia. "I am against participation in ANY WAR. And that, if no other end, I'll work for..." and an artist "has a right to say what he feels is right in his heart."¹⁵ Similar feelings and experiences eventually brought this entire circle that had engaged with Marxist thought and politics to take an apolitical stance. This was a far more unique occurrence for bohemia and this removal from the political realm was in place for almost three decades to follow. In the midst of the break with the political, Ford began his work at creating a new publication that grappled with issues of artistic freedom, the war, and Modernist poetry.

Ford's concept for creating a new art magazine originated in 1938 and stemmed from the clampdown on art and media within Germany and the threats felt by artists from the impending war echoing throughout France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Great Britain. In the late 1930s, Ford and Tyler had worked for the *London Bulletin*, which was the main British surrealist magazine of the decade. Ford was the American Editor and Tyler was the New York correspondent. They also avidly read and collected other European artist magazines. As the war approached they watched as these prominent avant-garde magazines folded one by one, including the French publications *Minotaure*, *Verve*, and *transition* and their own employer, *The*

¹⁵ Letter from Willard Maas to "My poor dear darling Ceres," 3.18, Willard Maas Papers, Ms. Maas, Brown University Library, henceforth referred to as WMPMMBUL. It should be mentioned that Maas was drafted into the war, though records do not indicate in what capacity he served.

London Bulletin. Rather than lament these losses, the savvy Ford saw this as opportunity to start his own magazine. More than simply a replacement, Ford knew that if his magazine was to succeed he had to shift focus from Europe to New York, simultaneously bringing European art and ideas to the United States and also exploring the new frontiers of art within the US that had been unknown to the European avant-garde.¹⁶ From their current experience with the *Bulletin* and previous work with *Blues*, Ford and Tyler had the know-how, the talent, and the opening to create a new American magazine to fill the void left by the fallen European ones. Ford turned to his Atlantic bohemian network to start.

Ford asked advice from his mentors and vetted potential writers. Ford wrote William Carlos Williams seeking his opinion on different possible names, formatting, and contributors for the magazine. Williams responded, "To me the title VIEW is much better than the other tho[ugh] less dynamic, more passive but it should be a "view", the work contained therein being left to supply the drive." Williams, ever supportive of Ford's endeavors, agreed to provide some writings, to let Ford use his name, and ended by saying "Congratulations on the new venture."¹⁷ Ford contacted Parker Tyler, Kay Boyle, Kurt Seligmann, Henry Treece, and other artists and writers from his bohemian social circles. Most were enthusiastic about the new project and agreed to take part in the magazine as writers, editors, staff artists, and more. The feedback that these friends gave was important, so that Ford knew there would be materials for and an interest in such a magazine. Knowing that the project would take off, Ford created a promotional flyer, which he mailed out en masse to declare the magazine's official debut.¹⁸

¹⁶ Catrina Neiman, introduction to *View: Parade of the avant-garde: an anthology of View magazine, 1940-1947* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), xii. While not complete, this is a thorough anthology of *View* magazine. Catrina Neiman is an independent scholar who worked with Charles Henri Ford and others to preserve these works.

¹⁷ Letter from William Carlos Williams to Charles Henri Ford, Mar 30 1938, 2.189, CHFPYCALB.

¹⁸ "The Poetry Paper" Promo Flyer, 14.6, CHFPHRHRC.

From the outset, Ford's magazine intended to break away from bohemia's previous flirtation with the political. Originally titled "The Poetry Paper," Ford's manifesto extended "the frontiers of poetic information..." with a "...new journalism." Ford intended to fill the absence in intellectual and artistic thought that standard media, which Ford saw as "agents of economic and political interests," were unable to discuss. Ford and his bohemian circle had by this point shunned politics and the economic and materialistic outlook of communism in particular. *View*, as it was named by its first printing in September of 1940, was intended not to be solely art news, but rather news from the perspective of artists. *View* contained interviews with prominent but hermitic artists, reviews of gallery shows, and news reports and communiqués about the war from artists and writers still in Europe.¹⁹ *View*'s scope was therefore much broader than even the art magazines that preceded it. It was in fact the crisis of war surrounding the magazine's birth that gave it this different aim. "Now, more than ever, contemporary affairs should be seen through the eyes of poets."²⁰ This perspective was carried throughout the entire run of the magazine.

Relatively small at the start, the magazine evolved in dramatic ways from 1940 to 1947. The first edition of *View* came in September 1940, and was a black and white six-page tabloid. Its subtitle "Through the Eyes of Poets" continued the emphasis on poetry and bohemian life from the 1930s. A couple years later, the subtitle was changed to "The Modern Magazine," which again underlined the commitment to Modernism. At the heart of this magazine, Ford's vision of a new artistic journalism where the content was "news not always about but always by poets" stayed true.²¹ The Oct/Nov 1941 issue was dedicated entirely to surrealism, which drew a considerable amount of attention. By the following year, the magazine was up to forty pages per

¹⁹ Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens, for example. See Neiman, introduction, xi.

²⁰ "The Poetry Paper" Promo Flyer, 14.6, CHFPHRHRC.

²¹ Tashjian, *Boatload*, 177.

issue and the April 1943 issue of *View* came out as a full-scale commercial magazine with impressively stylized and catching glossy color covers.²²



Figure 2.1: Left, Cover of *View* SERIES III, NO.4. By Pavel Tchelitchew, December 1943.

Figure 2.2: Right, Cover of *View* SERIES V, NO.4. By Leon Kelly, November 1945.

A typical issue of *View* was large, at about 12” by 9”, with modern, artistic visuals. Paul Bowles recalled decades later, “the magazine’s success on the newsstands was largely due to the brilliant covers.”²³ The original fronts created by famous artists and high-quality production materials kept *View* a step ahead of other magazines. Especially once *View* expanded to the large format color cover-pages, the magazine became a piece of art itself. When other publications’ editors wrote to Ford there was a high amount of praise for *View*’s visuals, such as from *Voices*’ editor, “I have read through *View* with interest - your production lavishness makes my paper-

²² Neiman, introduction, *xi*.

²³ Paul Bowles, forward to *View: Parade of the avant-garde: an anthology of View magazine, 1940-1947* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1991), *x*.

controlled-dry mouth water!"²⁴ While some larger scale magazines had color casings, it was difficult for most of the smaller publications to get that kind of access.

Inside the magazine was a creatively laid out collage of writings, poetry, reproductions of art, and advertisements. Tyler added his brilliant typography and mixed a variety of fonts, sizes, layouts, all of which provided stimulating visuals without the use of color on the inside. Most of the articles, writings, or poems were accompanied by an image, whether a work of art, a related illustration, or an icon. Most advertisements were small and on the sides of pages, though a few were full pages and advertised bookstores, art galleries, theaters, other publications, restaurants, music shops, schools, and more. The content included poetry, reviews of literature, shows, and music, writings on art and philosophy, as well as original and reproduction art. The magazine was published eight times a year, monthly from October through May. The cost was usually 50 cents a copy, or \$3.50 for an annual subscription. Special issues sometimes cost \$1 and members of the armed forces received a \$.50 discount on the yearly rate.²⁵ While this was more than magazines like *Time* or the *New Yorker*, which cost \$.15, it was the same price as specialty magazines like *Esquire*. The price was a little more, but it offered something very different from its competitors and readers took notice.

View served as an escape from the political publications and the tense political climate around the globe. Many of the readers spoke to the thrill of reading *View* to escape the mundane aspects of life. Halsey Davis wrote in her subscription letter that reading *View* "in Texas evens

²⁴ Letter from Editor of *Voices Magazine* to *View*, Oct 20 1945. 2.185. CHFPCALB.

This is also clearly a reference to the difficulty in finding access to paper. Though paper was not rationed, like many other items it could be difficult to come by. Like other resources, scrap collectors sought paper scraps for various uses, including as packing for shipments to troops abroad. And from 1944-45, advertisements asked consumers to save waste paper and cardboard in anticipation of a government call for it as supplies were constricting. See John Bush Jones, *All Out for Victory: Magazine Advertising and the World War II Home Front*, (Boston: Brandeis University Press 2009), 118-124.

²⁵ See for example the November 1945 issue of *View*.

up some of the dullness for me."²⁶ Lawrence Durrell, the famous English poet and writer, wrote to Ford lamenting his difficulty of staying “modern” in Rhodes until he came across a copy of *View* magazine. He immediately requested a subscription. *View* caused, he noted, “great astonishment among the islanders who are used to reading nothing except the bible and the daily paper.”²⁷ Moving beyond Durrell’s elitism towards the local peoples, whom he said only “point and drool” at the magazine, *View* offered something very different from other publications out in the market.²⁸ Carlyle Brown wrote from Farragut, Idaho and said, “Let me tell you that your type of publication will certainly relieve the monotony that is ever present at my present ‘address,’” which was a military base.²⁹ *View* had numerous subscribers in the armed forces and published work by active servicemen. It had been a long time since an art magazine of this nature had done enough to both reach out to readership in so many corners of the country, and globe, and conversely cover so much material from as wide a network as well.

View’s readership grew every year, both in numbers and in geographic reach. At its peak, *View*’s circulation hit approximately 3000.³⁰ It was distributed all over the United States. Large numbers of readers were in Eastern cities like New York and Boston, but *View* also reached into rural parts of New England and to Midwestern cities like Cleveland and Chicago. It made its way South to Texas, Louisiana, and Tennessee, and West to California, Idaho, and Utah. Internationally, subscribers came from all over Europe, including the Netherlands, Denmark, England, France, Hungary, and even the isle of Rhodes. *View* was also read and reviewed outside the North Atlantic, in Mexico, Cuba, Argentina, Morocco, and Egypt.³¹ Though the bulk of

²⁶ Letter from Halsey Davis to Charles Henri Ford 6 May 1943, 1.44, CHFPYCALB.

²⁷ See Ian MacNiven, *Lawrence Durrell: A Biography* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), chapter 7.

²⁸ Letter from Lawrence Durrell to Charles Henri Ford, dated only 1946, 1.5, CHFPYCALB.

²⁹ Letter from Otis Dudley Duncan to Charles Henri Ford, 14 Jan 1946, 1.54, CHFPYCALB.

³⁰ Neiman, introduction, xi.

³¹ See the letters of George Anthony, Russell Atkins, Eugene Berman, Karen Blixon, Claude Boursier, Luella Carlson, Wolfgang Cordan, Halsey Davis, Lawrence Durrell, Ray Edwards, R. Vale Faro, William Richards, and

View's readers were themselves members of the art world, the magazine extended its reach to broader society through availability in libraries and by informal circulation within the military at home and abroad.³² *View* also brought original content to its readership.

Each issue of *View* included a wide variety of art, reviews, news, and an exploration of different artistic, philosophical, and theoretical themes. The first small issue included writings about art in Mexico and California, musings on the state of poetry, film reviews, and reports from refugee European artists including Cecil Beaton and W. H. Auden. Despite the lower quality newsprint format, it included a few reproductions of art pieces. The second issue contained one of many communiqués from beyond the battlefield lines in Europe, writings about translating poetry, some of Tyler's film theory, and more reports from poets and artists in England and refugee Parisians in the United States. As the magazine grew in readership, the content increased as well. It experimented with features such as a "Children's Page." *View* then began to more deeply explore different artistic themes for an entire issue, such as "vertigo," "prophecy," and "Narcissus," different geographies, like Latin America, particular European countries, and the United States, the oeuvres of particular artists and certain artistic movements or fields.³³

Ford as an editor made sure to include work from the American "periphery" though much focus was on large urban cultural centers like New York and Paris. Henry Treece suggested several poets and writers for inclusion in a project with *View* and explained the importance of

Ramon Sender, CHFPYCALB. Also see the 1943 review in the Buenos Aires magazine *SUR*, in Ford's Scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPYCALB.

³² For examples of this, see the newspaper articles about the Brooklyn College library scandal, Brooklyn Eagle March 28 1944 "Off-Color Magazines Allowed by Gideonse in Brooklyn College" in Ford's Scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPYCALB. Also see Russell Atkins letter which mentioned *View* in the Cleveland Public Library, Letter from Russell Atkins to Chares Henri Ford n.d (03), 1.7, CHFPYCALB.

³³ To gain a sense of the different features of the magazine, see the index of the anthology of the magazine, Charles Henri Ford, *View: Parade of the avant-garde: an anthology of View magazine, 1940-1947* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), 271-283.

including non-English British writers, “These poets are functioning in a world diametrically opposite to that of Auden + Co... they are not bourgeois-English as Auden, etc are, but British (Welsh, Irish, Scots).” Explaining the relevance of this, Treece wrote, “This may sound small to you, as an American + citizen of the world: but these poets here included believe what they say, that England can only produce great literature again when it has learned to recognize all the voices of Britain.”³⁴ Ford’s editorship included this viewpoint, as he printed several writings from Treece, both poetry and communiqués from Britain, as well as poems from three of Treece’s recommendations.³⁵ Treece’s point about including the “periphery” was particularly pertinent as Ford and *View* actively sought to include material from all over the US, including smaller towns and cities in the interior of the country and also work from different racial and ethnic groups. *View* discovered two writers, Paul Childs from West Virginia and Russell Atkins of Cleveland, Ohio, both of whom were African-American. *View* also used Tyler’s poetry networks, which was how they were able to be first to publish work by poet Philip Lamantia.³⁶

Parker Tyler was critical to *View*’s networking, style, and vision. Tyler was involved with *View* from the very beginning, but continued working at other jobs. A year into the magazine’s run, Tyler took on the more official role and title of associate editor.³⁷ Tyler wrote various

³⁴ Letter Henry Treece to CHF Dec 18 1939, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

³⁵ Henry Treece had several poems and war communiqués and reports from Great Britain published in *View*. In addition, his recommendations Nicholas Moore, Nigel Heseltine, and Norman McCraig all had one or more poems published. Ford also included several writings and poems by W. H. Auden. See the full index of *View* in Ford, *View*, 271-282.

³⁶ Philip Lamantia was a student in a San Francisco high school when *View* published his poetry in 1943. The following year he dropped out and moved to New York City where he socialized and worked with both Ford and Tyler. Lamantia has been connected to surrealism, the beats, and to bohemia. He published his first book of poetry in 1946. See Steven Frattali, *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism* (New York: P. Lang, 2005) and Philip Lamantia *Erotic Poems* (Berkeley: Bern Porter, 1946).

³⁷ Tyler, having stayed in New York throughout the Great Depression, had employment and work obligations when Ford returned from Europe wanting to start his magazine. As late as 1941, Tyler was still working with the Works Progress Administration as an artist, and more substantially as an assistant to Henry Harrison. References to a publisher named Henry Harrison are made in the March 1941 issue of the NAACP’s *The Crisis*, Vol. 48, No. 3 for reprinting books of poetry by Joseph S. Cotter. This was likely an important publishing world contact for Ford and Tyler with *View* magazine. Ford mentioned to his mother in late 1941 that he was off to “meet Parker, we’re getting

pieces for *View*, including editorials, interviews, and film reviews. While Ford was in Europe during the 1930s, Tyler remained better connected and in contact with people in the art world, in publishing, and with businesses that bought advertising in New York City. Tyler had worked in the 1930s for Henry Harrison, a small publisher, which is possibly how *View* had access to better supplies and equipment.³⁸ In the beginning stages of *View*, Tyler was an essential part to its running until Ford acclimated back to New York.

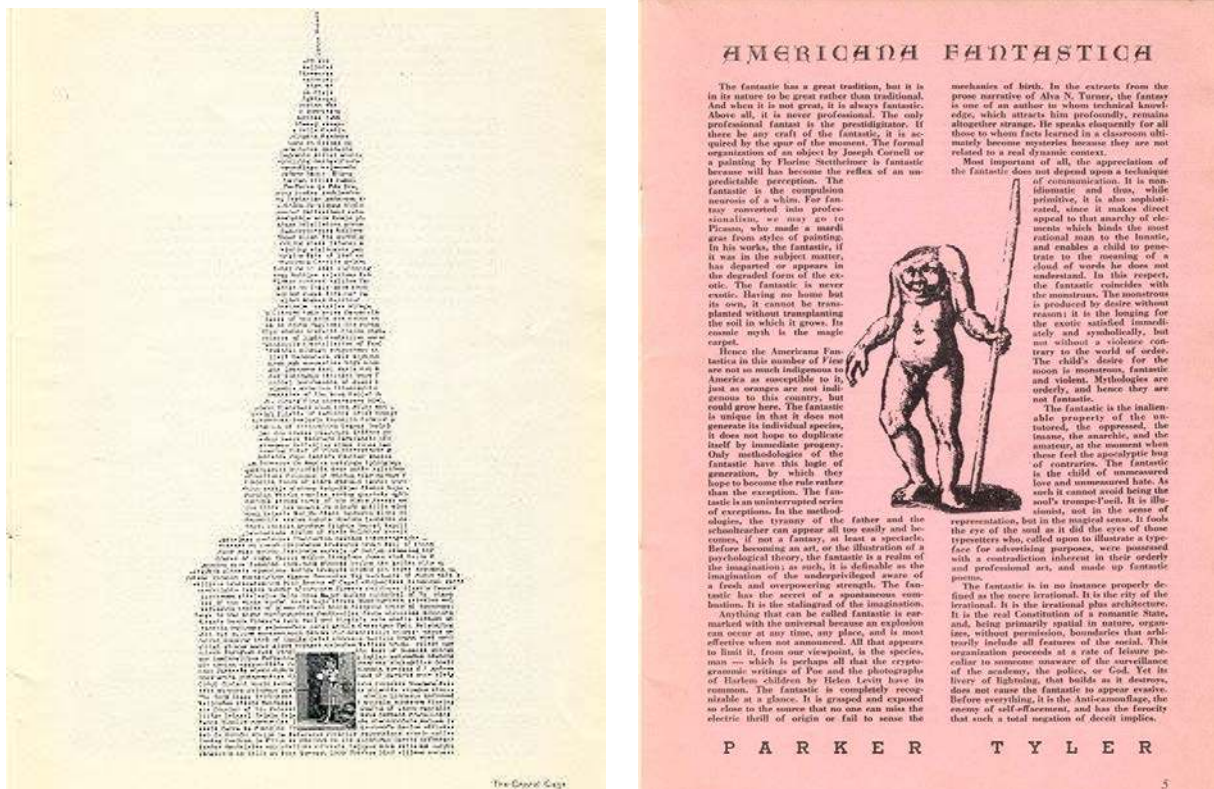


Figure 2.3: Left, “The Crystal Cage [Portrait of Berenice]” *View* SERIES II, NO.4. By Joseph Cornell, Jan. 1943. Figure 2.4: Right, “Americana Fantastica” *View* SERIES II, NO.4. By Parker Tyler, Jan. 1943.

Tyler oversaw the graphic design, typography, and layout for the magazine that was critical to its success. As so many readers and commenters pointed to the highly stylized color

ads this afternoon again, since Henry Harrison didn’t have any work for him today.” Tyler balanced several different jobs until *View* grew large enough to sustain him full time. See letter from Parker Tyler’s mother to Parker Tyler, dated “Tuesday afternoon” (likely late 1940 or early 1941), 50.2, PTCHRHRC and letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, 9 December 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHC.

³⁸ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his Mother, 19 October 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHC.

covers, the rich assortment of reproductions inside the magazine, and the frequent unusual collage-like layouts of the poetry, writings, and other work inside, the actual look of the magazine was part of what set it apart and kept readers' interest. Tyler was a large reason why *View* was itself a kind of art form not solely a platform for the work of others.



Figure 2.5: Cover of *View* SERIES II, NO.4. By Joseph Cornell, January 1943.

Tyler had a strong hand in shaping *View*'s reach into American diversity and the January 1943 "Americana Fantastica" issue was a perfect example of this. Tyler set the tone for the issue with an article of the same name:

"The fantastic is never exotic. Having no home but its own, it cannot be transplanted without transplanting the soil in which it grows. Its cosmic myth is the magic carpet. Hence the Americana Fantastica in this number of *View* are not so much indigenous to America as susceptible to it, just as oranges are not indigenous to this country, but could grow here... The fantastic is a realm of the

imagination; as such, it is definable as the imagination of the underprivileged aware of a fresh and overpowering strength.”

The poet’s role was to bring the fantastic into the grasp of people. *View*, the fantastic, and bohemia all existed outside and beyond the political framework of any single country. The “underprivileged” and their “fresh and overpowering strength” could apply to anyone marginalized, whether by race, economics, or even as artists in any part of the world.

The content of *View* was very international in nature. *View* and its editors made strong efforts to engage with and showcase content dealing from around the globe. As this bohemian circle had done before, they worked to draw Africa and Latin America into the transnational discourse of the North Atlantic. Paul Bowles guest edited the Latin America issue. His intention was not to be political, “scrupulously objective,” or even “just,” but rather he aimed “to present a poetically apt version of life as it is lived by the peoples of tropical America.”³⁹ Beyond the literature reviews and news, the issue included anthropology and archaeology writings on Latin America and the West Indies. *View* continued in its aim to include diverse voices from the peripheries within Latin America with translated stories of the Tarahumara people of northern Mexico, mythological tales by Mayan prophets from the books of Chilam Balam, Aztec poems, and creation stories from the Quiché people of Guatemala.⁴⁰ This bridged Native American culture and art with *View*’s transnational Atlantic perspective.

Shunning politics allowed *View* and the bohemians to see parallels between themselves as artists and oppressed groups around the Atlantic. In this same issue, Bowles discussed the resistance of the native Chavantes people of interior Brazil to efforts by the Brazilian government to clear out and develop the Chavantes’ land.⁴¹ Rather than see this event as that of

³⁹ See the Paul Bowles “The Point of View,” *View*, “Tropical Americana” issue, May 1945 in Ford, *View*, 146-7.

⁴⁰ See the “Tropical Americana” issue of *View*, May 1945 in Ford, *View*, 146-153.

⁴¹ “BRAZIL: Aboriginal Obstacles,” *Time*, Monday, Jan. 29, 1945.

native peoples against a fascist government, Bowles framed this and his broader look at Latin America as a struggle by people to voice their artistic ideas, which was made possible only within a non-political universalist Modernism worldview.

Another issue of *View* looked at the African diaspora. It included a new Edouard Roditi translation of “Impressions of Africa” by Raymond Roussel from 1910, poetry by African-American poet Joe Massey, a Children’s Page centered on an Afro-Cuban folk tale, and some early anthropological writings connected to Africa by Nicolas Calas.⁴² The inclusion of African art was prominent in modern art and emphasized beauty outside of the European tradition. Furthermore, the inclusion of Pan-African culture within the broader Atlantic world, rather than separating it into its own issue spoke to the diversity and transnational nature of bohemia. This emphasis on inclusivity extended not just to content but to the contributors themselves.

Writers in *View* were considered and published without regard to race, nationality, or sex. Ford and Tyler boasted in later years that they had published several unknown African-American writers in their magazine at a time when black writers had trouble getting published.⁴³ However, at the time of publishing, no mention of race was made in either a positive or a negative manner. The bohemian atmosphere created by Ford and Tyler drew people of various races, sexes, and sexual orientations to *View* without the magazine intentionally seeking out those particular groups.

View became known through writers’ circles as an open-minded magazine. Russell Atkins, an African-American poet from Cleveland, sought out Ford for publication of his poems. He said, “Langston Hughes has said of my poems that they show a subtle an’ intriguing quality... [and he] suggested that I send them to your magazine, saying that he had met a number of poets

⁴² From the December 1943 issue, see Ford, *View*, 275.

⁴³ See Neiman, introduction, xviii-xiv.

whose experiments in poetry had been given attention by you."⁴⁴ Hughes' support was likely because *View* had published the work of numerous new poets and several African-American writers. Paul Childs' piece titled "Dark Sugar" focused on Harlem and addressed issues of race, racism, and perception.⁴⁵ Joe Massey wrote poems from a jail in Columbus, OH, including one titled "They Cannot Stop Death." This poem used death, which comes to all people no matter what their station in life, to show a universal humanity beyond what barriers people drew to divide the world.⁴⁶

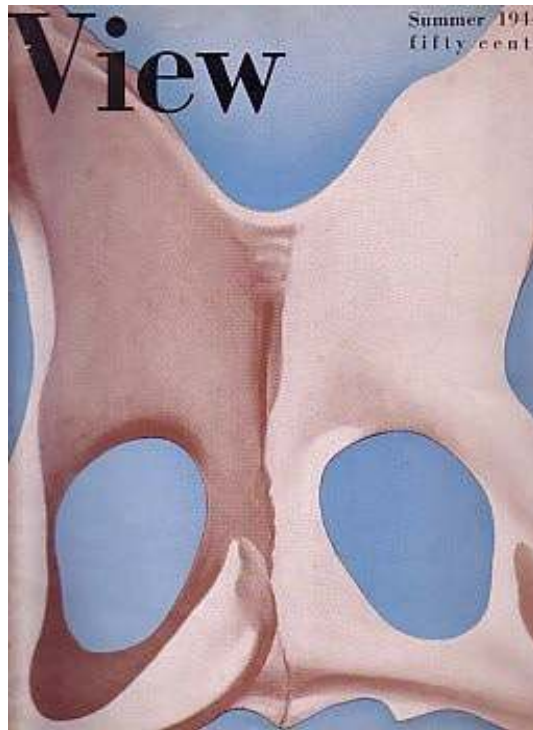


Figure 2.6: Cover of *View* SERIES IV, NO.2. By Georgia O'Keefe, Summer 1944.

Similarly, *View* included many women within its pages. It featured poems, writings, communiqués, and reproductions of art by Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, Gertrude Cato, Edith Sitwell, Florine Stettheimer, Maya Deren, and Joan Doleska. One of the covers featured work by

⁴⁴ Atkins also had support from Eugene Williams, editor of Cleveland's only poetry magazine. Letter from Charles Henri Ford Russell Atkins, n.d. (01), 1.7, CHFPCALB. This letter is likely from 1946 judging from his age and birthdate.

⁴⁵ Ford, *View*, 85-92.

⁴⁶ Ford, *View*, 254-55.

Georgia O'Keefe. Men did take up a majority of the space in *View*, but women's art was featured regularly on pages alongside them. This significant inclusion of women reflected the broader bohemian perspective on equality of the sexes.

While the content and the perspectives of the magazine pertained to the bohemian community and the Modernist poetic point-of-view, *View* magazine was shaped by the context and unique circumstance of World War II. Most artists vocalized their pacifist stance, relayed information about the war itself and its impact around the Atlantic, and encountered increased surveillance and challenges within the wartime climate of the United States. The war simultaneously was the largest threat to Ford and Tyler's bohemia and the very force which allowed the magazine to exist, prosper, and maintain relevance.

Ford and *View's* editorial position on the war was complex but largely one of pacifism. Distaste for the fascist governments in Germany and Italy that had launched attacks on the freedoms of artists was obvious. Ford expressed some of his personal attitudes towards this in his 1937 book of poetry, *Garden of Disorder*. In the poem "War," Ford specifically condemned Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia:

"in the sun, my imperfections
are recognizable;
the journey is slower
than massacre;
but there will be conscriptions
and marauders no more apropos
than those in Ethiopia,
bombs hurled at 15,000 poets,
killing 2,000."⁴⁷

Ford's reference to those killed as "poets" again highlights the universalist worldview that was central to Modernism. In "A Curse For The War-Machine," Ford wrote more abstractly:

"Your tombstone cannot numb the applebough

⁴⁷ Charles Henri Ford, *The Garden of Disorder and other poems* (New York: New Directions Press, 1938).

already stunted by the horn enow:
apples dumb-rotting in the strident hue
asylum worms of noise, your belly's due.
The carbonated soul will not aspire:
burn in the echo that deafened the heart's fire!"⁴⁸

Here Ford condemned the promulgation of the war for its impact on the heart, soul, creativity, and passion of people. This was an universalist statement not directed just at a specific event or even at violence alone, rather it was a response to the changes that swept through Europe as war was on the horizon.

Tyler also broached the issues of war in his poetry. In 1942, *Poetry* magazine published his poem "The Heroes." He dedicated it to Pavel Tchelitchew for his struggle to produce art in the face of war. Tyler's poem alluded to a respect for military, but in fact advocated for love and peace:

They focus us; and dimly, subtly, overwhelmingly aware of
The news in the paper,
We think: Where on the earth does the sun not shine,
and where, too,
Is no war done? From the top of this hill, green trees sail away
To the valley, and glide
To the permanent silhouette of the dimmest of waves
In the distance, clinging to that visible edge of the world
Like our hope of peace.

Tyler somewhat eroticized heroes and soldiers, yet he also referred to the "single-souled heroes," which seemed more to be artists. He made clear how the military targeted bohemians as well when he said, "I am only a curving bird Permitting my loud thoughts to soar, while those transfix me Even as an enemy."⁴⁹

After the conflict began, *View* regularly included information about the war from poets in or near the conflict. *View* printed communiqués from France, Sweden, Great Britain, Morocco,

⁴⁸ Charles Henri Ford, *The Garden of Disorder and other poems* (New York: New Directions Press, 1938).

⁴⁹ Parker Tyler, "The Heroes" in *Poetry* vol. 60 no, 2 (May, 1942), 82-85.

Egypt, and Latin America on events of the war and its impact on artists and ordinary citizens. In 1940, Kay Boyle wrote from Megeve in the French Alps, people were “engrossed by the material complications of life.” Civilian travel was restricted, so “the country is taking madly to bicycles, and they’re now difficult to find.” Businesses closed and rations were in place for sugar, oil, pates, rice, soap, and chocolate. Boyle and her husband continued their art, though “it has not been easy to concentrate on work of the literary kind with one’s heart wrung out and trying to dry its tears at last upon the line.”⁵⁰ Boyle continued:

“The feeling among the working-people is not of the calmest, and that any kind of trouble might be expected if a great number were suddenly allowed to return to their homes with no work before them. The common soldier no longer salutes a superior anywhere and boasts about it, and the officers turn their heads so as not to have to do anything about it.” Rumors abounded that before Nazi occupation “officers behaved with incredible weakness” and soldiers reported “a lack of material, of ammunition, of orders.” Many felt that France declared war but was unprepared with no hope of winning. These “legends,” as she called them, “passed from mouth to mouth with such rapidity that it astounds one; these things, and others like them, are not written in French papers, obviously, but it is these things which the people, even in the highest, most remote vallies [sic] say to you, just as they say them to you in a café at Annecy and probably in every town and city in France.”⁵¹

Information like this that came from the mouths of artists in either occupied territories or places threatened by Nazi takeovers offered readers a different perspective of the war unavailable in many regular news outlets.

Things changed for Ford and *View* once the United States joined the war after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. As pacifists, bohemians, many of whom had seen the changes in Europe before exile, feared the destruction that war brought to art and artists’ way of life. U.S. entry brought conflicted feelings to many artists and tensions could be felt between artist ideologues and the sometimes hawkish feelings of high society who supported bohemians by

⁵⁰ Letter from Kay Boyle to Charles Henri Ford, July 20, 1940, 12.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁵¹ Letter from Kay Boyle to Charles Henri Ford, July 20, 1940, 12.2, CHFPHRHRC.

buying their art. On December 9, 1941, Ford decided not to attend a cocktail party held by a prominent socialite. “I didn’t go to the [party] at Alice de la Mar’s on Sunday, the day Japan started the war, because I didn’t want to hear all their war-talk...”⁵² In general, the U.S. entering into the war did not change the position bohemians had prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Most continued their opposition to war and violence, while Ford strove to keep his magazine in production.

Material conditions of wartime affected *View* in surprising ways. Ford and Tyler had to contend with occasional shortages of paper and printing supplies and maintain the magazine’s visual edge over competitors. Work space also presented challenges. When Ford founded *View*, he brokered a great deal on a top floor office at East 53rd Street and 5th Avenue at a great price. It had a terrace and many people in the early years of the war feared aerial attacks on the city. However, in the summer of 1943, Ford’s landlord sought to raise the rent from \$135 to \$175. “This year there seems to be a need for [apartments with terraces] on account of the victory gardens and inconvenience of living in the country (gas shortage, etc).” Tchelitchew wanted to compromise, but Ford was unwilling because they had been great tenants for 3 years. In the end they were able to stay in the apartment, as Ford noted, “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Rent got easier to pay with the increasing success of the magazine and that Fall’s issue was “longer and grander [and] will begin to sell for 50¢.”⁵³ Through perseverance and luck, Ford and *View* managed to continue production and maintain the office space.

View as an institution was bolstered in large part by the use of its office as a social hub. The headquarters emerged as a multipurpose space for publishing, socializing, and exhibiting art. The office was located at 53rd Street and 5th Avenue, mere steps from other art institutions like

⁵² Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his Mother, 9 Dec 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁵³ Letter from Ford to his Father 17 June 1943, 7.8, CHFPHRHRC. Interestingly, Ford mentioned that in 1942 his friend Peggy O’Brien rented “her tower penthouse above us for \$125!”

the Museum of Modern Art. At times, the office was used as an art gallery and a bookstore, which turned it into a welcoming public space.⁵⁴ It became a natural meeting place for artists, especially émigrés from Europe looking to establish themselves in New York. When young American artists moved to the city, it served as a starting point to make one's way into the art world. Many newcomers had read the magazine and heard of the institution as inviting.⁵⁵ As a social space it was frequented by all kinds of artists and friends of Tyler, Ford, Tchelitchev, and the other staff, including Glenway Wescott, Peggy Guggenheim, Alexander Calder, Kenneth MacPherson, Donald Windham, Marcel Duchamp, Marius Bewley, Maya Deren, Max Ernst, along with others who regularly worked with the magazine.⁵⁶ Ford threw parties there and utilized the terrace. It was there where Tyler met his lover of three decades, Charles Boultenhouse.⁵⁷ Ford knew that his social skills were one of the keys to his success, so he used the office space as another tool in promoting *View*.

In publishing an art magazine during wartime, Ford, Tyler, and their circle chose a different path from many ordinary citizens and businessmen. Their goal was not only to preserve their art world but also to create a solid business. However, with so much weight placed on production that would support the war, *View* occasionally ran into problems with people or the government who saw their magazine as unnecessary, lewd, or subversive. *View* encountered two controversies during its run due to its perceived radical or inappropriate content. The first came in December 1943 when the United States Postal Service ruled the Winter issue of *View* to be “non-mailable” under postal obscenity regulations. The specific offending part of the magazine was not disclosed, but Ford believed it was a reproduction of a nude figure by Pablo Picasso.

⁵⁴ Tashjian, *Boatload*, 200.

⁵⁵ This was the case with Charles Boultenhouse, for example.

⁵⁶ Guestbook, 19.5, CHFPHRHRC.

⁵⁷ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his Mother, 9 Dec 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHRC.

Esquire magazine had encountered a similar problem. Ford saw this as a violation of his freedom of speech, and so challenged the postal service. He contacted the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald*, *New Republic*, *Time*, and *Newsweek* to run articles about the ban and they each did. Ford then went to a hearing in Washington, D.C. where his lawyer succeeded in having the Postmaster reverse the ban. The Post Office began sending out *View* again in late January, 1944, about a month after the initial mailing freeze.⁵⁸ An obstacle that was in many ways particular to the wartime climate, the whole episode actually also gave the magazine a lot of publicity and a platform to champion the causes of art and free speech.

The second controversy developed out of the Post Office ban. At Brooklyn College, complaints were made to remove copies of *View* and also *VVV* from the library. Objections called them lewd, mentioned the Post Office ban, and were doused in xenophobia, as the magazines were likely placed in the library by foreign-born faculty from the art or design departments, like Serge Ivan Chermayeff from Russia. The president of the college, Harry D. Gideonse, defended the “off-color magazines” and cited their usefulness and popularity among students. He also praised the faculty members in the art department because they were the best at what they did.⁵⁹ For Ford, Tyler, and the bohemians, this controversy spoke to the need for tolerance within the sometimes intolerant atmosphere of war.

Ultimately, *View* was entirely a product of the war. Though the magazine lasted until 1947, its place and success were deeply tied to the need for artistic outlets during the fight. In an interview in 1986, Ford claimed at the end of *View* that, “We’ve had it here. This is my war

⁵⁸ See “MAGAZINE VIEW BARRED: Winter Issue Non-Mailable, Says Post Office Department.” *New York Times*. January 1, 1944, “A Correction,” *New York Times*, January 29, 1944, and the *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New Republic*, and *New York Herald* articles in Ford’s *View* scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPYCALB.

⁵⁹ See “Off-Color Magazines Allowed by Gideonse in Brooklyn College,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, March 28, 1944 in Ford’s *View* scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPYCALB.

work. I'm going back to Europe."⁶⁰ This was a much too simplified explanation that came decades later. During the magazine's run, *View* branched out in every way possible in an effort to grow and to possibly live on past the war's end.

By 1943, *View* had built a strong reputation and foundation to expand beyond the printed word. Ford had both ambitions enough for creating a unique and strong artistic institution and was opportunistic enough to push *View* into every artistic vacuum he saw. With such a strong network of different kinds of Modern artists, from the Surrealist and Neo-Romantic painters, to filmmakers, people in theatre and ballet, writers of all disciplines, musicians both avant-garde and classical, Ford, Tyler, and their *View* circle had developed a keen eye for seeing supplies of under-appreciated talents and demands for alternative venues for showcasing art. In this way, Ford and Tyler used their resources to create galleries, show spaces, and other publishing channels to promote their work and the art of their colleagues. This was all done under the brand of *View*.

With a lack of adequate art galleries in New York, *View* opened one of their own from late 1943 into early 1944. The show featured work by Pavel Tchelitchew, American artists Kay Sage, Rico Lebrun, Paul Cadmus, and Alexander Calder, and exiled European artists André Masson, Yves Tanguy, and Kurt Seligmann. The diversity of artists shown at the gallery was impressive. Many were Surrealists, but also Neo-Romantic painters, magic-realist painters, and modern sculptors. The show gained rave reviews in the *New York Sun*, *Cue*, and *Art News*.⁶¹ While *View* did not continue with their own gallery after this first show, its success allowed *View* to sponsor and collaborate with other galleries on future exhibits.

⁶⁰ See Ford interview from September 1987, in Bruce Wolmer "Charles Henri Ford." *BOMB* 18, (Winter 1987).

⁶¹ See the *New York Sun*, *Cue*, and *Art News* reviews in Ford's *View* scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPYCALB.

These gallery sponsorships overlapped with numerous lecture series that *View* put together. Talks of these types were sponsored throughout *View*'s tenure, given by other artists and by Ford and Tyler. In a series of lectures given by Tyler in 1946, *View* and the Hugo Gallery co-sponsored the event which was held at the Museum of Modern Art.⁶² These talks incorporated visual arts with poetry and writings, just as the magazine did. They also added the dimension of an audience, which was crucial to several other *View* ventures.

View also brought its understanding of poetry and Modernism to music. In 1945, the magazine sponsored a concert of "New Jazz." The "New" was the cornerstone of Modernism and this "New" style, according to the promoter Barry Uanov, allowed moments of soloist improvisation but embraced a "disciplined" organization of the music, unlike "Old Jazz" which condemned it. The first concert in the series included musicians Pearl Bailey, Barney Bigard, Don Byas, Erroll Garner and Stuff Smith.⁶³ This show competed with Duke Ellington at Carnegie Hall and much of the press praised *View*'s show, even over Ellington. *Downbeat Chicago* spoke equally of both the *View* concert and Ellington's, while *Metronome* said, "stars shine" at the *View* show and if jazz fans were "sick and tired of the jazz concert idea as perpetrated by Condon's cohorts at Carnegie Hall" then they should have been at *View*'s great show.⁶⁴ This experience of running performance events was then utilized in *View*'s creation of a unique theatre space.

The most successful artistic show-space from the *View* institution was the Theatre Ubu, which was created to build off the roots of Modernist performance space and theatre. This theatre, as envisioned by Ford, was said to be "designed to create a theatre lacking in the life of New York - small, intimate, advanced, yet upholding the spirit of violence and fantasy of which

⁶² Invitation to the Lecture Series by Parker Tyler, 4.222, CHFPCALB.

⁶³ *View* presents "A Concert Series of The New Jazz" Flyer, 19.6, CHFPHRHC.

⁶⁴ See *Chicago Beat* and *Metronome* reviews in Ford's *View* scrapbook, 6.332, CHFPCALB.

Alfred Jarry's famed 'Ubu' is symbolic." Alfred Jarry was a French playwright who wrote several anti-bourgeoisie plays around the turn of the twentieth century that were seen as predecessors to the surrealists' "Theatre of the Absurd." Through this venue *View* put on several plays including Ramon Sender's "The Key", Jean Cocteau's "The Human Voice," and Lincoln Kirstein's Adaptation of Alfred Jarry's "Ubu Cocu."⁶⁵

Theatre Ubu showcased a variety of art forms beyond plays, which highlighted in particular the future artistic interests of Ford, Tyler, and their friends. As part of the theatre's mission, Ford said, "today the professional theatre is bowed under an onus of naturalism... When authentic tragedy and comedy leave the contemporary stage, they secrete themselves in more or less obscure forms but primarily in the unaged legends of poetry. Ubu's is a peculiarly poetic, peculiarly modern legend."⁶⁶ Ubu featured a marionette play, "At Noon Upon Two," which Ford wrote. Surrealist Kurt Seligmann designed the marionettes, and Ned Rorem composed the music. The theatre also screened films that challenged mainstream commercial productions. One, the British film "Children on Trial," was said to have "all the reality that Hollywood lacks."⁶⁷ It was emblematic of the growing interest that Ford, Tyler, and their circle had in film as a new artistic medium and was illustrative of Tyler's shift into film theory and criticism. These lecture series and performance spaces were just temporary projects, but demonstrated *View's* efforts to move modernism beyond the written word.

View was also well-positioned to enter the world of book publishing. "View Editions" wanted to offer an alternative to publishing with the larger houses. Since *View* at its core was about poetry, most of the works by View Editions were books of poems. First was Ford's *Poems for Painters*. The most attention grabbing was André Breton's *Young Cherry Trees Secured*

⁶⁵ See Playbill for "The Key," 4.222, CHFPYCALB.

⁶⁶ See Playbill for "The Key" 4.222, CHFPYCALB.

⁶⁷ See the program of 2 events Ubu Flier dated May 26, 1947, 4.222, CHFPYCALB.

Against Hares, which was Breton's first major publication in English. Coming from a prominent artist, this was an incredible show of confidence in the networks and exposure that Ford's brand could provide. View Editions also published Lionel Abel's *A, B and C on Lautréamont*. Plans were in development for a volume of poems by Philip Lamantia, whose work *View* magazine was the first to publish, and an anthology of short stories from *View*, however both of these projects were not completed.⁶⁸ View Editions did not outlast the collapse of the magazine, which came in 1947. When Man Ray wanted to publish his book he wrote to Ford, "I am afraid it will not get the distribution [from another publisher] you can give it. I would really prefer that I come out under the auspices of VIEW."⁶⁹

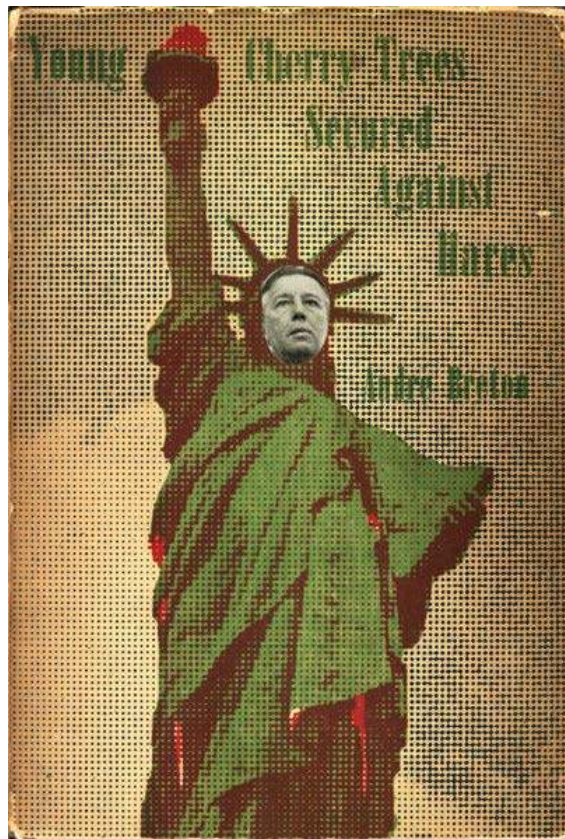


Figure 2.7: André Breton, *Young Cherry Trees Secured Against Hares*. Cover by Marcel Duchamp, 1946.

⁶⁸ See "View Editions" flyer, 4.222, CHFPYCALB. Abel was one of Ford and Tyler's bohemian friends and was depicted as a central figure in *The Young and Evil*.

⁶⁹ Letter from Man Ray to Charles Henri Ford, 2 August 1945, 2.147, CHFPYCALB.

Over the course of *View*'s existence, Ford, Tyler, and their bohemian circle interacted with different groups of artists. People from the world of dance and music, like Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Ned Rorem, and Lincoln Kirstein, sat on *View*'s board, wrote for the magazine, and collaborated on side projects. John Bernard Myers, later director of the Tibor de Nagy gallery, served as an editor at *View*.⁷⁰ Wallace Stevens, Pulitzer prize winning poet, published in the magazine. Willem de Kooning's work was influenced by Meyer Shapiro's essay "On a Painting of Van Gogh" in a 1946 issue of *View*.⁷¹ Parker Tyler connected with modern sculptor Alexander Calder and abstract-expressionist painter Jackson Pollock. *View* printed visuals by Mark Rothko and Isamu Noguchi, who also illustrated a cover in 1946. Ford and Tyler worked closely with expelled-, peripheral-, and unofficial-Surrealists, like Salvador Dali, Man Ray, and Marcel Duchamp. No group was more connected to Ford and *View*, however, than the Surrealists that fell under André Breton's official grouping.

Breton published writings and poetry in *View*, printed his first US book in English with View Editions, and collaborated with *View*'s editors. In 1941, Ford and his staff helped Breton to translate his writings and poems into English, and Ford included one in the 1941 "Surrealist" edition of *View*.⁷² In late 1941, Breton began work on an official Surrealist magazine, *VVV*. Ford was offered the job of editor for *VVV*, but Ford told his mother that he "didn't like their title (Triple V!) so [he] resigned." The actual reason was that Ford wanted to run a magazine independent of the Surrealists.⁷³ *VVV* was founded immediately following the success of the Surrealist issue of *View* and it was clear that Breton wanted control. In the end, *VVV* only

⁷⁰ John Bernard Myers, *Tracking the Marvelous: A Life in the New York Art World* (New York: Random House Press, 1981).

⁷¹ Jed Perl, *New Art City: Manhattan at Mid-Century* (New York: Random House Press, 2003), 184.

⁷² Letter from Charles Henry Ford to his mother, 19 October 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHRC.

⁷³ Letter from Charles Henry Ford to his mother, 9 December 1941, 9.2, CHFPHRHRC.

published four issues over the span of two years. Writers and artists freely published in both magazines without incident and Ford and Breton continued to collaborate on other projects.

Ford's editorial style was far too different from Breton's for such a joint venture to work. Ford had a diverse range of writers and artists featured in *View* and held to his bohemian outlook, unlike Breton's desire for an exclusive Surrealist perspective. Despite Ford's previous flirtation with Breton's FIARI group, he edited *View* with an apolitical stance, not the hard-line, Trotskyite political outlook of Breton. Breton wanted an all-encompassing political revolution, whereas Tyler and Ford wanted a revolution in artistic thinking.⁷⁴ Ford kept Breton and the Surrealists at arm's length. Ultimately, Ford did not want anyone to infringe upon the bohemian ideology and artistic freedom of *View*. Tyler and Ford incorporated ideas from surrealism into their own understanding of art and the world more broadly and published Surrealist art and writings, but never let it occupy the entirety of their work.

Breton has often been labeled as homophobic and scholars have suggested this divided Ford and Breton.⁷⁵ The two engaged in lengthy discussions about sexuality and the role of sex in art, and may not have agreed on homosexuality, however there is little evidence that suggests this prevented the two from working together more.⁷⁶ Ford said the idea that Breton was homophobic "has been exaggerated" and that he did not feel resistance from or exclusion by

⁷⁴ Tashjian, *Boatload*, 158. Tashjian points out that Ford and Tyler desired a "cultural renovation" in art, for which he cited Parker Tyler, "New Generation in American Poetry," *Earth*, May 1930, and Parker Tyler, "Beyond Surrealism," *Caravel*, 1935

⁷⁵ See discussions of Ford, Breton, and homophobia in Suarez, *Pop Modernism*, 190-196 and Tashjian, *Boatload*, 157. In what is likely the worst possible accusation of Breton's homophobia, John Ashbery linked Breton's homophobia and official dismissal of Rene Crevel from the Surrealist group as leading to Crevel's suicide. See Lytle Shaw *Frank O'Hara: the Poetics of Coterie*. (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 2006).

⁷⁶ Tashjian, *Boatload*, 157. Dickran Tashjian suggests that Ford "was perhaps too distracted by the gay life that Paris offered." Later, Tashjian notes that Ford was "understandably drawn to Jean Cocteau, who was anathema to the homophobic Breton." Yet, this does not make sense when comparing Ford's work with those two artists. Ford and Breton's working relationship lasted much longer and produced far more writing and art than did Ford's friendship with Cocteau.

Surrealists based on sexuality.⁷⁷ Rather, the amount of collaboration between Ford and Breton during the latter's time in New York suggests that Breton's supposed homophobia had little effect on their relationship. While Tyler and Ford believed that sexuality, broadly defined, should play an important part in art, bohemian identity was not based on a sexual orientation. Artistic connections and collaborations were more important. The reality is that Ford and Breton worked together a great deal during the war, and the tension between the two, if any, was that they both seemed to want sole control over the art magazine.

The bohemian world that Ford and Tyler created in the 1930s was central to understanding this separation between *View* and the Surrealists. *View*'s lofty purpose was to preserve art from the destruction of war and Ford added the Surrealists into the fold in order to achieve that. Ford and Tyler's bohemian circle were the central group to *View*. Ford and Tyler set the tone of every issue, not just through their editing but through their own writings, poems, and art. *View* was critical in pushing forward Ford's career as a poet and Tyler's career as a film critic and theorist. Yet, *View* within the broader literature is often referred to as a "Surrealist magazine."⁷⁸ One of the few times where this label is challenged is in Catrina Neiman's introduction to the anthology of *View*, written under Ford's consultation. The danger in labeling *View* as surrealism is that the fluidity and inclusivity of the bohemian angle to the magazine becomes lost to the rigidity and exclusivity of the Surrealist movement. This was the very dynamic that Ford and Tyler fought against. *View*'s remarkable success was because of this philosophy, especially when compared to other art magazines of the era.

⁷⁷ Wolmer, *BOMB*.

⁷⁸ Scholars such as Dickran Tashjian, Jed Perl and others, whether writing about Surrealism around the globe or the broader art world in New York City, always tend to classify *View* as Surrealist. It is far better to look at *View* as a period in the artistic world of Ford and Tyler, rather than a period of Americanization of Surrealism as it is so often framed. See Tashjian, *Boatload*, 176-201, and Perl, *New Art City*, 54, 135. Perl also describes *View* as a "Surrealism-Neo-Romanticism fusion magazine," in what was at least an effort to acknowledge the broader artistic stance of the magazine. See Perl, *New Art City*, 167.

View's success was also tied to Ford's participation in the "international set," which gave him and his magazine connections to other new artistic publications that emerged from the transformative events of World War II. *DYN* Magazine in Mexico City was created by Wolfgang Paalen from 1942-44. Paalen, an Austrian artist who fled to Mexico during the war published 6 issues of *DYN*, which were sold mostly in New York and London. It drew on many of the artists within Mexico City, but did not have as vast a supply as New York City did.⁷⁹ André Breton created *VVV*, the official surrealist magazine, from 1942 through 1944 in his exile in New York City. Many of the same contributors to *View* also wrote for *VVV*, including Ford, but the magazine never reached the readership or stature of *View*. This was in part because of the narrower focus of a strictly surrealist magazine, but also because Breton did not have the social graces and networks that Ford did. While other art and literary magazines survived the war years, none that were born of it seemed to fair as well as *View*.

View worked with other magazines that had been well-established prior to the war, to the benefit of each side. *Partisan Review*,⁸⁰ *Kenyon Review*,⁸¹ and other American literary and intellectual journals swapped ad space and sometimes exchanged contributor information and written works. This unique advantage for *View* was due to the relationships that Tyler and Ford had already developed with these journals in the 1930s. Ford shared translators and translations with other magazine editors.⁸² *Accent* suggested that swapping mailing lists was more effective than placing ads in each others' magazines, so *View* provided that magazine with 1,500 names.⁸³ Similar agreements were made with foreign magazines, such as *Centaur* in the Netherlands⁸⁴ and

⁷⁹ *DYN* magazine is described here: <http://www.paalen-archiv.com/en/archiv/wolfgang-paalen-05a.php>. Its archives are in Berlin, Germany.

⁸⁰ Letter from William Barrett to Parker Tyler, 19 January 1946, 1.11, CHFPYCALB.

⁸¹ See letters from Eric Bentley to Charles Henri Ford, 1.12, CHFPYCALB.

⁸² Letter from William Barrett to Parker Tyler, 19 January 1946, 1.11, CHFPYCALB.

⁸³ Letter from Kerker Quinn to Charles Henri Ford, 14 December 1944, 2.146, CHFPYCALB.

⁸⁴ Letter from Wolfgang Cordan to *View*, 23 May 1946, 1.39, CHFPYCALB.

Revista de Guatemala.⁸⁵ These networks and exchanges with other magazines were critical to *View* and Ford's success and gave *View* an advantage over its competitors.

As the war came to a close in Europe and people in New York celebrated V-E Day, Ford wrote to his mother, "*View* is now the world's leading journal of avant-garde art and literature."⁸⁶ Measuring such a claim was impossible, however *View* did have many great successes and a leading stature in the art world. *View* had managed not only to survive the war where few artistic institutions had, but it grew and expanded into a global phenomenon. Other magazines, whether starting out or survivors of the war, looked to *View* for guidance in building a successful art magazine. A Mezei, who started a Modernist art movement in Budapest following the war, wrote to Ford and praised his personal work and *View*. He requested back issues of *View* to use as reference for his fellow artists. Ford sent him "plentiful" current and back issues, including the much sought-after Duchamp issue and his book *Poems for Painters*.⁸⁷ Luis Navascues similarly contacted Ford when he started up the modern *Ambos Mundos*, a "completely universal magazine for Latin America" to exchange materials, lists, and to collaborate in general.⁸⁸ The Belgium literary publication *Solstice* reached out to Ford in 1946 for help with coverage of the American art scene. They asked Ford for contacts, particularly American writers who might like their work translated to French and featured in their magazine. Ford also wrote news flashes for *Solstice* about developments in the American art world, bringing exposure and money in for his magazine.⁸⁹

Ford staved off the competition from these other magazines with several issues of *View* that were dedicated to the rebuilding of the art world in postwar Europe. Whole editions focused

⁸⁵ Letter from W Mont Faledo to Charles Henri Ford, 25 December 1946, 2.156, CHFPYCALB.

⁸⁶ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother, May 9 1945, 10.1, CHFPHRHRC.

⁸⁷ Letter from A Mezei to Charles Henri Ford, 27 January 1947, 2.127, CHFPYCALB.

⁸⁸ Letter from Luis Navascues to Charles Henri Ford, 30 January 1946, 2.136, CHFPYCALB.

⁸⁹ Letter from Jean de Veubeke to Charles Henri Ford, 3 August 1946, 2.181, CHFPYCALB.

on places like Paris, Belgium, and Italy. These contained letters and writings from artists who returned to their liberated homes, reviews of concerts, art shows, scenes as the artistic communities rebuilt, and photo essays of the destruction brought by Nazi occupation. After the end of the war, *View* was therefore able to bring information about rebuilding the art world to its readership that would not have been covered in mainstream news sources.⁹⁰ One of the new artistic frontiers in the postwar era was film, something that *View* and its editors had long covered.

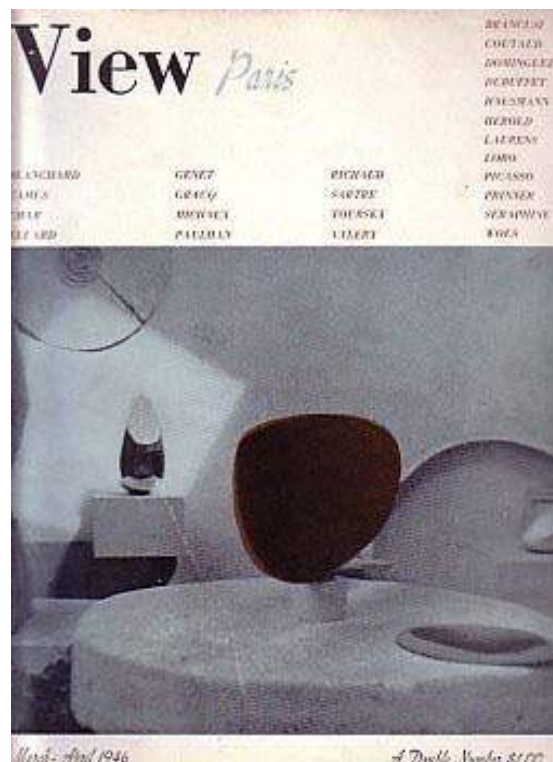


Figure 2.8: Cover of *View* SERIES VI, No. 1. Brancusi's studio, March 1946.

Parker Tyler made sure that *View* was at the forefront of viewing film as an art form. Tyler's writings on film theory, his reviews, and his film world connections brought important readership and attention to the magazine. At the same time, Tyler was able to use the magazine as a platform to launch his career as film theorist and critic for the following three decades. In

⁹⁰ See coverage in issues of *View* from 1946, Ford, *View*, 279-281.

the very first issue of *View*, Tyler wrote reviews of Hollywood films and pieces of film theory. The second issue was a test of his new ideas with “Hollywood in Disguise; Gods and Goddesses Paid to Be Alive.”⁹¹ This was connected to his larger project on Hollywood film, *The Hollywood Hallucination*, which he had published in 1944. Tyler also struck gold for *View* with his reviews of “The Maltese Falcon” and “Dorian Gray,” where many subscribers wrote into *View* specifically to praise these pieces.⁹²

By 1941, Tyler had the essential workings of his book of film theory and criticism and he sought publication for it. *Hollywood Hallucination* was published in 1944 by Creative Age Press. It was incredibly profound original analysis of film and was called a first of its kind. It also helped to create the field of film studies.⁹³ Bridging theory, criticism, and writing as a creative art form itself, *Hollywood Hallucination* was called “the first book in its field to deserve the name of creative criticism.”⁹⁴ Tyler more than just judged and critiqued films he offered an understanding of Hollywood cinema and film itself as an artistic medium.

Hollywood Hallucination used literary theory, myth, sex, Freudian psychology, and camp sensibility to dissect popular American movies. Starting from the point that Hollywood film was not actually about great narratives, in contrast to literature, Tyler examined character roles,

⁹¹ See index of all of *View*'s issues for the full extent of Tyler's film writings in the magazine. Ford, *View: Parade of the Avant-Garde*, 271.

⁹² See letters from Mary Caffeen to Charles Henri Ford, 8 April 1947, 1.26, CHFPYCALB, and Armando Machado to Charles Henri Ford, 20 November 1946, 2.111, CHFPYCALB.

⁹³ Tyler's role in the field of film studies, theory, and criticism is widely recognized. His writings are still included in new books on film studies and he is often grouped with Andrew Sarris, James Agee, and other postwar film critics. For books that discuss Tyler and his writings, see Thorsten Botz-Bornstein, *Films and Dreams: Tarkovsky, Bergman, Sokurov, Kubrick, and Wong Kar-Wai* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Press, 2007), Frank Manchel, *Film Study: An Analytical Bibliography, Volume 1* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Santa Monica: Santa Monica Press, 2010), Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, Karen J. Shepherdson, eds., *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume 3* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor & Francis Press, 2004), and Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹⁴ This is a quote from Iris Barry who was the curator for the Museum of Modern Art in the 1930s and 40s as well as a prominent film critic in London. Jerry Roberts, *The Complete History of American Film Criticism* (Solana Beach, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2010), 143-44.

gender, aesthetics, sex, and morality in films like *Birth of a Nation*, *Gone With the Wind*, *Citizen Kane*, *Fantasia*, and *the Great Dictator*, along with directors D. W. Griffith and Orson Welles, and actors like Greta Garbo, Mae West, Charlie Chaplin, and Clark Gable.⁹⁵ In taking this approach, Tyler used as material some of the most well-known and accessible film elements of the era to discuss Modernist aesthetics and principles and treated these films as open to legitimate artistic and intellectual criticism and analysis.

The bulk of Tyler's analysis came from reading myth, both ancient and contemporary, into the films, through which he critiqued types of characters, plot elements, and film genres. Tyler began by discussing the "surrealist eye" of Hollywood, that is the effect of the camera's displacement of the viewers' eyes and body. "The implicit but necessary role of the narcissistic movies is to let as many people as possible 'in on' its narcissism... That is why the screen is in more than a simple sense a mirror. It is a psychologically cubistic mirror."⁹⁶ It set the stage for an examination of movies beyond their face value. Tyler analyzed the behind-the-scenes unrealistic tricks used by the film industry to make the viewer believe the images on the screen were real. Tyler's critical look at film offered a very different reading than simple film reviews, something on par with literature or art, though he was very quick to say Hollywood films were certainly not a *high* form of art.⁹⁷ He succeeded in lifting the veil off of commercial film and raised important new questions about myth and sexuality.

Tyler brought a discussion of sexuality into his writing that stemmed directly from his bohemia's unique take on sexuality and psychoanalysis. Sex was still a somewhat taboo topic in the 1940s.⁹⁸ He pointed out the irony that a film showed so much more of a story than a viewer

⁹⁵ Parker Tyler, *The Hollywood Hallucination* (Los Angeles: Creative Age Press, 1944).

⁹⁶ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 12.

⁹⁷ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 23-26.

⁹⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

would observe in a real life situation, through close-ups and slow-motion for instance, yet sexual acts and scenes were removed and not discussed. A door was closed just before the act or a scene opened on the morning after, always leaving the audience with the question of “did they or didn’t they?” Tyler offered a very forward and blunt description of the role of sex in Hollywood films and read sexual themes and messages into many seemingly non-sexual scenes.⁹⁹

Tyler further looked at sexuality and gender by exploring the character types of Hollywood’s leading actresses. In discussing the sexuality of these characters, Tyler divided roles into three categories: the “vampire,” the “canary,” and the “somnambule.”¹⁰⁰ The vampire was the sexually secure and conscious woman, the canary was sexually timid and resistant, yet still conscious of her sexuality and in control of it. Both of these roles he embraced as those of the modern woman. Alarming, Tyler found that the most common female character was that of somnambule, that being “the woman who submits herself readily to the powers of sleep or hypnotism,” thereby becoming “merely an instrument of the sexual excess of the male.” Tyler criticized this character as a “feudal Eve.”¹⁰¹ The line he drew was one regarding empowerment, cognizance, and control over one’s body and one’s sexuality. Tyler lauded characters played by Greta Garbo, Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, and Mae West for not falling into the somnambule type.¹⁰² West, Tyler noted, was successful because of her mimicking the performance of female impersonators. Tyler laid out a spectrum of performance from the passive somnambule to the show girl to the burlesque strip-tease girl. He argued that while most actresses remained in a single role, female impersonators did it all. “Every time he puts on his female masquerade, he

⁹⁹ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 37-73.

¹⁰⁰ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 79.

¹⁰¹ Tyler’s reference to a “feudal Eve” criticized this character on several aspects important to bohemians. Feudal for Tyler meant that she was not modern. Eve similarly implied old and outdated, but also religiously grounded.

¹⁰² Tyler often jumps back and forth in his discussion between actresses and the characters that they play. To his credit, he points out how often actors and actresses were type-cast and how characters were often manipulated to fit the persona of the actor or actress who played them.

must realize the whole gamut of somnambulism... in *one evening* – from the astral vision of a Hedy Lamarr at the top of the stairs to the strip-tease girl doing “the bumps” at the bottom.” Though this figure had almost disappeared from the professional theatre, Tyler said that it was rescued and brought to “Hollywood from Broadway” by Mae West. It served a tremendously insightful look at the performativity of sexuality that came out of Hollywood. Tyler supported his reading by a quote from Greta Garbo: “Don’t forget that I am only an image, and that that is all I can be to you...”¹⁰³ This analysis of spectrums of sex, gender, sexuality, and imagery all stemmed from Tyler’s bohemian ideology.

Tyler’s particular examination here played into the two major theories he put forth in *Hollywood Hallucination*. The first was, stemming from Freud, that sex was the subtext of all Hollywood films. Whether it was what was shown, as in the romantic courting of a leading couple, or what was not shown, as in his discussion of bedroom scenes that were left out, Tyler’s “Romance of the Single Instance” drove the movie. The construction of commercial films all centered on the idea that marriage, relationships, and sex were built off of the single first time that a man and a woman had sex. So plotlines and questions all revolved around and built up to the reveal of whether a couple would have sex just once, which implied happiness, marriage, and so much more in life after the film ended.¹⁰⁴ Tyler’s second theory dealt with audience reception and viewing of these films. Hollywood movies were an escape, a type of dream or hallucination. “We are obliged to forget our immediate concerns when we enter a movie theatre and relax in our seats... the field of the screen is the lidded eye through which the mind that will not sleep, the universe whose sun will not go down, projects its memory and its wild intelligence,

¹⁰³ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 84.

¹⁰⁴ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 42-47.

penetrating unnumbered relativistic miles into empty space...”¹⁰⁵ These two theories elevated analysis and discussion of Hollywood film in general. Together they incorporated bohemian sexuality into larger American discourse and expanded the understanding of Hollywood film not simply as entertainment but as a form of modern American art and myth.

With this book, Tyler’s career was launched just as the field of film theory was born. Reviewers excitedly received *The Hollywood Hallucination* and his 1947 book *Magic and Myth of the Movies*. The Kenyon Review wrote that *The Hollywood Hallucination* “as it stands is full of unusually bright observations. Indeed it may well be the most intelligent commentary on Hollywood movies that has come from any literary man.”¹⁰⁶ Herman Weinberg wrote in *Hollywood Quarterly* that “no book like either of them has really happened before in the realm of movie criticism. That Hollywood has evolved a new mythology... is, of course, not new; but Tyler goes deeper.”¹⁰⁷ The general consensus from reviewers at the time was that Tyler had truly broken into new territory with his analysis on film. Tyler turned back to Hollywood in many of his later books and articles, but in the postwar era he also wrote extensively about the artistic and experimental films that emerged in New York. Much of this came from artistic connections linked to *View* magazine and friends like Maya Deren, Willard Maas, Amos Vogel, and others who became central figures in the rise of avant-garde film and film poetry in the post-war era. Tyler had found a space for writing about film just as *View* struggled to find its place within the postwar context.

During World War II, the economy fully recovered and expanded from its state of depression in the 1930s. The defense industry grew rapidly and employed a large portion of the

¹⁰⁵ Tyler, *Hollywood Hallucination*, 231.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Russell Bentley, “*The Hollywood Hallucination* by Parker Tyler,” *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Summer, 1945), 527-528.

¹⁰⁷ Herman G. Weinberg, “*Magic and Myth: Magic and Myth of the Movies* by Parker Tyler,” *Hollywood Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Jul., 1947), 434-436.

American workforce. With income to spend again, consumer demand increased and other ancillary industries grew as well. Especially in big cities like New York, entertainment, restaurants, and literature became big business and helped to further fuel the economy and the war effort.¹⁰⁸ During the war, *View* magazine played a part in that economic development.

Regardless of the artistic and intellectual aims of the magazine, *View* was also a business. As such, it employed five people directly to create and edit the product as well as run the office. Indirectly it supported hundreds of others by paying writers and artists for their work and advertising for other businesses like shops and galleries. Ford managed to create a successful business model for several years that drew money from advertising and sales to pay for the cost of production. He used private stockholders, chiefly his parents, to raise capital to begin the magazine and later to expand it.¹⁰⁹ Remarkably, *View* never had a foundation as backer, which through its existence allowed it to be independent and not beholden to any organization or agenda.¹¹⁰ Ford once said in response to a push from an advertiser to include a recommended artist, “Our editorial policy is not now and never will be influenced by our advertisers.”¹¹¹ This was a point of principle for Ford which allowed him to maintain his own Modernist perspective. As Elizabeth Wilson pointed out, bohemia was a way for artists to exist within a modern, industrialized world and that was what Ford and Tyler and their circle were attempting with this magazine.¹¹² Advertising and subscriptions alone, without control by a foundation, benefactor, or official artistic organization, actually allowed for Ford and Tyler to exercise greater artistic

¹⁰⁸ See Richard R. Lingeman *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front, 1941-1945* (New York: Nation Books, 2003), 63-106.

¹⁰⁹ Ford's parents were two such stockholders. Letter from Charles Henri Ford to Dad, 17 June 1943, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁰ Letter from *View* to Subscribers, 4.222, CHFPYCALB.

¹¹¹ Myers, *Tracking the Marvelous*, 54.

¹¹² See Elizabeth Wilson, *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

freedom. However without a backer, the magazine was also subject to financial difficulties with changes in the market.



Figure 2.9: Gotham Book Mart Photograph, 1948, on the occasion of Sir Osbert and Dame Edith Sitwell's visit to New York (seated, center). Also in attendance: W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Bishop, Marianne Moore, Delmore Schwartz, Randall Jarrell, Charles Henri Ford (cross-legged, on the floor), William Rose Benét, Stephen Spender, Marya Zaturenska, Horace Gregory, Tennessee Williams, Richard Eberhart, Gore Vidal and José Garcia Villa. Stuart Wright Collection – Randall Jarrell Papers, East Carolina University.

Production costs began to skyrocket after the close of the war. When *View* began in 1940, printing was fairly cheap as it was just a tabloid. When Ford expanded the format in 1941, printing costs increased to \$140 an issue. A majority of the budget was paid for by advertisements and the rest came from subscriptions, at \$.50 an issue. Increased costs to create special larger issues, with more color pictures and reproductions, were offset by increasing the price for that particular issue to \$1. This model kept the magazine afloat through 1945. In 1946,

View ran at a loss for the first time and prospects for continuing production did not look promising.¹¹³

Several factors led to the end of *View*. In April of 1947, Ford turned to his subscribers for support. He sought to raise \$20,000 to keep the magazine running. It is unclear how much of that was the actual production costs of the magazine, but that with the office rent, payments for writers, office staff, and editors' salaries, without a major financial intervention *View* could not survive in the changing economic times.¹¹⁴ Help did not come. Many of the exiled artists returned to Europe, which syphoned off the important resource that made *View* viable during the war. The magazine printed its last issue in March of 1947. It had a successful run for seven years and maintained relevance and influence within the art world in the years that followed. Ford, Tyler, and their friends managed to propel their messages and work much farther into public discourse and consciousness than they had in the decade prior.

This period for Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford was a challenge to preserve the Modernist bohemia that they had created. In so doing, they accomplished a tremendous feat. *View* magazine employed, preserved, and published the work of Modern artists exiled in New York during the war and offered the world the poet's perspective on the global crisis. For this bohemian group, the most significant change was their large shift away from the political. Several aspects of the war changed their perspective on politics. The outright attack on artists under fascism in Europe, the restrictions of artistic freedom that came under communist supporters like Breton and the Trotskyites, and the hyper-patriotism within the United States that stifled free speech and art all played a part in pushing the bohemians away from politics. It was

¹¹³ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to his mother in New York City, 19 October 1941 (Sunday), 9.2, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁴ Letter from *View* to Subscribers, 4.222, CHFPYCALB.

due to this disconnection from political thought that these artists were removed from the development of identity politics for the following twenty-five years. This simultaneously allowed them to continue their way of life and thinking for two decades, but left their world vulnerable to a new form of politics by the end of the 1960s.

After the collapse of *View*, Ford and Tchelitchew returned to Europe. Tyler found more and more opportunities as a film theorist and critic. They never remained far from the pulsing beat of avant-garde art and continued their help in shifting the global center of arts from Paris to New York after the war's end.¹¹⁵ Just as an independent artistic film movement blossomed in the city, Tyler, Ford, and their friends were right there to join it.

¹¹⁵ A shift in location from Paris to New York was not the only change in the art world in the era, but also a shift in artistic ideas and aesthetics. Most notably a shift away from symbolism, which was central to modern art of the decades up the 1940s, to abstractionism, which defined the new and particularly American modern art of the post-war period. Tyler, Ford, and *View* were certainly more linked to the symbolism of Neo-Romanticism and Surrealism but also built a bridge to understanding the connections between the old mythologies upon which symbolism relied and the new wave of abstractionist art.

CHAPTER 3: POSTWAR FILM POETRY, 1943-1957



Figure 3.1: Still from *The Lead Shoes*. By Sidney Peterson, 1949.

In May of 1950, Sidney Peterson, a leader within the growth of postwar film poetry in San Francisco's bohemia, premiered his film *The Lead Shoes* at Cinema 16 in New York City. This work represented in many ways the newest format of bohemian art: film poetry. It was 18 minutes long and was shot with a distortion lens on black and white stock, so the field of vision was a circle on the rectangular screen. The feeling of the film was at once anxious, playful, and sad. The film opened on a young woman playing hopscotch in slow motion but focuses on the three listed characters: father, mother, and Edward. Scenes jumped from hopscotch, shots of the character Edward, the erasure of chalk lines, the mother digging the father, who was in an old diving suit, out of the sand, and the agony of the mother over a dead father whom Edward presumably had killed. Using techniques that evoked the choppiness of Modernist poetry, the work cut sharply between clips of different events creating an almost dreamlike state and

evoking strong emotions without dependence on narrative. Peterson slowed down and sped up the film, distorting time and memory. The final scene is Edward, who shifts from himself to a priest to a dog, tearing apart and eating a loaf of bread, which transformed from bread to bone and back and bled onto the table, all while the mother mourns over the body of the diver. The film relied on myth, as much Modernist art did, and was inspired by two old European ballads, “Edward” and “The Three Ravens.” With no dialogue, it was the “music supply[ing] a savage rhythm for the ecstatic if accursed performers of the domestic catastrophe.”¹

Parker Tyler wrote the Cinema 16 notes for the premiere of *The Lead Shoes*. As New York City’s preeminent film society created by Amos Vogel in 1947, Cinema 16 promoted, screened, and distributed experimental films. Its ability to avoid censorship through private members-only presentations allowed the society to show films that could not be shown in regular theatres. Tyler frequently wrote these accompanying program notes for new avant-garde films and described *The Lead Shoes* as “an unusually vivid and skillful example of creative-experimental film.” Tyler offered explanation of the broader genre of film poetry and his analysis of this particular work by defining who a poet was in Modernist thinking. “The poet is a kind of seer. He penetrates to the depths and brings forth images birthed there by a marriage between his deepest self and things everybody experiences in daily life.” Tyler thought that perhaps the mother was in fact digging her son’s body out of the sand, which was a performance of the labor of birth a second time and he saw jealousy and incest in the relationships between the woman, the dead man, and Edward. Tyler also firmly situated the film in bohemia’s belief in myth. “It is the lyrical interpretation of the tragedy and suggests the historical fact that Greek tragedy derived from the Dionysian revel,” and Tyler explained the symbolism of castration,

¹ All descriptions are of the film, *The Lead Shoes* by Sidney Peterson, 1949. The quote about the music is from Parker Tyler’s Program Notes for Cinema 16, see Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 145.

childhood, and erasure. Overall, Tyler greatly endorsed the film, calling it "...an outstanding experimental film... the whole effect is so compelling that I believe 'The Lead Shoes' may be called a notable event."²

Amongst his fellow bohemian colleagues, Parker Tyler further discussed the film's meanings. Tyler told Amos Vogel that he initially thought Edward's confession of killing his "own true love" was just a "homosexual byplay."³ However, Tyler examined it more deeply utilizing the tenets of Modernist poetry and an understanding of bohemian sexuality. Knowing that Modernism was subjective and its poetry sought some individualist understanding of one's self through internal analysis, Tyler found, "our experimentalist has, I would hazard, elided *three* versions of the same ballad... [with] three versions of "Edward the murderer": the first kills his sweetheart, the second kills his brother, the third kills his father."⁴ This represented the multiple dimensions of an individual's personality and identity and the complicated layers of relationships between lovers, friends, and family. This film, as did many within the film poetry movement, included a broader and more diverse representation of sexuality as based on the practice and concepts of bohemia. In keeping with the focus on myth, the film also wove together subjectivity, mythology, and modern life. More than a framework that Tyler imposed on these filmmakers through his theory and criticism, Tyler, Ford, and their friends, who had lived the bohemian life before the war, saw it recreated with a new wave of young artists in the postwar era. Tyler, as a prominent theorist of film, was a supporter of and leading figure within this film poetry movement. He offered a critical eye and pushed these new artists and their films to constitute a more cohesive movement and impact the larger history of film and art.

² From Tyler's Program Notes, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 145-47.

³ Tyler saw this piece in the part of the film subtitled "The Three Edwards." Letter Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 11 May 1950, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 147-8.

⁴ Letter Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 11 May 1950, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 147-8.

Avant-garde film had flourished in Europe during the 1920s, but died down during the political and economic constriction of the 1930s.⁵ Similar types of work were not as common in the United States, despite a few experimental pieces like *Lot In Sodom* (1933) and *Rose Hobart* (1936), and the commercial Hollywood industry remained dominant over film. During World War II, several elements created fertile ground for the growth of experimental film in the United States. The growth of critical analysis and the view of film as an art form were facilitated by Modernist poets like Parker Tyler in his writings for *View* and other journals. Availability of film stock and equipment allowed for individuals to create their own movies. Poets from the 1930s, including Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and Maya Deren, saw film as a medium in which they could create poetry. Bohemia was a perfect place for this, with a particularly receptive audience and art spaces in cities like New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles that supported new work. This evolution in art accompanied a transformation in identity to that of the “film poet.”⁶ This was a new revival of the Modernist poet within the bohemian world. Ford and Tyler, who had cultivated bohemia in New York in the 1930s and worked to preserve it in 1940s, stood as leaders in this new art form through their successes with *View* magazine and Tyler’s books of film theory and criticism. Modern poetry and bohemia underwent a metamorphosis.

⁵ Film art went under different names in its various phases. It was predominately called “avant-garde film” in the 1920s and 30s, “experimental film” in the 1940s and 50s, and “underground film” in the 1960s and 70s. In this period, these terms are mostly interchangeable. Most people outside of the bohemian world called these films “experimental,” while those inside the movement self-identified them as “film poems” or “film poetry,” but also called them “experimental.” In this chapter, I emphasize the term “film poetry,” as that was the preferred terminology of the filmmakers, however I use “experimental” and “avant-garde” as well. I try to abstain from the term “underground” because that refers more specifically to the films of the New American Cinema in later decades.

⁶ For more on this postwar period of filmmaking prior to the 1960s, see Stan Brakhage, *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers* (New York: McPherson, 1991), David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Cinema* (New York: Dutton, 1967), P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943–2000, 3rd ed.* (1974; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Parker Tyler, *Underground Cinema: A Critical History* (1969; New York: DaCapo, 1995).

Bohemian sexuality also evolved in this period, though it retained the core principles of the prewar era. As begun by Charles Henri Ford and Pavel Tchelitchew, many of the bohemians entered into long-term committed relationships. Willard Maas and Marie Menken married in the late 1930s, Maya Deren began her second of three relationships in the beginning of the 1940s. Parker Tyler and Charles Boultenhouse began living together by the end of the World War II. All of these relationships continued through the post war period and became integral to the structure of bohemian society. However, these unions still allowed for sexual freedom and defied definitive boundaries of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Within the public sphere and artistic world, all of these bohemians still worked as individuals even if in their personal and private lives they were couples.

This chapter will explore the concept of film poetry as a new wave of Modernist art and the absence of it within scholarship as a significant movement. It will examine the primary filmmakers and institutions, including Maya Deren, Gregory Markopoulos, Willard Maas, and Marie Menken, as well as production with the Gryphon Group and screening and distribution with Cinema 16.⁷ Parker Tyler was a central figure within film poetry and while not a filmmaker, he worked closely with them as a mentor, critic, and theorist. Key elements to film poetry will be looked at, such as the branding of films, collaborations and aesthetics, and the role of myth. This will lead into a discussion of the obstacles encountered by bohemians, such as fears of McCarthyism and attacks from other artists on the grounds of sexuality. Sex in the films as well as the sexuality of the bohemians will then be contextualized within the emergence of the modern gay community and its identity in the 1950s.

⁷ Gryphon Group was a group of film poets and Cinema 16 was a film society that screened experimental films. Both will be explained more in depth later in this chapter.

Turning poetry into film was a way to co-opt a modern and very American medium of art, albeit in a new and different manner. Poetry was the most elemental form of art for Modernists. As Tyler mentioned in his notes on *The Lead Shoes*, poets believed they were seers who brought forth manifestations of emotion, thought, and experience in the form of beauty.⁸ They saw film as a new means to express their poetry visually, without the reliance on words of written poems. Film poetry advanced Modernist art for a new age after the war and was an understandable evolution in lieu of technological changes in focusing on visual media during and following World War II and Modernism advocacy of all things “new.” This wave of postwar film poetry existed as a unique art form but also as a bridge between the pre-war bohemia’s Modern poetry and the Postmodernist underground film of the 1960s New American Cinema.

Most scholarship has downplayed the significance of the focus on poetry in this new film art. Lauren Rabinovitz’s work on Maya Deren did not address her interest in poetry or the view Deren held of her film work as poetry.⁹ Melissa Ragona has acknowledged that Menken was known as a film poet, but dismissed this as a title framed by the biased interpretations of other filmmakers, such as Willard Maas and Jonas Mekas. Instead Ragona focuses on Menken’s connection to painting and other art.¹⁰ Lastly, Juan Suárez looked at the Gryphon Group and mentioned the prior poetic work by its filmmakers but he does not draw the connection that their films were also themselves poetry. For instance, Suárez dramatizes the heartbreak Willard Maas felt when Norman McLaren moved to Canada by saying “Maas wrote ‘100 or so poems to Norman after this,’ then stopped writing poetry altogether for over twenty years: ‘It was too

⁸ See Tyler’s Program Notes. MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, p. 145-47.

⁹ Lauren Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance: Women, Power & Politics in the New York Avant-garde Cinema, 1943-71* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 49-91.

¹⁰ Melissa Ragona, “Swing and Sway: Marie Menken’s Filmic Events,” in Robin Blaetz, *Women’s Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 20-44.

painful,' he said.”¹¹ However, Suárez neglected the fact that those twenty years were the time where Maas made short films that he called “film poems.” Maas did not stop making poetry, rather his technique changed. Furthermore, in missing this link, the recent historiography has not seen that this new wave of avant-garde film was situated in the Modernist bohemia created by Ford and Tyler back in the 1930s. Subsequently, key elements to understanding these figures’ identities, art, and sexuality have not been adequately explored.

Small film poetry movements sprouted up in bohemias across the country in the 1940s. The beginning of this growth can be traced to Maya Deren, Willard Maas, and Marie Menken in New York who made several films in 1943.¹² In the years after the close of World War II, other small groups created films in San Francisco, whose principal figures were Sidney Peterson and James Broughton, and in Los Angeles, with Kenneth Anger, Gregory Markopoulos, and Curtis Harrington. Despite these seemingly separate beginnings, all of these film circles were in fact connected through the bohemian networks that were established by people like Tyler and Ford, and through institutions such as *View*. In the years that followed, Stan Brakhage, Ben Moore, and others also joined in filmmaking. Parker Tyler was central as a critic and supporter of the filmmakers and institutions like Cinema 16, and Charles Henri Ford was connected to the movement and made films in later decades.

With the use of this new medium, these bohemians recast their identities as Modern poets as film poets. Willard Maas claimed to have coined the phrase “film poem.” It garnered wider use by Amos Vogel in screening these works at Cinema 16 and by Tyler in his writings and

¹¹ Juan A. Suárez, “Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943–1969,” *Grey Room* 36 (Summer 2009), 61.

¹² Deren filmed her first film poem, *Meshes in the Afternoon*, in Los Angeles where she was temporarily stationed with her dance group, but she was much more strongly active in and associated with New York.

reviews.¹³ This idea also developed on the West Coast, where Gregory Markopoulos proclaimed in 1949 that the goal in LA was “of being someday the first film poets or creators of this country.”¹⁴ This built off of the prewar work in Modernist poetry but brought that poetry into a new era in the postwar period. Tyler, Maas, Ford, and Broughton were very accomplished as poets and had volumes of written poetry published in the 1930s and 1940s. Even the few who had not actively written poetry before filmmaking, such as Menken, still had their work described as poetry. Maas declared that all the members of his close circle of filmmakers “except Marie [Menken]... have written poetry, but no film Marie has made is not a poem.”¹⁵ Writing in retrospect from 1963, Menken said, “I consider these works visual poems and that is where my experience and talent brings me.”¹⁶ Scholars have separated Menken’s films from the others based on aesthetics, chiefly their “painting” quality. While there were differences in appearance, Menken believed her conception, methods, and other aesthetics fit in line perfectly with the other film poets. Charles Henri Ford was drawn into the movement through his friends and through seeing these films. Parker Tyler integrated him into the film poet identity as well. As an insider who understood film poetry, he served as a sort of ambassador between the artists and audiences.

Both Ford and Tyler promoted avant-garde film beginning with their work at *View*. Tyler was the main conduit to the film world at the magazine, whereas Ford and Pavil Tchelitchev were more intimately connected to the theatre scene, the dance and ballet world, and music composers. Ford attended parties and socialized with the film poets in New York City and in Paris after the war, and he and Tyler promoted the works to the wealthy philanthropists and art-supporters that they knew. During this same period, Ford transformed poetry into other mediums

¹³ Willard Maas, “Gryphon Yaks,” Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

¹⁴ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 31 May 1949, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 126.

¹⁵ Maas, “Gryphon Yaks,” Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

¹⁶ Marie Menken’s 1963 Ford Fellowship Application, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives.

as film poetry did, which similarly challenged artistic conventions. However, by the end of the 1940s, Ford had left New York once again with Tchelitchev to live in Europe where he spent most of his time until Tchelitchev's death in 1957. Ford's more substantial work in creating visual poetry, his poem posters and film, came later but the groundwork was set in his travels through Paris, Italy, Greece, and Mexico, and his returns to New York City.¹⁷ Conversely, Tyler remained in New York at the center of this Modernist art renaissance.

Parker Tyler was a central figure in the avant-garde film movement as an intellectual and mentor. His prominence as a film critic based in New York City meant that younger filmmakers sought him out for guidance to break into bohemia and the Modernist film world. Kenneth Anger, Sidney Peterson, James Broughton, Stan Brakhage, and Gregory Markopoulos were among the many who sought out Tyler for career advice and creative input. Brakhage and Markopoulos turned to him before shifting their work to New York, and Anger, Peterson, and Broughton all had Tyler write the Cinema 16 notes for their first films.¹⁸ This elevated Tyler to a position of prominence and expertise within the film poetry world. Tyler's theoretical work helped to create community among filmmakers and dialogue between the films that they created.

Tyler's writings took the lead in framing analysis of film poetry and constructing the historical narrative for its development. This was also part of how film poetry fit into

Modernism, which sought to build new ideas on the foundation of old ones, not destroy them.

Tyler wrote articles, reviews, and gave talks regularly on avant-garde film. In 1949, Tyler wrote

¹⁷ Ford was connected to various artist groups through his travels in Europe, including Peggy Guggenheim and her friends, Alexander Calder, Jackson Pollock, Ned Rorem, Virgil Thomson, Lincoln Kirstein, and W. H. Auden. He also spent time with film poets from New York and Los Angeles as they traveled in Europe for vacation, filming, and film festivals. Ford, *Water from a Bucket*, 64, 110, 154, 183, 185, 213. Throughout this period, Ford also worked on transforming poetry into other media. While not specifically into film yet, first into prose, then visual posters and collages, and finally into film by the 1960s and 70s. Ford, *Water from a Bucket*, 185-191.

¹⁸ From notes for Boultenhouse's afterward to 1994 edition of Parker Tyler's *Underground Film*, written September 1994, 12.14, Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, henceforward referred to as CBTPNYPL.

a pioneering piece for the *Kenyon Review* “Experimental Film: A New Growth.” In this, Tyler historicized film poetry and cited its relationship to and influence by earlier European avant-garde films. He also emphasized that the new postwar wave of American experimental film was much “like the traditional idea of the cultural Bohemia, and a little like Greenwich Village itself.” He pointed to specific figures in the movement, such as Maya Deren and James and John Whitney. Tyler described these films as “visual poems” and that they were “very personal and subjective-symbolic in scope but with a lively sense of film vision.” These descriptors of personal, subjective, and symbolic were all key principles of Modernism. He also differentiated these works from commercial films in that film poetry was generally non-dramatic or non-narrative. Unlike Hollywood films, film poetry “represents the art of cinema... Experimental Film is the crusade for a potent purity in cinematic art.”¹⁹ Tyler repeatedly mentioned Cinema 16 and noted that it was the primary venue for this filmic art.

There was a high amount of diversity in the aesthetics, themes, and characteristics of film poetry, but did share some common characteristics and ideas. Most film poems of the 1940s and 1950s were short in length, usually between five and twenty minutes, black and white, and silent or with only musical accompaniment. This was intended as resistance to big-budget commercial films, which by the 1940s were often in color and with sound, but also fit with the poetic aim to remain visual and non-narrative.²⁰ Illusions of reality were not necessary, so commercial techniques for transitioning from one scene to another or maintaining continuity through a certain scene did not matter. Film poems often made sharp cuts between scenes, or different people or pictures. Sometimes the same event or scene repeated itself, either exactly the same or with differences, which created the idea of a dream or alternate realities, or was meant to dig

¹⁹ Parker Tyler, “Experimental Film: A New Growth,” *Kenyon Review* 11.1, (Winter 1949), 141-144.

²⁰ Some works in the late-1950s and 1960s were feature-length, though the majority remained short films.

even deeper into a single moment in time. These elements were similar to written Modernist poems, which also made sharp transitions and utilized repetition. Spatially, they often were contained to a single place like a park or house, or even just on the body. Many dealt with emotions or ideas, such as love, anguish, the artist against society, or the artificiality of sex. Ancient Greek myth, Freudian introspection, and bohemian sexuality were themes that ran through many of these films, and again were important to earlier Modernist poetry. While they were not highly polished pieces like Hollywood made, film poems used editing, special effects and lenses, and intentional creative processes to mold these films into the visuals that the artists desired; that meant they were not documentary or attempting to simply capture reality. In Modernist fashion, they were works of human creativity and ability. In these ways, film poetry was unique compared to earlier avant-garde film, contemporaneous Hollywood blockbusters, and future Postmodern underground films of the 1960s.

Maya Deren was a central figure to film poetry as a prolific filmmaker, a mentor and inspiration to other film poets, and a pioneer of production and exhibition of this art. Tyler called Deren “the newest and best American experimenter” and that her work was “creatively outstanding... [because] she *thinks* in the cinematic medium.”²¹ Deren was born in Kiev, Ukraine, and moved with her family to upstate New York when she was young. She attended Syracuse University but finished her Bachelor’s Degree at New York University, where she became involved in Greenwich Village’s bohemian life. She took graduate courses at both the New School and Smith College before beginning work with Katherine Dunham’s dance company. With Dunham, Deren traveled to Los Angeles in 1943, where she began filming her

²¹ Tyler, “Experimental Film: A New Growth,” 143.

first film poem, *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Once she had returned to New York, she screened it at the Provincetown Playhouse in Greenwich Village and then across the country.²²

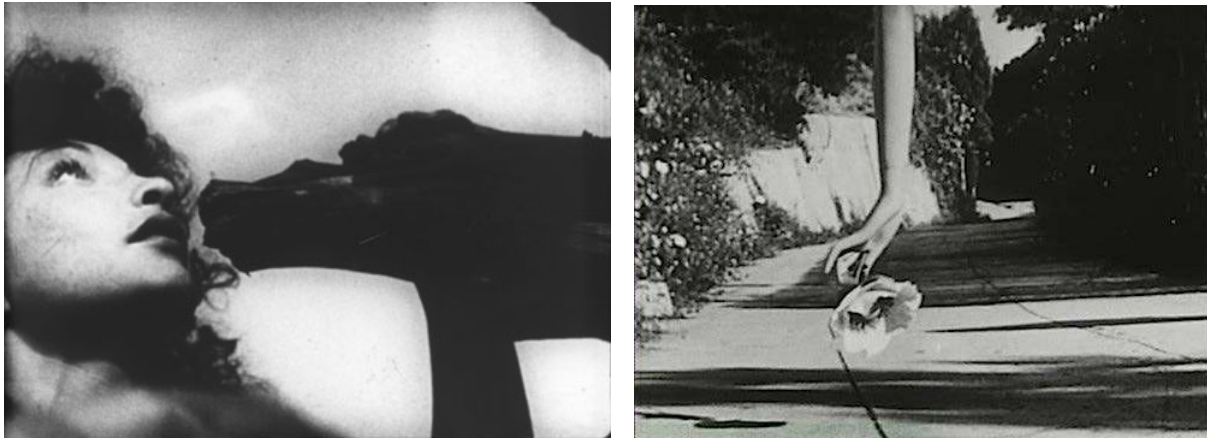


Figure 3.2: Left, still of Maya Deren in *Meshes of the Afternoon*. By Maya Deren, 1943.

Figure 3.3: Right, still of opening shot from *Meshes of the Afternoon*. By Maya Deren. 1943.

Meshes of the Afternoon was a 14 minute long black and white film. It opened on an arm descending from the sky placing a flower on a walkway just before the female lead, played by Deren, walks by on her way home. This triggered a break between reality and fantasy, between the dream and waking world. She walked into her home to find something slightly off, a half loaf of bread with a knife and a telephone off the hook. She fell asleep and the film relived the moment of her finding the flower and coming home over and over again. Each time the mood became increasingly anxious and tense. Multiple versions of the main character are present in the house, at one point three of them sit at the dining table together. A hooded figure with a mirror for a face was one step ahead of her, changing the flower, the knife, and the key each time the character tried to grasp what was happening. Then her male partner came home and woke her up. He hung up the phone and gave her the flower. It seemed reality was restored, but her flower transformed into the knife and she stabbed him in the face, which broke into mirrored pieces. The final scene was of the male character returning home to find her dead and covered in broken

²² Bill Nichols, *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

mirror. The film portrays many elements of Modernism: the subjectivity, individualism, the quest for understanding and identity as the main character digs deeper into her psyche, and the struggle of the mind, reality, and fantasy.

Maya Deren's work greatly inspired her contemporaries to advance film poetry as the new wave of Modernist art. Amos Vogel said that seeing Deren's films at the Provincetown Playhouse showed him the need for an institution dedicated to these new films, which became Cinema 16. Many other filmmakers credited Deren as an early influence to become film poets. Decades later Willard Maas said that his interest in avant-garde film "developed out of my poetry... and my association with the film makers Maya Deren and Norman McLaren."²³ Similarly, Kenneth Anger recalled that, "Back in the forties when there were very few of us working, I was certainly encouraged by the example of Maya Deren: she made films... [that] were very consciously works of art."²⁴ Deren was similarly cited by numerous filmmakers for decades to follow.

Maya Deren was not only an inspiration to other filmmakers through her art but also through her understanding of production and exhibiting her work. In New York, Deren was friends with Willard Maas, Marie Menken, Parker Tyler, and other early leaders of the New York film poets. Deren and McLaren worked for the Office of War Information and so had access to the film library, materials, and equipment. She rented films to Maas and others at reduced rates and helped them grapple with pricing and procedures based on larger commercial distribution practices. She screened special films privately for friends and made copies of films

²³ Willard Maas' Application for Ford Foundation, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

²⁴ From the interview with Kenneth Anger, Scott MacDonald *A Critical Cinema: Interviews with Independent Filmmakers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 23.

for them.²⁵ Through these connections, early film poets gained tricks of the trade, production techniques, and access to equipment and materials. Maas and Menken then built off of these small informal structures and expanded them in the creation of the “Gryphon Group.” as a way to codify the film movement.²⁶

The Gryphon Group was a loose organization in which filmmakers shared ideas and equipment, collaborated in production, promoted each other’s work, and in general created a communal atmosphere conducive to individual artistic output. Willard Maas conceived of the Gryphon Group in the early 1940s and Marie Menken registered the title with a Christmas bonus to make the group official. It included more filmmakers as new people came into Maas and Menken’s circle: Gregory Markopoulos, James Broughton, Stan Brakhage, Charles Henri Ford, Ben Moore, and Charles Boultenhouse, while maintaining strong ties to Parker Tyler, Norman McLaren, and Maya Deren as well. Maas’ 1943 film *Geography of the Body* made with George Barker and Marie Menken was, as Maas saw it, the first actualization of a Gryphon film.²⁷ After *Geography of the Body*, future film poems by these artists were created through the Gryphon Group and many carried the Gryphon name on the title screen or in the credits of the film. This both promoted the Gryphon brand and used the name recognition to assist up-and-coming filmmakers. Menken summed up the role of the Gryphon Group as “ a group of people who love

²⁵ Letter from Maya Deren to Willard Maas, written in the early 1940s, 2.6, Willard Maas Papers, Ms. Maas, Brown University Library, henceforth referred to as WMPBUL.

²⁶ The most thorough exploration of the Gryphon Group comes from Juan Suárez. Suárez looks at the Gryphon Group as an art-producing community. He therefore has developed some of the social interactions and dynamics of the group. Of particular importance, he has shown that the group emphasized collaboration: sharing equipment and assisting each other in filming, editing, and production. See Juan A. Suárez, “Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943–1969,” *Grey Room* 36 (Summer 2009), 58–87.

²⁷ This film will be examined more in depth later in this chapter.

and contribute to art, life, poetry, film-making, and the world in which they are inherent part... we share equipment, ideas, dreadful experiences, debts and hopes.”²⁸

Collaboration was necessary at every stage of the process in making film poems. Members of the group assisted one another with coming up with ideas, with writing and music, acting, filming, and editing. Collaboration of this nature began with the first films made in 1943, Maya Deren’s then husband filmmaker Alex (“Sasha”) Hammid filmed much of *Meshes in the Afternoon* in which she acted. Menken, Maas, and George Barker all filmed and acted in Maas’ *Geography of the Body*. As relatively inexpensive and obtainable as the materials and equipment for making films had become in this period, there was still considerable more cost and labor involved than in writing or painting. The assistance provided by the Gryphon Group reduced those costs.²⁹ As Maas pointed out in an application for funding, “with experimental films so much is exploited from oneself and from friends.”³⁰

Similar efforts at collaboration existed in Modernist film groups on the west coast as well. In San Francisco, Sidney Peterson organized Workshop 20 at the California School of Fine Arts, a group that included James Broughton and other art students. Peterson often led classroom workshops in creating avant-garde short films, and created five films with other artists through the program.³¹ Peterson and Broughton made *The Potted Psalm* together in 1946 and worked together on other films. In Los Angeles, Gregory Markopoulos, Kenneth Anger, Chester Kessler, and Curtis Harrington assisted each other on some of their films. As Markopoulos had

²⁸ From an interview with Marie Menken by Leslie Mandell at Wagner College in 1962, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives, 51.

²⁹ Menken discussed how much more expensive filmmaking was compared to her painting in her interview with Leslie Mandell. Menken File, Anthology Film Archives.

³⁰ See Willard Maas’ Application for Ford Foundation, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives. Also see letter From Willard Maas to Charles Boultenhouse, "Friday," 5.22 CBPTPNYPL.

³¹ See Sidney Peterson’s Autobiography, Sidney Peterson, *The Dark of the Screen* (New York: New York University Press, 1980).

mentioned, there was some group identity there.³² Harrington helped Anger on *Fireworks*, as Anger starred in the piece. Harrington and Anger also created a distribution company for the group's films, Creative Film Associates. The aim, Harrington said, was for filmmakers "to get together on a cooperative basis to insure the widest possible distribution of their work."³³ Similar challenges in each bohemia prompted these attempts at informal and formal organizations.

There was also a great deal of interregional cooperation. Sidney Peterson in San Francisco communicated with Harrington and Anger and considered using their distribution association in Los Angeles.³⁴ Everyone outside of New York City gravitated towards the people and institutions there to distribute, screen, and socialize. New Yorkers, in turn, used these other groups to promote their films on the West Coast. These filmmakers traveled throughout the United States, from both coasts and to smaller cities and college campuses in the Midwest, in order to screen their films. Many also traveled to Europe for cultural experiences and to participate in film festivals, where they connected to bohemian, Modernist, and film circles there.³⁵

Teamwork was essential, but each particular film poem was in the end credited to just one or two artists with the original vision. Individualism was a critical part of Modernist thinking and art. Each artist had individualistic artistic ideas, as Markopoulos said, "we are striving to [make films], in each our own way."³⁶ The final decisions and product fell to the poem's author and that person, or sometimes two people, was recognized for the film. Those that helped were

³² Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 31 May 1949, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 126.

³³ David E. James, *The Most Typical Avant-garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 219.

³⁴ Letter from Sidney Peterson to Amos Vogel, 25 June 1948, in Macdonald, *Cinema 16*, 106.

³⁵ Parker Tyler traveled to Europe during the 1950s, as discussed later in the chapter. Marie Menken and Kenneth Anger traveled to France and Belgium to participate in film festivals there and the two became close through those experiences. Charles Henri Ford also met and socialized with American film poets when they went to Paris and in some cases helped them see films in Paris that were restricted in the United States.

³⁶ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 31 May 1949, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 126.

usually mentioned in the end credits. Through the need for many hands in making a film and the moral and emotional support that the Gryphon Group and the broader bohemian community provided, these filmmakers developed a form of communal or group identity as “film poets.”

Beyond the mere production of films, the Gryphon Group became a brand and an institution. Films created by members began with a credit screen for the Gryphon Group.³⁷ Through this period, the Gryphon Group put together private and public screenings of their members’ work.³⁸ They advertised and printed promotional materials.³⁹ Maas also sought to create a foundation to help and told a friend “the Gryphon Film Group... intend[s] giving a thousand dollar prize for a film by a new young filmmaker whose work fits into our concept of ‘film as poetry.’”⁴⁰ While the group handled support and promotion, the more difficult task was getting their work distributed and screened in front of larger audiences. The film society Cinema 16 served as the most important venue in connecting these films with audiences and critics.

The rapid growth of experimental film was made possible in large part through new film societies that connected filmmakers with interested audiences. Cinema 16 in New York City, founded in 1947 by Amos Vogel, was the preeminent film society in the postwar era that brought many of the avant-garde films emerging from bohemia to its members-only screenings. Cinema 16 was a large institution and pushed boundaries in bringing marginal, potentially offensive, and complicated films to its audience. It generally ran two programs a night to a 1,600-seat theatre. Each was made up of several films designed to speak to one another. Events that anticipated even larger crowds were shown in other theatres that could accommodate larger audiences.⁴¹ No

³⁷ See for instance the Cinema 16 notes for Willard Maas’ *Image in the Snow*, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

³⁸ Advertisement titled “The Living Theatre will present six new films by THE GRYPHON GROUP,” Menken File, Anthology Film Archives.

³⁹ See the promotional materials for the Gryphon Group, available in the Maas Files in WMPBUL.

⁴⁰ Letter from Willard Maas to “Gideon,” dated “Friday,” Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁴¹ See the introduction, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 1.

film institution in New York City did more in this period to bring film poetry to such a large audience.



Figure 3.4: Section of the audience at the Hunter Playhouse for Cinema 16, 1948.

Private membership was a tool to avoid censorship and was not exclusionary. Joining Cinema 16 was reasonably affordable and open to just about anyone interested. Upfront payments created stable funding for the film society, after it had initially tried ticket sales that failed in bad weather. This also allowed the society to take risks in the films it showed. Yearly membership was \$10 and granted a person 8 screenings per month. If someone attended the full 96 times, each show cost about 10¢. By the 1960s, membership rose to \$16.50 but members were granted more monthly screenings and guest passes for friends. This was still comparable to the neighborhood public theatres where admittance was often 25¢.⁴² More importantly, as a private organization, Cinema 16 was not subject to the same regulations set by the censorship board as public theatres were.⁴³ Public theatres had to provide the board of censorship with the films and

⁴² Macdonald, *Cinema 16*, 13.

⁴³ MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 3-5.

transcripts prior to screenings.⁴⁴ As a private society, Cinema 16 did not have to go through this process, however the board could still investigate them after a screening if there were any complaints. This was unlikely as members were interested in the society's stability and chose which screenings they attended.⁴⁵ Through this method, Vogel was able to create a self-sufficient film society that screened experimental films to thousands of members at a relatively affordable price.

As Cinema 16 was the vision and creation of Amos Vogel, he almost exclusively maintained the decision-making power in regards to which films were screened and distributed. From the beginning he was highly sympathetic to experimental film poetry and he received mostly praise from film poets for his work. In Cinema 16's first year, Kenneth Anger wrote to Vogel, "we experimental film makers are particularly indebted to such a project as yours, as it constitutes practically the only means for our works to reach the public."⁴⁶ Also that year, Gregory Markopoulos wrote to Vogel, "Cinema 16 and I shall continue to understand each other as we have done so, in the future. You have had my full cooperation and shall continue to have

⁴⁴ Censorship was managed at both a state and city level in New York City. The city passed its first censorship laws in 1906, but the majority of regulation came from the state level in 1921 when the New York State Legislature created the independent Motion Picture Commission to review films for distribution and screening. The commission was turned into the Motion Picture Division under the State Education Department in 1926 and operated until 1965. During its tenure the Division reviewed over 70,000 films. It rejected a few hundred in their entirety and required changes and cuts to over 7,000 others. Hollywood handled most of its own reviews after the creation of the Hays Code in the 1930s, but New York had to review independent films made in its state and most of the foreign films coming into the country after World War II. To enforce the Hays Code, the commercial industry operated its own censors, the Production Code Administration, which had an office in Los Angeles and another in New York. In 1965, the US Supreme Court called for changes in the state level film review boards. When the New York Legislature failed to pass the necessary changes in time, the Motion Picture Division was discontinued. The experimental films screened at Cinema 16 were in general able to avoid these various review boards. See Raymond Haberski, *Freedom to Offend: How New York Remade Movie Culture* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 13-28, Jon Lewis, *Hollywood v. Hard Core: How the Struggle Over Censorship Created the Modern Film Industry* (New York: NYU Press, 2002), Edward De Grazia and Roger K. Newman, *Banned Films: Movies, Censors, and the First Amendment* (New York: Bowker LLC, 1982), Nancy J. Rosenbloom, "Between Reform and Regulation: The Struggle over Film Censorship in Progressive America, 1909-1922," *Film History* Vol. 1, No. 4 (1987), 307-325.

⁴⁵ See the chapter on Amos Vogel, Cinema 16, and censorship in Haberski, *Freedom to Offend*, 90-118.

⁴⁶ Letter from Kenneth Anger to Amos Vogel, 20 November 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 90.

it.”⁴⁷ Anyone was allowed to drop off or mail in a film to Vogel. Then he, his wife and partner Marcia, and any assistants, such as Jack Goelman, watched the films and decided whether or not to screen them. Ultimately, this method worked for the organization and the filmmakers for several decades. The Committee of Sponsors had some influence at certain times, though many were silent. Tyler was one of the few sponsors who offered regular opinions to Vogel on which films were worthy of joining the Cinema 16’s roster.⁴⁸



Figure 3.5: Photo of Amos and Marcia Vogel. By Peter Martin, 1955. *Mademoiselle*.

Tyler was on the original Committee of Sponsors for Cinema 16 alongside other prominent Modernists from different artistic fields, including W. H. Auden, Leonard Bernstein, Oscar Hammerstein, and Man Ray. In the following years some experimental filmmakers joined as well. Marcia Vogel, while not listed with an official role within the organization, was a crucial element in making the organization run and in deciding which films to include. When she was asked for specific people who made “particularly strong presences at Cinema 16,” the first

⁴⁷ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 6 December 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 93.

⁴⁸ See Letter from Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 11 May 1950, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 147-8. And also see Letter from Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 5 May 1971, 9.50, PTCHRHRC.

person whom she mentioned was Parker Tyler.⁴⁹ Tyler regularly wrote the program notes for films and he wrote reviews in newspapers and journals.⁵⁰ He also gave lectures and talks, such as “How to Look at An Experimental Film,” at Cinema 16 in conjunction with film screenings.⁵¹

In general, Vogel refrained from influencing the creativity of filmmakers. However in certain cases he offered his opinion or advice. In one instance, he suggested to Sidney Peterson to edit his film *The Cage*. “CINEMA 16 never intends to appear as the arbiter of taste nor does it consider its function to consist of telling the producer what to do. However, with all due modesty and speaking only for myself, I might say THE CAGE could only benefit by at least some cutting, if not some radical cutting.”⁵² Peterson was very receptive to Vogel’s advice, “Thanks too for your personal reactions to *The Cage*. The general point as to the need for some cutting, is, I think, well taken.”⁵³ This was intended not to impose Vogel’s standards on the film poets, but rather was meant to be helpful in professionalizing film poetry.

Vogel’s control kept the film society free of censorship and hidden influences from benefactors, but it also occasionally caused tensions between Vogel and the filmmakers. In 1950, Markopoulos accused Vogel of withholding his films, calling Cinema 16 “a skeeming [sic] commercial venture.”⁵⁴ Markopoulos later visited Paris and he saw how film screenings and distribution worked there. He subsequently apologized to Vogel, noting how much better and fairer his program was compared to those in Paris. In other instances, Sidney Peterson and others questioned Vogel’s pricing plan for renting their films through Cinema 16 as the distributor.

⁴⁹ Interview of Marcia Vogel by Scott MacDonald, January 1985, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 67.

⁵⁰ Tyler wrote regularly in the journals *American Quarterly*, *Art News*, *Film Culture*, *Kenyon Review*, *Nation*, *Poetry*, and *Sewanee Review*, as well as in other journals. His books and publications were reviewed in many of these same journals, others such as *Hollywood Quarterly* and *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, and in newspapers like the *New York Times*.

⁵¹ Program Announcement, Spring 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 114.

⁵² Letter from Amos Vogel to Sidney Peterson, 28 November 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 91.

⁵³ Letter from Sidney Peterson to Amos Vogel, 12 December 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 95.

⁵⁴ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 13 June 1950, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 148-149.

Peterson suggested that flat rates were restrictive to small screening venues⁵⁵ and Markopoulos felt that filmmakers could be paid more if fees were based on attendance of a screening.⁵⁶

However these filmmakers conceded to Vogel's methods after realizing that his policies were fairer to more people in the long run. Barring these minor incidents, film poets in the 1940s and 1950s were generally content with Vogel's approach.

The arrangement that Vogel created with independent filmmakers was one that did its best to both support the artists and keep Cinema 16 afloat as a business so that those filmmakers had a place to screen their films. As a distributor, Cinema 16 divided revenues in half with the artist, which was standard for most commercial film distributors.⁵⁷ Vogel prided himself on the personal relationships that he cultivated with the film poets:

“We have always tried to maintain a relationship with experimental film producers which is based on close collaboration between pioneers in a field which, it appears to us, would be of interest only to idealists and not to business men.” He went on to say, “with all due modesty-that we have done our part in publicizing and making known the work of the new avant-garde to audiences nationally that had not even been aware of their very existence.”⁵⁸

Both Vogel and the filmmakers understood that Cinema 16 was as much dependent on the film poets' films as they were on the organization as a venue for showcasing their work.

The film poets helped out the institution in any way that they could. Kenneth Anger and Curtis Harrington became part of the board of sponsors.⁵⁹ Sidney Peterson served as the film society's “westcoast ‘public relations,’” in an attempt to bring more California filmmakers into the New York fold.⁶⁰ After gaining followers, the filmmakers committed to screening their films at Cinema 16 first, which gave it an edge over other screening houses. Gregory Markopoulos

⁵⁵ Letter from Sidney Peterson to Amos Vogel, 12 December 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 95.

⁵⁶ Letter from Amos Vogel to Gregory Markopoulos, 18 September 1950, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 149-151.

⁵⁷ MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 19.

⁵⁸ Letter from Amos Vogel to Gregory Markopoulos 15 December 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 141.

⁵⁹ Cinema 16 Statement of Purpose, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 6.

⁶⁰ Letter from Sidney Peterson to Amos Vogel, 25 June, 1948, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 106.

debuted most of his works there,⁶¹ and Willard Maas said, “ever since [my first film *Geography of the Body*] every film I did premiered at Cinema 16.”⁶² Understanding how much the filmmakers helped out his organization, Vogel sometimes went beyond contractual arrangements to assist them.

The film poets had to continually produce in order for Cinema 16 to have films to screen. In some cases, Vogel on behalf of Cinema 16 advanced funds to filmmakers, like Markopoulos and Anger, against future earnings from their rentals.⁶³ Vogel provided moral support and expressed his sympathies towards the financial difficulty of making such films. “Your last letter once again showed me the so difficult and often unbearable conditions under which experimental film producers operate. I only wish we could help you more.” Vogel was troubled that film was turned into “a commodity in our money-mad society” but he “congratulated [Markopoulos and other filmmakers] for [their] tenacity and determination to remain free of prostituting agreements.”⁶⁴ Vogel also worked with Maya Deren and her organization that provided monetary awards to experimental filmmakers.⁶⁵ Vogel was also understanding when filmmakers worked with other organizations. For one film, James Broughton decided to exclusively distribute with another company. Vogel told Broughton he “felt that an informal relationship had been established, according to which all of us were freely working together ‘for the good of the experimental film.’” Vogel had good things to say about the agent with whom Broughton was working and hoped to work with Broughton in the future.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 6 December 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 93.

⁶² Maas interview with George Semsel for Film Comment, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁶³ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 8 July 1948, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 109.

⁶⁴ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 8 July 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 126-7.

⁶⁵ Rabinowitz, *Points of Resistance*, 44-5.

⁶⁶ Letter from James Broughton to Amos Vogel, 25 March 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 118-21.

Membership grew fast in the early years and remained strong into the early 1960s. At its peak there were over 7000 members.⁶⁷ A majority joined after an advertisement was placed in the *New York Times*. Several questionnaires were administered over the years, which revealed some of the audience demographics. Two-thirds of spectators were under 30 years of age and one-quarter were between 30 and 40. Three-quarters were college graduates. Most members held white-collar jobs, with 41% described as “professionals,” 14% were in “business,” 8% in clerical or sales work, and 17% in the arts, advertising, or publishing. “Skilled workers” made up 6% and 5% were housewives.⁶⁸ Judging from photographs of the audience, it appeared anywhere from a quarter to a third were women, and most were white.⁶⁹ Relatively diverse in terms of sex and religion, the audience remained mostly younger, educated, and middle-class.

Viewers sometimes needed help with understanding the films, especially ones that were abstract, non-narrative, or potentially offensive. To promote dialogue about interpreting film poetry, Parker Tyler gave a talk titled “How to Look at An Experimental Film” in 1949. Tyler discussed the difficulties in understanding experimental film and offered some of his theories and techniques for “appreciating” film poetry. He posed the question of whether there was a “lag” between the spectator and filmmaker to drive at a discussion of the cultural value of the avant-garde.⁷⁰ Beyond these films confusing viewers, some outright offended them. Vogel’s assistant Jack Goelman said of Willard Maas’s *Image in the Snow* in 1952, that he believed 400 of the 1200 audience members walked out, many “grumbling, enraged, stamping their feet, yelling” while those that stayed “were going ‘Shhh-hhh!’-they wanted to hear and see the

⁶⁷ MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 1.

⁶⁸ MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 13.

⁶⁹ MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 7, 15.

⁷⁰ Program Announcement, Spring 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 113.

film.”⁷¹ Filmmakers enjoyed both the positive and negative receptions of their films. After receiving both criticism and praise from viewers for his film *Mother's Day*, James Broughton wrote to Vogel to thank him for the experience and the critical debate with the kind of discerning audience that could “only exist in New York.”⁷²

On occasion, the discussion of the principles of film poetry among bohemian filmmakers and critics broke through into the public realm. These were rare occasions when these artists had the chance to vocalize their ideas, processes, and the tenets of their work. It also illustrated that film poetry was truly a new Modern art form that was actively discussed and questioned. This often occurred through writings in art journals but also in lectures, talks, and symposiums that engaged with other types of artists and with viewers. On October 28, 1953, Willard Maas created a symposium on Poetry and Film, which included Maas, Parker Tyler, Maya Deren, and poet Dylan Thomas and playwright Arthur Miller. Together they worked to define poetry and to construct some of the “basic aesthetic principles of the poetic film.”⁷³ No consensus was reached and there were tensions between the film poets and Thomas and Miller.

Tyler, Maas, and Deren were able to give a broad idea of what the medium of film poetry was but encountered trouble when they moved into details. Tyler divided film poetry into the visual, which he saw in works by Deren, James Broughton, Kenneth Anger, and Curtis Harrington, and the verbal, which he linked to Sidney Peterson and Willard Maas. He also mentioned “the poetry of painting in motion” which was best exemplified by Norman McLaren. Deren built off of this and attempted to more deeply explain what poetry was. She defined it as “an approach to an experience... visible or auditory forms for something which is invisible.”

⁷¹ See both “Introduction,” and MacDonald Interviews with Jack Goelman, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 75.

⁷² Letter from James Broughton to Amos Vogel, 25 March 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 118-121.

⁷³ Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 202-212.

Deren further argued that poetry moved up and down in a “‘vertical’ attack” as opposed to narrative drama that was “horizontal,” and that film was a perfect medium for poetry so long as it both dug down into an experience and raised it to new levels of consciousness. Tyler added that “poetic film means using the film as a conscious and exclusive means of creating ideas through images.”⁷⁴ Maas concurred with Tyler and Deren’s concepts of poetry and understandings of the film poetry form, however Dylan Thomas and Arthur Miller had trouble with these definitions.



Figure 3.6: Symposium on Poetry and Film at Cinema 16, New York. 28 October 1953. L to R: Dylan Thomas, Arthur Miller, Willard Maas, Parker Tyler, Amos Vogel and Maya Deren.

Dylan Thomas had hesitations about the whole concept of film poetry. He said, “I’m not at all sure that I want such a thing, myself, as a poetic film... I’m not quite sure that I want a new kind of film at all.” Thomas’s work is widely considered to be Modernist, though he resisted any ideological or aesthetic associations. Though Thomas was resistant to Deren’s definition of poetry and film poems, he acknowledged that the audience understood her. Maas attempted to

⁷⁴ Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 202-205.

divide film between the “popular medium” and art, and suggested film poetry could bring poetry to broader audiences as Thomas had done. Thomas remained unmoved and Arthur Miller joined his side. The interesting outcome was not the opposition of Thomas and Miller, but rather the audience’s involvement.

The audience at the “Poetry and Film” symposium was fully engaged with the discussion on stage. The resistance from Thomas and Miller frustrated many of them. Judith Malina, who was not a filmmaker but part of the bohemian artist community, was at the symposium and said, “The ennui is indescribable. Dylan is contrary but doesn’t push it to the point of being interesting.”⁷⁵ Maya Deren similarly commented during the symposium that she was “flabbergasted at the fact that people who have handled words with such dexterity as Mr. Thomas and Mr. Miller... should have difficulty with such a simple idea” as her explanation of poetry as “vertical.”⁷⁶ She became so frustrated that she was “unable to develop the idea any further.” Some of the symposium audience members took the discussion to other locales after it ended. Malina, Maas, Marie Menken, Ben Moore, and others went to a friend’s studio where “we heatedly debate[d] the same subject.” Malina was so incensed by the symposium that she insisted “on going to the White Horse [tavern] afterward if only to hear Dylan carry on.”⁷⁷ Active audiences had been central to bohemia going back to poetry readings in the 1920s and 1930s. The artistic community was eagerly interested in this new concept of film poetry.

⁷⁵ See Malina diary entry for October 29, 1953. Judith Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina, 1947-1957* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 300.

⁷⁶ Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 208-209.

⁷⁷ Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina*, 300.



Figure 3.7: Still from *Geography of the Body*. By Willard Maas, 1943.

Nothing explained what film poetry was more than the works themselves. As Deren described, film poets used this medium to dig deeply, vertically, into themselves, into an emotion, or into an idea.⁷⁸ Central to all of these films was the use of visual elements to convey their messages and ideas, as opposed to narrative story lines. These films had no need or use for typical film techniques such as establishing shots, character development, dialogue, climaxes, and transitional editing. In *Geography of the Body*, Willard Maas transformed the contours of the human body into terrains and landscapes which the viewer experienced as an exotic journey. In both *Meshes of the Afternoon*, and *At Land*, Maya Deren explored the feelings of loneliness, multiplicity of self, and social interactions. Space and time were made fluid as the same moment repeated itself in different ways, or spaces of interiors and nature almost seamlessly shift. In much the same way as modern poetry can inject a single word or sentence, seemingly out of place, in order to make the reader feel or think something different about what they just read, these films often cut to objects, flowers, or other visuals to evoke certain feelings in the middle

⁷⁸ Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 202-205.

of the film. In all of these ways, film poetry was meant not to tell a story, but convey an idea or sentiment, which was a continuation of earlier waves of Modernist poetry. Seeing these films was what brought others into believing in their poetic power, as Charles Henri Ford said, “My doubts about the value of the camera- as a medium for discovering poetry- no longer exist. Perhaps Cocteau’s best poem is his film *Blood of a Poet*.”⁷⁹

A film poem began as an idea and evolved through the process of filming as it would through writing. Maya Deren believed that while the images on the physical film was created in the camera, “it does begin before the machine. And it begins in the mind of creator.”⁸⁰ Scripts, visual directions, props, and other parts of the film were planned out before filming began, but all that would change. When making the *Potted Psalm*, Sidney Peterson said, “the original scenario was discarded on the first day. Thereafter fresh scenarios were prepared at least once a week for about three months.”⁸¹ Willard Maas wrote, “like when writing a poem, one doesn’t deliberately go out to prove something. I just began writing a script, and the final script for *Image* varies much from my original thoughts.”⁸² Marie Menken described her process, “They are created much like a poem, are not particularly premeditated, but once a theme presents itself I pursue it with an application of form, design, aesthetics and composition.”⁸³ Production was a crucial artistically transformative process and further change occurred in editing.

The aesthetics and visual quality of film poetry were what set it apart from other art forms. Sidney Peterson emphasized that good film poetry needed “aesthetic involvement,” because in bad filmmaking “there is seldom much evidence of any intent” so that “the [aesthetic]

⁷⁹ Charles Henri Ford, *Water from a Bucket: A Diary 1948-1957* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2001), 181.

⁸⁰ Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 202-212.

⁸¹ Program Notes by Amos Vogel for Cinema 16, November 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 88.

⁸² Maas, “Gryphon Yaks,” Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁸³ Marie Menken’s Ford Fellowship Application, 1963, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives.

involvement is quickly dissipated.”⁸⁴ That “aesthetic involvement” meant that the artist separated the film from any attempt at reality, which was why so many films took on a dreamlike quality. This was a critical tenet of Modernist art and this separated film poetry both from commercial entertainment and from later Postmodernist films. Visual elements, such as harsh breaks between scenes, the use of black and white film, and other camera techniques were used to differentiate film poetry from mainstream narrative films.⁸⁵ The chief example of the visual over narrative was in the use of actors. Actors in the films were there to portray beauty, or anger, or sadness, or loneliness, not to engage in dialogue with other actors or convey a story. Marie Menken’s work rarely used actors at all, as in *Visual Variations on Noguchi*, which examined details and shadows of Noguchi’s sculptures,⁸⁶ or *Hurry! Hurry!*, which looked at the movements and shapes of sperm under a microscope.⁸⁷ Certain visuals, themes, and ideas transcended multiple works.

Mythic aesthetics and themes were an important feature of much of the film poetry. Illusions to ancient Greek mythology pervaded many works by Gregory Markopoulos, Willard Maas, and the other film poets. Gregory Markopoulos used images of Greco-Roman pillars and statues to create mythic environments in *Psyche*, *Lysis*, and *Charmides*, all of which were modern interpretations of Plato’s dialogues. Maas used similar effects in his modern take on *Narcissus*. In other cases, East Asian tapestries, Middle-Eastern costumes, or even black or white backgrounds were used to evoke mythic realms in which to tackle different ideas and subjects.

⁸⁴ Peterson, *The Dark of the Screen*, 166-7. Though this quote is directly in regards to pornography, it is made within a larger conversation of film philosophy and aesthetics.

⁸⁵ See Deren’s remarks, Transcript of the symposium was originally published by *Film Culture* in 1963, reprinted in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 202-212.

⁸⁶ Marie Menken made the film *Visual Variations on Noguchi* in 1945.

⁸⁷ Marie Menken made the film *Hurry! Hurry!* In 1957.



Figure 3.8: Still from *Lysis*. Gregory Markopoulos, 1947-48.

The use of myth was a choice in order to delve into feelings and thoughts in a way that was unconventional and was not restrained by a need for rationality. Myth sometimes referred specifically to ancient Greek mythology and sometimes to the belief that those same stories and ideas reverberated throughout space and time and existed in the present day public's psyche. Sidney Peterson used myth in the *Potted Psalm*, noting, "the connections may or may not be rational... What is being stated has its roots in myth and strives through the chaos of commonplace data toward the kind of inconstant allegory which is the only substitute for myth in a world too lacking in such symbolic formulations."⁸⁸ Myth better exemplified film poets' own ways of feeling and thinking and it was not always used as an intentional motif; rather as Kenneth Anger pointed out while working on *Eros Eidolon* (later titled *Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome*) and also in reference to *Fireworks*, out of the films "are released the archetypal elements from the realm of collective, unconscious "myth."⁸⁹ Myth made these film poets feel

⁸⁸ Program Notes by Amos Vogel for Cinema 16, November 1947, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 89. Also part of this is quoted in Suárez, "Myth, Matter, and Queerness."

⁸⁹ Letter from Kenneth Anger to Amos Vogel, 8 December 1952, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 189.

connected to a long line of artists and poets throughout history, which was a pillar of bohemian thought.

Specifically, myth was a tie to the bohemia constructed by Ford and Tyler in the 1930s. Connecting to ancient myth was a way in which Modernists like Tyler and Ford worked around the sometimes-grim naturalism and materialism of the 1930s. The Gryphon Group utilized myth in many places within their written poetry and in their film poetry. This was a principle tenet of Modernism to contextualize new art within the discourse of the past.⁹⁰ Myth was an important thread between the Modernist prose poetry of the 1930s and the film poetry of the postwar era. As Tyler wrote, "[the] ONLY REASON for taking movies seriously is, as I always said, MYTH - and only poets care for myth as other than archaeology and anthropology."⁹¹

As with earlier Modernist art in the 1930s bohemia, film poetry sought to overcome barriers of gender, sex, and sexuality with universalism. This was often attempted by using myth, specifically ancient Greek mythology. Tyler wrote a play in the 1950s "on a transvestite subject about Tiresias, hermaphrodite, and a mythical androgyne named Hippolytis/Hippolyta."⁹² The transvestite and hermaphrodite were common elements in many bohemian works, as it highlighted the artificiality of gender and sexual differences. Years later, Gregory Markopoulos similarly used ancient Greek myth in his modernized take on Balzac's *Seraphita* in "Himself as Herself." There, Markopoulos fused the male and female leads into a single character. These pieces directly challenged the divisions in gender, sex, and sexuality that were reinforced during

⁹⁰ Suárez's analysis of Maas's use of myth has missed a few connections. Suárez claimed that "Maas's 1930s poetry contains no allusions to myth. Myth seems to have entered his intellectual orbit later on... [with] his initiation into film." However, Maas was in fact aware of myth in the 1930s. Through his work for Alcestis Press, he published Parker Tyler and other associated Modernists that all actively used myth. Maas also by the early 1940s had possession of art and writings by British poet George Barker, including poetry and writings about Aeneas and Dido, and ink drawings of Orpheus, Bacchus, Ganymede, and other mythological creatures and figures. See Suárez, "Myth, Matter, Queerness," 61, and see Maas and Barker letters, writings, and drawings, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, WMPBUL

⁹¹ Parker Tyler's *Diary*, Feb 20 1952, 29.1, PTCHRHRC.

⁹² Diary entry from 13 September 1954. Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina*, 341.

the postwar suburban baby boom in broader society. The goal was not simply to use these figure as a façade for homosexuality, nor to destroy genders, but rather in a Modernist universalist way to say that all people contained both masculine and feminine genders.



Figure 3.9: Still from *Narcissus*. Willard Maas, 1956.

Self-identification was a major element in film poetry. Some films explored the origins of identity by looking at family and childhood. James Broughton's *Mother's Day*, "a sardonic and poetic comment on childhood," looked at the familial pressures and expectations placed on children.⁹³ Sidney Peterson's *Lead Shoes* examined family tensions and feelings between siblings and between children and parents, all overlaid with Freudian thought and ancient Greek myth.⁹⁴ Willard Maas' *Image in the Snow* looked at the struggle of the artist in relation to family, society, and spirituality. The films of Maya Deren, Kenneth Anger, and Gregory Markopoulos

⁹³ Program Announcement, Spring 1949, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 113.

⁹⁴ Program Notes by Parker Tyler for Sidney Peterson's *The Lead Shoes*, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 145-7.

also looked at identity in similar ways. This included a feeling of subjectivity and a quest for identity and answers within oneself.

Much of this work within bohemia emphasized that a person was not one single identity or self, but rather was multifaceted and made up of different, sometimes competing, selves. Both Deren in *Meshes of the Afternoon* and Peterson in *The Lead Shoes* created films in which the main characters were shown in multiple representations reliving the same moments over and over. This illustrated the struggle between different identities and different perceptions of oneself. These films grappled with how the artist identified oneself and how family, partners, or society at large perceived him or her. This was not a unique or new concept, but it was central to the psychological elements common in Modernism and it was different from the practices and feelings of the general public. The film poets emphasized the idea that identity was both malleable and self-constructed.

These artists all pushed the boundaries of themes and ideas within art and also challenged the idea of rigid art forms. In this period, Charles Henri Ford did not make films but similarly worked to alter his poetry into other forms and other media. His anthology project “The Poem in Prose” pushed poetry into a more mainstream and digestible format to bring it to broader audiences. Ford also “became more visual.” As he recalled, “During the ‘50s I was doing photographs... [and] drawings. I had three shows in Paris and one in London.”⁹⁵ Meanwhile, others worked to transform other forms of art. Marie Menken's *Visual Variations on Noguchi* was provocative as it transformed views and understandings of Noguchi's art and became art in its own right. Alongside *Geography of the Body* of which she was a part in filming and

⁹⁵ Ford saw great success in selling pieces and exploring new media, which would in later years, include film. “Poem Posters” 1960s and made a film of based on them. These pieces of art were visual poetry, large scale words made into posters that were displayed in galleries similar to paintings and other art. In making a short film of the poetry posters in the 1960s, he truly transformed poetry into another medium and into another medium again. See Ford interview from September 1987, in Bruce Wolmer “Charles Henri Ford.” *BOMB* 18, (Winter 1987).

producing, *Noguchi* showcased similar techniques that Menken had further developed. Through her lens, Noguchi's sculptures resembled body parts that Menken examined in disjointed close-up shots. This again removed the body from any particular sex, gender, or sexuality. In these other efforts and in film poetry, these bohemian artists fought to keep art and poetic principles alive in the postwar era.⁹⁶

Many artists at the time saw huge potential for change in art after World War II. Tyler, Ford, and their friends preserved their Modernist bohemia through *View* magazine during the war. Many artists wanted to a fresh and new take on Modernist art. Sidney Peterson reflected on this, "if ever there was a time for taking inventory it was at the end of WWII."⁹⁷ Yet many intellectuals questioned the role of art after the horrors of the war. Theodor Adorno wrote, "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today."⁹⁸ This kind of thinking was laying the groundwork for a deconstructionist Postmodernism, yet the film poets hoped to continue creating art and promoting their sense of universalism. These film poets felt that the simplicity and innocence of poetry was still possible and even necessary after the war.

In this environment, many of these film poems were received as shocking, even if that was not the artist's intent. Kenneth Anger made some of the films considered to be the most shocking, yet he worked to avoid spectacle and sensationalism. In a letter to Amos Vogel, Anger raised concern about the use of one of his films, "I would like to amplify somewhat more the 'reservation' I expressed before regarding sending my film to the West Coast....[knowing the distributor there, Anger] felt some trepidation that my film might be exploited by him as

⁹⁶ Menken made her film in 1945. Menken knew Isamu Noguchi and allowed her to film in his studio.

⁹⁷ Peterson, *The Dark of the Screen*, 23.

⁹⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 34.

‘sensational’ and attract unfavorable attention.”⁹⁹ Sometimes these films did shock audiences, but the intent was to make people feel and think about the poets’ message.

Due to this occasional shock reaction, the film poets and their bohemia met with an array of pressures and attacks from outside. Many artists, Hollywood filmmakers, writers, musical composers, were blacklisted and harassed during the anti-communist crusade of the late 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁰ This impacted the film poets and bohemians in a variety of ways. Parker Tyler was concerned that he might be a target of the red scare, having been associated with communist groups in the 1930s. In 1953, at the height of anti-communism, Tyler was invited to travel to Europe with his friends Marjorie and Norman Borisoff, who worked in publishing. He wrote Marjorie and expressed concerns about the trip:

“I don’t know how much you’ve been reading of late political developments over here but the McCarthy gang of politicians is trying for a stranglehold on office... and they are creating a fascist atmosphere where it seems they’ll stop at nothing to give the country the impression that hundreds of thousands of dangerous and undesirable persons live here. By now, it is an old and very hideous contemporary tale. But it has begun over here, like it or not. There seems the possibility that while I might leave the country without hindrance, the McCarran Act conceivably might be applied against me to prevent my coming back. I know I am relatively obscure as a writer but not unknown. Of course, my hypothetical dossier does not, or should not in truth, hold anything that could legitimately bar me from reentering, but legitimacy—where political interests decide things—means nothing. All that would have to be done is to identify me, or anyone else, with certain public bogeymen. As for those who would espouse my “case” in such an eventuation, they would be “liberals” and thus, in this administrattion [sic], the wrong people. As I say, it is only, or seems at the moment only, a slim possibility. But it is there—as my bogeyman.”¹⁰¹

As someone who wrote openly about sexuality, cultural criticism, and more, Tyler was in general not afraid of potential censorship or backlash. In the end, he did take the trip to Europe without

⁹⁹ Letter from Kenneth Anger to Amos Vogel, 8 December 1952, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 188.

¹⁰⁰ For more background here, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006), Robert Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), and Jonathan D. Katz, "Passive Resistance: On the Critical and Commercial Success of Queer Artists in Cold War American Art." *L'image* 3 (Winter, 1996).

¹⁰¹ Letter from Parker Tyler to Majorie Borisoff, 30 November 1953, 9.8, PTCHRHC.

incident. However, this shows how deep the fear of repression was for artists and it also illustrated the continuing disdain that the bohemians had for politics.

Sexuality remained an important theme in both their art and in their lives throughout this period. Many of the film poets used their work to explore their sexuality and their understandings of sexuality. Decades later, scholars and viewers looked back at some of these films and identified them as “homosexual films” or “gay films,” but this was not exactly the case. In the same vein as Ford and Tyler’s bohemian principle of sexuality, some of these films included homosexuality, but did so with an understanding of it as part of a larger diverse pansexuality. Furthermore, sexuality generally was only one element or theme in the films not the dominant or most important one.

All of Willard Maas's films included sexuality in various ways. To examine his oeuvre in this period showed his understanding and portrayal of bohemian sexuality. Both *Geography of the Body* and *Mechanics of Love* disassembled the act of sex and bodies in such a way that differences within gender, sex, and sexuality became blurred.¹⁰² In *Geography*, this was accomplished through close up shots of various body parts often indistinguishable in any capacity let alone as male or female. *Mechanics*, which starts with a male and female seemingly about to have sex, transformed the act of sex as well as the bodies and sex of the actors into a series of inanimate objects, which while suggestive were devoid of any actual sex or sexuality. Thus, there was no clearly defined sexuality in either of these films, rather some concept of sex and sexual action that was reduced to a point where it was applicable to anyone. In this way, Maas represented the same ideals of bohemian sexuality that were promoted by Tyler and Ford.

¹⁰² *Geography of the Body* was made in 1943 and *Mechanics of Love* was made in 1955.



Figure 3.10: Still from *Image in the Snow*. Willard Maas, 1948.

Two of Maas' other films have often been cited as having gay elements, though the reality is more complex. Homosexuality and gay life were a part of *Narcissus* and to a certain extent *Image in the Snow*. *Narcissus* contained three scenes that examine the love and sexuality of the main character as Tyler perceived them, "the first is idyllic and pathetic, the second (set in a gay bar) orgiastic with anamorphic photographic effects, the third tragic and manic."¹⁰³ The film was produced out of the relationship between Willard Maas and Ben Moore, who was the lead actor and Maas' lover at the time; so the relationship of two men was central to the work. However, the different pieces of sexual identity as portrayed by the different "dream episodes"¹⁰⁴ harkened back to complexities of bohemian sexuality. When asked what the theme of the film was in 1970, after the flood of gay liberation, Maas said he believed it was "the artist against society, that would be my idea of the theme there," not homosexuality, nor sexuality in general.¹⁰⁵ *Image in the Snow* has been called gay or queer, usually due to one scene in which its

¹⁰³ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (1969; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1995), 219.

¹⁰⁴ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 219.

¹⁰⁵ Maas interview with George Semsel for *Film Comment*, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives, 63.

lead character watches a bodybuilder, a male dancer, and then a robed female. The struggle the protagonist went through in leaving home and becoming lost in the city has been compared to the struggle of a gay man finding his place in the world. However, for Maas that was not the point of the film. He said, “there was a kind of theological theme there... [and Rheinhold Niebuhr wanted to] urge all theological students to see [the film].”¹⁰⁶ Though sexuality was present, the real struggle was about spirituality and an individual’s place in a changing world after the war.

Gregory Markopoulos included homosexual attractions in several of his films. In looking at *The Dead Ones*, there was an implied love triangle between three men, however it was not necessarily sex that was critical to the relationships. Art, again, was more important and was seen prominently throughout the film, from African tribal masks, to Modernist drawings, to Calderesque mobiles. The characters in the film were all writers and artists. At the end of the film, the lead character was shown dead at a construction site, from what might possibly have been a killing provoked by jealousy. Sex and homosexuality were present and important in this work, but it should not overshadow the roles of art, bohemian identity, and mythology that were equally important.

Sexual discovery was the central theme in Kenneth Anger’s *Fireworks*. The film was a young man’s dream, where he entered a “Gent’s Room,” flirted with a sailor, and was then beat up by the sailor’s friends. Tyler wrote the Cinema 16 notes for the film, which said it was an “attempt to deal with typical homosexual fantasies.” He continued by saying the film was “poetic,” its effects “sensational,” and the imagery “erotic.” Tyler addressed some of the reception of the film. Psychiatrists saw the film and were curious if it could be used “as ‘clinical therapy’ in the cure of homosexual neuroses.” One was Alfred Kinsey who developed a close friendship with Anger after seeing his film. Tyler also said the film had “aroused much

¹⁰⁶ Maas, “The Gryphon Yaks,” Maas File, Anthology Film Archives, 52.

enthusiasm in Paris” due in some part to the “literary cult of homosexual eroticism” that was present in the city.¹⁰⁷ Tyler’s previous writing on sexuality gave him grounds to discuss these elements of the film, but what was different was his use of the word “typical.” This distanced himself and his bohemian identity from the subject material in the film. Furthermore, Tyler does not use “homosexual” to signify a person but rather a particular sexual act. Tyler leaned on his Modernist universalism, which did not label a person by sexual orientation and saw sexuality as a broad spectrum. He offered that “the best way to approach and judge Anger’s film, as an artistic organism, is to disregard the cult-nature of its content and conceive it as though it were any kind of erotic fantasy.” Tyler set up this framework, one that was true to his ideals of pansexuality, and then walked through the scenes noting, “all these have poetic intuition and human authenticity.”¹⁰⁸ In translating these films to the broader public, the inclusion of homosexual sexuality did not inherently mean these films were “gay art.”

The filmmakers themselves also pushed to define their film poetry in these broader bohemian ways. Markopoulos pointed out that part of *Lysis*’s goal was to be “a complete seduction of an audience who are made to deal with perverted or homosexual types.” Central as homosexuality was in this film as well, Markopoulos’ vital idea was much deeper, as he “point[ed] out that the complete clue for the trilogy is, and is for each part of the trilogy in the name, “DU SANG[,] DE LA VOLUPTÉ, ET DE LA MORT”,”¹⁰⁹ which meant “Of Blood, of Pleasure, and of Death.” With partial reference to Jean Cocteau’s *Blood of a Poet*, Markopoulos’ point was that central to everyone’s life, certainly to that of a bohemian film poet, was blood: the physical similarity that binds all people, pleasure: sex, and death: the one guarantee for all

¹⁰⁷ For the most thorough take on *Fireworks*, see Tom Gunning, “Magick weapon: Tom Gunning on Kenneth Anger,” *ArtForum* (March 2007).

¹⁰⁸ See Parker Tyler’s Program Notes for *Fireworks*, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 174-5.

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Amos Vogel, 8 July 1948, MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 109.

people. Sex was therefore only one part of life and viewed as universal, as in pansexuality, not as divisive. These examinations of sexuality and sexual identity in film poetry were rooted in the context of larger shifts in sexuality during the postwar era.

Following World War II, gay identity as based on same-sex sexual activity began to emerge. Communities formed through connections drawn out of the army and the workplace during the war, particularly in large urban centers. John D'Emilio argues in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*,¹¹⁰ that the shared oppression experienced during the Cold War created a united political identity based on sexuality. Daniel Hurewitz builds off of this with *Bohemian Los Angeles*¹¹¹ saying that in Los Angeles the creation of political identity emerged out of the bohemian community and also involvement with communist thought and activism. Hurewitz's assessment fits well for Los Angeles because of the work of Harry Hay there and his analysis could be applied to the growth of gay political identity in New York. However, the case for this particular bohemian circle of film poets was different. Due to the bohemians' apolitical artistic identity, they were not involved in, nor sought to create, any comparable gay political identity.

Bohemian sexuality and identity was renewed and recreated in the post-war era separately from both mainstream society and the gay community. As young artists and filmmakers migrated to New York they were mentored by the likes of Tyler, Ford, and Maas, all of whom reinforced the bohemia as opposed to developing the gay world. In this way, the

¹¹⁰ John D'Emilio. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of the Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-70*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). D'Emilio looks at the growth of the subculture of community of gay men and women in urban centers after WWII, which led to gay political activism and identity. He argues that at the turn of 20th century there was a shift to thinking same-sex sexual acts constituted a homosexual identity. Then he argues that through WWII connections between gay men and women were created in same-sex spaces: the army for men and the workplace for women. The 1950s McCarthy era created a sense of shared experience and oppression which codified this community feeling and created the push for greater activism and the formation of the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. Then the social movements for African-American rights and women's rights created a model for gay activism. Added to this was the sexual revolution further legitimized public discussion and acceptance of different sexualities. This then leads to the gay liberation movement.

¹¹¹ Daniel Hurewitz. *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

established bohemian way of life continued. The one notable change was the embracing of long-term, committed relationships.

The shift towards relationships was not out of the ordinary as marriages across the whole population also increased after the war. Americans were getting married earlier in life, men on average at 22.5 years and women at 20.1, which was on average a couple years earlier than in previous decades. The age gap between husband and wife also narrowed and was relatively close. The nuclear family model took hold and relationships were increasingly seen as “companionate marriages,” with each partner seen as equal.¹¹² Bohemians’ relationships came in many forms and all of them negotiated their own rules to meet the needs of each partner. In broad terms, all these relationships were meant to foster greater artistic output. They were usually not monogamous, as bohemians believed that artistic freedom and sexual freedom were intrinsically tied together.¹¹³ While there were these commonalities to all bohemian relationships, most of them fell into one of two models. In the first model, partners were more or less equals and based their relationship largely on the idea of companionate marriages. In the second model, the relationship was usually intergenerational and the sides were balanced but not meant to be equals. Partners in this case established roles based on the idea of a lover and a beloved, a teacher and student, or a parent and child.

The first model was part of a growing phenomenon of relatively equal partners. In bohemia, all these cases were made up of two artist partners. Often these relationships included legal marriages, as was the case for Willard Maas and Marie Menken, Stan and Jane Brakhage,

¹¹² Stephen Lassonde “Family and Demography in Postwar America” in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 3-19.

¹¹³ See Ford’s consistent use of sex and relationships as a means to artistic production, Ford, *Water From A Bucket*. Also many film poems were made collaboratively of relationships such as, such as Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and George Barker with *Geography of the Body*, 1943, Maas and Ben Moore with *Narcissus*, 1956, and Gregory Markopoulos and Robert Beavers with *Oh Basileus*, 1967.

Paul and Jane Bowles, and Julian Beck and Judith Malina. In many of these relationships, sex was allowed outside the marriage especially as many of the men and women engaged in affairs with members of both sexes. In most, both partners were somewhat close in age and experience. Occasionally there was an age difference, as with the Bowleses who were about a decade apart. These artists therefore often collaborated and assisted one another in their work, but it was not as much a dynamic of one teaching the other.



Figure 3.11: Photograph of Marie Menken and Willard Maas in their home. Likely 1940s.

The second relationship model was the intergenerational long-term committed relationships. Charles Henri Ford and Pavel Tchelitchew served as a direct example of this in the bohemian film poet circle. Parker Tyler and Charles Boultenhouse, Maya Deren and Alexandr Hackenschmied, Deren and Teiji Ito in her later relationship, and Gregory Markopoulos and Robert Beavers all followed this same setup. This model was also present throughout broader bohemia, in the cases of W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman, F. O. Matthiessen and Russell Cheney, and Christopher Isherwood and Don Bacardi. The older partner, usually with a 10-20 year age difference, was often more established in the art world and provided guidance in art,

sex, and life in general. Due to the inherent imbalance between the partners, they often used a different vocabulary: terms like parent and child, teacher and student, or lover and a beloved, which referenced ancient myth. Ford once described his relationship, “Pavlik has kept me, protected me like a father, all these years.”¹¹⁴ Willard Maas also described his and Menken’s role as parental to some of his younger boyfriends. Due to this dynamic, the terms of the relationship were constantly renegotiated over time.

Parker Tyler began his relationship with Charles Boultenhouse in this period and they were together for almost three decades. Tyler and Boultenhouse met in 1945, when Boultenhouse’s friend John Bernard Myers introduced them at the office of *View*. Boultenhouse said there was a “busy silence” and that he was “enchanted by [Tyler’s] romantic profile and black hair, his "southern" charm and his laugh.”¹¹⁵ Boultenhouse moved in with Tyler that year and the couple lived together in the Village for the remainder of their relationship. They were not just romantically involved, but also collaborated on poetry, plays, writings, and in Boultenhouse’s career as a filmmaker. Tyler served as both lover and mentor, teaching Boultenhouse about poetry, art, literature, music, film, love, and bohemia.

Parker Tyler explained the function and benefits of this bohemian sexuality and this type of relationship best. Anne Deidre Bolten, a friend of Tyler and Charles Boultenhouse, wrote them about sex and relationships while she was aboard a ship to Paris, “I flirt all the time. I have many boyfriends from all possible professions and from all three classes plus steerage. ...” Several were in their late teens, which showed that the intergenerational dynamic was not

¹¹⁴ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 149.

¹¹⁵ Charles Boultenhouse, “Parker Tyler’s Own Scandal” *Film Culture*, Fall 1992 77, 10-23.

exclusive to male-male relationships.¹¹⁶ Tyler responded out of his own bohemian beliefs and his experiences with Boultenhouse, by asking questions and offering advice:

“It is hard for us to imagine what, if anything, has happened to your heart: what matter above all. I’ve always thought you curiously naïve and that being ingeniously sophisticated was some-thing you did to please a certain person. All this time I have assumed what you wanted was love... Your desire to be worldly: is it a desire for knowledge? Your introduction to the “world” took place on a peculiar basis: you fell in love with a teacher. You “learned” the way many children do: to please teacher; and/or “parent” as is sometimes the case. But your drive, my dear, your drive—in that one finds the complex factors that finally create one’s personality.” He continued, “They also say about women that they wish to be loved more than to love. Women’s economic position would help to explain this truism, if truism it be. To be loved: to be supported; for many women (not very complex ones) these things are virtually the same... with you?” Then he ended, “Always follow your instinct—and never be ashamed. But I think you should remember that at least half of loving (not of being loved) is imagining. Every lover, artist or no, paints an abstract portrait of his beloved. Down to the last detail. The flesh is loved—I don’t mean merely fucked—according to the portrait’s recipe. That is the meaning of ritual in lovemaking.”¹¹⁷

Tyler laid out here that bohemian love and relationships were built off of this learning model because they were about more than just supporting one another financially; rather they are about gaining worldly knowledge. While his distinction of women’s economic position might be read as sexism, it is actually more telling that on the whole he engaged in conversation with Deirdre as he would with any other man or woman. Tyler drew the line not between men and women, or gay or straight couples, but between “not very complex” people and bohemians whom he believed to be worldlier and more enlightened.

Bohemians explored and enjoyed love and sex and were able to use them to advance their art and knowledge. As Ford said, “what pleasure is greater than sex? Art-if one creates it oneself.”¹¹⁸ In balancing these various elements in one’s life, Ford thought of famed poet Hart

¹¹⁶ Folder Letter from Anne (Deirdre) Bolton to both "Charles and Parker," 1957, 1.16, CBPTPNYPL.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Parker Tyler to “Deirdre,” 8 February 1957, 9.31, PTCHRHC.

¹¹⁸ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 99.

Crane.¹¹⁹ “When Hart Crane perceived that he had exhausted the exhilaration derived from drink and sex and poetry, he drowned himself. He had lost contact with the thread that lead up, Poetry, and took hold of the Whirlpool and didn’t let go.”¹²⁰ Elitist as these bohemians may sound in speaking of knowledge, experience, and their lives, it stemmed from their emphasis on the importance of art and experience above material things.

This second model of relationships was successful and attractive to bohemians in particular because they invested so much of their life in the creation of art. When it came to crafting poetry, there was no distinction in their minds between work and personal life. Their identity as poet and artist was not just a daytime occupation, rather it meant that they lived as poets every second of the day. This meant that they were more likely to meet and develop relationships with another artist. It also meant that they needed their partners to serve not just a romantic function but also a professional one. Their aim was to integrate their sexual, artistic, and spiritual selves into one. So all relationships had to help their work, and all of their work was open to such relationships.

Over the course of their lives, bohemians participated in multiple types of these relationships, even sometimes at the same time. As Willard Maas maintained his companionate marriage with Marie Menken, he also engaged in smaller affairs with younger men seeking to learn from him.¹²¹ A bohemian often evolved from the “student” side to the “teacher” side. Ford while in the student/child role with Tchelitchew also became the “teacher” for a young man in

¹¹⁹ See Paul Mariani, *The Broken Tower: The Life of Hart Crane* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000), and Clive Fisher, *Hart Crane: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

¹²⁰ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 115.

¹²¹ Brakhage discusses this in his piece on Marie Menken, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives. Comparisons were made to ancient Greece as on July 12, 1951 Judith Malina commented on Maas’ actions at a bohemian party, “Willard Maas... flirts with the young men, especially Jo Jo LeSueur- “the perfect Attic youth”...” See Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina*, 176-7.

Italy whom he taught about academics and art and sex for several years.¹²² In the 1940s, Maya Deren had married Alexandr Hackenschmied, ten years her senior, who taught her about filmmaking. Their marriage ended in the late 1940s, and in the beginning of the following decade she entered into a relationship with Teiji Ito, almost 20 years her junior, who was an aspiring composer. Ito then made music and soundtracks for many of the film poets.¹²³ Here again, Deren transitioned roles and showed that these positions were not based on the sex or gender of the bohemians.



Figure 3.12: Photo of Teiji Ito and Maya Deren. Likely late 1950s.

Women in this bohemian world often behaved and participated in the sexual dynamics as men did. Judith Malina and Marie Menken debated the definition of pornography during a party, using sexual dialogue similar to that made among men, and caused unease for a maid who

¹²² See Ford's relationship with "G," where Ford said "G is the most poetic companion imaginable" and then relayed quotes from Virgil and Dante. Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 93-4.

¹²³ See Nichols, *Maya Deren and the American Avant-Garde*.

overheard.¹²⁴ Judith Malina and her husband Julian Beck were in an open marriage. Maya Deren also entered into sexual arrangements with men just as the male bohemians of her circle did.¹²⁵ Such actions, no different from the male film poets, seemed to bear no separate consideration in the eyes of all the other bohemians.

The one difficulty with intergenerational relationships was that often one partner died long before the other. This was the case with Ford and Tchelitchew and was repeated in many other bohemian relationships, such as with Tyler and Boultenhouse, Deren and Ito, and Markopoulos and Beavers in later decades. Ford and Tchelitchew's relationship was not always smooth but it lasted over twenty years. Ford questioned it at times, "Do you love this person or don't you? –a question that *always* comes up. One doubts-and the only proof is in the endurance."¹²⁶ Certainly, they had that. Tchelitchew passed away in July 1957 while the two were living in Italy. Ford wrote in the hours that followed, "Oh so cold, when I kissed him on the cheek. Oh so cold."¹²⁷ However, he took great comfort in knowing all the wonderful things that came out of their lives together in terms of knowledge, love, and art. "When I think, as I do every day, of that agonizing day of his, that day of agony... I do not cry over my great loss, I do not pity myself at all."¹²⁸ Even as many bohemians entered into these decades-long relationships, they still accepted these changing tides and that with one relationship ending another would be begin.

This was the understanding for Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler's relationship beginning in 1945. At age 19, Boultenhouse was more than twenty years Tyler's junior but fell completely in love with Tyler. They built their union exactly on the lover/beloved,

¹²⁴ Malina, *The Diaries of Judith Malina*, 345.

¹²⁵ Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 49-91.

¹²⁶ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 13.

¹²⁷ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 242.

¹²⁸ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 244.

teacher/student model. In their first year together, Boultenhouse wrote his former lover Marius Bewley about Tyler,¹²⁹ and Bewley responded with his own advice and opinions:

"but I should be caddishly ungrateful if I delayed a reply to such a charming letter, and one which I enjoyed receiving so very much." He continued, "It was good of you to trust me so much. Parker is worth as much love as you wish to give him, or can't help giving him. But I do hope you won't love anyone, not even Parker whom I myself value so highly, to the extent of ever being outrageously unhappy. Naturally it's inevitable a young man embarking on love should be a little unhappy sometimes-- it would be indecent in him not to be-- but he should attempt to navigate only easily weatherable storms. The nice thing about Parker is that he always carries, somewhere about him, an omen of fair weather. I don't know if one should consider him a reliquary in which to deposit the totality of one's heart, but he is one of the dearest, most kind friends (in your case, lover) one should wish to have."¹³⁰

Here a former lover still served as a teacher to his former beloved. This illustrated how comfortable and understanding these bohemians were of the other friendships, relationships, and partners that everyone had. Tyler assisted Boultenhouse in his work as well, often reviewing his poetry, writings, and film work. One summer day in 1952, Tyler read and critiqued Boultenhouse's writing, and they quarreled a little. After, Tyler wrote in his journal, "he insists on a formal reconciliation with words of reassurance + tenderness. LA! LA! Such is married life for a pair of BACHELORS!! - Delightful day! -" The allusion to marriage was significant, however more important was their Modernist understanding of each other as individuals and artists in a relationship that overlapped with work. Functional as this system was, it began to feel pressure from changes to sexuality outside of bohemia.

While this bohemian sexuality central to 1930s Modernism was able to survive WWII, the evolution of gay communities in the postwar era began to impact the artists' world. Charles Henri Ford kept journals and personal writings his whole life. From the 1930s through to the

¹²⁹ Marius Bewley was a writer and literary critic. He was born and educated in England, but lived in New York City and taught at Rutgers University. For more, see Frederick Morgan, "Marius Bewley, 1916-1973" in *The Hudson Review*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Spring, 1973), 5-7.

¹³⁰ Letter from Marius Bewley to Charles Boultenhouse, 4 October 1945, 1.13, CBPTPNYPL.

1950s, his writings reflected his bohemian understanding of sexuality. In 1954 Ford identified himself as homosexual, however, even this was in a very different way from that of the gay community. “Why is everyone always foolish enough to think that a sexual partner will make life happy? I went ahead and became a homosexual... Not everybody does that—who should (or would *like* to)... More usually a vice is made of it.”¹³¹ While this might sound like gay identity, it actually asserted the notion of bohemian pansexuality. After relationships with men and women over the years, he changed his identification. Ford suggested that there was choice in one’s behavior and identification. The way in which he used the term “homosexual” in reference to himself was different from seeing homosexual as a primary identifier or as a political identity. He did not see it as “natural” or “inherent.” Still, even with this instance of homosexual identity, Ford and the other bohemians never believed or expected that such a rigid identity be placed on others. This was one of the critical differences in bohemian sexual identity as compared to gay political identity.

By the end of the 1950s, the changing conception of sexuality in broader society began seeping into other areas of bohemia if not yet into the film poet circles. Tensions and attacks arose specifically out of the emergence of New American Cinema, or “underground film.” Jonas Mekas, one of the movement’s leaders, wrote what was perhaps the most scathing condemnation of film poetry and called it homosexual propaganda. In the magazine *Film Culture*, which Mekas and his friends founded in January 1955, Mekas wrote “the majority of film poems made at present in America suffer from the markedly adolescent character.”¹³² Citing Kenneth Anger, Gregory Markopoulos, Curtis Harrington, Stan Brakhage, Ben Moore, Maya Deren and others,

¹³¹ Ford, *Water From A Bucket*, 196.

¹³² Jonas Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” in P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), 21. Mekas’ original article was printed in *Film Culture* 3, May-June 1955.

Mekas claimed that they and their films were “escapist,” “juvenile,” and “sadistic.”¹³³ He went on to give the reason:

“it is the conspiracy of homosexuality that is becoming one of the most persistent and most shocking characteristics of American film poetry today. In these films... the protagonists are consistently exposed to physical and mental assault; they are a prey to the most ingenious forms of brutality, sadism, and masochism. The perversion of sex seems to be accepted by these film poets (and their films) as a natural way of life.”¹³⁴

Mekas then condemned Parker Tyler for his “justification” of film poetry as an evolution from avant-garde and Surrealist ideas in the 1930s. Mekas momentarily praised the film poets for “a certain honesty” in their films, but he then said “these film poets lack what makes any art valuable to humanity: a deeper insight into the human soul, emotions, experiences.”¹³⁵ Mekas was particularly harsh on Deren and said, “the supposed depth of [her work] is artificial,” and that the value of her films was “absolute zero.”¹³⁶ The film poets were accustomed to people criticizing, attacking, and degrading their work, however more disturbing this time was the source of the assault in addition to the nature of the complaint.

Maya Deren reached out to Mekas to address the situation on behalf of the film poets. She and her colleagues met with Mekas and discussed their work. They addressed his prejudices towards the artists and their films and made major strides in bringing Mekas to understand their artistic point of view. Soon thereafter, Mekas and *Film Culture* looked much more favorably on these films. Mekas himself began making films in 1961. When he later wrote a regular column on film for the *Village Voice*, Mekas called in Deren to replace him when he took a leave of absence, illustrating his very dramatic change in views.¹³⁷ In 1970, Mekas acknowledged that in

¹³³ Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 22.

¹³⁴ Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 23.

¹³⁵ Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 24-5.

¹³⁶ Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 24-5.

¹³⁷ Rabinovitz, *Points of Resistance*, 84.

rereading his piece he had made a complete turnaround in understanding. He was also horrified by the similarity in his condemnation of film poetry in the 1950s to conservative denunciation of underground film in the 1960s.¹³⁸ This shift in attitude was particularly crucial to Mekas' involvement in the growth of a new form of avant-garde film, known as New American Cinema or underground film. These films moved away from the visual poetry that had been fundamental to the previous avant-garde. The New American Cinema's aim was to democratize what art was as well as open up distribution and screening of these films. This was the first major and successful challenge to Vogel and Cinema 16's control over experimental film.

After World War II, Paul Bowles wrote to Charles Henri Ford from Morocco and said, "There is absolutely no way to be again in a place. Whether or not it has changed, it's never the same. Isn't that true? And by never being the same one means of course: not being alive any more. Every place one revisits seems to have lost the life that made it exist the first time one knew it."¹³⁹ In many ways, this applied just as much to the bohemia that Ford, Tyler, and all the film poets had created. A dramatic metamorphosis had taken place in the decade or so following the end of the war and the closing of *View* magazine. Their bohemia had been reborn after the threat to its existence from the violence of the war. This time however, newcomers had turned to Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford, as they had done to Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein decades before. Furthermore, poetry had transformed from written words into visual imagery on film. Through screenings, writings, lectures, and discussions, the film poets

¹³⁸ Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: the Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972), 392.

¹³⁹ Letter from Paul Bowles to Charles Henri Ford, 19 November 1947, 12.6, CHFPHRHRC.

had gained recognition and legitimacy for their new art form. The tenets of this bohemia appeared to be ascending into a new decade of opportunity, however they would learn that it was impossible to recreate the bohemia they had once known within the changing climate of the 1960s.



Figure 3.13: Emilio Snchez de Soto, Pepe Crleton, Truman Capote, Jane and Paul Bowles, at El Farhar, Tangier. By Emilio Sanz de Soto. August 1949.

CHAPTER 4: FILM POETS AS OLD GUARD, 1957-1967

In the late 1950s, the film poets saw a promising future for Modernist art in the decade ahead. Avant-garde film had gained a level of stature and acceptance that granted legitimacy to the work and theories of Parker Tyler, Willard Maas, Marie Menken, Gregory Markopoulos, Charles Henri Ford, and the rest of the film poets. They had successfully bridged one potential divide that Jonas Mekas had brought in his attack on the sexuality of film poetry. As they had once rebuilt their bohemian world in the postwar era, they hoped and expected to do the same in the 1960s and gain greater exposure for their ideas. To this end, the film poets were terrific at assisting and mentoring new filmmakers who shared those same goals and visions.

Charles Boultenhouse stood as a perfect example of the film poets' hope for the coming decade. His three films from the late 1950s and early 1960s all exhibited the core values of Modernist film poetry. *Henry James: Memories of Old New York* incorporated collected images and drawing with street sounds of old Gotham to recreate what Boultenhouse interpreted as James's world. The use of images and sounds instead of words invoked the emotions and ambiance of the written poetry of Henry James. It was non-narrative and appeared simple, yet was a highly crafted and thought out short film. In *Handwritten*, Boultenhouse's own hand was shown as it wrote out a poem in the shape of a hand, which elucidated the multiple layers of the creation process, drew the written word into the visuals of the film, and illustrated in various forms a central tool in making all kinds of poetry, the hand. Lastly, Boultenhouse's 1963 film *Dionysius* succeeded in bringing ancient Greek myth to life through fluid and vibrant camerawork, a ritualistic dance sequence, layers of imagery with visuals of hands and flowers,

and a voiceover of spoken poetry. All of his films met the standards and criteria of film poetry and Modernism set out by his predecessors in the 1940s and 1950s.



Figure 4.1: Still of Louis Falco dancing in *Dionysius*. By Charles Boultenhouse. 1963.

Boultenhouse's *Dionysius* was a 26-minute long mostly black-and-white film based on a "free treatment of Euripides' *The Bacchae*."¹ It starred dancer Louis Falco in the lead role. Falco as Dionysius wore only white briefs and sculptural metal or wooden curls in his hair to give him the look of a modernized Greek god. At first, Dionysius danced in an undefined space, moving fluidly and beautifully. Boultenhouse laid one dancing sequence over another to create greater depth and to portray the conflict between Dionysius and Pentheus through dance. As the scene pulls back, the viewer can see Dionysius is surrounded by a chorus of cameras that were operated by Markopoulos, Maas, Menken, and other filmmakers from the Gryphon Group. The instrumental to a soundtrack by Teiji Ito is vibrant and evokes the struggle between the two characters. After the fight, a veiled Agave, Pentheus's mother, enters and mourns her son. About

¹ See the finding aid for the Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, henceforward referred to as CBPTPNYPL

these scenes, Wallace Thurston wrote, “Frequently throughout DIONYSUS the technique of superimposition of images is used to achieve some of the most startlingly beautiful filmic texture I have ever seen.”² There was no dialogue, but Markopoulos recited poetry about the myth of the Bacchae in Greek, French, and English. The film ended with a jarring change of scene and visuals, which Boultenhouse made as a parody of Alain Resnais’s 1961 film, *Last Year at Marienbad*. A woman and two men, perhaps meant to represent the characters of Dionysius, Agave, and Pentheus into the 20th century, sit at a card table. A voice repeatedly says “Pick a card, any card” and “Mommy’s got a secret.” The abrupt switch feels almost as a separate film, and it may well have been intended that way. Often in ancient Greece, short humorous plays were performed at the end of a tragedy to lighten the mood. In the film *Dionysius*, the ending does that and also, in a Modernist manner, calls into question the whole reality of the film.

The previous generation of film poets marveled at the promise of this next group of filmmakers. Parker Tyler and Gregory Markopoulos wrote articles that heralded in this new wave of film poetry. Markopoulos praised Charles Boultenhouse’s *Dionysius* for its visual and verbal poetics, and for its inventive and “extraordinary” ending, which was “conceived in the tradition of a satyr play.”³ *Dionysius* evoked ancient Greek art and caused the viewer, in Markopoulos’ opinion, to become possessed in an almost religious way. The film was, in Markopoulos words, “supremely American” and it perfectly balanced ancient myth with Modernist sentiment and aesthetics. Parker Tyler added, the film “in a brilliant way...magically convert[ed] its literal boundaries into unlimited space...the themes are mythological, the action in *Dionysius* mimed and danced discontinuously, naturally expand[ed] the impression of both

² Wallace Thurston, review of “Dionysius,” *Kulchur* #16, 1963.

³ See Gregory Markopoulos, “Three Film-makers,” *Film Culture* 35, (Winter 1964-65), 23-24, Boultenhouse File, Anthology Film Archives, and Parker Tyler, “Harrington, Markopoulos, and Boultenhouse: Two Down and One To Go?,” *Film Culture* 21, (Summer 1960), Tyler File, Anthology Film Archives.

temporal and physical space.”⁴ The earlier wave of film poets were particularly excited by these fresh works as they knew this was an important moment in recreating their Modernist bohemian world once again, as had happened in the early 1930s and again in the mid-1940s.

Up-and-coming film poets were able to make films in large part because of guidance and encouragement from mentors and friends. Charles Boultenhouse had been Parker Tyler’s lover since 1944 and so Boultenhouse had plenty of exposure to the avant-garde film world. By the late 1950s, Boultenhouse’s interest in filmmaking finally materialized. Willard Maas pulled Boultenhouse into the Gryphon Group fold and offered him use of studio equipment.⁵ Boultenhouse screened his films under the Gryphon brand and alongside the films of Stan Brakhage, another Gryphon newcomer, and Marie Menken. Teiji Ito, Maya Deren’s third husband, created the scores for *Handwritten* and *Dionysius*. Gregory Markopoulos gave input to Boultenhouse, such as opinions on content, the poetry voiceovers, camerawork assistance, and ideas on the mythic concepts and dimensions of the film. Tyler offered tremendous moral support within their relationship and he wrote reviews of Boultenhouse’s work in the 1960s, but waited until after other positive reviews in order to not appear to be biased.⁶ This dynamic of mentorship between Boultenhouse and the established film poets played out with many others, including Stan Brakhage, Robert Beavers, and Storm de Hirsch, and the bohemians were hopeful that film poetry would continue to flourish. However, some of the same cultural turns that increased interest in and reception of film poetry also allowed new styles of avant-garde film to emerge and compete with film poetry for audiences.

⁴ Parker Tyler, *Underground Film: A Critical History* (1969; reprint, New York: Da Capo, 1995), 54.

⁵ Letter From Willard Maas to Charles Boultenhouse, "Friday," 5.22, CBPTPNYPL.

⁶ Tyler’s positive references and reviews to Boultenhouse can be seen in several of his books from the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Underground Film* and *Screening the Sexes*.

This chapter will begin by contextualizing the changes within the art world from Modernism to Postmodernism, including issues such as camp, authenticity, and democracy, within broader social, cultural, and political changes in the 1960s. This is best represented by the rise of the New American Cinema group led by Jonas Mekas, which promoted Postmodernist “underground” film, in opposition to the film poetry created by earlier Modernist bohemians and defended by Parker Tyler. Next, the chapter will examine the work done by the film poets in this period, including Charles Boultenhouse, Gregory Markopoulos, Willard Maas, and Marie Menken, in juxtaposition to films made by the New American Cinema and other figures like Jack Smith and Andy Warhol. Then, the broader sexual revolution will open up discussion of the growth of the gay community, the decline of the bohemian sexual world, and the search for complimentary sexual systems for bohemians in New York City, Latin America, the Mediterranean, and Asia. The divide between gay identity, bohemian, and other groups will be shown chiefly through the discussion of the notion of sensibility, in the forms of gay, mythic, pop, and hip sensibilities. Finally, the chapter will look at the resurgence of Parker Tyler’s writing career at the end of the 1960s after a boost in popularity from Gore Vidal’s novel *Myra Breckinridge*, which included a character based upon Tyler.

The Sixties was a period of tremendous social, political, and cultural upheaval. The civil rights movement of the 1950s that had brought about the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision moved beyond behind-the-scenes tactics and began to use direct action in attacking segregation, racial inequality, and economic injustice.⁷ American “affluence” shifted discussions of change

⁷ See discussions of the civil rights movement in the 1960s in Bloom, *Class, Race, and the Civil Rights Movement: The Changing Political Economy of Southern Racism* (Bloomington, University of Indiana Press, 1987), Chris Rhomberg, *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), Peter F. Lau, *From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court: Brown v. Board of Education and American Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), and Peniel E.

and progress to social and cultural issues from economic and political ones, which was critical to the development of postmodernism, and the personal as political element into identity politics.⁸ New waves of youth and student activism transformed the political, social, and cultural spheres, not to mention the art world, as will be examined later.⁹ All of these shifts were essential to both creating the environment for change within art and also for receiving new kinds of artistic ideas that would lead to further changes in broader society.

This decade brought challenges to the film poets' Modernism and to their bohemian lifestyle from unexpected places. Shifts in cultural discourse highlight the two major points of tensions. Within the realm of avant-garde filmmaking, the shift towards Postmodernism created conflicts over the purpose, quality, and meaning of avant-garde films. Where once the struggle for Tyler and his circle was defining film poetry, whether it was legitimate art, and what its value was, the debate shifted to one over the "authenticity" of an artist and his or her film. Discourse over sexuality and sexual identity also shifted in this decade. While bohemians had long advocated for increased dialogue regarding sexuality, they had always fought for universal concepts of sexuality that could apply to everyone. The growth of the gay community, with an increasing belief in a distinct social, sexual, and political identity for gay men and women, pushed forward dialogues of sexuality. At the same time it posed a risk of dividing a diverse group like the bohemians and offered a more limited understanding of sexual identity. Through both of these challenges, the film poets learned how to promote their vision of art, sexuality, and

Joseph, *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006).

⁸ See broader discussions of changes in the American thought and society in the 1960s in Howard Brick, *Age of Contradiction: American Thought and Culture in the 1960s* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), and Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, 4th ed. (2004, repr.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁹ See Andrew, John A. 1997. *The Other Side of the Sixties: Young Americans for Freedom and the Rise of Conservative Politics*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press) and P. Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, eds., *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960's and 70's* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

identity in a new world of competing ideas. These two shifts and the subsequent chasms for the film poets were not separate, but rather stemmed from the same place: both were part of a politicized turn in the understanding of identity based on the personal. As people pushed personal matters, such as sexuality, into the public sphere, the reception and interest in art shifted towards a desire for authenticity. This had enormous ramifications for art and for artists, particularly the bohemian film poets who did not exactly fit into this new dynamic.

Part of the cultural shift of the decade was an attack on formalism. Previous debates within the Modernist “high art” world centered around differences in opinion on content, aesthetics, and ideas, and were always held in a serious tone and a formal manner. By the mid-60s, Postmodernist cultural critics and intellectuals, especially in New York City, began to dismiss high-art entirely. This new critique focused on mass culture, democracy, and fun, and many artists and intellectuals placed value on art based on its “authenticity,” even for avant-garde film. Part of this discourse around art and formality came from the intellectual analysis of “camp” given by Susan Sontag in 1964. “Notes on Camp” was an era-defining essay that said camp celebrated the unnatural, the artificial, and comic exaggeration. Sontag largely credited the development, use, and influence of camp to gay culture.¹⁰ Camp both played with informality but also artificiality. This was connected to a larger assault on formalism in all of art, journalism, culture, and life and greatly affected the work of film poets. Within the avant-garde film scene, the move away from formalism was a central pillar to the New American Cinema and their underground film movement.¹¹ Film poetry was caught between these changing ideas.

Modernist in its outlook, these films utilized creation and artifice and were not concerned with

¹⁰ Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” in Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays* (1964: reprint, New York: Picador, 2001).

¹¹ Raymond J. Haberski, *Freedom to Offend: How New York Remade Movie Culture* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), introduction, 8-12.

“authenticity,” which drew some parallels to camp, but film poetry was generally formal. So film poetry was often part of the avant-garde that came under fire from artists that sought less formality in art.

Jonas Mekas was the chief proponent of this attack on formalism and the most vocal challenger within avant-garde cinema to the aesthetics and principles of Modernist film poetry.¹² Mekas was a champion of what came to be known as “underground” film. His role in the movement developed over time. He immigrated to the United States from Europe in 1949, after he had fled his native Lithuania in 1944 and had been interned in a Nazi labor camp. He long attended screenings at Amos Vogel’s Cinema 16 and became an advocate and film critic of avant-garde film. Mekas co-founded and edited the journal *Film Culture* beginning in 1955 and wrote a weekly column, “Movie Journal,” for the *Village Voice* starting in 1958. It was, however, his role as a leader and founder of the New American Cinema in 1959 that shifted the discourse and direction of avant-garde cinema in the 1960s. His new platform in the *Village Voice* allowed him to increase his vocal demands for change in avant-garde cinema.

Jonas Mekas officially organized this new movement and group in the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹³ Mekas published “A Call for a New Generation of Film-makers” in *Film Culture* in 1959, which demanded a new direction for the avant-garde. While reiterating parallels to film poetry, such as anti-commercialism, anti-materiality, and experimentations in form and aesthetics, Mekas advocated ideas that would be categorized as “Postmodernist” and attacked the “overprofessionalism and overtechnicality” of film art including the film poems of the 1940s and

¹² See David E. James, *To Free the Cinema: Jonas Mekas and the New York Underground* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), P. Adams Sitney, ed., *Film Culture Reader* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2000), Jonas Mekas, *Movie Journal: the Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959-1971* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1972), Stephen Petrus, “To Break Down the Walls: The Politics and Culture of Greenwich Village, 1955-1965” (PhD diss., The Graduate Center, CUNY, 2010).

¹³ I will refer to the broader movement around Mekas in the 1960s as “underground film” and the more official movement and organization that he created as New American Cinema and the New American Cinema Group.

1950s. He acknowledged that the film poets had freed cinema from Hollywood studios and he hoped that “the new generation of film-makers would eventually free direction, acting, and sets from their commercial conceptions and go on to seize the truth of their experiences and their dreams.” Mekas claimed that even many experimental filmmakers had become “miniature Hollywoods.”¹⁴ Unlike Parker Tyler and the film poets, who wanted to present highly-crafted creations depicting universal aspects of humanity and myth, Mekas and the New American Cinema wanted spontaneity, improvisation, and amateurism, which they felt evoked authenticity and therefore truth.

In September of 1960, Jonas Mekas and over twenty other filmmakers officially created the New American Cinema Group, often referred to simply as “the Group.” Mekas, his brother Adolfas who jointly ran *Film Culture*, filmmaker Shirley Clarke, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie who made *Pull My Daisy*, along with about twenty other producers, filmmakers, actors, and distributors met at the Producers Theater and formalized the group. The group wanted to support and promote new avant-garde filmmaking in the United States and sought to create a film distribution cooperative as well as new film festivals. In this way, some of its goals and functions were similar to those of the Gryphon Group and even Cinema 16, which was perhaps why Gregory Markopoulos was initially involved. Members agreed to pool some profits towards maintaining such organizations and assist filmmakers in finishing films. The group hoped to promote a surge of new avant-garde filmmaking and took a stand against censorship and Hollywood commercialism. They pledged to organize, support, and promote new “underground” films, none of which was particularly new to the world of avant-garde filmmaking.¹⁵ The

¹⁴ Jonas Mekas, “The Experimental Film In America,” *Film Culture* 19 (1959), in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 74-5.

¹⁵ “The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group,” *Film Culture* 22-23 (Summer, 1961), in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 79-83.

difference in their approach to some of these tasks, when compared to Cinema 16 and the Gryphon Group, was that the New American Cinema was intended to be more democratic and unstructured, principles of Postmodernism. Mekas and a few others retained influence, but in general they wanted to accept all artists and allow all members to have a voice in decision-making.

There was also something very new in their aesthetic principles and therefore their expectations for the Group's films. The New American Cinema attacked the "polished" and "slick" looks of films, whether they were Hollywood blockbusters or Modernist avant-garde works. The first published statement of the New American Cinema Group claimed that clean, finished, and edited visuals masked corrupt or empty themes in film, which placed a moral value on the aesthetics of a film. Officially, the Group did not endorse any aesthetic style or mold, but did emphasize the need for less edited visuals, which they believed were more authentic.¹⁶ "We don't want false, polished, slick films – we prefer them rough, unpolished, but alive; we don't want rosy films – we want them the color of blood."¹⁷ This emphasized two principles of Postmodernism: deconstructionism and particular authenticity (as opposed to universalism). Mekas further differentiated the underground from the Modernist film poets, he said, "Whereas the experimentalists such as Maya Deren, Willard Maas, Hans Richter, and Sidney Peterson were concerned with the exploration of the subconscious, with the development of a universal, abstracted film poetry, free from time and place, this other group of film-makers were interested in exploring their world in a more prosaic and realistic manner, right here and now."¹⁸ This notion, which Mekas had promoted for several years, was now endorsed by a growing number of

¹⁶ "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 80.

¹⁷ "The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 83.

¹⁸ From Jonas Mekas, "Notes on the New American Cinema," *Film Culture* 24 (Spring, 1962), in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 89.

filmmakers and this new direction in avant-garde film was supported by an organized and expanding group.

The Group functioned on a collective and democratic basis. It and the Film-makers Cooperative, the distribution organization formed by the Group in 1962, were run by the artist members. The Co-op accepted any and all films for distribution and charged half the fees that Cinema 16 and commercial distributors charged. The intention behind all of this was to eliminate the control of either a profit-driven board or the aesthetic taste of a single programmer, such as Amos Vogel in the case of Cinema 16. The Co-op did not license its films, which would have subjected them to the censorship board. By not licensing, the co-op protected the few films that would not have passed the review.¹⁹ Through his role at *Film Culture* magazine and his regular column “movie journal” in the *Village Voice*, Mekas championed the ideals of this new underground cinema while simultaneously advertising and sensationalizing the films. His voice and vision for avant-garde cinema in the 1960s did not go unchecked within the bohemian world. Parker Tyler frequently challenged Mekas’ writings and leadership and tried to maintain the course of poetic film principles.

Anticipating the changing tide in art and film ahead, Parker Tyler attempted to amplify Modernist criticism of and standards for film poetry. As the world turned against formalism, he hoped to resist it by pushing film art to be *more* formal. In 1960, he noted, “some time ago, I decided that film poetry was so much younger, and so much more awkward to handle, than word poetry that there was little use in judging it... by the same rigid artistic standards.”²⁰ A decade and a half after its birth, Tyler felt the new art form had emerged from its infancy and had to be

¹⁹ See chapter 5 “The ‘Flaming’ Freedom of Jonas Mekas” in Haberski, *Freedom to Offend*, 119-151, in particular 126-8.

²⁰ Parker Tyler, “Harrington, Markopoulos, and Boultenhouse: Two Down and One To Go?,” *Film Culture* 21, (Summer 1960), in Tyler File, Anthology Film Archives.

held to the same standards as all art. Shortly before this, Tyler sought to synthesize the aims, accomplishments, and weaknesses of the film poetry movement and lay out the problems within the group in order to improve their work in the future. Tyler noted that film poetry, unlike Hollywood film, was not commercial, that it was independent both in terms of funding and in being created by a single person. It took seriously its work as imaginative art. Tyler believed that film poets “used the camera the way a poet uses his pen,” not as big industrial films used the camera to “swallow and reproject” vast images, nor underground filmmakers’ passive technique of simply capturing truth.²¹ Despite these praises, Tyler felt film poetry at times was intentionally contradictory and radical, often immature, and helpful as these were in its beginning, film poetry as an art needed to grow up. More importantly, it needed to not stray from its roots and should continue to strive to find “those prime sources of ritual and myth where humanity refreshes and revitalizes itself as in a mystic bath.”²² By 1958, Tyler saw Sidney Peterson, Willard Maas, Stan Brakhage, Maya Deren, Curtis Harrington, and Kenneth Anger, all of whom were film poets, as the leading filmmakers whose work would continue to challenge commercial cinema by making films as art. Yet try as Tyler could to steer the direction of film art, a major rupture occurred within avant-garde cinema.

At the outset of the decade, Tyler fought the tone of Jonas Mekas’s film criticism because he saw it as little more than propaganda for underground film. Tyler wrote articles and reviews of films in both avant-garde film magazines and in leading literary and art journals. At the end of the decade Tyler wrote his masterpiece on avant-garde film, *Underground Film*. It focused primarily on the period from 1957 to 1969 and included many underground films, more significantly it applied Modernist criticism to them and constructed a history back to the 1920s.

²¹ Parker Tyler, “A Preface to the Problems of the Experimental Film,” *Film Culture* 17, February 1958, in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 42.

²² Tyler, “A Preface to the Problems of the Experimental Film,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 50.

It was largely within this arena of the small press that Tyler and Mekas debated the merits of certain films, the history of avant-garde cinema, and the direction that the movement ought to take. Two films and their critical reception exemplified the polarization in the film art world which led to underground film's major challenge to film poetry.

On November 11, 1959, Cinema 16 premiered the second version of John Cassavetes's film *Shadows*, preceded by the beat film *Pull My Daisy*. *Pull My Daisy* was supposedly inspired by the first version of *Shadows*, which had been screened in Paris in 1957.²³ Amos Vogel, proprietor of Cinema 16, told Cassavetes, who was unable to attend the premiere, that the event "exceeded all expectations... the house was packed for all performances... [and] at the end, there was a long and pronounced ovation that continued for a longer time than I have witnessed at Cinema 16 in many a year."²⁴ *Shadows* drew rave reviews in particular from critics and was instantly slated for larger commercial screening and distribution. The reception of *Pull My Daisy*, however, was quite different. These two films placed side by side, which had seemed natural to Vogel, created a juxtaposition that highlighted this growing divide in postwar avant-garde film. Major figures like Amos Vogel, Parker Tyler, and Jonas Mekas each came to show critical support for one and sharp disapproval of the other, all while a new wave of film washed over the art world of the 1960s.

Both *Shadows* and *Pull My Daisy* were black-and-white films that grew out artistic environments in New York City. *Shadows* looked at street youths and the jazz scene in the city, while examining race relations and the tensions and complications connected to interracial sex and romance. Though more narrative in form, its scenes were often broken or detached and the dialogue and content were often improvised. While there were some setting shots of busy streets,

²³ "Program Announcement: Fall 1959/Spring 1960" in Scott MacDonald, *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 364.

²⁴ Letter from Amos Vogel to John Cassavetes, 17 November 1959, in MacDonald, *Cinema 16*, 369.

racy jazz theaters, parties, and other symbols of the bustling city, most of time the camera is held very close up on two or more people in conversation. There was a tension and excitement in the animated dialogues between the actors in what felt like very close quarters within the frame. One of the main characters, Lelia, stood up to men's assumptions of her space, body, and actions. In response to one character who asked to whom she belonged, Lelia replied "I belong to myself." The film also included a couple of insults towards beat culture. When one character was said to be writing a novel about another's life, he responded disdainfully, "Better not be any of that beat generation jazz like the last one." While this film was not made by one of the film poets and differed in key regards, particularly its narrative structure, many aspects of the content and form reflected principles from the more film poet bloc of bohemia.²⁵



Figure 4.2: Still of Lelia in *Shadows*. By John Cassavetes, 1959.

The film *Pull My Daisy* was about the beat life and space. The camera moved from intimate close-ups during conversations between Peter Orlovsky and Allen Ginsberg to a distant shot from the ceiling that exposed a large area of a Downtown loft apartment. A wife had invited a bishop over for dinner and discussion. The nice evening was ruined by the husband's beat

²⁵ *Shadows* connection to film poetry is examined further on pages 14-15.

friends, who crashed the party, disrupted the discussion, and teased the bishop. There was no audible dialogue by the actors, rather Jack Kerouac improvised narration and dialogue and the entire film was set in the space of just a single apartment in New York City. Each film in its own way garnered a great deal of attention and each was referenced as groundbreaking during the 1960s and after.



Figure 4.3: Still of Gregory Corso and Allen Ginsberg in *Pull My Daisy*. By Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, 1959.

Tyler wrote about these two films in a piece for *Film Culture* in 1962, aptly titled “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” which aided in polarizing the old Modernist and new Postmodernism strains of avant-garde film.²⁶ Tyler understood the response he would get from the readership of Mekas’ journal *Film Culture* and took a little jab at them, “I can hear some of my readers: Here’s that Heavy Culture Man again! Right, man.”²⁷ He gave his own background and credentials first, so that readers understood on which side of the avant-garde film debate he

²⁶ Much to Jonas Mekas’ credit, he did run opposing opinions to his own in *Film Culture*. This of course helped to boost readership and publicity, but could also have been linked to his belief in opposing censorship. Tyler acknowledged this as well, saying “I am glad I could present my argument in this particular form in this particular place.” Parker Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” *Film Culture* 24 (Spring, 1962), in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 115.

²⁷ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 109.

fell.²⁸ Tyler then laid out a lengthy condemnation of *Pull My Daisy* and commendation of *Shadows*. At the heart of his critique was the move in both culture and art away from the principles of the bohemia and film-poetry that he and his friends had worked for during the past three decades. Tyler blasted *Pull My Daisy* and its broader artistic world, “The most striking thing about the modern school from which *Pull My Daisy* stems is its lack of historical consciousness in its own field: its obvious debt...” to Dadaism, Surrealism, Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others.²⁹ Earlier acclaim for the film’s authenticity called it “Fresh.” Tyler in turn said, “the film’s as fresh as a frozen green pea... [which] is an authentic green pea with a relatively new unfreshness.”³⁰ Tyler tried to extend the debate beyond authenticity to history, aesthetics, and poetic principles.

The film poets were concerned with how the value placed on authenticity impacted art and criticism, which Tyler addressed in his critique. He noted that if authenticity was the measure of art, then anything and everything constituted art. Either everything was authentic or else nothing was, so such a debate was useless. Thus, the drive for “authenticity” was damaging. The older generation of bohemians believed that developed skills, what Tyler sometimes referred to as “plastic,” and intended creation outweighed authenticity in defining art. Tyler felt that authenticity downplayed human thought and capacity and it did not make something *morally* good.³¹ Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford had built their bohemia in the 1930s on Modernist creative imagining of art, identity, and community. This same focus on skill, craft, and creation

²⁸ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 109. Interestingly, Tyler usually did not include much about himself in his theory and criticism. He felt in this piece that he had talked too much about himself but then said that recent cultural shifts suggested “that the grammatical first-person no longer denotes egocentrism.”

²⁹ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 110.

³⁰ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 110.

³¹ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 110-111.

was central to the work of the film poets in the postwar era. The morality of authenticity felt like an attack on the world that Tyler, Ford, and their poetic group had created.

To judge film and art based on authenticity also reduced the level of critical analysis of avant-garde films. Tyler lamented the lack of critical thought given to this new wave of art. In the film poets' world, criticism and feedback were humbling and they helped to produce better work. "The avant-garde impulse... its free speech had become, at last, less the artist's privilege than the soap-boxer's arrogation. The spotlight of publicity has always been something the Belligerent Bohemian needed like warm bath: It's quieting (at first, anyway)."³² In his harshest criticism, Tyler said that the Postmodernist new wave disconnected the cultural revolution from its roots and endangered the work done by film poets by stripping them of their hard-fought credibility. "Never before today has the bohemian revolt been considered so ofay-and never before, consistently, has the outcast tramp-poet been so much a theatrical charade."³³ Tyler used these arguments in his direct analysis of the two films.

In turning to *Shadows*, Tyler praised it for doing what he felt *Pull My Daisy* had not: *Shadows* achieved the goals of Modernism. *Shadows* "punctures life, as it were, the skin of life, and, as the bleeding goes on, vanishes before the outflow is stanchd."³⁴ In *Pull My Daisy*, "Life is a surface that, from this viewpoint, is tantalizingly inarticulate, laced with enigmas of sound and sight, fleetingly submerged in its own volubility." Tyler then pinpointed the reason for that, "this stylistic trait is clearly related to the modern ambiguity in arts," where *Pull My Daisy* "steers, willy-nilly, toward the self-consciously literary, at times the arty... its gab unwinds from

³² Tyler, "For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 110.

³³ Tyler, "For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 111. "Ofay" was a slang term for a white person used by African-Americans, and was sometimes derogatory. It was sometimes used affectionately within bohemia, such as when Leroi Jones referred to Charles Henri Ford as his "ofay brother."

³⁴ Tyler, "For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*," in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 112.

the reel created by this much practiced self-consciousness.”³⁵ Tyler saw *Shadows* as achieving a kind of poetry, despite its narrative form and “documentary-style” aesthetic. The film subtly played in a space between races, lovers, and definitions, taking on ideas of passing, forbidden romance, and sexuality. Tyler commended the filmmaker and said, “*Shadows* could have been the opposite of delicate. But Cassavetes had a saving intelligence for what he was doing. He possesses a film sense and human tactfulness, a feeling for the inner person’s dignity and the facts encompassing it.”³⁶ For as much as Tyler saw *Shadows* as achieving artistic goals where *Pull My Daisy* did not, others disagreed.

After seeing these two films, Jonas Mekas came to a different conclusion about the future of avant-garde cinema. Mekas felt disappointment with the second version of *Shadows*. He had seen the first version and promoted the film before its release, calling it “the most frontier-breaking American feature film in at least a decade.” However, Mekas felt that “the second version of *Shadows* is just another Hollywood film.”³⁷ Most of the content remained the same from the first to the second version. However, the first version of *Shadows* was almost entirely improvisation. Mekas praised the first *Shadows* for “break[ing] with the official staged cinema...,” which meant no makeup, poor sound quality and editing, and rough camera work and imaging. Mekas felt these qualities revealed the authenticity of the film. However after early screenings, John Cassavetes chose to reshoot half of the film with the support of Amos Vogel, to improve the story, visuals, and technical work in the film. This move towards polished visuals, professionalization, and technical perfection were, in Mekas’ eyes, harbingers of the commercialization of film art.

³⁵ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 112.

³⁶ Tyler, “For *Shadows*, Against *Pull My Daisy*,” in Sitney, *Film Culture Reader*, 113-116.

³⁷ Jonas Mekas, “Two Versions of *Shadows*” 27 January 1960, in Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 10.

If the second version of *Shadows* showed Mekas the potential downfall of film art, *Pull My Daisy* was the hope. It offered “new ways out of the frozen officialdom and midcentury senility of our arts, toward new themes, a new sensibility.”³⁸ Mekas praised the aesthetics of the film, but it was an intangible quality that he cited as the reason this film would change avant-garde cinema. Mekas felt that the director, Robert Frank, had “succeeded in transplanting life—and in his very first film. And that is the highest praise I can think of... we believe him, we believe he is not faking, not pretending.” The improvisation of Jack Kerouac’s narration and the informality of the images, the looseness of the actors in the unremarkable New York apartment all gave the film, for Mekas, an authenticity that he felt had been taken out of *Shadows* in its second version. Mekas promised to use *Pull My Daisy* as a “signpost” for all his reviews and criticism thereafter. More importantly, he used this film as an example of a new movement in avant-garde film in which he would be a leader and proponent: the New American Cinema.

In the end, Tyler and Mekas represented the two sides of avant-garde film in this transitional period from Modernism to Postmodernism. Tyler and the film poets wanted a continuation of their poetic principles in film art, while Mekas pushed to upend those standards with the rising movement of underground film. This friction within New York’s experimental cinema continued through remainder of the decade and until the collapse of the Modernist group in the 1970s.

While the debate between Tyler and Mekas helped draw the lines for what the New American Cinema stood for, the group’s first major battle came with the screening of *Flaming Creatures* in 1963. While many aspects of the film represented the new Postmodernist art, for which Mekas greatly defended the work, it did also contain some elements of Modernism. *Flaming Creatures* was the work of Jack Smith and featured a variety of “creatures” in a range

³⁸ Jonas Mekas, “*Pull My Daisy* and the Truth of Cinema” 18 November 1959, in Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 5-6.

of gendered states performing dances, rituals, and sexualized acts. The male and female actors wore an assortment of make-up, fabrics, and women's clothing amid a set evoking Arab and Latin American environments, all of which left it difficult to separate male and female, or masculine and feminine, to contemporary American sensibilities. The film stock was outdated and black-and-white and the set was on a rooftop with minimal context or background, which created an indefinable space and gave the film a dream-like otherworldly quality.



Figure 4.4: Still of one of the “creatures” from *Flaming Creatures*. By Jack Smith, 1963.

The particularly shocking part of the film for audiences and censorship boards was a scene where a group of the “creatures” raped a young woman. The scene included kissing, bodies, hands groping breasts, and limp penises, and culminated in forced cunnilingus. The transvestism, nudity, and rape were all enough to violate obscenity codes and alert censors. Word of these elements of the film got out and reached the censorship board and the police.³⁹

The film became the center of a battle over obscenity and censorship. Jonas Mekas attempted to screen the film early in 1964 at the New Bowery Theatre, where he had regularly

³⁹ “AVANT-GARDE MOVIE SEIZED AS OBSCENE,” *New York Times*, 4 March 1964, 33.

screened New American Cinema films. Detectives from the District Attorney's office came to the theatre, seized the reels of film, and arrested Mekas and several others. Seventy people who were at the theatre to see the film were sent away and given refunds for their tickets.⁴⁰ Mekas proceeded with a legal fight to show the film, which was a brazen attempt to challenge the censors. A week later he attempted to screen another banned film, Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour*, just to continue to harass the police and censors. Other Village activists, intellectuals, and artists also began to advocate on behalf of *Flaming Creatures* in print and through word of mouth.⁴¹

The themes, form, and content of *Flaming Creatures* have been thoroughly discussed both in contemporary media and in academia. In a sharp turnaround from his stance in the late 1950s, Mekas applauded the graphic nature of "homosexuality" in the film, while the censors condemned the film for its inclusion of homosexuality and rape. Susan Sontag wrote a famous defense of the film, in which she lauded the film's "generous" visuals and its camp quality, and called it "a brilliant spoof of sex."⁴² Parker Tyler saw sexuality in the film but emphasized its sadistic side and did not see it as a portrayal of homosexuality.⁴³ Tyler, Sontag, and Mekas all discussed the film as high art on an academic level. Jack Smith disagreed in a way with all of these interpretations.⁴⁴ In Postmodernist fashion, Smith set out to make a fun art film, not specifically serious high art. He said that in his early private screenings people laughed from beginning to end, which he enjoyed. After this crusade by Mekas began and once "*that writing*

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For a thorough look at these events, see Haberski, *Freedom to Offend*, 119-151.

⁴² Susan Sontag, "Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*," in Gregory Battcock, *New American Cinema: A Critical Anthology*, (New York: Dutton Press, 1967), 205-210.

⁴³ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 19, 42.

⁴⁴ Juan Antonio Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars: Avant-garde, Mass Culture, and Gay Identities in the 1960s Underground Cinema*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996), 186-7.

started,” Smith felt that the film was turned into a political tool for Mekas’s gain.⁴⁵ In this disdain for the politicization of the film and perhaps in its universalist portrayal of sex and gender, *Flaming Creatures* echoed some of the concepts of Modernism from film poetry.

Both Jonas Mekas as defender of *Flaming Creatures* and the censors who condemned it all used the film’s “homosexuality” as the rationale. However, the creatures in the film were not gay or homosexual. Rather, the characters represented the removal of boundaries of sex, gender, and sexuality, which was part of the long tradition of bohemian art and sexuality and also evoked Postmodernism. Susan Sontag and Parker Tyler both understood the deeper complexities at play in the film. Sontag wrote, “The truth is that *Flaming Creatures* is much more about intersexuality than homosexuality.”⁴⁶ Tyler similarly believed that much of avant-garde film sought to remove taboos and barriers between people and to, in turn, “homogenize the sexes.” In this very vein, Tyler read this through a Modernist lens and felt that *Flaming Creatures* was about “homogenized sex, rather than homosexuality.”⁴⁷ Even to look back at the orgiastic scene that was considered so shocking, the more interesting aspect of it was the complete lack of any definitive sexes, genders, or sexualities as the camera panned over various body parts. Jack Smith was not part of the earlier film poetry movement, but his notions of gender, sex, and sexuality contained elements that of the bohemian model. However, many participants in the New American Cinema and also gay rights activists increasingly tried to define, contain, and minoritize homosexuals and gay art. The older avant-garde, the film poets and bohemians like Tyler and Maya Deren, and even some newer Postmodernist artists like Smith, found difficulty

⁴⁵ Suárez, *Bike Boys, Drag Queens & Superstars*, 187.

⁴⁶ Sontag, “Jack Smith’s *Flaming Creatures*,” in Battcock, *New American Cinema*, 209.

⁴⁷ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 104.

in expressing their notions of bohemian sexuality amid an increased awareness and discussion of homosexuals and homosexuality in America.⁴⁸



Figure 4.5: Still of “homogenized sexes” from *Flaming Creatures*. By Jack Smith, 1963.

While some of the content of *Flaming Creatures* and other New American Cinema films was appealing to Modernist sensibilities, the form and technique often were not. Parker Tyler felt that Smith and others in the underground had a “casual empiricism of technique that may come from inexperience,” but could be deliberate to give their films “the air of being literally true” or the illusion of authenticity.⁴⁹ Maya Deren similarly attacked the lack of editing and technique used by the New American Cinema early in the 1960s. She said the method “reminds me of nothing so much as an amateur burglar in a strange apartment, turning all the drawers onto the

⁴⁸ Perhaps the most prominent look at homosexual identity was the *Time* article “The Homosexual in America” in 1966, along with various news programs on TV and other articles in print. The *Time* article declared that there was increasing interest and acceptance of gay people, though many people still saw them as abominations or perverts. The article, while sympathetic, repeatedly refers to gay men as “deviates” and reinforces the notion that homosexuality stems from psychological disorders. This article represented increased discussions in America of homosexuality and sparked further debates. The article also addresses the idea of the “homintern,” or “gay mafia” of the art world. While the article is dismissive of such a powerful group, it does say that gay men are highly involved in creative jobs, including theatre, television, and film. Art Critic Harold Rosenberg was quoted as saying that there was a “banding together of homosexual painters and their nonpainting auxiliaries.” This was an example of the conflation of gay identity with bohemian artists identity, and was against what Tyler, Deren, and the other film poets were working. “The Homosexual in America,” *Time*, vol. 87 issue 3, 21 January 1966, 52-56.

⁴⁹ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 80-1.

floor, cutting up the mattresses, ripping off the backs of pictures, and in general making one ungodly, clumsy mess in a frantic search for a single significant note.” Deren felt that the film poets that preceded the underground, “[began] with a concept, a magnet charged with conviction and concentration.”⁵⁰ Other film poets felt the same way. James Broughton felt filmmakers should challenge social and artistic norms, “but this doesn’t mean that all you have to do is turn on the camera and express yourself,” as he felt Postmodernist filmmakers did.⁵¹ Even Gregory Markopoulos, who was at least nominally part of the New American Cinema, after seeing more of where that group was headed criticized other filmmakers who made films in a “mode of filmic conception as any birth from coenogenesis,” suggesting he did not respect those who did not conceive of a film and create it with the intent to see their vision come to life.⁵² Resistant as the old film poets were, they continued to make their films through the 1960s but found their voices often drowned out by the wave of New American Cinema.

Markopoulos criticized many elements of underground film in veiled ways through his continued beliefs and artistic production as a film poet. Markopoulos acknowledged that there was indeed something different about the “new American cinema” compared to previous waves of avant-garde film in the 1920s, 30s, 40s and 50s.⁵³ However, he criticized the New American Cinema filmmakers in the same vein as Tyler for their belief that their films were artificially conceived outside the “body” of film history. In his writings, Markopoulos focused his positive attention on filmmakers peripheral to the underground, like Charles Boultenhouse, Storm de Hirsch, and Andy Meyer. De Hirsch was a poet in the 1950s and early 1960s before turning to film. She overlapped at times with Mekas and the underground, but her films were radically

⁵⁰ Mekas quoted Deren from *Village Voice* on 21 June 1960 in Jonas Mekas, “On Improvisation and Spontaneity,” 2 March 1961, in Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 26-9.

⁵¹ James Broughton, *Coming Unbuttoned* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 1993), 35.

⁵² Markopoulos, “Three Film-makers,” 23-24.

⁵³ The writing of the New American Cinema without capital letters could have been a slight to group and movement.

different. Similar to the film poets of the 1940s and 50s, she desired to create her poetry in a visual medium. *Divinations* and *Peyote Queen* were both abstract films in which de Hirsch painted, scratched and otherwise manipulated the film stock itself. The result was transformations of colors and shapes that did not resemble life or reality from a mostly solitary and outside figure in avant-garde film. Meyer's film *Match Girl* was not a film poem, but it did challenge Postmodernist Pop Art and the underground. The piece focused on the dreams of a young actress in Andy Warhol's factory. While an underground work, it also critiqued and demythologized Warhol's whole world of building superstars in his film and art.⁵⁴ As harsh as they sometimes were, the film poets did have some good things to say about the New American Cinema.

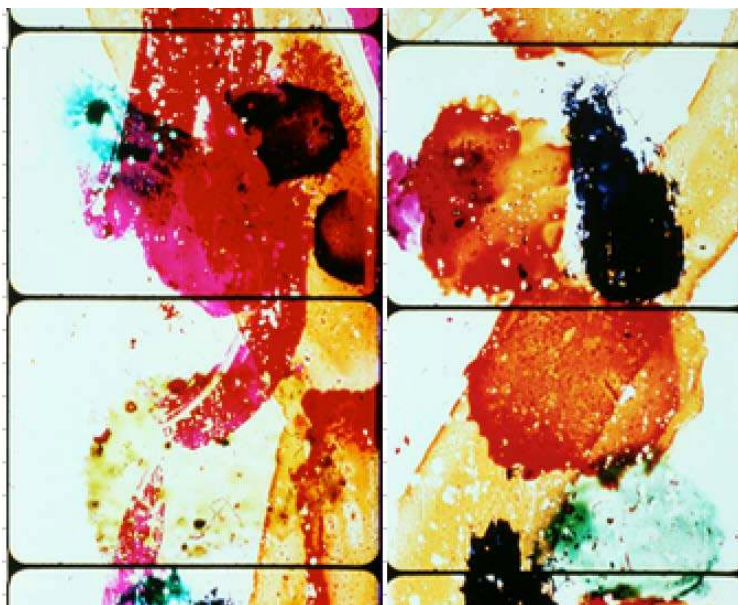


Figure 4.6: Painting on film stock technique in *Divinations*. By Storm de Hirsch, 1964. Anthology Film Archives.

Praise often accompanied the reproach in the interchange between the film poets and the underground. Jonas Mekas said that Marie Menken was a great improviser and experimentalist, using her entire body in the process of filming. “You can feel Marie behind every image, how

⁵⁴ Markopoulos, “Three Film-makers,” Boultenhouse File, Anthology Film Archives.

she constructed the film in tiny pieces and through the movement. The movement and the rhythm this is what so many of us seized upon and have developed further in our own work." Menken similarly said Mekas was a great writer and filmmaker, and that she "liked [Mekas'] *Guns of the Trees* and you have to be a Lithuanian to truly understand it and I am." Menken did however undercut Mekas' movement, calling it instead "the new "Undertow"... [Mekas] thinks it is the Underground but since we are not walking on water this season but referring to it, undertow is a better nomenclature for the U.S. as new wave was for France."⁵⁵ While reviewing Maya Deren's *The Very Eye of Night*, Mekas said "It is impossible to capture in words a film which is, basically, a poem, and which affects us not by its story but through its visual associations and symbols... [it] is a very thought-out film, clear and crystalline." This was high praise for film poetry, yet Mekas still attacked its formality and universality, where he said that Deren dug more into the universal subconscious rather than her own subconscious.⁵⁶ Yet for all of this tension and infighting, these filmmakers clearly did respect and appreciate their colleagues who made film art. By the middle of the decade, both the film poets and the underground artists around Mekas had to contend with another innovative new start without the film and art world.

This Postmodernist shift in avant-garde film saw the most success under the direction of Andy Warhol. Warhol sought, in a camp sensibility, to make bad films. He abandoned formalism entirely, sometimes refusing to edit. He also shunned authorship of his films, by acknowledging that most of his films were produced by groups of people at his factory and by methods such as turning on a camera and walking away from it. In all of his art, Warhol attempted mass production techniques and incorporated popular culture ideas and imagery, all in an attempt to

⁵⁵ Leslie Mandell Interview of Marie Menken, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁵⁶ Jonas Mekas, "Maya Deren and the Film Poem," 25 February 1959, in Mekas, *Movie Journal*, 1-3.

informalize and democratize art.⁵⁷ Warhol, in effect, created his own little Hollywood, as both Tyler and Mekas alluded to in their writings. He commercialized avant-garde film and the underground aesthetic and was able to bring it to a much larger audience than ever before. While Warhol rose to become one of the most successful and emblematic symbols of this turn against high art, his was just a part of a larger shift and the film poets persisted in their art throughout the decade.

Amidst the ideological debates over the direction of film art and the power struggles between these various groups, the film poets made their film poems. Most stayed steadfast in their poetry principles, however they did socialize, collaborate, and engage with new underground and pop art filmmakers. Gregory Markopoulos, Willard Maas, Marie Menken, Stan Brakhage, and others all produced and screened films. Parker Tyler wrote reviews and articles on avant-garde film and Charles Henri Ford experimented with poetry in other visual media.

The artistic and aesthetic tides had truly changed course and those artists that either involved themselves in the new movements or engaged in the dialogue continued to find outlets for their work. Gregory Markopoulos and Stan Brakhage worked with the New American Cinema, but resisted their form. Marie Menken, Parker Tyler, and Charles Henri Ford socialized and discussed art with Andy Warhol and his cohort. Charles Henri Ford held a close friendship with Gerard Malanga, who was the most important artist within Andy Warhol's factory after Warhol himself. Many of the bohemian film poets continued to voice their beliefs regarding art, aesthetics, and sexuality in debates with advocates of change and in that way remained relevant and in the conversation. Tyler more than anyone else engaged in arguments in the pages of *The*

⁵⁷ See Douglas Crimp *"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), and J.J. Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Village Voice and *Film Culture* with Jonas Mekas. Other film poets who did not keep up with these changes slipped out of prominence or felt forced to remove themselves.



Figure 4.7: “Henri Ford Presents Gerard Malanga.” Photo by Gerard Malanga, 1968.

Gregory Markopoulos increasingly grew frustrated with the changes in the art scene. In 1966, Markopoulos made *Galaxie*, which was in many ways a Modernist equivalent of Andy Warhol’s *Screen Tests*. Warhol’s *Screen Tests* were rough and raw black-and-white film portraits of various artists, celebrities, socialites, and factory superstars, and included Gerard Malanga, Charles Henri Ford, Willard Maas, Marie Menken, Jonas Mekas, Allen Ginsberg, John Ashbery, Susan Sontag, along with hundreds of others. The *Screen Tests* felt as if you were looking at the person standing in a room with you. Markopoulos’ *Galaxie* included some of these same figures, like Ginsberg, Sontag, and Mekas, but included other bohemians more significant to the film poets, like Parker Tyler, W. H. Auden, Storm de Hirsch, the Kuchar Brothers, George and Mike,

and Jasper Johns. *Galaxie* was in bright color, but it was edited and polished and not meant to feel *real*. Since Markopoulos' portraits were of artists, he filmed them within the space of their home or workshops, not amidst a white background at the Factory as most of Warhol's *Screen Tests* were done. More importantly, Markopoulos spliced in blank screens, creating a jarring flashing effect. He also cut to objects and things around the room, which created a well-rounded portrait. In this way, Markopoulos continued the Modernist film poets' ideas and aesthetics but also entered into conversation with pop art.



Figure 4.8: Left: Still of Gregory Battcock from *Galaxie*. By Gregory Markopoulos, 1966.

Figure 4.9: Right: Still of Jonas Mekas from *Screen Tests*. By Andy Warhol, 1964.

Markopoulos' more emblematic work for the mid-1960s was the film *The Iliac Passion*. It was based on the Greek tragedy Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, where Markopoulos maintained the use of myth and ancient Greece. Markopoulos cast Andy Warhol as Poseidon, Taylor Mead, a Warhol regular, as a Demon, and Jack Smith, who made *Flaming Creatures*, as Orpheus. The film utilized rich colors, art, and modern interpretations of ancient imagery. For instance, Warhol as Poseidon rode a stationary exercise-bike amid a sea of plastic wrap with images of his famous poppy prints on the wall behind him. Parker Tyler commended Markopoulos' "mythic sensibility," "magic editing," and his "uncompromising eye for the beauty of the nude" in regards to *The Iliac Passion*. Tyler continued, "The film is consciously

subjective, seriously playful, as a film poet's declared fantasy about the gods." Though Tyler criticized Markopoulos' first overt use of celebrity, overall he saw the film poem as an impressive and important Modernist work. Markopoulos left the United States shortly after *The Iliac Passion*, and Tyler saw hope in this transition, saying, "If Markopoulos could be weaned from the very milieu [the recent Postmodernist underground and pop artists] that has nourished and rewarded him, he might some day live up to his great promise."⁵⁸ While Markopoulos was productive in exile, many of his friends that remained in New York City were straining to keep their creativity up.

Several film poets struggled in the atmosphere of pop art and New American Cinema aesthetics. Willard Maas, who had made many well-received and influential films in the 1940s and 50s, did not make any films in the early 1960s. It was not until his involvement in Andy Warhol's world that he began making films again. Maas was the subject of one of Warhol's *Screen Tests* in 1966. That same year, Maas made the short film *Andy Warhol's Silver Flotations* based on a gallery installation by Warhol.⁵⁹ Like Marie Menken's *Visual Variations on Noguchi*, Maas managed to take the artistic work of someone else and make a piece that was truly his own poetic voice. In the Warhol installation, the viewer entered a room filled with silver Mylar balloons that covered the ceiling and moved around from the wind created by a fan. Maas' four-minute film brought the camera up close to the "silver flotations" so that the viewer felt he or she was moving throughout them. Music reminiscent of a sci-fi movie created the sense of traveling through outer space. As the camera swung and passed by the balloons, the space of the room felt limitless and the number of balloons felt infinite. It was not until the last moment of the film when the camera pulled back where one saw the whole scene of the cluster of balloon within the

⁵⁸ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 215-17.

⁵⁹ According to Gerard Malanga, Maas was allegedly the off-screen actor in the Andy Warhol film *Blowjob*.

walls of the room. So although the film was inextricably tied to the work and prestige of Andy Warhol, Maas managed to create new emotions and experiences out of Warhol's work. Warhol greatly respected both Maas and Menken. He included both of them in several of his films, regularly socialized with them, and offered some astounding praise when he said of the couple, "Willard and Marie were the last of the great bohemians. They wrote and filmed and drank."⁶⁰

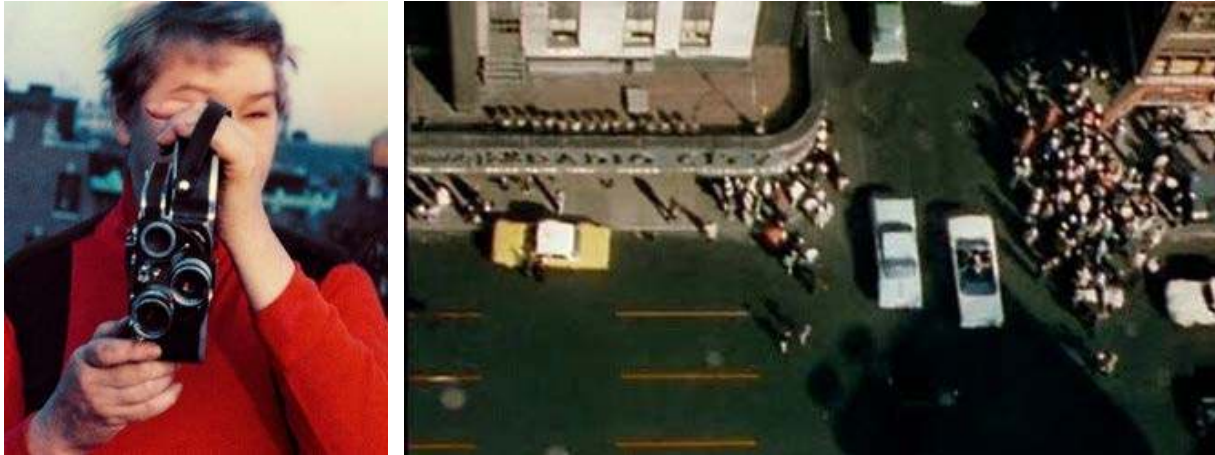


Figure 4.10: Left: Marie Menken, 1960s.

Figure 4.11: Right: Still of street scene from *Go! Go! Go!* By Marie Menken, 1964.

Menken made several new films in the 1960s including *Glimpse in the Garden* and *Go! Go! Go!*⁶¹ Made in 1962, *Glimpse in the Garden* was a 5-minute color film of various visuals of natural life in a garden. An audio track of birds chirping and other nature sounds immediately transports the audience to a warm summer day in the garden. Menken played with a variety of camera techniques as she did in all of her films. She shot some images close up and some from a distance. She held the camera still at times and cut through a series of different plants and scenes, and frequently rotated or swung the camera around to capture different views of the garden and at the same time to make the viewer feel lost within it. The diversity of subject and camerawork

⁶⁰ From Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 40, and see Elizabeth Wilson *Bohemians: The Glamorous Outcasts* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 68.

⁶¹ See discussions of Marie Menken's films and "place" in Scott MacDonald, *The Garden in the Machine: A Field Guide to Independent Films about Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

created lush and textured imagery. *Go! Go! Go!* was a color film from 1964 of various scenes of bustling Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the harbor. Shots were taken from cars and rooftops viewing city-life on the streets below. People, buildings, cars, and boats all skid by at a fast pace, both at their own high speeds and due to the film being artificially sped up. Students raced by the camera during graduation from Wagner College, workers flooded the streets of 6th Avenue and Madison Square, young women danced at a debutant ball, attendants poured into a church for a wedding, Willard Maas sped through typing on their Brooklyn Heights terrace, and young people enjoyed the beach and boardwalk. The film evoked not just the fast pace of city life but of life more broadly as you felt the different stages of school and career and the different spaces of home, leisure, and work. Beyond making these films herself, Menken was featured in several of Andy Warhol's films, including *Chelsea Girls*, *Screen Tests*, and others. Overall, Marie Menken was highly productive in the 1960s.

Though Willard Maas did not make as many films as in prior decades, he worked to continue The Gryphon Group in the 1960s as he had done in the 1950s. The decade started off well with Maas advertising under the Gryphon Group name, which promoted the brand.⁶² The group organized events with filmmakers, "Gryphon symposiums," to raise money to help its members finish their films.⁶³ Maas organized a special screening at the Living Theatre with six new Gryphon Group films, Stan Brakhage's *Wedlock: An Intercourse* and *Window Water Baby Moving*, Charles Boultenhouse's *Hand Written* and *Henry James Memories of Old New York*, and Marie Menken's *Dwightiana* and *Zenscapes*. Two of Maas's earlier films, *Geography of the Body* and *Mechanics of Love*, were also shown at the event. Maas worked to establish a Gryphon Film Group award of \$1,000 for an up-and-coming filmmaker who created "film as poetry,"

⁶² Letter from Willard Maas to "Gideon," "Friday," Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁶³ Letter from Willard Maas to Charles Boultenhouse, "Tuesday," 5.22, CBPTPNYPL.

which was a clear effort to counteract the growth of pop art and underground film. As the 1960s moved on, however, avant-garde film moved farther and farther away from the 1950s conception of film poetry.

Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford continued to create their poetic works and to influence the art world with their bohemian ideas. In 1960, Olympia Press in France reissued Tyler and Ford's 1933 novel *The Young and Evil*. Though it still remained technically banned in the United States and the United Kingdom, it found its way into both countries and to a new generation of readers. Author and literary critic Mary McCarthy offered a quote for the back of the new publishing, and said that rereading the novel was "even better perhaps than when I first read it... [it seems] more appealing... [and] the language is so fresh."⁶⁴ There was still an audience for this bohemian art and world that Tyler and Ford had created decades prior. Praise from younger artists illustrated the important role that Ford and Tyler served as mentors. In the mid-1960s, Philip Lamantia, who was discovered by Ford and Tyler in their *View* days, expressed the importance of Tyler and Ford's reactions to a new book of poetry and said "I think its great...for the three of us, you [Ford], Parker & I to be issuing so many books & demonstrations all in the same general time span; it's a sign too, of a new stage being reached."⁶⁵ Ted Joans, who was another *View* discovery and traveled with Ford in Greece, wrote of Ford in late 1964, "Charles Henri Ford one of my mentors one of my guides and one of my ofay soul brothers needed by my side (truth one can not ever forever hide)."⁶⁶ The bohemian concepts that Ford and Tyler imparted to their mentees were not always able to overpower these other ideologies of the 1960s but the bohemian message still made an impression.

⁶⁴ Letter from Mary McCarthy to Charles Henri Ford, 1 May 1960, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

⁶⁵ Letter from Philip Lamantia to Charles Henri Ford, 10 January 1967, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

⁶⁶ Letter from Ted Joans to Charles Henri Ford, 9 December 1964, 14.1, CHFPHRHRC.

Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford were instrumental in the start of Warhol's filmmaking in the early 1960s. Tyler invited Ford to the Film Culture office for a private screening of *Flaming Creatures* and Ford brought along Warhol. Tyler noticed certain elements of the younger generation and the Postmodernist shift in the art scene in Warhol, including his "beatnik bawdiness and shabbiness" and that he was "proud" and "gay." After watching the film, Warhol marveled at, what he believed was, the "easy-to-doness" of avant-garde film and thought that all a filmmaker needed was "personality[,] drive and picturesque obsession: the queerer the better."⁶⁷ Warhol thereafter began making films. In 1963, Gerard Malanga, second in charge at the factory, wrote to Ford, "Andy has hit the New American Cinema scene; is having a still from one of his movies on the next cover of FILM CULTURE; is making a short new film every week to be shown at the Gramercy Arts Theatre. You launched him and now he's upset the entire film scene with his pranks."⁶⁸ It was in no small part due to this introduction to film that Warhol and his factory filmmaking colleagues all looked up to Tyler and Ford for their role in bringing them into film. However, as much as Tyler, Ford, and the other film poets were able to maintain their ideology amidst competing visions within the arts world, larger social changes were also weighing down on the Modernist bohemian sphere.

The 1960s was an era of dramatic shifts in sexual mores and was the start of the postwar sexual revolution in America. The film poets had long pushed for greater discussion and exploration of sexuality and promoted their bohemian sexual system. That sexuality was a universalist one that allowed for anybody and any sexuality to participate in their group and create poetic art. However, as discussion of sexuality grew, it was also increasingly politicized so

⁶⁷ From Parker Tyler's manuscript for "Warhol: Horrible or Beautiful Filmmaker," 2.7, PTCHRHC.

⁶⁸ Letter from Gerard Malanga to Charles Henri Ford, 13 December, 1963, 14.3, CHFPHRHC.

that the discourse of sexuality and identity was changing in ways that were detrimental to the Modernist film poets.

The gay community took shape in the 1960s as a distinct and oppressed cultural minority with a political identity, which was the culmination of several decades of activism. Many young men and women with same-sex attractions from across the country connected during World War II in the military or auxiliary industry. There they built social and sexual bonds.⁶⁹ Following the war, many of these men and women remained in cities at the time when cities were bleeding populations out into the suburbs. In the 1950s, the beginnings of political organization and activism were spearheaded by the likes of Harry Hay and Frank Kameny in large cities on the coasts, creating “homophile” organizations like the Mattachine Society, ONE, and the Daughters of Bilitis. These early organizations were small, numbering in the hundreds, and were scattered across a few large urban areas. Most were “inward-looking,” meaning they focused on discussion, esteem building, and community networking. However small as this work was, it constructed information pathways and opened up dialogue both within the gay community and with policy-makers in broader society through magazine publishing.⁷⁰

By the mid-1960s, activists within the gay community were taking increasingly militant measures to advocate for change. Frank Kameny and others in Washington D.C. fought against job discrimination by the federal government. Kameny and the Mattachine Society of Washington D.C. picketed the White House in 1965. In Philadelphia, gay-rights groups held sit-ins to protest businesses that refused to serve costumers that were perceived to be gay. As the

⁶⁹ See Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*, (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 1-7.

⁷⁰ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 108-148.

decade went by, members within these organizations began to call for an increase in public direct-action to raise visibility of the gay community and of their goals.⁷¹

Notably absent from all these developments were the film poets and bohemians. As homosexuals came to comprise a distinct minority group from the 1920s through the 1940s and developed a social and political identity as such in the 1950s and 1960s, the film poets continued to identify themselves with their bohemian roots and identity. They continued to advocate an alternative understanding of sexuality and sexual identity that was removed from the work of the gay community. It was not just that bohemia was different, but rather that there seemed to have been almost no real awareness in bohemia of these gay rights groups or of the movement more broadly.

There were other groups of artists who similarly identified with and practiced this bohemian sexuality. Studies have shown the importance of gay identity and a gay sensibility to the work of various artist circles. Nadine Hubbs *The Queer Composition of American Sound* says that gay identity was critical to the composers Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Leonard Bernstein, Paul Bowles, and others and the American songbook that they created. Hubbs uses “queer” almost synonymously with gay and suggests that “musical” was a euphemism for gay, which is similar to arguments made about art and Greek myth. David Lehman’s work *The Last Avant-Garde* about the New York School of Poets John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler, is both a history of the group and a contemplation of the nature of “the avant-garde.” The sexuality of the New York School of Poets was rather diverse and Lehman embraces that complexity, which falls in line with bohemian sexuality, though his analysis of it is not fully developed. Regina Marler has proposed the same importance of queer identity and sensibility for the beats in *Queer Beats*. Marler does a great deal in documenting the tangled

⁷¹ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 149-175.

sexual relationships and identities of the beats. However, she makes some mistakes such as conflating present-day queer identity with the use of the term “queer” in the 1950s. All these works have taken for granted that gay identity was a fixed and understood concept by the 1960s. Many of the figures in these studies were connected to the film poets, and those like Paul Bowles were bohemian and did not identify as gay, while others like Allen Ginsberg were of a younger generation and, though did not fully embrace gay identity, were more comfortable with it. Only certain people and groups embraced gay identity; it was highly in flux and contested by others and it was only one of several concepts of identity and sexuality in the period.

Alternatives to the rise of identity politics and to a gay identity as connected to a unique minority group existed but have not been adequately studied. Robert Corber’s look at Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin offers one of the few examples of artist resistance to gay political identity.⁷² Corber saw this alternative as a response to the “domestication of masculinity.” Corber posits that in the post-war era, the Cold War demanded that men submit to large corporations and organizations, consume mass products, and behave cooperatively not individually, independently, or ambitiously. Gay political identity, in this view, embraces the Cold War era emphasis on consumerism and assimilation/incorporation. Corber therefore sees the alternative conception of sexuality and identity practiced by Williams, Vidal, and Baldwin as a challenge to gay political identity within the Cold War crisis of masculinity. The bohemian sexuality and identity of the film poets was however not simply a response to gay political identity in the 1960s but rather was rooted in a long history of alternative sexualities and identities of the bohemian poet.

⁷² Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

Bohemians were immune to and removed from the forces that shaped the gay political identity of the 1960s. Allan Berube and John D’Emilio have both shown that World War II played a large role in uprooting young men and women from smaller towns and immersing them in large single-sexed environments in coastal cities or on the battlefield.⁷³ This was not the case for the film poets and bohemians who had already left their hometowns to live as artists in New York and Paris due to their creative ambitions, not strictly their sexual orientation or drive. Most also did not serve in the military, whether because they provided skills in other ways or because they were conscientious objectors. D’Emilio then emphasized the bonds built out of the fear and oppression in the 1950s as central to forming gay identity and driving the growth of community in urban areas which were losing populations to the suburbs.⁷⁴ Due to their unconventional lifestyle and occupations, bohemians were not subject to the same fears of job loss that many gay men and women experienced during the broader “lavender scare.”⁷⁵ Oppression for artists came in the form of censorship. This could have been for a variety of reasons, not specifically one’s sexual identity; so bohemian identity did not foment around sexual identity. Lastly, D’Emilio points out that much of the influence in constructing a gay political identity stemmed from exposure and involvement in the civil rights movement,⁷⁶ in which the film poets and bohemians were not involved.

The bohemian artist sexual circle was rather insular. The poets and filmmakers developed overlapping artistic and sexual relationships within their group, which more than anything was important to their creating art and writing poetry. This was exhibited by the tendency of these artists to enter into relationships with other artists, not outsiders. Even sexual activities outside of

⁷³ See Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire* and D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 23-39.

⁷⁴ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 40-52.

⁷⁵ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁷⁶ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 149-175.

romantic partnerships often remained insular, as Gerard Malanga wrote to Charles Henri Ford of parties and orgies that took place at Allen Ginsberg's apartment in the East Village.⁷⁷ While there was some potential for the bohemian world and the gay world to overlap, especially in lower Manhattan, just as it was in the 1930s these two constituencies existed in separate spheres in the same place.

It was even difficult at times for artists to find forays into the gay sexual scene. Ford had little trouble finding sex as he traveled abroad or through his artist networks, but he was unable to navigate the field in New York. When discussing his lack of sex life during one of his visits to the city, a friend mentioned some of the current gay social spots but Ford was unable or uninterested in going. He showed some interest in a place where he could pick up young Puerto Rican men, which reminded him more of the sexual systems in the Mediterranean.⁷⁸ By the mid 1960s, Charles Boultenhouse, who was Parker Tyler's lover for 20 years by then, began branching out into sex outside of his relationship with Tyler. Yet, he quickly found that within the bohemian sexual scene, he was "persecuted by too many old friends."⁷⁹ By the mid-1960s, the former sexual geography and systems of these film poets was shrinking and disappearing.

Bohemian sexuality and gay life differed, which stemmed in large part from their distinct perspectives and sensibilities. Bohemians did not connect to the political side of the gay rights movement and prized individualism over communal identity. These divides came through in the film poets' thoughts and vocabulary, particularly in the notion of "sensibility." Sensibility was the concept that one's identity somehow informs or shapes the artistic work that one produced. That identity could be something innate or constructed, which in this case could be a person born

⁷⁷ Letter from Gerard Malanga to Charles Henri Ford, 8 November 1964, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC.

⁷⁸ See Charles Henri Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5 CHFPHRHRC, 140-141, and Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 111-113.

⁷⁹ See Charles Boultenhouse's Puerto Rico Diary, 6 August 1970, 1.2, CBPTPNYPL, 7-14.

as a homosexual or a person who became a bohemian poet. At stake in terms of sensibility was who could make art and whether or not that art was authentic. The notion of a gay political identity and a matching gay sensibility would have the effect of restricting anyone who was not gay from creating art that dealt with that sexuality and would deem attempts at that art as inauthentic.

By 1967, Charles Henri Ford had a firm understanding of the variety of sensibilities at play in the art world. In comparing Jack Kerouac's work to that of other beats, he wrote, "Kerouac's work, and his sensibility [were] disastrously un-homosexual."⁸⁰ In this Ford seemed to believe in gay sensibility. Yet, he did not like it when Gregory Corso implied that Ford had a gay sensibility and through it "saw the woman" in Corso.⁸¹ Ford knew that a gay sensibility had emerged, which was a result of the growth of a gay community and identity in the 1960s, but he still identified with the mythic and poetic sensibilities of bohemia.



Figure 4.12: Still from *Iliac Passion*. By Gregory Markopoulos, 1967.

⁸⁰ Charles Henri Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5 CHFPHRHRC, 19.

⁸¹ Charles Henri Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5 CHFPHRHRC, 19.

These complex feelings and understandings of sensibility became clear when placed next to Parker Tyler's description of the sensibility that stemmed from the bohemian film poets: the mythic sensibility. The centrality of myth to both bohemian identity and to the Modernist art created by this group was evident going back to the 1930s. However, in response to the growth of a gay sensibility in the 1960s, Tyler thoroughly outlined his understanding of the mythic sensibility in his work on avant-garde film. He gave it a spiritual element and defined it in part as the assumption that people have "godlike faculties" to move and act freely and an inward drive and power to fulfill all their desires. All of this he felt was central to the tenets of Modernist poetry.⁸² Tyler introduced the mythic sensibility in his discussion of Marie Menken's film. Intentional or not, it showed that the mythic sensibility was not exclusive to men, or gay men. It was not, as some scholars have interpreted it later, simply a "code" for gay sensibility. He added that Charles Boultenhouse and Gregory Markopoulos had it, both men who were in relationships with other men, but also that Stan Brakhage, who was married to a woman and did not have sex with men, as holding this particular vision. Tyler wrote of Markopoulos, "No individual filmmaker embodies the mythological sensibility and its poetic aura more than Markopoulos... His virtues of magical editing to create transcendent effects and his uncompromising eye for the beauty of the nude and its filmic possibilities..." He also made clear that any person willing to study myth, art, and poetry could develop and learn this sensibility, which illustrated this was not tied to any innate characteristic.⁸³ Tyler compared this to a Postmodern sensibility as well, when Tyler described Warhol's art and Pop Art more broadly as having a "hip sensibility," and also saying that Warhol was not a true artistic filmmaker at all.⁸⁴ Beyond these differences in

⁸² Tyler, *Underground Film*, 217.

⁸³ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 215-17.

⁸⁴ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 222-223.

sensibilities, bohemians and self-identified gay men used certain words in very different ways, even words as seemingly simple as “gay” or “homosexual.”

Members of the younger generation seemed much more apt to consider themselves gay and to revel in the sexual freedom of the 1960s afforded by the gay community. This new gay identity was innate, naturalized, and all-encompassing. This was markedly unlike Ford and Tyler’s earlier understanding of a “homosexuality” that was just a part of one’s larger sexuality, or of Ford’s idea of “becoming homosexual.”⁸⁵ This new understanding of gay identity opened up the younger generation to different community and sexual experiences.⁸⁶ This also meant that the new generation that was coming of age saw the previous bohemian ideals of Tyler and Ford in a very different light. Charles Boultenhouse mentioned in a letter to Charles Henri Ford of the increased interest in earlier work of Ford, Tyler, and their friends. “The younger generation is asking about you all the time so you are beginning to penetrate.”⁸⁷ Ford’s reply was a cheeky “Now, there’s no idea I like more than “penetrating” the younger generation,” but the larger point was that the Modernist work of Ford, Tyler, and the other film poets was reaching that newer, more Postmodernist generation, many of whom were more likely to identify as gay. The earlier bohemian art which so often included same-sex love and relationships was now interpreted through the new prism of gay identity and Ford and Tyler were painted as gay pioneers.⁸⁸ However, just as Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler were coming to symbolize gay forefathers to younger American artists, Ford’s own sexuality was taking off in a new direction.

As the sexual world of the bohemians was constricted and mislabeled from the outside, the film poets explored other spaces, places, and communities outside of the gay world and

⁸⁵ See the discussion of “bohemian sexuality” in Chapter 1 and for Ford’s quote, see Chapter 3.

⁸⁶ See letter from Gerard Malanga to Charles Henri Ford, 8 November 1964, 14.3, CHFPHRHRC, where he references “parties, smoking, orgies, at Ginberg’s.”

⁸⁷ Letter from Charles Boultenhouse to Charles Henri Ford, 4 January 1965, 4.9, CBPTPNYPL.

⁸⁸ Letter from Charles Boultenhouse to Charles Henri Ford, 8 January 1965, 4.9, CBPTPNYPL.

outside of New York City. This pushed bohemians in search of sexual systems that were more similar to their own and so they engaged with the Latino community in New York City and traveled to Latin America, the Mediterranean and to Asia. Due to Ford's earlier travels in Europe and North Africa and his conception of self as a global citizen, he was among the first bohemians to leave behind New York City's declining bohemia in search of other bohemian-compatible spaces around the globe. Others followed Ford's path by over the course of the 1960s and 1970s.

This decade was a new era of sexual experience for Ford. Not due to relaxed social mores or to the growth of gay identity and the gay community, but rather because Ford was single for the first time in decades after the death of Pavel Tchelitchew in 1957. Ford's relationship with Tchelitchew was not a monogamous one, Ford having noted that he "was as promiscuous, on the side, as [he] could possibly be."⁸⁹ Yet, Ford was limited by his relationship in some ways and this was the first time in his adult life that he had complete sexual freedom.

Ford traveled alone throughout Europe and Latin America on a journey to explore sexuality on his own and find his art again. He visited old friends and acquaintances in Mexico City and he spent time in Paris and socialized with the Beats Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs. He maintained correspondence with Paul Bowles in Morocco, and planned a trip to visit him.⁹⁰ Outside of the larger cities like Paris, Athens, and Mexico City where he knew people, Ford traveled through the countryside in Italy, around the Yucatan Peninsula, and among the islands of Greece. It was on these expeditions that Ford played sexual voyeur and tourist and continued his artistic and intellectual study of sexuality.

Everywhere Ford went, he observed the men and women in public squares, on boats, in cafes and restaurants, and at the beaches. He flirted and conversed with men and women,

⁸⁹ Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 161-2.

⁹⁰ The beats, in particular William Burroughs, spent a good deal of time in Morocco and visited with Bowles there.

gauging their interests and practices, and often came away with a sexual partner. In one instance, he spent a few days with a young naval recruit from Crete and some of his friends. The friends of the recruit knew of his interest in Ford and gave the two some time apart to have sex. In another case, Ford met a man on a boat to Samos and they flirted and fooled around on board. The man and his wife ran a coffee shop on the island and Ford stayed with them in a guestroom.⁹¹ Ford had a lot of sexual partners in his trip through Greece, but was far less active and promiscuous in his travels in Italy and Mexico.

Beyond the act of sex, Ford analyzed the sexual practices, systems, and sexualities of the local people and towns everywhere he went. He was particularly fond of the sexual system in Greece, which seemed to him markedly different from France or the United States. He noted that the men and youths he engaged with did not consider themselves “gay” or “pederasts.” He found different taboos there. For instance, they would not kiss after oral sex there as was done in France. Prostitution was visible and accepted, but stigmatized. This was evidenced to Ford when his romance with the naval recruit was soured after Ford gave him a few coins as a present; the gesture, he realized after, had made the recruit feel like a prostitute. Still, Ford found the freedom there to be remarkable, noting that “nothing outside the Arab World – is more spontaneous – nothing that I’ve known – than lovemaking with the Greeks.”⁹² His most exciting moment of the trip was leaving a movie theatre with the naval recruit and squeezing each other’s hands as they walked down the street.⁹³

Ford also took note of the broader sexual and gender system outside his personal interactions. On one Greek island, he saw and heard about a local man that wore women’s clothing. Ford dubbed her “The Folle of Varthi,” somewhat derogatory as “folle” is French for

⁹¹ Charles Henri Ford’s Greece Journal, VI, 28.2, CHFPHRHRC, 31-32.

⁹² Charles Henri Ford’s Greece Journal, VI, 28.2, CHFPHRHRC, 31-32.

⁹³ Charles Henri Ford’s Greece Journal, VI, 28.2, CHFPHRHRC, 31-32.

“mad woman,” however Ford came to gain appreciation for her status in society. Ford first believed that she was just a “clown” or a “pet” for the locals, but saw that the women accepted her and she moved around freely on her own, often singing in the streets. Ford had thought her status was akin to that of a “whore,” but came to see she had a good reputation. Lastly, Ford compared the differences between the “folle” and people in the United States such as Christine Jorgensen, whose story was top news at the time.

Ford’s experiences in Mexico and Italy differed from Greece in unusual ways. Ford traveled through the Yucatan, through the larger city of Merida, through Puerto Juarez (present-day Cancun), and spent a long time on Isla Mujeres. He compared the sexual atmosphere and system to other places, noting it was less open than Greece but more relaxed than New York. He wrote of hanging out with young men on the beach, but it was not clear if he slept with any. He complained often of not having much sex, even once resorting to using a conch shell for a “new sensation.”⁹⁴ In Italy, it seemed the opportunities for sexual encounters existed, but Ford fell for one young man in particular, which limited parts of his sex life.

Ford reflected that his new relationship replicated the general dynamic of his previous romance with Tchelitchew, only this time the roles were reversed. Ford pondered a great deal about his relationship with Tchelitchew in this period, both mourning his Pavlik but also gaining new insight into Tchelitchew’s side of things. Andrea Tagliabue, whom Ford called Renzo, was a young Italian actor.⁹⁵ After their affair began in Italy, Ford and Tagliabue lived together for a period in Paris. In Ford’s relationships with Tchelitchew and Tagliabue, the older artist imparted his wisdom and experience upon the younger. The younger reciprocated with admiration and gratitude and had an eagerness to absorb more knowledge and culture. This was the same pattern

⁹⁴ Charles Henri Ford’s *Mexico Journal*, 28.5, CHFPHRHRC, 14.

⁹⁵ Tagliabue had a role in a Robert Aldrich film and worked with Mexican film director Luis Buñuel.

of lover and beloved that the poets had practiced in bohemia for decades. Ford returned to New York earlier than anticipated, and left Tagliabue with a month's stay in a hotel unclear as to the future of their relationship. Ford asked one friend for advice and he was reminded that Tagliabue might have felt insecure, something Ford remembered in his relationship with Tchelitchew. His feelings for Tagliabue only became fully apparent after he left Paris on a train headed to the coast. "Last night – the emptiness that leaves a lump in your stomach... When Mother went, when Pavlik went – Renzo went like Mother, sudden. To recover takes time."⁹⁶ He wrote about Tagliabue everyday and the two made plans to meet again in New York, after Tagliabue's filming was over. Ford's friends helped him to bring Tagliabue over to New York and his brother-in-law wrote a reference letter to the Consul at the US Embassy. Tagliabue arrived in early December. Ford's friends were impressed by how affectionate, and "not strictly sexual," the two were.⁹⁷ In the middle of these broader changes in sexuality in 1960s New York, Ford was building a new relationship in the same bohemian vein as his previous one. This had a large impact on Ford's artistic production.

Bohemian relationships were central to the creation of art, so it was no surprise that Ford's new romance stimulated his creativity. The 1950s was a time where Ford lost focus, letting his sexual life overpower his art. Pavel Tchelitchew warned Ford of the dangers of this in the 1940s after *View* magazine folded, when "Pavlik reproached me for my 'pick up' activities," saying that Ford should put more of his energy into his art career and less into sex.⁹⁸ During a stay in New York in the early 1960s, John Myers, Ford's friend and colleague from *View* magazine, told Ford the same thing, that "[Ford's] great weakness and ruin (ruinous of my

⁹⁶ Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 2-24. Again here is a reference that compared lovers to parents within the bohemian sexual system.

⁹⁷ Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 160-164.

⁹⁸ Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 107.

career) has been and is Sex.”⁹⁹ Ford’s move back to making art was a slow one. He wrote to Paul Bowles that he “started writing poetry again, but a new kind... devoid of description or apparent sense, using words as sound notations to create a form - no doubt an emotive form. I might write a libretto for you in this way.”¹⁰⁰ He had had four exhibitions in Rome and Paris of photographs, paintings, and drawings. As much interest as these events drew from artists in Europe, they amounted to false starts and something was missing. By the mid-1960s through his mentorship of emerging new poets and his relationship with Tagliabue, he had made a serious return to art-making and, in particular, Modernist poetry.

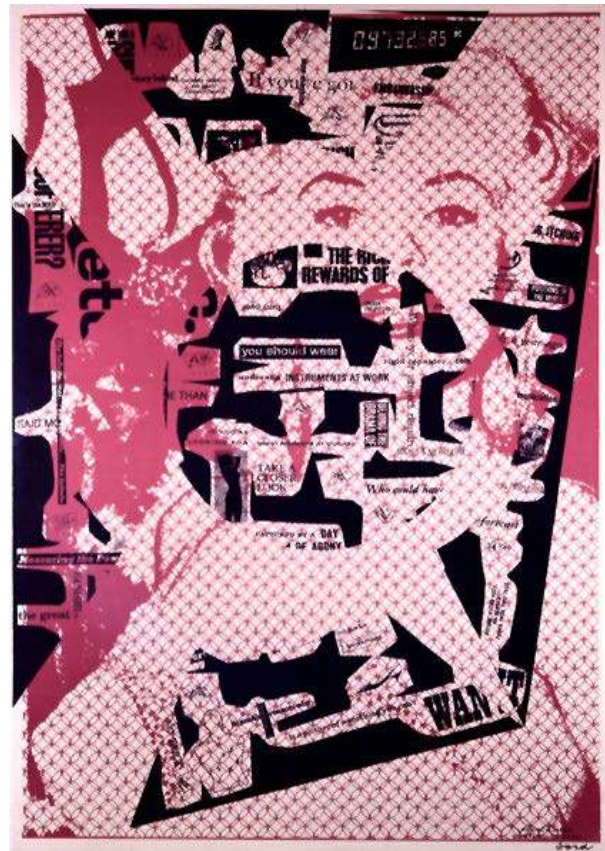


Figure 4.13: Right, "Fallen Woman" from the Poem Poster Series. By Charles Henri Ford, 1964.
 Figure 4.14: Left, "Jane as Jane" (Violet/Blue) from the Poem Poster Series. By Charles Henri Ford, 1964.

⁹⁹ Charles Henri Ford’s Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHC, 149.
¹⁰⁰ Letter from Charles Henri Ford to Paul Bowles, 18 September 1960, 8.12, Paul Bowles Paper, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, henceforth referred to as PBPHRHC.

Ford returned to his roots in poetry and at the same time launched his art into the visual realm. In 1965, Ford created a series of “poem posters.” The concept was largely Modernist and similar to that of the film poem: to express poetic ideas and feelings by visual means. The posters were silkscreened, containing bright colors, images of objects and, in some, celebrities, and words. The words, however, were chosen and assembled in the manner which Ford previously described to Bowles. The words did not necessarily read as sentences or have a logical narrative, rather they were meant to evoke certain visuals and emotions in conjuncture with the other parts of the posters. Some of the poem posters worked in a sequence or related to one another. Tyler reviewed the series, giving them high praise for the inventive new style and medium and for Ford’s return to his poetic core. The poem posters had a certain Pop Art sensibility with their celebrity images and bright aesthetics, not surprising as Tyler pointed out that Ford had an “enjambement with Pop.” Yet Tyler insisted that Ford had “pop” ideas in his poems long before the Pop Art movement of the 1960s. Furthermore, the central piece to Ford’s posters was not the celebrity or a popular mass-produced object, rather it was the poetic words and images combined.¹⁰¹ So the chief difference in Ford’s work from Pop was its literary and poetic nature. Tyler also pointed out the *filmic* “pulse” and nature to Ford’s Poem Posters, especially the “suites” about Jayne Mansfield or W. H Auden as Dracula, further shifted Ford’s art further into the sensibility of the film poets.

To further this transformation of poetry into the visual, Ford made his first film. Ford shot the work in the Cordier & Ekstrom Gallery in New York in 1965, and it was based on his poem posters. The camera followed the installation of his art and the opening party. Marie Menken, Willard Maas, Charles Boultenhouse, Gregory Markopoulos, Andy Warhol, and others

¹⁰¹ From Parker Tyler’s write-up of Ford and his Poem Posters, see Parker Tyler “Charles Henri Ford, Graphipoet,” 27.5, PTCHRHRC.

assisted in the filming, and Jonas Mekas, William Burroughs, Jayne Mansfield, as well as many other friends and colleagues of Ford's attended the party and were featured in the film. This ended up a very roundabout way for Charles Henri Ford to actually enter the ranks of the film poets and he made two films in his career.¹⁰²

The growing arts scene, the rise of the gay liberation movement, and a few other chance events returned the spotlight to Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and their bohemian circle. The new attention and audience came from a certain point of view that might limit the scope of the message of Modernism and bohemian sexuality and identity. Some of the film poets used the opportunity to continue their message within the shifted political discourse. Others found it to be too restricting and either left the country or dropped out of the art scene. For those that remained, like Tyler and Ford, they tried to work toward a resurgence of Modernist bohemia.

Parker Tyler received the benefit of publicity from an unlikely place: the publication of Gore Vidal's *Myra Breckinridge* in 1968. The main character in the novel, aspiring actress Myra Breckinridge, was obsessed with the writings of a certain film critic named Parker Tyler. Vidal claimed after publication that the film critic character in his novel had no connection to the real-life Tyler, which was unlikely. True or not, it meant little to readers who looked for Tyler's writing after reading Vidal's novel. This led to several new book contracts for Tyler in the late 1960s and the 1970s, and re-printings of his older books. His first new book contract was *Underground Film*, which came out just a year after *Myra Breckinridge*.¹⁰³

¹⁰² See Parker Tyler's write-up of Ford and his Poem Posters, see Parker Tyler "Charles Henri Ford, Graphipoet," 27.5, PTCHRHC.

¹⁰³ *Myra Breckinridge* was a best-selling book and one that was highly discussed in literary circles and in broader American society. The first printing in 1968 was for 85,000 copies, and Hackett's estimated that approximately 2,180,000 copies were sold by 1977. As the central figure in the novel, and the 1970 film starring Raquel Welch, was obsessed with the writings of a film critic named "Parker Tyler," this gave Tyler's film writings a great deal of exposure. See "20th-Century American Bestsellers," accessed on 21 May 2013, <http://people.lis.illinois.edu/~unsworth/courses/bestsellers/search.cgi?title=Myra+Breckinridge>.

Tyler used this renewed attention to push forth his ideas of bohemianism and Modernist film poetry. He weighed his strongest criticisms of the New American Cinema in *Underground Film*. He began the work by comparing Postmodernist underground film to “voyeurism,”¹⁰⁴ “peephole excitement,”¹⁰⁵ and fetishism.¹⁰⁶ He said that much of that art was based on the filming and documenting of people, lives, and acts, sometimes but not necessarily sexualized, that had remained out of the public eye. Tyler acknowledged that such portrayals of formerly private spaces were exciting, provocative, and interesting, and that the depictions of “offbeat sex” were of a “phenomenal *moral* importance” because they showed diversity of sexuality.¹⁰⁷ However, Tyler argued that this did not make them *artistically* important.

Larger than this, Tyler was concerned that the underground movement did not intend to challenge or redirect the course of art but to “destroy forever” the art establishment entirely.¹⁰⁸ The anti-commercialism and anti-establishment foundation of the underground, which was central to Postmodernism, could even head down a frightening path toward self-destruction if the commercial establishment took on aesthetics or ideas of the underground movement and the underground turned on the very things it once stood for.¹⁰⁹ Tyler included in this the underground’s attack on Modernist “*formal virtues*” in filmmaking techniques and editing, and the underground’s staunch anti-intellectualism.¹¹⁰ This again was a reworking of the major arguments that Tyler had made against the underground over the course of the previous decade, only now it had the clout of book publication.

¹⁰⁴ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 22-23.

¹⁰⁸ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 196.

¹¹⁰ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 34, 230.

His largest criticism of underground film was its imagined isolation from earlier art. Tyler's whole argument was that underground film and New American Cinema were built on the work set forth by earlier waves of Modernist avant-garde film. In particular, Tyler emphasized the work by the film poets of the 1940s and 50s of mentioning Sidney Peterson, James Broughton, and Maya Deren, and also other avant-garde art, including Dadaism and Surrealism.¹¹¹ Ultimately, Tyler saw the potential ideological outcome of underground film and the New American Cinema to become "a movement to end all history."¹¹² Many of the filmmakers and promoters, such as Jonas Mekas, claimed their work was so radical that it could not be compared to anything that came before it, thereby existing outside of history. For the film critic and theorist or any audience member, this notion meant that the films could not be accepted or rejected against the art that had proceeded them, something that was key to Modernist ideology. "I prefer *history* for the film only because I prefer *consciousness* for the film. Therefore I am for Underground Film only as I am for its historic avant-garde values as these exist and can be verified in a total continuity of aesthetic values."¹¹³ Tyler pushed for a greater questioning and judgment of these films.

Ultimately, for as many wonderful things as Tyler said about underground films and the New American Cinema, he was one of the few voices within the scene that put forth this kind of criticism at all. Mekas was an unabashed advocate and rarely said anything negative about New American Cinema films or filmmakers. Tyler said that this "homogenized" art and criticism, amounting to propaganda.¹¹⁴ Tyler agonized over the sometimes harsh things that he had to say about his friends and colleagues, but as Boultenhouse attested to later, the friendships that Tyler

¹¹¹ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 126.

¹¹² Tyler, *Underground Film*, 234.

¹¹³ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 23.

¹¹⁴ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 22-3.

maintained with those artists whom he criticized was a tribute to the respect that they had for him as a film critic and theorist, not simply a cheerleader of the movement.¹¹⁵

Tyler commended underground film where the films and filmmakers invoked the ideas of film poetry. “One of the most positive things achieved by Underground Film... was recognition of the value of the film work as a charade, in relation to two developments rising independently in the plastic arts: Happenings and Pop Art.”¹¹⁶ Tyler appreciated certain underground films that challenged thinking, expressed bohemian ideas, or that were poetic in nature. Rather than Mekas’ focus on film capturing reality, Tyler often praised films that had intent and tried to verify the “*absence of content in life.*” Thus, this acclaim was really one that supported Tyler’s opposition to the notion of *authenticity* as the most important aspect to art.

The threat posed by both the underground and the rise of gay identity was the *politicization* of art and identity. Tyler warned against the danger of allowing “political coloration” of art films. The anti-establishment angle of underground films, where “the *art* of the film becomes confused with the *social protest*,” created an expectation that all film art was meant to be political.¹¹⁷ Tyler noted that “the avant-garde’s development before the *Film Culture* [Mekas’ magazine] era...wished to bring the plastic sensibility of painting into filmmaking, with the idea of film as a *nonrepresentational* medium; this would exclude social protest *as such.*”¹¹⁸ Tyler believed that art became just a tool or propaganda when it was used towards political ends. This was what happened to avant-garde film under Mekas’ leadership, both in the content of some films but also in the way films were promoted, screened, or used as censorship bait. Similarly, Tyler was against the politicization of one’s identity into a gay identity. Such an

¹¹⁵ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 253.

¹¹⁶ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 11.

¹¹⁷ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 178. This was the same problem that Jack Smith, for instance, had with Mekas and the New American Cinema.

¹¹⁸ Tyler, *Underground Film*, 178.

identity divided people in general, separated artists with different sexual orientations within bohemia, which was why the film poets always sought universal ideals.

That politicization of both art and sexuality felt extremely restricting to bohemians. Tyler continued to make his Modernist arguments within that confined space, but others could not, or would not, do so. Jack Smith, Gregory Markopoulos, and Robert Beavers removed themselves and their work from the New American Cinema scene. Smith became disenchanted with the movement after feeling used by Mekas as a political tool. He made his last film in 1967, *No Presidents*, and only worked in theatre and spontaneous “happenings” during the following two decades. Markopoulos’s films never fit into the aesthetics or ideals of the New American Cinema. By 1967, he grew to dislike the association of his films with the other works in the Underground. Furthermore, with the increased visibility of the gay community and gay rights movement, Markopoulos resisted having his films classified as “gay art.” So in 1967, Markopoulos and his partner Robert Beavers, a fellow filmmaker, moved to Europe and they removed all of their films from the Film-makers Cooperative making their films nearly impossible to see in the United States. Markopoulos even convinced P. Adams Sitney to remove a chapter from his book that was about Markopoulos’s films. Markopoulos and Beavers continued to create films and only more recently had they begun to screen their films again at their own events in Switzerland and Greece.

The 1960s proved to be an era of maturation and decadence for the film poets. The group’s work was well received by the end of the 1950s and their artistry, as Tyler said at the turn of the decade, was mature. The film poets were ready and excited to see film art expand. The poets’ aesthetics and principles did not simply transfer to the new and younger wave of

filmmakers. So while the Modernist film poets continued to make films and express their bohemian identities and lives, they were in fact in a state of decline.

CHAPTER 5: POETRY IN THE ERA OF GAY LIBERATION, 1967-1975

The previous decade's tensions between the film poets' Modernism and the underground's Postmodernism over questions of authenticity, authorship, and plasticity in avant-garde film grew even more complicated as gay liberation burst forth into public debate and consciousness in 1969. The gay rights movement, along with the sexual revolution, dramatically transformed how Americans conceived of sexuality and identity in the 1960s and 70s. Bohemian artists had largely not taken part in the earlier homophile movement's efforts, nor did they consider themselves part of a homosexual minority that was building a conscious gay community.¹ While the broader sexual revolution and the early accompanying gay liberation offered more discussion of sexuality and the potential for pansexuality and perhaps even universalism, a strongly politicized gay identity came to dominate the discourse. After initial interest and excitement, the film poets became concerned about the direction of these changes. Since their world included same-sex relationships, outsiders viewed bohemians as gay. The gay rights movement forced bohemians to confront the issue of identity politics, and to choose whether to embrace the changes, stay put and challenge them, or else reject them and leave New York or the country entirely. These political changes began to encroach upon the Modernists' way of life. As gay liberation shifted from a broader sexual revolution into a politicized minority movement, it began to restrict the poets and filmmakers in terms of their art, identity, and sexuality.

¹ For more on alternative sexualities, see Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997) and Juan Suarez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Champaign-Urbana: The University of Illinois, 2007). For a concise contemporary piece on this, see Gore Vidal, "Bisexual Politics," in Len Richmond and Gary Noguera, eds. *The Gay Liberation Book* (Ramparts Press: Palo Alto, CA, 1973), 134-138.

Parker Tyler addressed some of these tensions and feelings in his poetry. In 1972, he published a volume of his poems titled *The Will of Eros*. The collection was an anthology of his Modernist poetry and included poems dating back to the 1930s. The final poem, which was titled “His Elegy,” served as a requiem for Modernism, and ended with this:

Even as other we are bored, bored horribly
With great life, soon
Soon to vanish... What is there to do but be
Sexual or revolutionary; make money; enjoy, over
Again, the female?

The conversation flags, and insidious, heartbroken,
Socrates,
Whose pricelessly beautiful gymnasium
We inherit inside us, falls expressionless.
Like a muscle,

The soul glistens, and hurdles; the hemlock's
Husband
Continues silent. He will never speak again.
Something dreadful has happened. Melancholy
Overwhelms us.

The poem laments the direction of the cultural revolution in the early 1970s and mourns the Modernist art and bohemian world which Tyler and his friends created and believed had been a truer legacy of the philosophical and intellectual school of Ancient Greece. Postmodernism and the political direction and sexual focus of gay liberation abandoned, in Tyler's eyes, the formalist intellectual structures in which he and his friends had invested their lives.

This chapter will first look at the Stonewall uprising and the growth of gay liberation ideology. Next, it will examine the reaction by bohemians and the challenges posed to their work, as well as the new reception of their art and ideas by audiences, critics, and society at large. It will follow the artists' search for alternatives to identity politics through their interactions with the Latino community in New York City and their travels abroad. Their

bohemian world had declined by the middle of the 1970s. Some members left the country, others abandoned old ways under pressure from identity politics, and many who had been artistically active for 40 or 50 years, died. Their Modernist art and bohemian world collapsed under the weight of identity politics.²

By 1969, New York was a city in unrest. The prior year had witnessed the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the subsequent riots in cities throughout the country. New York City managed to avoid any major disturbances in large part due to Mayor Lindsay's outreach to community leaders and his show of strength and support to the city by walking the streets of Harlem. Later that month however, students at Columbia University took over the administration building and shut down the school in protest of the Vietnam War. In February of 1969, a massive blizzard brought the city to a halt. It took days to dig out and ended in 42 deaths. Beginning in July and for the next four months, a group of political radicals began a string of eight bombings in the office buildings of major corporations, federal government agencies, and army centers in Manhattan. The Woodstock festival, which took place in August, signed acts and advertised in the city starting in April, which created a big buzz within lower Manhattan's countercultural scene. Overall, there was a feeling that social change and political rebellion were on the immediate horizon. Many gay men and women were involved in these social movements, but up to this point there had been little public activism addressing their issues. A new gay rights movement following the Stonewall riots emerged out of this atmosphere.³

² Adorno and Horkheimer describe the "culture industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which says that popular culture is produced in modern industrialized capitalist societies and consumed by the masses of society to ensure passivity. Furthermore, innovations in culture or even rejections of mass culture can in turn be commoditized and consumed by the masses. The film poets' use of ancient Greek myth, their indefinable sexuality, and their notion of individuality were all attempts to resist the "culture industry." See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947, repr.; Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

³ See Charles Kaiser, *1968 in America: Music, Politics, Chaos, Counterculture, and the Shaping of a Generation* (New York: Grove Press, 1997) and Mark Kurlansky, *1968: The Year That Rocked the World* (New York: Random House, 2005).

The Stonewall Rebellion was a turning point in how Americans conceived of sexual identity and how it played out in politics. Stonewall was the culmination of years of gay identity and community building and the work of activists who forged them into a political movement. In 1965, Frank Kameny and other gay rights activists had picketed the White House to protest discrimination in hiring by the federal government.⁴ In 1966, a riot had broken out at Compton's Cafeteria in San Francisco after a police raid in which people in drag had been arrested.⁵ In 1967, there were demonstrations after a police raid of the Black Cat Tavern in Los Angeles where several patrons had been arrested for kissing.⁶ The Stonewall Rebellion was not the start but rather the tipping point where frustration over harassment fomented a political movement, fully entered the public consciousness, and evolved into gay liberation ideology.

At 1:20am on June 28, 1969 police officers raided a popular gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, the Stonewall Inn, and attempted to confiscate the liquor, arrest transvestites, and harass the gay clientele. Stonewall patrons, passersby, and neighbors who had heard the commotion gathered into a crowd on the street outside the bar. Then, a riot erupted as the group hurled rocks, bottles, and curses at the police, along with shouts of "gay power!" The cops retreated into the bar and blocked the door, but the crowd broke the window, set fires in trashcans, and threw bottles and rocks into the bar. Police reinforcements arrived but the unrest continued into the night. There was no prior planning for this act of defiance. Deep frustrations

⁴ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of the Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-70*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁵ Susan Stryker and Jim Van Buskirk, *Gay by the Bay: A History of Queer Culture in the San Francisco Bay Area* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 49.

⁶ Christine Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies and Grog Shops* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 257-8.

within the gay world over police harassment and discrimination meant that many soon added themselves to the growing uprising.⁷

The protest that erupted after the raid of the Stonewall Tavern went on for days and spread throughout the neighborhood. Demonstrations occurred the next night and in the weeks that followed. A tide of resistance and direct action swept the gay community. They held marches and vigils. Neighborhood leaders and political activists propelled the significance of the event and called newspapers to report on the riots at the Stonewall Inn. The Mattachine Society and other gay rights organizations covered events in their own newsletters and called for continued political action. Accounts told of the speed and numbers by which residents throughout the village joined various events and rallies. Some said that they had never seen so many people out and gay in one place before, which showed the activists the real size and strength of their community.⁸

Just two blocks from the Stonewall Inn and in the midst of this uprising in the Village was the apartment of Parker Tyler and Charles Boultenhouse. No record shows that either of these bohemians joined in the events on the night it started or in any of the activities and organizing that followed during that summer. Nor is there any evidence that any of their film poet friends became involved. Decades later, the only connections that Boultenhouse could draw was that he and Tyler had once visited the Stonewall months prior to the uprising on a quiet “off night.”⁹ In fact, the only account of any of these bohemians being connected to the Stonewall uprisings was when Allen Ginsberg and Taylor Mead stopped in the bar two days after the riot while they strolled through the neighborhood. Ginsberg walked through the bar for his first ever

⁷ For more on Stonewall, see D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1994), and David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (Boston: Da Capo, 2007).

⁸ Again, see D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Duberman, *Stonewall*, and Eisenbach, *Gay Power*.

⁹ Charles Boultenhouse, introduction to Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1972; repr., Boston: Da Capo Press, 1993).

visit, danced a little bit, and then left. He reportedly said of the crowd inside, “You know, the guys there were so beautiful – they’ve lost that wounded look that fags all had 10 years ago.”¹⁰

Tyler similarly pointed out this change in mood and atmosphere in the gay community a couple years later.¹¹ Ginsberg was considered very supportive of gay liberation, but as an artist and bohemian even he was not *part* of it. He remained an outside observer, interested in it because he was not within it.

Out of the excited and mobilized atmosphere following Stonewall, a group of new left activists formed the Gay Liberation Front. Gay liberation was a diverse phenomenon that initially included political activists, artists, sexual revolutionaries, and ordinary gay men and women. The potential of a broader philosophy in the first couple years came to be dominated by a political ideology which became the principle belief system for gay identity and the politicization of the gay community.¹² This politicized gay identity had developed over the previous decades, yet after Stonewall its growth overshadowed and even threatened the bohemian artist identity and way of life.

The gay liberation movement and the Stonewall riots had a complex and unexpected effect on the ideas and work of Parker Tyler and the bohemian film poets. These artists were excited about the potential for change and for new discussions. They had long worked for cultural transformation but they still remembered the uses and abuses of political power during World War II and in the years that followed. They were still wary of politics. Interested in some of the ideas of “liberation,” they were conversely concerned that this bout of identity politics might limit their artistic freedoms.

¹⁰ Lucien Truscott, “Gay Power Comes to Sheridan Square,” *The Village Voice*, July 3, 1969.

¹¹ Charles Ortleb Interview with Parker Tyler, July 1973, 14.1 Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, henceforward referred to as CBPTPNYPL.

¹² Again, see D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Duberman, *Stonewall*, and Eisenbach, *Gay Power*.

The gay rights movement stemmed from the building of a separate gay-minority consciousness, which was connected to similar political and cultural developments in civil rights and women's rights groups. This outbreak of activism was preceded by earlier homophile efforts and the growth of gay identity and communities in cities like New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Los Angeles in the 1960s. Gay men and women saw themselves as a community of people who shared their sexuality in common. Through the political discourse of early homophile groups and through the examples set in other civil rights movements by African-Americans, women, and Latinos, they came to understand themselves also as a minority group oppressed by larger straight society.¹³

Gay Liberation challenged the previous political attempts at gay rights made by homophile organizations. Historians have shown that the Society for Individual Rights, the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis, groups active since the 1950s, all collapsed amidst the new political atmosphere of the 1970s.¹⁴ Harry Hay and others created the Mattachine Society in 1950 and its primary task was to create "an ethical homosexual culture," which many understood to mean adjusting gay life to be respectable by heterosexual mainstream standards. Gay liberation political activists counteracted this by claiming that gay men and women were an oppressed minority with a distinct culture.¹⁵ Parker Tyler said the work done by homophile groups helped lead towards greater acceptance of different sexualities, but bohemians similarly resisted the notion of "respectability" that seemed attached to homophile activists in the era preceding gay liberation. However, they did not see themselves as an oppressed minority.¹⁶ The

¹³ Again, see D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, Duberman, *Stonewall*, and Eisenbach, *Gay Power*.

¹⁴ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 240.

¹⁵ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 248-9.

¹⁶ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, xiii.

film poets' belief in sexuality and identity did not fit with either the homophile groups or the newer gay liberationists.

The post-Stonewall gay rights movement echoed changes occurring with civil rights groups and women's rights groups. Gay liberationists found fault with homophile groups that they saw as too passive and assimilationist, just as other groups of the New Left, like radical feminists, the Black Panthers, and the Young Lords, had discovered with their own predecessors. Like these other groups, gay liberationists wanted acceptance on their own terms and opposed assimilation. They felt that homophile groups still harbored feelings that gay men and women were deviant and troubled. Attacking this perceived thread of guilt and shame became a major part of the new movement.

Gay liberation ideology had two aims; one addressed the private and the other the public. The personal half called for each gay individual to liberate him or herself, which entailed accepting one's homosexuality as natural and positive and breaking off the shackles of guilt that straight society had placed on them. The political side was the fight for visibility and fair treatment, which was done through coming out as gay and joining with gay brothers and sisters. As more and more people did this, gay activists formed social and political groups, marched in parades and protests, and petitioned the government to end discrimination.¹⁷ However, this ideology and movement was built on the belief that homosexuality was an unchangeable discrete

¹⁷ For sources and readings on gay liberation, see Len Richmond and Gary Noguera, eds. *The Gay Liberation Book* (San Francisco: Ramparts Press, 1973), Dennis Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation* (1973, repr., New York: New York University Press, 1993), and John Murphy, *Homosexual Liberation: A Personal View* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1971). Altman was an Australian, but made several extended trips to the US, mostly to San Francisco, New York City and Cornell. He was a professor at Sydney University in American Politics, so while elements derive from his personal experiences it had an intellectual and academic grounding. *Homosexual Liberation* by John Murphy echoed much of Altman's book, but was more of a personal account of gay liberation ideas and experience in the Gay Liberation Front. The one note to make is his personal discomfort with gay bars and gay sex scene.

attribute and that it generated a distinct political identity. Both of these ideas directly conflicted with the film poets' understanding of identity and sexuality and threatened their very world.

Within a few years of the Stonewall uprising and the formation of the Gay Liberation Front, liberationists had published a number of books that outlined their principles and recounted their stories of involvement in the movement. Several of these early accounts offered inside perspectives on the gay liberation effort and its ideology. There were many voices within gay liberation in the early years. The political faction that sought to build a civil rights movement was the strongest. Dennis Altman's *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation* written in 1971 was a rallying cry for gay liberationists. He charted the personal and political goals of gay liberation and he started by insisting that there was a natural division between a heterosexual majority and a homosexual minority. This distinct division between straight and gay people was critical to liberationist thought. Furthermore, central to their political outlook was, in Altman's words, that "we perceive everything in terms of our homosexual status."¹⁸ While not representative of the entirety of gay liberation, Altman does evoke a dominant thread of gay liberationist ideology and the voice that came to dominant in decades to follow. Other books echoed and reinforced this same philosophy.

Liberationist literature advocated a process of self-affirmation and acceptance built on the notion of gay essentialism. They drew comparisons to the black power and women's liberation movements.¹⁹ Altman challenged any notion of the ability to choose, saying that sexuality was not changeable. While he was not certain whether or not sexual orientation was biological, he did

¹⁸ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 238.

¹⁹ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 18-19.

believe it was unalterable and could not be suppressed or changed without destroying a person's psyche.²⁰

Liberationists confronted a great deal of literature written before the Stonewall uprising. They divided these works into personal accounts and memoirs by homosexuals, which they felt were often filled with guilt and self-loathing, and social science and journalistic accounts written by heterosexuals, which were often detached and not empathetic. These new writings emphasized the goal of gay liberation to change homosexuals from thinking of themselves as lonesome unhappy deviants into seeing themselves as an oppressed minority group.²¹ Altman reinforced the belief that old-line homophile groups wanted incorporation into society on its terms, whereas liberationists wanted a revision of society so that they might have the freedom to continue to do as they wished.²²

The essentialism and minoritization of gay liberation clashed with bohemian understanding of identity. Altman was personally drawn to the writing and ideas of James Baldwin, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, Christopher Isherwood, John Rechy, W. H. Auden, and E. M. Forster. Indeed, many liberationists of all stripes looked towards these writers and artists for inspiration.²³ Altman understood that all of these figures were working for something beyond homosexual minority status: a place where the distinction between homosexual and heterosexual would be irrelevant. Tyler and the film poets fell similarly into this group of poets, artists, and writers, none of whom were gay liberationists. Altman saw a dividing line between gay and straight, whereas Tyler and the film poets saw bohemian ambisexuality. Altman hoped that after gay liberation there might be "a transformation of society... based on a 'new human' who is able

²⁰ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 25-26.

²¹ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 16-19.

²² Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 197-198.

²³ See chapter 6 "New York City Gay Liberation and the Queer Commuters," in Henry Abelove, *Deep Gossip* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2005), 70-88.

to accept the multifaceted and varied nature of his or her sexual identity.”²⁴ Here Altman glimpsed the very world that the Modernist bohemians had built. Yet, through his political lens he believed that world could only exist *after* gay liberation. He and other liberationists failed to realize, or were incapable of seeing, that that world existed in the present and had been achieved without moving through gay liberation or identity politics.

Other gay liberation publications included a more diverse set of voices. Len Richmond and Gary Noguera compiled a group of essays about gay liberation in 1972, called *The Gay Liberation Book*. It was first printed in 1973 and was expanded in 1979.²⁵ Unlike the other literature about gay liberation, which all stemmed from figures inside the movement, this compilation reached out to the broader gay community and some of the movement’s perceived forefathers: bohemian artists and writers. In so doing, the book incorporated some of the bohemian conflict and dissent into the prominent literature of the gay liberation movement. Perhaps most bluntly, Gore Vidal undercut gay identity in “Bisexual Politics.” Vidal was best known for his 1948 novel *The City and the Pillar*, which many considered to be a “gay novel.” Vidal wanted to “show the ‘Naturalness’ of homosexual relations, as well as making the point that there is of course no such thing as a homosexual.” Much in line with bohemian thought, Vidal emphasized that the word “homosexual” was an adjective describing a sexual action, not a noun describing a recognizable type of person. For Vidal, all human beings were better described as bisexual.²⁶ He supported the greater discussion and openness about sexuality that gay liberation pushed forward, but Vidal attempted to chip away at the very building blocks of gay identity and the political movement, as did other artists and writers in the collection.

²⁴ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 241.

²⁵ See Richmond and Noguera, *The Gay Liberation Book* and Len Richmond and Gary Noguera, eds. *The New Gay Liberation Book* (Ramparts Press: Palo Alto, CA, 1979).

²⁶ Vidal, “Bisexual Politics,” in Richmond and Noguera, *The Gay Liberation Book*, 134-8.

Contributors to the book who fell in line with bohemian thinking also either disputed the essentialist view of sexuality and identity or challenged the political nature of the movement. William Burroughs wrote an essay in which he said that any gay men could be conditioned to be straight and similarly straight men could be conditioned to be gay, which undercut gay liberation's essentialism.²⁷ Burroughs had entered into relationships with both men and women and identified with the bohemian model. An interview with Christopher Isherwood showed his support of gay liberation and of the movement for people to be open about their sexuality, or "come out." However, Isherwood said that he was not political at all and so could not speak to the move towards political action by the gay liberationists. The editors of the book appeared to have reached out to Isherwood for interview. If this was the case with these other artists and writers in the book, it suggests that bohemians were not generally involved in gay politics, unlike many gay liberationists who seemed to be readers of bohemian poets.²⁸ Whether brought in for their prestige or their alternative perspectives, these writers added a much more complicated view of identity and sexuality.

A generational gap exacerbated divides both within the gay community and between it and bohemian writers and film poets. The political viewpoint dominated thinking of identity based on sexuality within the younger generation of gay liberation activists. The Stonewall rioters themselves were, by and large, in their late teens and early 20s and many of the gay liberationists were of this younger generation. Some reports have suggested that older gay men resisted the movement and its push for "coming out" because they were stuck in their closeted old ways and had more to lose.²⁹ Perhaps true for some, this logic did not hold for many artists.

²⁷ William Burroughs, "Sexual Conditioning," in Richmond and Noguera, *The Gay Liberation Book*, 194-5.

²⁸ Christopher Isherwood, "Living With The Backlash," in Richmond and Noguera, *The New Gay Liberation Book*, 195-8.

²⁹ Lucian Truscott, "The Real Mob at Stonewall," *The New York Times*, 26 June 2009, A25.

Certain parallels can be drawn within the avant-garde film world as well. Many of the tensions in the 1960s were between the film poets, many of whom were in their forties and older, and young rising artists looking to break into the art scene or rile it up. However these two generations of artists did have an active relationship and dialogue, as evidenced by the mentor/mentee and teacher/student dynamic within bohemia. Conversely, many gay rights organizations strictly prohibited members under the age of 21. Amidst the wave of activist groups for gay men, lesbians, and transgendered people that sprouted up in New York in 1970, many were separate youth and student groups. For these gay liberationists in high school or in their early 20s, their coming of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s meant that identity politics was the only worldview and route for change that they knew. One founder of a George Washington High School group pointed out, “coming-out demands that we become political; there is no other choice.”³⁰ This different outlook between generations could more easily be challenged within bohemia where there was greater cross-generational discourse. However for the younger generation outside of bohemia, alternatives to the political may have been beyond comprehension.

In the years after Stonewall, Parker Tyler reflected upon the changes that the gay liberation movement had brought to his group of poets. From his terrace, Tyler witnessed the pride parade in 1973, which marched past his apartment building on Charles Street in Greenwich Village. He commented in an interview with Charles Ortleb that the celebratory gay scene was “altogether incredible!”³¹ Yet, his feelings were much more complicated and he quickly moved to criticism of the ideology and the movement. When asked if he saw gay liberation coming, Tyler responded, “No, I didn’t anticipate it because... I’d been too much of an individualist.” He

³⁰ Cohen, Stephan. *The Gay Liberation Youth Movement in New York*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

³¹ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

emphasized that the communal and political dimensions of the movement were barriers for the bohemians and film poets from conceiving of it or participating in it. In the 1930s, Tyler said, “there wasn’t any concentration of gay people... [and] I don’t recall until the late 30s and early 40s any well known gay bar.”³² This did not speak to the reality of gay life in Greenwich Village in those earlier decades as historians have shown, nor to the dramatic rise in the number of gay men and women in the area in the 1950 and 60s and their growing sense of community.³³ It did reflect, however, that at the moment of liberation Tyler and the bohemian poets of his milieu felt they had not been part of that world. They had existed in a separate space from the gay sphere and did not feel they were part of gay liberation. For Tyler, it was just “a matter of bohemian custom and simply toleration because a homosexual—if he was artistic and intellectual—was just another bohemian.”³⁴ This earlier bohemian world that Tyler and the film poets built and shared was being erased and they feared their lives and identities would be restricted and pigeonholed.

Prior to the Gay Liberation Movement, Tyler and his artist friends resisted politics and did not consider themselves “a suppressed minority” on account of their sexuality. “I couldn’t take up politics because I think it’s a career in itself. You can’t be a serious artist and a serious revolutionary too... I’ve always subscribed to that myself.”³⁵ Tyler had seen poets around him who were interested in politics of various kinds, particularly communism, but felt politics infringed on one’s ability to create pure art. Tyler had always aimed to be a good poet.³⁶ Being well regarded in the art world negated any need for politicized sexual identity. “On a certain

³² Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

³³ For more on gay life in New York prior to 1940, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994) and Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America* (1998, repr., New York: Grove Press, 2007).

³⁴ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

³⁵ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 1.

³⁶ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 2.

level of true liberal thinking, there is always acceptance of the homosexual if he's a serious person. It's true in low bohemia and it's true in high bohemia. It's also true in the international set."³⁷ Tyler's point here was that men and women within the various sectors of bohemia did not, nor did they have to, develop gay identity as an oppressed minority because there was an acceptance of all sexualities within their world that stretched back for decades.

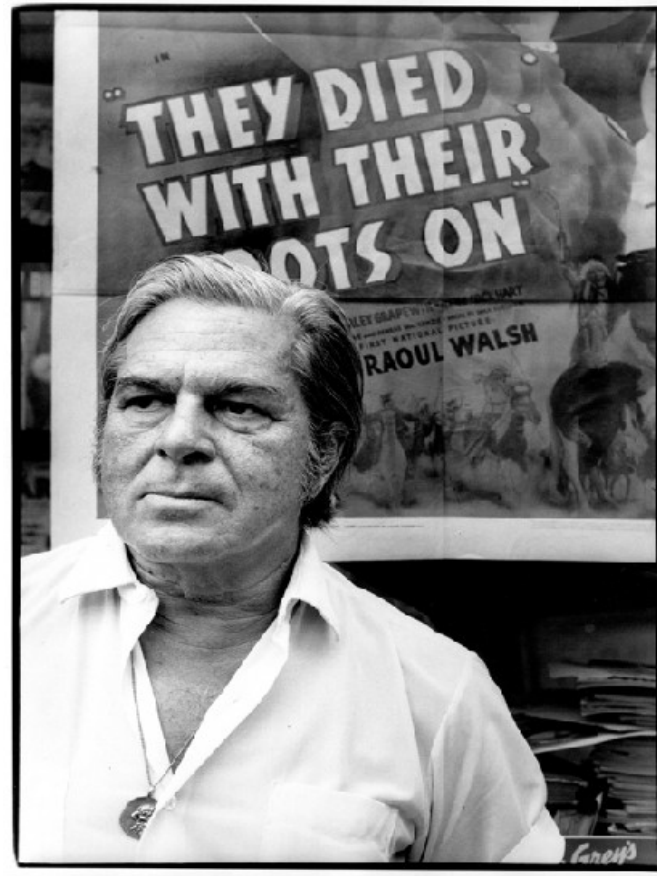


Figure 5.1: "Wandering the haunts of 4th Avenue with Parker Tyler, 1969." Photo by Gerard Malanga, 1969.

In the post-Stonewall era, outside pressures forced bohemians to be more conscious of sexual identity. This was particularly the case in dealing with gay activists and gay media. A question about a rival film critic revealed the layers and tensions for Parker Tyler in balancing

³⁷ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 2. Tyler used "homosexual" as a noun, in contrast to Vidal and bohemia's thinking otherwise. However, this was likely in response to prompts by the interviewer. Additionally, he avoided the use of the term "gay" as homosexual would have been more comfortable for bohemians in that it described a sexual act not an identity.

his views, his identity, his interviewer's magazine, which was a gay publication, and broader discourse. When Charles Ortleb asked Tyler about James Agee and if Tyler was a fan of Agee's work, Tyler wrapped his answer in the identity politics language but revealed that at its core the disagreement between the two was an artistic and intellectual difference. Tyler began by saying that they did run in some of the same circles, "I met him at parties but we didn't communicate with each other," Tyler continued half in jest, "He was hetero, for one thing, and we just didn't click."³⁸ However, as Tyler continued he based his discord with Agee around the fact that Agee was only a "movie buff" and "a sentimental slob about Hollywood."³⁹ Tyler believed that Agee "really didn't have the intellectual fiber to be a first-rate critic." Ortleb asked Tyler to list other film critics that he did admire. When he did so, some of them were straight and even "anti-homosexual," a point brought up by Ortleb not Tyler. This highlighted the fact that the genuine rifts in Tyler's mind were around intellect and culture, not sexual orientation or gay rights.⁴⁰ Tyler and the other bohemians, who increasingly were sought out by the gay media and the liberation movement had to navigate the new politicized environment but maintained and advocated their pansexual viewpoint. This was in stark contrast to the gay rights movement's imperative to "perceive everything in terms of our homosexual status."⁴¹

The bohemians and film poets had long championed a universalist sexuality that was far more flexible and diverse than the politicized idea of sexual identity that Tyler saw developing a few years into gay liberation. The bohemians had advocated for sexual and artistic freedom, but they feared that a gay political agenda would not mean liberation for them. As Tyler described it, "All political programs are moral crusades and a fault of such crusades is characteristic of both

³⁸ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 6.

³⁹ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 6.

⁴⁰ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 7.

⁴¹ Altman, *Homosexual Oppression & Liberation*, 230.

radical politics and radical religions. It's simply fanaticism." He warned that as gay liberation put all its efforts into countering the perceived homophobic system, it would lose "all sense of humor and irony and self-criticism."⁴² It was in such an atmosphere that Tyler saw danger for artists and their artistic freedoms.

This again illustrated the old Modernist view that sex was something a person *did* not something a person *was*. The film poets resisted, challenged, and critiqued gay liberation in a variety of spaces, including interviews, published books, and in their art. Due to their open portrayal of their own "off-beat sex," a phrase Tyler sometimes used, the gay community and media shifted a lot of attention towards the bohemians, something that will be explored more in depth later in this chapter. The bohemian filmmakers continued their message in their art and films, but Tyler, a writer and a poet, took to using his words in print.

In 1972, Tyler fully and formally articulated his views on gay liberation in his book *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*. This book, while reviewed at the time in academic journals and in film and art magazines, has not since been used as a source on gay liberation. This is likely due to his criticisms of the movement. In Tyler's words, "This book is about an idea of sexuality... [to] seize upon instances in all kinds of movies that consciously or unconsciously revert to pagan attitudes toward sex ...that deal with sex as a thing naturally, perennially taking offbeat... truly free forms."⁴³ Tyler believed that over time intellectuals and artists had "perfected the faculty of molding sex into an infinite variety of tensions, shapes, characters, and styles. This true erotic liberalism renders absurd the sexual categories as determined statutorily by the organic male and female."⁴⁴ Often people tried to restrict sex and

⁴² Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL, 10-11.

⁴³ Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), ix-x.

⁴⁴ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, x.

sexualities. Tyler and the film poets knew that was done by mainstream society which promoted procreative heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sex. Yet, these artists now had concerns about the limits that the gay rights wave might also bring. Tyler warned in his interview with Ortleb, “You can be a gay liberationist and... be too much of a puritan.”⁴⁵ For Tyler to criticize gay liberation in this way was daring in an interview with the gay media. To pull this off, Tyler reframed the debate in an interesting way. He began for the first time to articulate his argument in the terms “pagan” versus “puritan.” While there were also religious connotations to these words, the more important element was the “liberated” versus “authoritarian” implications to each, which was something readers could understand outside of the political realm. Tyler then was able to discuss the issues of identity politics, in an apolitical way and without resorting to the divide between gay and straight. Tyler did not want to dismiss or reject gay liberation; rather he wanted to change it to incorporate the universal bohemian viewpoint that he and his fellow Modernists believed.

Tyler used a thin façade of homosexuality to frame his book and to appeal to the discourse of gay liberation.⁴⁶ This was most evident in his title, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*. He furthered this through his playful creation, or as he called it a “discovery,” of a god of homosexuality, whom he named Homeros, to guide the reader through his analysis. After this start, Tyler’s true aim was immediately revealed, which was to challenge the new understanding of gay identity and the notion of a politicized homosexual minority. Tyler did this through his emphasis on ambisexuality, unisexuality, and “off-beat sexes.” Rather than allow the belief in a heterosexual majority and a homosexual minority, Tyler said that there was

⁴⁵ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

⁴⁶ It was advantageous for Tyler to frame his book in terms of homosexuality, if there was not outright pressure from his publishers to do so. Yet, by framing it with “homosexuality” and not “gay” or “homosexual” identity, he stayed within his bohemian ideology.

an ever-varying array of sexualities and sexes, and his invented god Homeros suddenly took on such a wide variety of forms that “homosexual” or “gay” became too complicated, unfixed, diverse to be applied to any single finite group.⁴⁷

To engage with the topic of sex and sexuality directly, Tyler utilized an idea made popular in the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s but one that at the time still required an explanation. Tyler began his book by saying it was “about an idea of sexuality,” a simple “moral” concept that sex was about pleasure and not simply reproduction. While this was something central to bohemian understanding of sex going back decades, it was a view that had become more mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁸ Building on the notion of sex as pleasure, Tyler was able to then dismiss distinctions made between males and females, masculinity and femininity, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Outside of reproduction, all of those distinctions were, in Tyler’s view, irrelevant. Part of Tyler’s rationale for this was that during sex partners “are fused to the point of losing their sense of identity and separateness.”⁴⁹ This explanation of sex and sexuality also subverted the very notion of a simple or fixed idea of homosexuality or of a gay person. Despite the use of the term “homosexuality” in the book, Tyler’s aim was one of “all-inclusiveness,” which was why his discussions were not limited only to homosexualities.⁵⁰ Tyler continued his examination of sexuality and identity by using film as a vehicle for his discussion.⁵¹ This method was a reversal of directions for Tyler, who had previously used ideas of sexuality, identity, and culture as a means to understanding film and art.

⁴⁷ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, introduction. Tyler also frames many of his chapters around different manifestations of “homeros.”

⁴⁸ See David Allyn, *Make Love, Not War: The Sexual Revolution: An Unfettered History* (New York: Routledge, 2001), Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), Patricia Juliana Smith, *The Queer Sixties* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁴⁹ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, xii.

⁵⁰ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, xi.

⁵¹ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, ix-xiv.

This allowed Tyler to define the sexuality and identity of the bohemians more fully and directly than he was usually able and to compare it to the recent rise of gay identity and gay liberation.

The film poets in prior years had referred to their sexuality as just “bohemian,” in keeping with their sense of identity. With the strength of gay rights overshadowing that, Tyler embraced new terminology to better challenge identity politics. He used the terms “unisexuality,” “omnisexuality,” “pansexuality,” and often “ambisexuality.” Tyler defined the term, “The ‘ambisexual’ is liberal in the most useful sense because it frees one from the necessity of defining (that is, limiting) a person’s sex.”⁵² Tyler and the other bohemians believed in a universalist sexuality. They felt that pansexuality could have a place in gay liberation as it was in part a product of the larger sexual revolution. This would counteract the rigidity of a politicized gay sexual orientation.

The possible effects that this politicization had on art and how people perceived art were, in the eyes of Tyler and his bohemian colleagues, even more dangerous. This could either drive art to serve only a political or state function. Worse, this could lead art to be purely documentary. “As a creative thing, film must be absolutely subjective. There should be no ideal goal of simply reflecting life ‘as it is.’”⁵³ This was the epitome of Modernist thought. Tyler felt that art had to remain creative and imaginative, as well as individualized and subjective.

The ideological debates of film critics and theorists were not isolated from the filmmakers and their art. Since Tyler was so closely connected with the film poets, he vocalized many of the beliefs, feelings, and responses that they had to the rise of identity politics. Many filmmakers struggled to produce their films in this period, so while evidence from art was limited

⁵² Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, 41. This was in discussion of Aubrey Beardsley’s erotic novella *Under The Hill*, which had just been republished in the 1960s. Beardsley was a contemporary of Oscar Wilde, however Tyler emphasizes *Under the Hill* for its ambisexual tone. Also it should be noted that Tyler often used the term “sex” in place of “sexuality.”

⁵³ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

they expressed their ideas through interviews, letters, and other outlets. Overall, the concerns raised by Tyler in his writings on film strongly correlate to that of the film poets' art and experiences in the early 1970s.

Willard Maas, Marie Menken, Charles Boultenhouse, and other film poets all had aims to create new material in the 1970s. Some struggled within the new environment and did not produce anything. By January 1971, Willard Maas and Marie Menken had both died and just days apart. It is impossible to know how their new films might have ended up, but they did discuss their intentions. At the moment of liberation, they spoke of their earlier pieces and what they hoped to do in the future, which indicated some changes they might make in their work within the new era of identity politics.⁵⁴

Sex had been a common theme in their film poetry and, as society shifted its understanding of sex, these artists had to account for that. Bohemian sexuality, which included homosexuality, ran through Gregory Markopoulos's *Du Sang* trilogy and Willard Maas's *Geography of the Body* and *Mechanics of Love*. They had developed ideas of mythic sexual interests, often had a male central figure whose gaze was drawn to both males and females and people of a variety of races. They examined the human figure and the act of sex and simultaneously deconstructed bodies and intercourse to the extent that sex and gender were obsolete or undeterminable.⁵⁵ Same-sex attraction was just one option among many and was not necessarily a unique identity. When asked in 1970 about the role of homosexuality in his films, Maas said, "Homosexuality has a part in both *Image in the Snow* and *Narcissus...*" but the main

⁵⁴ Semsel Interview with Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁵⁵ This was the three films *Psyche*, *Lysis*, *Charmides*, which Gregory Markopoulos made between 1947 and 1948. See the discussions of sexuality and these works in Chapter 3. Suarez points out that males are *more* eroticized both in Markopoulos' films and in Maas' *Image in the Snow*, but I contend that it is more important that various genders and sexes are shown together. See Juan A. Suárez, "Myth, Matter, Queerness: The Cinema of Willard Maas, Marie Menken, and the Gryphon Group, 1943–1969," *Grey Room* 36 (Summer 2009), 58–87.

theme in those films was “the artist against society.”⁵⁶ At a moment when it was possible, or even potentially advantageous, for Maas to “come out” and promote gay identity in his work he chose not to do so. Furthermore, he did not redefine the meanings behind his earlier works to fit the present context. The artistic identity that Maas mentioned was what was most important to the film poets in their earlier work and this identity was removed from homosexuality or gay identity.⁵⁷

Bohemians also discussed the changes of sexuality, identity, and politics within their group. Conversations on such topics were not new within the bohemian world, yet the impact of politics on bohemians was now added into them. Gregory Markopoulos had included same-sex relationships in his films, yet never in a political manner. In an exchange with Parker Tyler, he defended his work and his methods against these changes. He said, “[for bohemians the] message is the very form and content of the film... Messages I do not deliberately seek to create; that they are present in all of my work goes without saying; but they have appeared of their own free will.”⁵⁸ This was in contrast to the recent politicized method, “one where the message is bombarded in a very ugly manner.”⁵⁹ Donald Sutherland similarly discussed the various intrusions of politics into filmmaking and theory with Parker Tyler. Sutherland wrote, “Had a call from Stan [Brakhage] a few days ago and among other news he mentioned darkly that some group or other had proscribed the showing of all his films done in the last three years. After your

⁵⁶ Semsel Interview with Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives, 63.

⁵⁷ Suarez suggested that myth was used as potential “alibi” for queer sexuality or homosexuality, see Suárez, “Myth, Matter, Queerness.” Rather, as Ford had suggested in his memoirs, it was the opposite. For Ford, having sought out a life in the style of a mythic poet opened him up to same-sex relationships. “I went ahead and became a homosexual-no matter what. Not everybody does that-who should (or would *like* to)... A virtue of necessity? More usually a vice is made of it.” See Charles Henri Ford, *Water from a Bucket: A Diary 1948-1957* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2001), 196. Parker Tyler echoed this sentiment where he discussed “homosexualization,” the process by which a person, inclined towards homosexuality or not, comes to culturally and behaviorally take on homosexual activity. So while Tyler saw homosexual acts as natural, he did not see homosexuality as necessarily innate or ingrained or exclusive of other sexual interests. Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, 28.

⁵⁸ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Parker Tyler, 25 Jan 1971, 9.31, PTCHRHRC.

⁵⁹ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Parker Tyler, 25 Jan 1971, 9.31, PTCHRHRC.

'politics' with Jonas I am ready to believe it." For Sutherland, it took several such episodes for him to be convinced finally of the huge incursion that the new "political identity" made into bohemia.⁶⁰ This came after Tyler wrote to Sutherland in 1969 about an article where Jonas Mekas attacked Tyler's *Underground Film*. Tyler said, "To my face, [Mekas] admitted that the gesture was, after all, "political..." And he smiled (as always). The point is: Will anybody reviewing the book sit down and trouble to digest my analysis of UF in terms of ideas?"⁶¹ It was a struggle for many bohemians to first realize and accept the new politicized atmosphere around art, which had felt inconceivable.

As bohemians came to realize and comprehend these changes, they often struggled with keeping their voices and ideas afloat in the changing discourse. Tyler commended Markopoulos' ability to do just that, "Your best quality is fitting so snugly into this awfully queer, fantastically uneven world of ours today."⁶² Appreciative of the compliment, Markopoulos did not agree and discussed his disconnect with the politicized Underground filmmakers. "You know they have never liked me, nor my work, though they, at the same time, cannot do without me." The two expressed the impact of politicization within art as the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism, or, as Markopoulos framed it, the move from "thinking" to "unthinking." This, he believed, was highly dangerous to the creative person. For Markopoulos, he had to continue to make art, but America was no longer a suitable environment and so he moved to Europe. "The only thing left for a creative person to do is to continue his work."⁶³ Here again Markopoulos emphasized his artistic identity over his sexuality.

⁶⁰ Donald Sutherland was an accomplished scholar of classics who was close friends with Tyler, Charles Boultenhouse, and Stan and Jane Brakhage. See exchange of letters between Parker Tyler and Donald Sutherland, 1971, 9.44, PTCHRHRC.

⁶¹ Letter from Parker Tyler to Donald Sutherland, 26 Dec 1969, 9.44, PTCHRHRC.

⁶² Letter from Parker Tyler to Gregory Markopoulos, 16 May 1971, 9.31, PTCHRHRC.

⁶³ Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Parker Tyler, 22 Oct 1971, 9.31, PTCHRHRC.

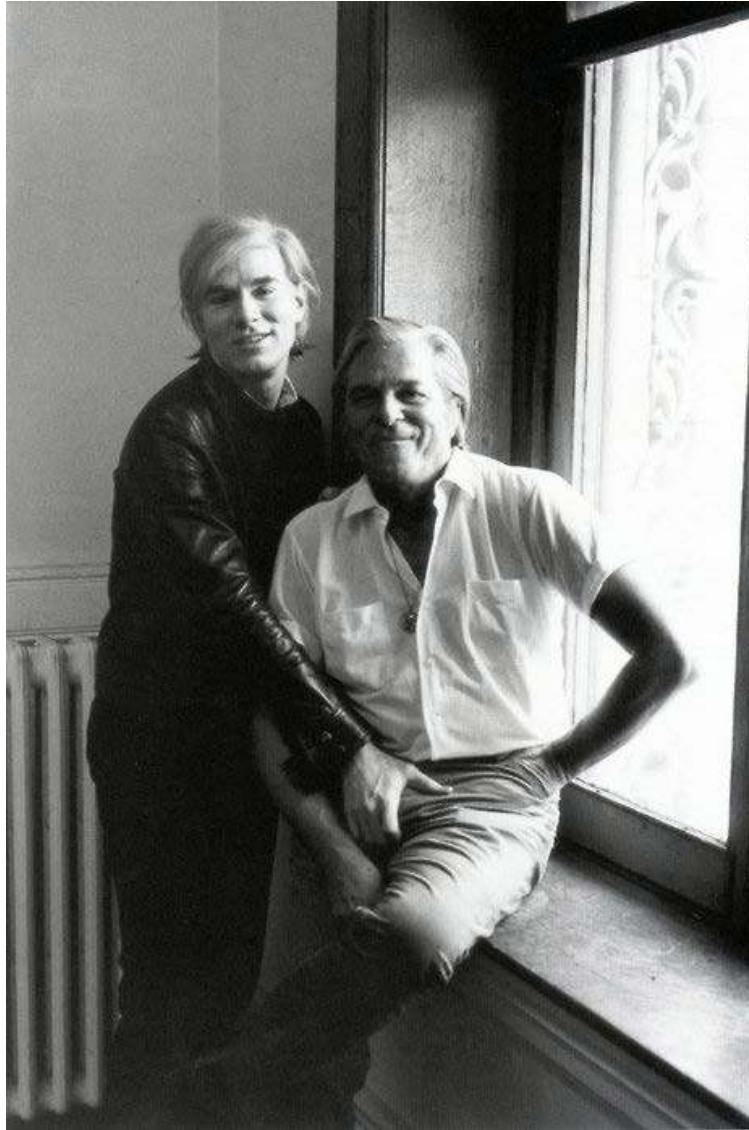


Figure 5.2: Andy Warhol and Parker Tyler at the Factory. Photo by Gerard Malanga, 1969.

These internal bohemian conversations also showed the efforts to strategize in opposition to the politicized discourse. Amos Vogel, who was a close ally in Tyler's Modernist thinking, was part of a debate on the state of avant-garde film on the public program "Free Time," which aired in the spring of 1971. Andrew Sarris, another prominent film critic, undermined the legitimacy of film poets by calling one, Stan Brakhage, "literary." Tyler said this translated to "not analytic or intellectual, [and was] therefore insulting." Despite his efforts, Vogel was unable to shift the conversation back to Modernist analysis, which was what Tyler and Vogel believed

the film art movement needed most. “There are refutations more concrete than Mekas' vague attempt to answer [Sarris] although what he said had some point.” Instead, the discussion was overrun by political motivations and Underground Film “propagandists.”⁶⁴ Tyler, Vogel, and the film poets wanted to support avant-garde film, challenge identity politics, and accurately express their Modernist viewpoint. “The most important point made about the general status of avant-garde film was that its greatest need is, as you [Vogel] said, not just more space in critical columns (and more public exposure), but analysis by competent critics.”⁶⁵

This new politicization of identity affected the broader social and critical discourse of art and artistic identity. Bohemians felt labeled in different ways, by race, sex, or sexual orientation, and felt pressured to produce art for those groups. Even more restrictive was the change in the reception of art. Film, writing, and art were seen as authentic only when made by a member of a group about which the art dealt. Furthermore, specific characters that referenced a category that was labeled as an oppressed minority became a representation of that entire group. These changes limited and constrained the bohemians' identities, their way of life, and the artistic work that they created. This impact on the bohemian social world also included a large shift in the sexual scene in New York. Film poets were driven in search of peoples and places whose sexuality seemed to fit closer to their own and were more accommodating to creating art, chiefly the Latino community in New York and Latin America itself.

The gay rights movement's politicized idea of sexual identity threatened the flexibility and diversity of bohemian identity and its relation to broader society. Tyler, like other scholars, saw the similarity that gay liberation had to the political movements of black power and radical feminism. However, Tyler felt these ideas segregated and then homogenized a group of people

⁶⁴ Letter from Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 5 May 1971, 9.50, PTCHRHC.

⁶⁵ Letter from Parker Tyler to Amos Vogel, 5 May 1971, 9.50, PTCHRHC.

into a minority. “These extremist ideas are as puritanical in their way as the rigid norm of heterosexuality.”⁶⁶ The Modernist bohemians wanted instead to focus on universal traits and ideas that unified diverse peoples. In turning to sexuality and gay identity, Tyler said, “The free libido... is a human majority, not a human minority.”⁶⁷ There was not just danger for bohemian identity in the abstract, but also for the intellectual freedom of the film poets.

Tyler’s major resistance to the politicization of a gay minority was that it limited artistic expression. Identity activists of all stripes called for less stereotypes and more positive characters for each respective identity group. Tyler saw that “in order to rectify things and restore a just balance, [these activists] automatically exaggerate.” These objectors said that gay characters “were always comical” or that Native Americans were “portrayed as villains.”⁶⁸ The problem in Tyler’s opinion was not stereotyping, rather it was the political response. This discourse restricted the characters that an artist could create. Being individualists, the film poets saw characters as singular artistic creations; they were not intended to always be taken seriously nor were they expected to be representative of a whole group of people. Tyler insisted that the artist must strive to “become a distinct individual different from all other individuals.” This was in direct defiance of any sort of identity politics labeling or representational art. Art was meant “to make life something other than it was to begin with. That goes for gay activism, by the way, as much as it goes for art.”⁶⁹ With the Modernist emphasis on personal subjectivity, Tyler repeatedly hammered the point that art was not representational and he specifically pointed to gay rights activists for pushing reception of art in a representational direction. Yet, for all

⁶⁶ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, xii.

⁶⁷ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, xiii. The movement sought to challenge the perceived homophobic system, and in so doing lost “all sense of humor and irony and self-criticism.” See Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

⁶⁸ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

⁶⁹ Ortleb Interview, 14.1, CBPTPNYPL.

Tyler's efforts there was little he could do when it came to the actual changes brought to the film poets' world.

The film poets had to stay active in the new Postmodernist dialogue in order to continue their Modernist message. Some, like Tyler in *Screening the Sexes*, packaged their bohemian messages in gay liberation terms. Others tried to embrace the change in atmosphere by catering to a gay audience or by trying to produce "gay art." In 1970, Maas said he was now inspired to make a "homosexual film." Norman MacLaren also wanted to try his hand at "a beautiful, sweet homosexual film." Marie Menken, meanwhile, worked on a film about the mothers of famous thinkers and artists, such as Andy Warhol, Malcolm X, and Oscar Wilde.⁷⁰ Menken's films had always been visual and abstract, often without human actors. This new project was a departure for her and would have appealed to the feminist movement by taking women's perspectives on well-known men. It was also keeping with bohemia's diverse sexual and racial focus in Menken's choice of figures. The film poets were aware of the interest in their work within the new era of identity politics and they knew they could not avoid publicity from new interest groups, such as feminists or the gay community. In reference to his book, Tyler mentioned to Ford, "As Charles [Boultenhouse] says I can't say I'm not getting "coverage" from the Gay World."⁷¹ However, this new exposure brought its own problems.

Some film poets found it hard to create at all due to the changes in art and sexuality. Charles Boultenhouse whose of rites of passage into filmmaking were steeped in Modernist art found it too difficult to produce in the shifting environment and did not make any films after *Dionysius* in 1963. Maas struggled to complete his film *Orgia* in 1967. The intended film was a

⁷⁰ See the Semsel Interview with Willard Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives, and the Robert Jacoby article on Willard Maas and Marie Menken, Menken File, Anthology Film Archives. Whether coincidental or not, this was around the same time that Nancy Milford published *Zelda*, the biography of F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife. This film idea had a similar idea behind it.

⁷¹ Letter from Parker Tyler to Charles Henri Ford, 14 March 1972, 15.3, CHFPHRHRC.

longer critique of contemporary society's decadence, however all that Maas filmed was one scene of "an uptown sex party."⁷² Maas described the project as a "lyrical extension of a sexual orgy," but that it was "kind of sad."⁷³ Though this shorter finished piece was shown, the project as a whole fell apart, as Maas felt unable to craft the work into his poetic vision. He never made another film.⁷⁴ That same year Gregory Markopoulos left the United States with his partner filmmaker Robert Beavers and withdrew all of his films from distribution. Markopoulos found himself unable to produce within the changed artistic and social environment in New York City and the United States. He did this because he did not agree with the new Postmodernist reception and interpretations of his work. He continued to make films in Greece and Europe and collected his works and writings into an archive, however he severed ties with the American art scene, except of course for his film poet friends such as Parker Tyler.⁷⁵ After so much struggle with the changes in the 1960s, it was Charles Henri Ford who created and released one of the few film poems after the Stonewall rebellion and the Gay Liberation movement.

Charles Henri Ford's 1971 film *Johnny Minotaur* returned to some of the fundamentals of Modernist film poetry in the middle of the gay liberation era. The film was, in Tyler's words, "a personal adaptation of the Theseus story in the form of a modern poet's diary." The poet, portrayed by several actors including Ford himself at times, fell in love with a young painter who did not return the same affection. Launching into the poet's feelings and mind, the film flowed

⁷² Semsel Interview with Willard Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁷³ Semsel Interview with Willard Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁷⁴ Semsel Interview with Willard Maas, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

⁷⁵ Markopoulos was unhappy with both the art and gay scene in the US. Markopoulos also requested that P. Adams Sitney remove the chapter about Markopoulos's work from the second edition of Sitney's book *Visionary Film*. See Letter from Gregory Markopoulos to Parker Tyler, 25 Jan 1971, 9.31, PTCHRHC. For more on this, Sitney's Chapter on Markopoulos, P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 121-154, Kristen M. Jones, "Gregory J. Markopoulos - film exhibition at Whitney Museum of American Art" *Artforum* 34 (Summer 1996), and John Hanhardt and Matthew Yokosky, *Gregory J. Markopoulos: Mythic Themes, Portraiture, and Films of Place* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996).

between reality and fantasy, between consciousness and dream, and between the present and an ancient mythic past. Within the film itself, the poet was making a film about the Minotaur, which created further layers. The work blurred different elements of ancient myth, of the poetry of the film, and of Ford's experiences together into a cohesive film poem. The central ideas were the struggle of an artist to create, of the difficulties of the lover-beloved relationship model, and the role of myth in life.



Figure 5.3: Still of young artist and the Minotaur on Crete from *Johnny Minotaur*. By Charles Henri Ford, 1971.

The film embraced a sexuality that was not based on same-sex attraction, but rather chiefly on the lover-beloved dynamic. It contained a sex scene between two males, nudity of men, women, and male youths, and both homoerotic and heteroerotic masturbation. The graphic nature of this imagery bordered on pornographic. This was a step farther than previous era's film poetry, even works such as *Flaming Creatures*, but was not atypical for film art of the 1970s, which often blurred the lines between art and pornography. The nature of the sexuality in the film was that of artistic bohemia. Gay identity and homosexuality were not discussed, rather in their place was the lover-beloved, teacher-student model which was thoroughly explained by the

young Greek artist, with whom the poet was in love. He felt attraction to both males and females and described his earliest relationship as the beloved of an art teacher. However, the interpretation of the film and its sexuality changed within this new era of sexual politics.

Reviewers began to incorporate gay politics into their reception of film poetry. Four reviews of Ford's *Johnny Minotaur* in the early 1970s framed and described the work in different ways. Parker Tyler saw the central theme in the poetic identity and ambitions of the main character, looking for the work to "carefully build up personal identities... to define their fluid shifts... [and to create] a clear plot from reality to fantasy and back."⁷⁶ Lil Pichard's review in a local Village magazine also focused on Ford's art, noting "Ford is a true poet. A poet who loves fragmentations of images, sentences, thoughts and views." Although the title of Pichard's review, "HOT PANTS & HOT BOYS," looked a little like a gay advertisement.⁷⁷ Archer Winsten in the New York Post typified the transformation which gay liberation had on the perception of film poetry. His review started, "Sex Activities on the Gay Side... Johnny Minotaur... is a film for homosexuals." Winsten said that the use of Greek myth in the film was "important only as excuse for display [of male nudes]." He only recommended the film to gay audiences because "both a straight and a conventional audience might find it repellent."⁷⁸ Despite the negative tone, it was an impressive feat for an art film such as Ford's to be reviewed

⁷⁶ Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*, 161-3.

⁷⁷ Lil Pichard was a Village writer and performing artist in the late 1960s and early 1970s. She performed at the Judson Memorial Church and knew Ken Jacobs and some other film artists. See a newspaper clipping of her review, Ford file, Anthology Film Archives.

⁷⁸ Archer Winsten was a film reviewer for the New York Post for 50 years. As his obituary in the New York Times pointed out, he was a reviewer and not a critic or theorist. "Mr. Winsten did not approach movies with furrowed brow, on the lookout for some auteur's allegorical meaning in a lighting scheme or camera angle, but with the expectant delight of someone who went to the movies to be entertained... making no effort to assess its artistic merit. Indeed, Mr. Winsten, who detested the term 'critic' and insisted on being called a 'reviewer.'" See Archer Winsten's obituary, February 23, 1997, *New York Times*. See the New York Post review, 16 April 1971, Ford File, Anthology Film Archives.

by Winsten in the *Post*. Howard Thompson of the *New York Times*⁷⁹ was more reserved in his review, but he similarly said that sex overshadowed the art. “All of [the characters] are involved with one another and in making a backyard movie about the Minotaur legend.” It ended with the intended joke, “The order of the day is male anatomy and male sexuality. Toward the end a young girl edged into view, as though from another planet. The Greeks had a word for all this...” which the reader was to understand to be “homosexuality.”⁸⁰ This divide within the reception of the film fell between those that understood the varied and nuanced sexuality and identity of bohemians and those that subscribed to the notion of a gay minority and straight majority.

These same tensions in reception of bohemian ideas were visible in the reviews of the other film poems, books, and poetry. This was especially true in the case of Parker Tyler’s *Screening the Sexes*. Reviews from three different types of publications highlight these distinctions. Foster Hirsch gave a highly positive review in a leading film art journal, *Film Quarterly*, in 1973, and grasped Tyler’s bohemian ideology better than others.⁸¹ He showed that he was familiar with Tyler’s entire oeuvre by frequently referencing Tyler’s other essays and books. He suggested that the book took on a subject that had always been present in Tyler’s writings but that had never been at the center of Tyler’s writing. Hirsch picked up the core arguments in *Screening the Sexes*, noting that the book was multifaceted, being a “moral tract, social document, psychoanalysis, and... legitimate film criticism.” He drew out Tyler’s main bohemian arguments in regards to sexuality, namely that “we are all a composite of masculine and feminine traits... [a] pansexualized society... [in which] we would be entirely free to select

⁷⁹ Howard Thompson worked for the *New York Times* for 40 years and was famous for his pithy snide reviews of films. Here again, it was impressive that Ford’s film was reviewed by Thompson.

⁸⁰ See Howard Thompson, “Minotaur Theme of Cretan Film Devoted to Sex” in *New York Times*, 16 April 1971, 26.

⁸¹ Tyler’s book was reviewed in various film journals, see Foster Hirsch. “Review of *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies* by Parker Tyler.” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Winter, 1972-3), 47-49. Hirsch was a prolific writer on film and was a professor of English and Film Studies at Brooklyn College. Also see Richard Lippe, review of “*Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*” in *Velvet Light Trap: A Critical Journal of Film & Television*, Issue 6 (Fall 1972), 51.

our sexual beings from among the many possible varieties.”⁸² As much as Hirsch easily extracted Tyler’s point of view and his main arguments, Hirsch was unable to not apply the contemporary identity politics to Tyler and his book.

The complication presented itself in the connection between film and sexual politics. Hirsch pointed out, Tyler treated homosexuality as “not sick... but... simply one of the many instinctual possibilities of sexual identity.”⁸³ However, Hirsch went further to say that though this was “ostensibly a work of film criticism... [Tyler was] proselytizing for the Cause...[and] considers the films decidedly secondary to the sexual politics.”⁸⁴ Hirsch was trapped in the dichotomy of seeing everything as either pro- or anti-gay liberation, whereas Tyler’s view of gay liberation was much more complicated. Other reviewers and scholars drew a similar dichotomy to Hirsch’s. Edward Sagarin in *Contemporary Sociology*, who in reviewing about a dozen books on homosexuality including Tyler’s, said, “It is predictable that these books will be evaluated, not for their merit, but for the position they take on... anti-homosexual legislation... [and] the homosexual world.”⁸⁵ Sagarin coming from an academic standpoint acknowledged the intellectual value in *Screening the Sexes*. Tyler, however, wanted the discussion and freedom of sexuality, but opposed the identity politics.

Screening the Sexes was also reviewed in a number of publications from the gay community. These tended to value the book less on its discussion of film and theory and more directly on its assistance to and promotion of gay identity and rights. David Beard reviewed the book in *Body Politic*, the leading gay periodical in Canada. He appreciated Tyler’s topic, his wit and style, and his passion for film. Beard felt that, “Thanks to Gay Liberation, the veils are

⁸² Hirsch, 47.

⁸³ Hirsch, 47.

⁸⁴ Hirsch, 47.

⁸⁵ Edward Sagarin, “The Good Guys, The Bad Guys, and the Gay Guys” *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Jan., 1973), 3-13.

dropped and the truth is in the open.” However, he did not care for Tyler’s “theories on films and sex,” which he found confusing, although he said “[Tyler’s] knowledge is vast, his references are all encompassing... He seems well informed on the various movements around him.” Beard chastised Tyler for seeing male beauty in film as “rooted in myth” instead of seeing it as simple homoeroticism. He saw that Tyler’s desire in the end was for complete sexual liberation and “unisexuality.” Yet, Beard saw that Tyler’s book failed as “gay writing” and as a weapon “against the enslavement of stereotype homosexuality and its attendant aspects on the screen.”⁸⁶ Unlike Hirsch’s review, many in the gay community felt that Tyler’s work did not strongly support the gay political movement.

One of the political notions at play in these reviews was the idea of “coming out.” Coming out was only applicable in a space based on the personal as political and where people were invested in the idea an oppressed gay minority. Tyler, Ford, and the others never felt the need to “come out” because they identified as bohemians, not as part of a political gay minority. Tyler jested that the closest thing to a coming out for he and Ford was their novel *The Young and Evil* and even that was a nod to the older notion of the phrase, such as when a debutant premiered within high society.⁸⁷ Hirsch instead lightly reprimanded Tyler for not *officially* coming out. Hirsch began by saying, “Tyler never exactly says look, I’m gay, all right?” and ended saying that, “*Screening the Sexes* doesn’t fully represent a personal coming out.”⁸⁸ Hirsch implied that this was due to “the double life of the homosexual” in Tyler’s generation, for which Hirsch forgave him. He credited Tyler with “writ[ing] more popularly and accessibly than in the past.

⁸⁶ See David Beard, review of “Screening the Sexes” in *Body Politic* Issue 5 (July 1972), 8-10. Also see Harold Fairbanks, review of “Screening the Sexes” in *Advocate* Issue 91 (August 1972), 19. *Advocate* was a leading gay periodical based out of Los Angeles.

⁸⁷ See Manuscript of Tyler review of *Poster Poems* by Charles Henri Ford, 9.10 PTPHRHRC, 3, and see the discussion of different understandings of “coming out” in Chauncey, *Gay New York*.

⁸⁸ Hirsch, 47, 48

And the reason...is precisely this opening of the closet.” He also commended Tyler for finally “talking directly about a subject which has always been lurking shyly in the corners and around the edges of his criticism.”⁸⁹ This all stemmed from a liberation stance on homosexuality. The reality was that Tyler had frequently discussed homosexuality in his earlier writings where it had been relevant, but he always did so within the context of discussions of broader human sexuality. Tyler and the rest of the film poets never came out because they never felt closeted. Instead, bohemians approached their romantic relationships in a different way. In 1967, Tyler wrote a biography of Pavel Tchelitchew. Tyler did not say anything of his own sexuality in this and he did not “out” Tchelitchew, but he did discuss Tchelitchew’s relationship with Ford. Most often he wrote of Ford as Tchelitchew’s “best friend,” which held a lot more weight that many people would give it today. Tyler also candidly wrote of their love, their quarrels, their “domestic life” together, their “outright love letters,” and even their “wet-dreams.”⁹⁰ Tyler and the bohemians did not have to come out in order to discuss their art and sexuality. This change in reception of film poetry and writings about it made it more difficult and frustrating for the bohemians to express their philosophies to the public and to even exist within their bohemian world as they had done for decades.

As identity politics restricted a number of social and artistic avenues for the bohemians, opportunities also opened up for interactions with other groups in the city. Greenwich Village bohemia had long held symbiotic relationships with other communities that it bordered and overlapped. In the 1930s, this included the small gay world and the working-class Italian neighborhood in the Village. By the 1970s, these other spheres had also shifted; the gay world had expanded, which partially overshadowed bohemia, and much of the Italian population had

⁸⁹ Hirsch, 48.

⁹⁰ For examples, see Parker Tyler, *The Divine Comedy of Pavel Tchelitchew* (New York: New Directions Press, 1967), 360-63.

moved out of the area. Bohemians and bohemian spaces similarly adapted to these shifts in populations as they found inroads to mingle with the growing Latino community of the Lower East Side.⁹¹

Gay liberation displaced the film poets' identities and art at the same time as it, with Latino migration, also changed their sexual world. By the early 1960s, Ford complained that the sex scene in New York City was too focused on gay bars. Ford was interested in same-sex affairs, however he did not like the culture of the bar scene. He preferred instead the sexual systems that he knew in other parts of the world, such as the Mediterranean, Latin America, and South Asia.⁹² Charles Boultenhouse had similar frustrations by the late 1960s, as well as Willard Maas and Parker Tyler.⁹³ This was when these bohemians began interacting with the Latin American community. Through interactions with these newer communities in New York, the bohemians grew more aware of alternative spaces outside the city, in particular Puerto Rico. Traveling to places like Puerto Rico rejuvenated creative energies for Maas and Boultenhouse. They also noticed that it alleviated them of the gay persona placed on them in New York.⁹⁴ These other locales offered these artists the sexual and artistic environment that New York once had, but no longer provided them.

Within the city, there was a surge of Latin American immigration, overwhelmingly migration from Puerto Rico, which came into the city after World War II. The Latino population

⁹¹ For a look at the cultural history of queer Puerto Ricans in New York City, see Lawrence La Fountain-Stokes, *Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) and for work on sexuality and sexual exchanges between Latinos and whites, see Amalia L. Cabezas, *Economies of Desire: Sex and Tourism in Cuba and the Dominican Republic* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), Carlos Ulises Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), and Susana Pena, "Visibility and Silence: Cuban-American Gay Male Culture in Miami (Florida)" (PhD diss., University of California, 2002).

⁹² Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 111-113.

⁹³ See Charles Boultenhouse writings, diaries, and letters on Puerto Rico, 1.2 and 9.2, CBTPNYPL.

⁹⁴ Boultenhouse began writing ideas for a new film for the first time in years. Maas had a rough sketch for a film together which he was seeking money to produce.

in New York City grew from about 150,000 in the 1940s to over a million by 1970, which was about 10% of the city's population. Puerto Ricans made up about 80% of that group. While large numbers of these migrants settled in upper Manhattan and the South Bronx, others settled into lower Manhattan in the neighborhoods of the East Village and the Lower East Side.⁹⁵

The social geography and spatial overlays of the city were instrumental to the connections between bohemians and the growing Latino population. For artistic bohemians, the result was a rich cultural infusion of Latino artists and Latin themes into modern art.⁹⁶ Through these exchanges artists learned more of Latin America and were inspired to visit the Caribbean as an alternative space removed from the politicized sexual identity in New York City.

Bohemians that made these connections included Parker Tyler, Charles Boultenhouse, Charles Henri Ford, Marie Menken, and Willard Maas, and also other artistic groups friendly and sexually aligned with the poets. Musical composers Leonard Bernstein and John Cage, beat poet Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara of the New York School of Poetry, Pop artists Andy Warhol and Gerard Malanga, and underground filmmakers Ron Rice, Jack Smith, and Charles Ludlum, all interacted with the Latino community in New York City and many traveled to Latin America as some of the film poets did.⁹⁷ The film poet group represented just one section of this interaction with the growing Latino community, but all these various other artistic groups shared similar experiences.

⁹⁵ Juan A. Suárez, "The Puerto Rican Lower East Side and the Queer Underground" *Grey Room* 36 (Summer 2009).

⁹⁶ Few scholars have examined these intersections, and usually have looked at just one or two Latino artists. They have shown that there was interaction and cultural fusion between artists and the Latin population prior to identity politics. This will build off of Juan Suarez's work on the intersection of Underground film and Latino community in New York. By broadening the scope of my essay beyond just actor and performer Mario Montez and filmmaker José Rodríguez Soltero

⁹⁷ See Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), Jonathan D. Katz, "Passive Resistance: On the Critical and Commercial Success of Queer Artists in Cold War American Art" in *L'image* #3 (Winter, 1996), David Lehman, *The Last Avant-garde: the Making of the New York School of Poets* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), and Regina Marler, *Queer Beats: How the Beats Turned America on to Sex* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2004).

The Latino community was varied and contained many creative people. While the main motivations for migration were economic, some migrants also sought greater artistic and intellectual freedoms.⁹⁸ New York City offered more opportunities for artists and the US boasted great art colleges, which drew filmmakers like José Rodríguez-Soltero. Latino migration also brought a different outlook on sexuality to the New York community. In the 1960s, same-sex sexual activity was common in Puerto Rico, yet modern gay identity was less prevalent. Sexuality in Puerto Rico at the time was more age and gender based.⁹⁹ This meant that within the New York migrant group, there were people open to more diverse sexual experiences without the constraints of gay identity. These aspects of the Puerto Rican Lower-East-Siders opened up ample opportunities for either cross-cultural sex or artistic life where people had only to wander into nearby neighborhoods to find such exchanges.

By the 1960s, geographic proximity, complementary sexual interests, and artistic motivations created interactions between these groups. Bohemians ventured into Latino neighborhoods, restaurants, and businesses often as cultural exploration. Latinos who were interested in art explored the bohemian galleries, cafes, and theatres and were usually welcomed. As contemporary sociologists pointed out, in bohemian Greenwich Village “there is more contact across the ethnic lines, and the ethnic lines themselves mean less, than in other areas of the city's life.”¹⁰⁰ Additionally, the gay world in the Village offered safer spaces for exchanges between people of different ethnicities or races. News outlets like the Village Voice pointed out

⁹⁸ Sociological studies from the 1960s found that this was the case for a majority of the Puerto Ricans living in the Lower East Side. George C. Myers, “Migration and Modernization: The Case of Puerto Rico, 1950-60” in *Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (December, 1967), 425-431.

⁹⁹ See George Chauncey, “The Queer Underground as Cultural Formation: Postwar New York and the Politics of Queer Cinema.” Postwar Queer Underground Cinema, 1950-1968 Conference at Yale University, 20 February 2009. Also, Rafael L. Ramírez, Víctor I. García-Toro and Luis Solano-Castillo, “Men Coming out in Puerto Rico” in *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Jul. - Dec., 2003), 37-58.

¹⁰⁰ See Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1964), 20, and mention of this in Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 13.

at the time that gay bars and establishments in the Village had white, black, and Puerto Rican clientele.¹⁰¹ Through these overlapping social and sexualized spaces, these various groups blended together.

Interactions between bohemians and Latino artists led to unique new creative productions. Filmmaker Jack Smith met performer Mario Montez unintentionally in the hallway of an apartment building on the Lower East Side. The two had a brief romantic relationship, which, in bohemian fashion, led to many collaborations. Montez went on to work in film with Ron Rice, Andy Warhol, Ken Jacobs, and José Rodríguez-Soltero. Rodríguez-Soltero, who was also from Puerto Rico and was an avant-garde filmmaker, befriended Charles Ludlum and other Underground directors. Ludlum and Rodríguez-Soltero lived together for a period and worked together on projects, though it is not clear if it was ever romantic or sexual.¹⁰² Bohemian films also pulled in Puerto Rican culture. Jack Smith, Kenneth Anger, Charles Boultinhouse, Marie Menken, Andy Warhol, and Charles Henri Ford reached out to Latino culture and the community for inspiration and many filmmakers featured Latin dance, décor, Spanish language, and characters in their films.¹⁰³ There was tremendous cross-fertilization between the older bohemian world and the Latino community.

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that some contemporaries outside of bohemia saw the distinctions between bohemia and the gay world. See discussion of this in Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 13.

¹⁰² See discussion of Rodríguez-Soltero. in Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side,” 16.

¹⁰³ Both José Rodríguez-Soltero and Andy Warhol’s films on Lupe Velez. Rodríguez-Soltero made a film *El Pecado Original* which was dedicated to Luis Bunuel. Hoping to draw up some artistic material on African-American and Puerto Rican youth culture, Ford visited an institution for delinquent boys near Poughkeepsie, where most of the residents were African-American and Puerto Rican. Charles Henri Ford’s Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 111-113. See also Ronald Gregg, “Fine Vintage: Fashion, thrift shops, and the space of pleasure in queer underground film” in Lucy Fischer, Inga Fraser, and Ronald Gregg, eds., *Birds of Paradise: Costume as Cinematic Spectacle* (Köln: Walther König, 2013), and Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side.”



Figure 5.4: Still of Mario Montez from *Flaming Creatures*. By Jack Smith, 1963.

Latinos used and benefitted from access to the bohemian world. Mario Montez and José Rodríguez-Soltero were examples of successful artists who moved into bohemia. Montez was born in Puerto Rico and moved to New York, where he acted in films, plays, and happenings. Part of his performance and persona was derived from the 1940s Hollywood starlet, Maria Montez. Mario Montez mixed comedy, dance, and sensuality and was often the stand-out star in films, including Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* and *Normal Love* and Andy Warhol *Mario Banana 1* and *2*, *Harlot*, and *Camp*. Jose Rodriguez-Soltero was also born in Puerto Rico, studied art at universities in San Juan, San Francisco, and New York, and was a film and theatre director. Rodriguez-Soltero made several films, which were screened alongside the works of Gregory Markopoulos and other film poets of the time, and his *Jerovi* dealt with both poetic myth like many bohemians and also Latin themes. In 1966, Soltero and Andy Warhol each made films about the life of Lupe Velez, the Mexican dancer and actress who starred in Hollywood

films, vaudeville shows, and Mexican cinema in the 1920s and 30s, both titled *Lupe*.¹⁰⁴ Latin artists were a part of the bohemian world just as Latin cultural themes were fused into the art.



Figure 5.5: Still from *Jerovi*. By José Rodríguez-Soltero, 1965.

Sex was an instrumental element in many interactions between the artist and Latino communities. As part of the poetic lifestyle, sex was one of the vehicles by which artists found inspiration and created work. Both men and women sought out sexual and romantic partners in public spaces and through social networks. There was an informal information network within the artist community about where one could meet companions, be they gay men, black and Puerto Rican youths, or women.¹⁰⁵ The nature of these interactions varied greatly. Some were romantic and often led to poetic creation. Charles Boultenhouse had Latino companions sit for portraits and pose for photographs. These points of contact served as inspiration for writing poetry and film scripts. Willard Maas was inspired by the island of Puerto Rico and a dancer

¹⁰⁴ See writings on Montez, Rodríguez-Soltero, and Warhol by Douglas Crimp, *"Our Kind of Movie": The Films of Andy Warhol* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 2012), Gregg, "Fine Vintage," Suárez, "The Puerto Rican Lower East Side."

¹⁰⁵ As mentioned by Ford, Charles Henri Ford's Paris Journal, 29.2, CHFPHRHRC, 111-113, and shown in Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, *The Young and Evil* (1933; repr., New York: Richard Kasak Books, 1996).

from San Juan became a muse for Charles Boultenhouse.¹⁰⁶ These artists had a history of exploring the diversity of Latin American and Latino culture that went back to Ford and Tyler's work at *View* magazine in the 1940s, but this connection expanded greatly in this period.

Much more common were the smaller exchanges that took place. In several instances, bohemians discussed helping aspiring artists move to New York City and break into the art scene.¹⁰⁷ Tyler assisted a 20 year-old recent migrant from Puerto Rico, who worked at a nearby restaurant, to write his resume and discussed his education, work aspirations, and family life.¹⁰⁸ Boultenhouse, Ford, and Maas mentioned conversing with and meeting young Puerto Ricans in their neighborhood and during trips to Puerto Rico and Mexico.¹⁰⁹ Some scholars have pinned the cooperation and partnerships forged between these two groups on each side's "outsider status," because one was a racial minority and the other a sexual minority.¹¹⁰ However, the bohemians simply saw similar aesthetic, spiritual, and sexual outlooks that created these cross-cultural bonds.¹¹¹

Bohemians grew increasingly aware of life in Puerto Rico as they became frustrated and pigeonholed by the changes that stemmed from the rise of identity politics. It appealed to them as a place more in line with their outlook and it became easier to travel there in this period. General tourism to Puerto Rico grew dramatically by the mid-1960s. This came after the construction of Luis Muñoz Marín Airport in 1955, the closing of Cuba to tourism after the revolution, and the federal government's increased promotions of Puerto Rican vacations.¹¹² For bohemians, who

¹⁰⁶ See Charles Boultenhouse diaries on Puerto Rico, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL and Willard Maas Application for Grant, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Boultenhouse mentions wanting to do this in his Puerto Rico journal and Ford did this with his Italian lover.

¹⁰⁸ See resumé, 21.7, PTCHRHRC.

¹⁰⁹ For some of these occurrences, Charles Boultenhouse diaries on Puerto Rico, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL, Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5, CHFPHRHRC and Willard Maas Application for Grant, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

¹¹⁰ See Suárez, "The Puerto Rican Lower East Side."

¹¹¹ As discussed in introduction to Tyler, *Screening the Sexes*.

¹¹² "Beyond Tourist Gazes and Performances: U.S. Consumption of Land and Labor in Puerto Rican and Mexican

were a small piece of that rise in tourism, interest in and knowledge of travel to the island came from artist and Puerto Rican friends. As one fifth of Puerto Ricans in the Lower East Side made return trips to the island, the community retained a high level of communication and first-hand knowledge of life back in Puerto Rico.¹¹³ Through descriptions from Puerto Rican residents in lower Manhattan and from the first bohemians who had visited, these artists built up a conception of what the island was like. As one of these artists said of his first trip to Puerto Rico, he was “worried fantasy and reality might be too far apart but... they weren’t.”¹¹⁴

It was not just the mere tropical weather, the vacation mentality, or the sexual activity that bohemians sought in Puerto Rico. They did enjoy these things and they employed them in their art. However, the island also stimulated their creativity in a way that New York City no longer did. Aesthetically, one bohemian said, the architecture in San Juan was amazing in a “High Camp sort of way.”¹¹⁵ They spent time at the beaches, but they engaged with locals and learned of life and culture there, and at night they went to restaurants and bars. More importantly, these bohemians sought out like-minded Puerto Rican artists to connect with on the island. Charles Boultenhouse, who went on several trips to Puerto Rico in the late 1960s and early 1970s, mentioned once going to a bar where there were hustlers but he did not go home with any. Rather he sparked a sexual, romantic, and artistic affair with a young ballet dancer. This relationship pushed Boultenhouse into what he called a “creative regression,” which he said was a good thing. He was inspired to make a film for the first time in years. He also discussed helping the dancer move to New York, where he could find work in avant-garde film.¹¹⁶ Others

Destinations” Alicia Swords and Ronald L. Mize. Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 35, No. 3, *The Impact of Tourism in Latin America* (May, 2008), 53-69

¹¹³ Myers, “Migration and Modernization.”

¹¹⁴ Charles Boultenhouse Puerto Rico diaries, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL.

¹¹⁵ Charles Boultenhouse Puerto Rico diaries, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL.

¹¹⁶ Charles Boultenhouse Puerto Rico diaries, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL.

found equal inspiration. Maas sought Ford Foundation funding to make a film in Puerto Rico, and Ford traveled through Mexico.¹¹⁷ All these bohemian travelers emphasized artistic inspiration, aesthetic beauty, and a sense of belonging in their journeys.

Bohemian artists also collaborated with institutions in Latin America itself. Maas applied for an academic appointment at a University in Puerto Rico. Marie Menken sought grants to travel to Puerto Rico to create her films. Boultenhouse assisted art magazines in Santiago, Chile and Guatemala City. Perhaps most significant of all was Ford's exhibition of his "poem posters" at a gallery in Mexico City, which brought some of New York City's visual poetry to Latin America.¹¹⁸

Above all else, the attraction for these bohemian artists to Puerto Rico was the escape it offered from the identity politics that had overtaken American society. These artists said that they had felt "persecuted" in New York.¹¹⁹ Bohemians who felt same-sex attractions were labeled as gay and their artwork as "homosexual art." They felt this limited their artistic freedoms and divided them from their colleagues who were not labeled gay. Ford expressed this bohemian detachment from and dissatisfaction of New York best when he said, "Manhattan Island is almost a foreign country."¹²⁰ For these bohemians, they found Puerto Rican society more comfortable and more in line with their cultural outlook. That they should have needed to feel a sense of belonging so far away from New York City showed how disconnected they were from the changes in society there. Bohemians felt liberated in the Caribbean from the weight of gay liberation that they bore in New York.

¹¹⁷ See Maas Ford Application, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives and Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5, CHFPHRHRC.

¹¹⁸ See Charles Boultenhouse diaries on Puerto Rico, 9.2, CBPTPNYPL, Ford's Mexico Journal, 29.5, CHFPHRHRC and Willard Maas Application for Grant, Maas File, Anthology Film Archives.

¹¹⁹ Charles Boultenhouse diaries on Puerto Rico, 1.2 and 9.2, CBPTPNYPL, 16.

¹²⁰ Charles Henri Ford, *Om Krishna I* (Rhinebeck, NY: Cherry Valley Press, 1979), 16.

Though these two groups interacted through sexual and economic means, the root of those connections was artistic creation. In the era preceding identity politics, Latinos had no barriers to artistic production within the bohemian world. White and Latino artists collaborated on works both with and without Latin themes. Scholars have shown that amidst the rise of identity politics in the 1970s, Latino art in New York took on more nationalist aims and heterosexist tones. The rich cultural, artistic, and sexual exchange between these groups in New York City was damaged as artists were categorized as gay or Latino.¹²¹

While these exchanges with the Latino community injected new life into bohemia, it could not survive the collapse of the older generation of Modernist film poets. Traces of bohemian thought continued in the artistic work of others into the 1970s, including a few works by Charles Henri Ford, Gregory Markopoulos, and younger bohemian protégés. Through the 1970s, Ford held regular Sunday salons at his apartment in the Dakota. He brought together poets from various groups and generations, including Warhol, Robert Mapplethorpe, Patti Smith, Leonora Carrington, and Gregory Battcock. Patti Smith said it was “one of the most sophisticated literary salons in the city... I felt like I was at a relative’s for Sunday dinner. As various poets read interminable poems.”¹²² Interest in the work and ideas of these artists would grow again in the 1990s and the early 21st century. However, the 1970s saw the end of several important figures in bohemia.

¹²¹ As discussed in the historiography, Suárez, “The Puerto Rican Lower East Side.”

¹²² Battcock was an art historian and journalist, as well as a painter. He worked with the underground film scene. Carrington was a British-born surrealist, but spent much the 1960s in New York City and the rest of her life in Mexico. Mapplethorpe was an artist and photographer. Smith was a musician and poet. See mentions of Ford’s salon in Patti Smith, *Just Kids* (New York: Ecco, 2010), 150, and Ford interview from September 1987, in Bruce Wolmer “Charles Henri Ford.” *BOMB* 18, (Winter 1987). Ford mentioned in the *BOMB* interview that Battcock wrote an article for the *SoHo Weekly News* about Ford’s salon.



Figure 5.6: Charles Henri Ford, Indra Tamang, and Ruth Ford. Photographer unknown, 1970s.

On December 31, 1970, Parker Tyler answered a call from Willard Maas, who was distraught over the death of Marie Menken. Tyler knew that Maas “was in a terrible state,” and Maas died only a few days later.¹²³ Tyler lamented that he had written and mailed Maas a sympathy card the day he received that phone call, which probably arrived at Maas’s apartment the day that he died. A week after, Tyler wrote to Menken’s sister Adele, “I know poor health and various trials came to them both before the end, but Marie was such a loyal sweet soul, always comradely and kind, her going was doubtless too much for Willard... It is a pity that two people with such gifts, who may have had still more to contribute to creative film, should now be gone from us totally and finally.” As previously mentioned, Andy Warhol offered the highest praise when he said, “Willard and Marie were the last of the great bohemians.”¹²⁴

Parker Tyler was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1964 and his physical state fluctuated over the next decade. His health took a sharp decline beginning in late 1972, not long after the publication of *Screening the Sexes*, and he began a regimen of several medications and

¹²³ Letter from Parker Tyler to Adele (Marie Menken’s sister), 11 January 1971, 9.44, PTCHRHRC.

¹²⁴ Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 40.

painkillers. Charles Boultenhouse, his loyal partner of three decades, assisted him through many of the difficulties that accompanied Tyler's deteriorating condition. On July 24, 1974, Parker Tyler died, which brought an end to one of the prominent voices of the Modernist bohemian life.¹²⁵ Boultenhouse never recovered from the loss, but did spend the rest of his years tending Tyler's legacy into the 1990s.

With the deaths of Menken, Maas, and Tyler, and Markopoulos and Beavers in self-imposed exile in Europe, the Gryphon Group and the film poets had fallen apart by the middle of the decade.¹²⁶ The only work in the United States by a film poet after this period of early gay liberation was a series of poetry books, *Om Krishna I, II, and III*, by Charles Henri Ford beginning in 1979.¹²⁷ Ford's poems drew heavily from eastern spirituality, which was new for him though in line with bohemia's continued cultural explorations. Also surprising was the lack of sexuality in this work compared to his previous writings. Instead, this was a return to poetic myth and he quoted Rainer Maria to illustrate that: "To transform the dreadful into the lyrical-what else is poetry." Ford did make two references to sexuality, which spoke to his take on the changes that came after Stonewall. One was a nod to gay liberation, where he called for youth to experiment sexually free of guilt. The second was a quote Ford attributed to Truman Capote, "Taming the indiscernible... as I grew older my unwillingness to be friendly toward men for my mother's sake kept recurring. Everyone know(s) I'm not traditional but I won't play it gay."¹²⁸ While this could in part have been a self-deprecating jest (in reference to Capote's flamboyance), it also expressed the bohemians' resistance to ideas of sexuality that came from gay liberation.

¹²⁵ "PARKER TYLER, 70, A WRITER ON FILMS" Obituary, *New York Times*, 26 July 1974, 36.

¹²⁶ Gregory Markopoulos, as previously mentioned, continued to produce films, but they were not distributed or screened. These films only became available in the 1990s and 2000s after his death.

¹²⁷ See Ford, *Om Krishna I*, Charles Henri Ford, *Om Krishna II* (Rhinebeck, NY: Cherry Valley Press, 1981), and Charles Henri Ford, *Om Krishna III* (New York: Red Ozier Press, 1982). Poems from each book were previously published in art, gay, and Greek cultural periodicals.

¹²⁸ Ford, *Om Krishna I*, 20.

Ford ended his book with five elegies for poets who had died in the few preceding years. For Ford, the previous era of Modernist poetry and myth had come to an end when the gay rights movement took off.

The memory of the film poets and the bohemian world that they built has been muddied over the years by the gay rights movement and identity politics. In the 1993 republishing of Tyler's *Screening the Sexes*, film critic Andrew Sarris began by framing Tyler, not as a film theorist or poet, but as a gay film critic. In the start of his introduction for the reprinting, he offered a recollection that he did not notice that Parker Tyler was gay when he first heard him speak at Columbia University. In the 1990s, Boultenhouse felt compelled to draw his own connections to the Stonewall rebellion, creating some sense in hindsight of being a part of the movement. In the afterword that he wrote for Tyler's book, he praised Stonewall as "an event that still lives in 'song and story,'" and offered his loose tie to the uprising by saying that he had visited the bar with Tyler three months prior to that night. Identity politics also eventually shaped how bohemians even looked back on their own experiences and friendships. Stan Brakhage, a dear friend to Willard Maas and Marie Menken and who spent a period learning to be a filmmaker under Maas, described Menken and Maas in a piece written in late 1983. He said that he felt that Maas used and abused Menken and saw Menken as a victim of Maas' homosexuality, not a tone in which he had ever written prior.¹²⁹ By comparison, Robert Jacoby had gotten to know Maas and Menken in the last year of their lives and described this relationship, which included loving moments and also substance abuse and fighting. Yet at that time, Jacoby saw them both as equals, as partners, and as active participants in their marriage, social life, and artistic creation.¹³⁰ These different viewpoints that came over a decade apart speak to the

¹²⁹ Stan Brakhage, *Film at Wit's End: Eight Avant-Garde Filmmakers* (New York: McPherson, 1991), 39-40.

¹³⁰ Roger Jacoby, "Willard Maas and Marie Menken: The Last Years" in *Film Culture* 63 (1977), 119-24.

sometimes divisive nature of gay identity and identity politics more broadly. This process of reimagining the film poets and the bohemian world began right away with the advent of the gay rights movement. Parker Tyler had intended the audience of *Screening the Sexes* to be a broader intellectual readership, not specifically a gay audience. Taking up homosexuality in the title and as a framework of the book gave it strong relevance within the contemporary discourse. Yet, simultaneously his work was pigeonholed. This dilemma was the exact problem that Tyler foresaw with identity politics and its shadow fell across the decades that followed the collapse of their bohemian world.

Gay liberation offered a tremendous amount of promise for this group of Modernist film poets, yet as the gay rights movement took off and grew increasingly politicized, it actually restricted the film poets' conceptions of identity and sexuality. The gay rights movement created an environment where artists' work was looked at and valued based on its political function. Barriers were erected between artistic colleagues who were then forced into categories of gay, straight, women, men, black, and white. Some bohemians resisted, some adapted, and some fled. They sought out similarities of their old world in other places around the globe, from the Caribbean, to Europe, to South Asia. Ultimately the advancement of identity politics brought about the collapse of the mythic film poet and their Modernist bohemian world, and they and their work were reimagined as gay pioneers of gay art.

CONCLUSION

Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford were central figures within a last wave of American Modernism in the twentieth century. They learned from and worked with the earlier generation of Modernists including Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Duchamp, André Breton, and Georgia O'Keefe. They constructed a Modernist bohemia in Greenwich Village in the 1930s that lasted through the 1970s. By the 1960s, they engaged with, and often struggled against, the beginnings of Postmodernist thinkers and artists. They worked with, and continually challenged, Jonas Mekas and other writers and filmmakers of the New American Cinema in the 1960s. Tyler and Ford also introduced avant-garde film to Andy Warhol, whose Pop Art became the quintessential Postmodern art. In this way, the Modernist bohemia that Tyler and Ford were leaders of from the 1930s through the 1960s was an alternative bridge from earlier Modernism to Postmodernism.

Today, Parker Tyler is best known as one of the founding fathers of film theory and criticism. Over his life he wrote ten books on film, dozens of articles, and another ten or so books on art and literature. His application of psychoanalysis, Freudian thought, and Modernist artistic principles to both avant-garde film and Hollywood film are considered ground breaking and many of his writings and ideas are still read and used in film studies courses today.

Lesser studied, but equally important, is Tyler's poetry. He wrote numerous books of poetry and regularly published poems in leading literary and poetry journals. His works were beautiful explorations of self, sexuality, art, beauty, and life. His language was often playful and funny, sometimes sexy and sensual, and other times it was poignant and sad. His poetry was thoroughly Modernist. It broke conventions of meter and rhyme, and often played with sound,

repetition, and word form. Most often Tyler's poetry evoked strong visuals and contained a feeling of the cinematic.

Charles Henri Ford similarly played with poetry, words, and visuals. His poems were often surrealistic, erotic, and brought out the darker insides of human nature. More than Tyler, Ford played with other media, including painting and sculpting, and more significantly creating "poem posters" and two "film poems." Ford also pushed the duo to write their joint-novel *The Young and Evil*, which was bohemian, dark, poetic, funny, and sexy all at once. Still a very fresh and beautiful work, it has been republished several times for new audiences to enjoy in the 1960s and 1990s since its first appearance in 1933.

More significant was the role that these two played in cultivating the art of others in their group. Starting with Ford's first poetry magazines *Blues* in the early 1930s, into which he brought Tyler right away, Ford became a muse, a magnet, and a cultivator of poetry and art. While in his teens and living at home, Ford published works by Ezra Pound, Williams Carlos Williams, and Gertrude Stein, who were the leading voices of Modernist poetry at the time. Ford and Tyler repeated this on a much grander scale with the creation of *View* magazine in 1940. In *View*, Ford and Tyler published work by all the leading avant-garde European artists that were exiled in New York during the war, and used it as a platform to showcase newly discovered talents from across the United States. It was one of the most highly respected and widely influential Modernist art and poetry magazines of the 1940s. Tyler also used it as the basis for his writings on film theory and criticism, which resulted in his first film book, *The Hollywood Hallucination*, in 1944. From there Tyler became a central figure in film theory and criticism, publishing works for three decades to follow.

In this way, Tyler and Ford were highly influential figures within the new Modernist art form of film poetry in the postwar era. Bohemian Modernist poets transformed their poetry into visual art, “film poems,” from the 1940s through the 1960s. Tyler in particular, through his role as a mentor, film critic, and his seat on the board at Cinema 16, created a space for the creation of film art and helped, in conjunction with the artists themselves, to outline the standards by which artists created their works. These works were influential in several ways. They are still screened in film festivals and written about in scholarly works. They also influenced later generations of filmmakers and artists. Perhaps most significant of all was Tyler and Ford’s introduction of Andy Warhol to the film *Flaming Creatures* by Jack Smith, which prompted Warhol to begin making his own films.

United by their poetry and artistic identity, these Modernists practiced and crafted an understanding of sexuality that was universalist. They entered into a variety of sexual, romantic, and platonic relationships with others regardless of sex, gender, ethnicity, race, age, and sexual orientation. The central principle of these bohemian unions was to produce, inspire, and aid in artistic creation. Therefore, bohemian sexuality was inclusive of homosexuality, but it did not define people as principally or exclusively homosexual; rather it saw a universal sexuality that included everyone. Furthermore, sexuality and identity were based on practice. A person did not have a fixed identity or sexuality, they did not have to behave or identify as strictly gay or straight, or in any other manner. Tyler, Ford, and their friends simply referred to their relationships and their sexuality as bohemian, until the rise of identity politics, when they expressly defined it as “pansexuality” in opposition to other ideas of sexuality and identity.

Tyler and Ford came from a world and a way of thinking that was markedly different from the cultural and social upheaval of the late 1960s. Identity politics, including the gay rights

movement, were built upon the belief that ethnicity, race, sex, and sexual orientation constitute innate and unchangeable traits and that the groups who share a trait are a distinct minority. In contrast, bohemia was open to anyone interested and anyone could create poetry and channel beauty into the world. One had to work hard and meet the standards of critics, however there were not other qualifying characteristics. This created a diverse and open-minded community of individual artists. Bohemia was also a means to combine multiple facets of life, such as art, intellectual thought, spirituality, and sex into one. This was much more like the artistic and sexual freedom that identity politics foretold would come only *after* the politicization of identity.

Their Modernist outlook meant that Tyler and Ford believed in the abilities of humans and human creation, universalist standards for art and universalist connections between people, and the construction of identities based on action and practice. It was not binary, and it was not a Postmodernist challenge to binaries, or queer. In this study, the term “queer” does not apply to Tyler, Ford, and their circle. Queer is particular to Postmodernism, and as such it is not an appropriate term for this group of Modernists. Furthermore, “queer,” as used by Lee Edelman and Judith Halberstam who focus on “negativity,” does not fit because Tyler, Ford, and their colleagues were, while not aiming for liberal inclusion, did imagine that society could change and evolve from their critiques. Queer in that way is a constant undermining and critique of society and formalist structures.¹ Conversely, “queer” in its “Utopian” understanding as used by José Esteban Muñoz’s could perhaps be closer, but it still misses the Modernist universalism which Tyler and Ford believed in and their conception of individualism, not collectivity.²

Furthermore, as Valerie Traub has addressed, since these figures did not identify as “gay” or

¹ See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

² See José E. Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

“queer,” this study avoids building anything like a teleological history that seeks to find these identities in a period before they existed.³ This is something that can be seen in Sam See’s look at *The Young and Evil*, in which See calls Tyler and Ford “proto-queer.”⁴ Lastly, Tyler, Ford, and their circle had the self-awareness, the freedom, and the linguistic skills to define themselves and their friends with their own historically relevant vocabulary and so I choose to use that set of terms in this dissertation: poet, Modernist, bohemian, and pansexual.

This group also complicates the gay history narrative of the twentieth century. As Modernist bohemians that engaged in same-sex relationships, they lived much of the sexual freedom that gay liberation sought. Yet, they were also removed from the political side of these movements. This does not undermine the narrative that is created from the works of George Chauncey, Allan Bérubé, John D’Emilio, and Daniel Hurewitz, rather it enhances and enriches that story.⁵ As Hurewitz shows that bohemia was the beginning of gay political identity in Los Angeles, this bohemian group in New York differed markedly in that it was disconnected from the political. In this way, my project falls parallel to work by Robert Corber, which has found that several other like-minded bohemians in New York were removed from gay identity.⁶ Parker Tyler and his colleagues were concerned that politicized gay identity would limit their freedoms. Though staunchly political, Martin Duberman has similarly spoken out against the narrowness and conservatism of the gay rights movement of the last twenty years, with particular focus on its

³ See Valerie Traub, “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies,” *PMLA* 128.1 (2013), 21-39

⁴ See Juan Antonio Suárez, *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of the Everyday* (Champaign-Urbana: The University of Illinois, 2007), and Samuel See, “Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in *The Young and Evil*,” *ELH* 76, No. 4 (Winter 2009), 1073-1105.

⁵ See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990), John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), and Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: Univ Of California Press, 2008).

⁶ Robert J. Corber, *Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

aims of marriage equality and hate-crime legislation, which speaks to the “puritanical” nature of the movement that Tyler predicted in the early 1970s.⁷

In the end, this project shows the bohemia and art that Parker Tyler, Charles Henri Ford, and their group created. It also reaffirms their place within Modernism. As so many studies of these figures and others around them have portrayed them as predecessors of Postmodernism, this work also draws out the critical elements of their thought, identity, and art that frequently are lost in other studies. Tyler, Ford, and their friends resisted and challenged many of the developments of Postmodernist art and identity politics. These acts were highly unique as resistance to Postmodernism and the gay rights movement not from a standpoint of conservatism, but rather as a last gasp of a Modernism that offered other liberties which Tyler and Ford knew would be lost. As Tyler said, saying he and his fellow Modernists were against “gay liberation... developing a kind of moralism that would be the survival of puritanism. You can be a gay liberationist and yet be too much of a puritan. This means falling into the same trap that all militant moralists fall into, of taking yourself too seriously... You can’t have a true culture and a true art and lack irony.”⁸ Tyler’s emphasis on a *true* culture and art belied his belief in Modernism in both art and identity, a world and a way of thinking that disappeared by the 1970s.

⁷ See Martin Duberman, *Waiting to Land: A (Mostly) Political Memoir, 1985-2008* (New York: The New Press, 2009).

⁸ Charles Ortleb Interview with Parker Tyler, July 1973, 14.1 Charles Boultenhouse and Parker Tyler Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, henceforward referred to as CBPTPNYPL.

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