

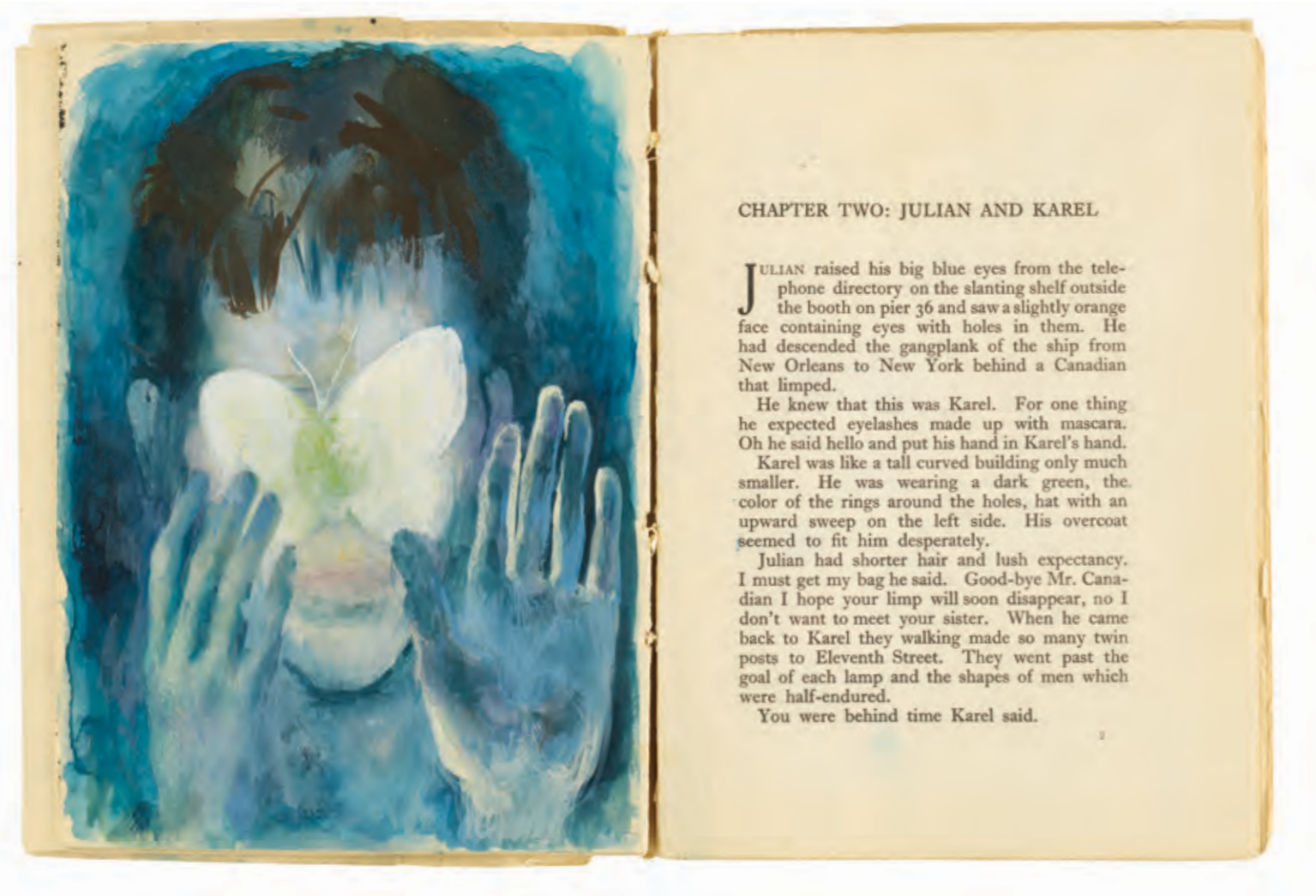
THE
YOUNG
AND
EVIL



**THE
YOUNG
AND
EVIL**

QUEER MODERNISM IN NEW YORK, 1950-1955

EDITED BY JARRETT EARNEST



CHAPTER TWO: JULIAN AND KAREL

JULIAN raised his big blue eyes from the telephone directory on the slanting shelf outside the booth on pier 36 and saw a slightly orange face containing eyes with holes in them. He had descended the gangplank of the ship from New Orleans to New York behind a Canadian that limped.

He knew that this was Karel. For one thing he expected eyelashes made up with mascara. Oh he said hello and put his hand in Karel's hand.

Karel was like a tall curved building only much smaller. He was wearing a dark green, the color of the rings around the holes, hat with an upward sweep on the left side. His overcoat seemed to fit him desperately.

Julian had shorter hair and lush expectancy. I must get my bag he said. Good-bye Mr. Canadian I hope your limp will soon disappear, no I don't want to meet your sister. When he came back to Karel they walking made so many twin posts to Eleventh Street. They went past the goal of each lamp and the shapes of men which were half-endured.

You were behind time Karel said.

NO STRANGERS

ANN REYNOLDS

*Oh it isn't a world for scissors, for mallets; but for needle,
thread and for paste: it is such a world for we were only
being yes apart, not together, and that is the making of it.
The making of us.*

— Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler¹

Near the dead center of the novel *The Young and Evil* (1933) is a letter from Karel to Julian, written as the two men prepare to move on to other lovers: "There was an unmaking of it, it being we. We were not, not either, not all, not together, not apart and it is discouraging but it is good too for I am loving him, I am finding out again with someone entirely different oh so much so that there is nothing now but the writing of it. So here."² *The Young and Evil* is a roman à clef based, in part, on letters written and sent between Parker Tyler and Charles Henri Ford in the relatively early days of their friendship, before and after Ford arrived in New York in 1930. Karel is Tyler; Julian is Ford. Many of the novel's other characters are based on mutual friends and lovers, including Kathleen Tankersley Young and Lionel Abel. At the time, and over time, some resisted identification with their fictional counterparts or even with the worlds depicted in the novel, which underscores how distinctions between reality and illusion, life and art, are relative, mutable, and constituted by different desires—and how the ways in which one perceives oneself and may be perceived by others are not inevitably the same. During *The Young and Evil*'s circuitous route to publication—which was eventually secured in Paris in 1933—and for a long time afterward, Tyler and Ford had recurring arguments about who wrote what, how well, and how much, neither of them ever ceding principal authorship nor wanting to claim sole credit for the novel or for the experiences it details.

This is how their writing got done: across letters, diaries, scrapbooks, daybooks; manuscripts of all types, including poetry, fiction, plays, children's books; and reviews, critical essays, and books about film, art, poetry, dance, and many other subjects. A significant amount of this writing got published; an almost equal amount did not, particularly in Tyler's case, although he wrote very little that he did not intend or end up trying to publish. He was always writing to be read by others, to establish relationships—often contentious ones—with others. For him all manner of relationships were worth having as long as partisanship was not a requirement. He also had little interest in sustaining distinctions between what others called personal or private language—and private life—and public discourse. In this he was consistent, often to others' dismay.

The Young and Evil was Ford and Tyler's second collaboration—their first was *Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms*, which Ford edited and published in Mississippi from 1929 to 1930 with the initial editorial assistance of Young and then Tyler. Their third was the magazine *View*.

Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler
The Young and Evil (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1933).
with six original gouaches by Pavel Tchelitchew



Ford was also this magazine's editor; Tyler frequently wrote for the publication and helped to select content for individual issues. Eventually, as associate editor, he also put most of the issues together, designing the layout and choosing the highly stylized typography. *View's* first issue appeared in September 1940, and it ran until mid-1947. With an unerring eye for quality and a penchant for the unexpected, the editors offered a mix of fiction and poetry, political and philosophical texts, musical scores, and film, art, music, and book reviews, with features on artists such as Hans Bellmer, Constantin Brancusi, Alexander Calder, Joseph Cornell, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Morris Hirshfield, Wifredo Lam, Fernand Léger, René Magritte, André Masson, Joan Miró, Isamu Noguchi, Georgia O'Keeffe, Man Ray, Florine Stettheimer, and Pavel Tchelitchew. Many of these artists also produced images for the magazine's cover. Writers published by the magazine included: Lionel Abel, Jorge Luis Borges, Paul Bowles, Kay Boyle, André Breton, Nicolas Calas, Leonora Carrington, Maya Deren, Lawrence Durrell, Jean Genet, Paul Goodman, Lou Harrison, Harriet and Sidney Janis, Lincoln Kirstein, Julien Levy, Mina Loy, Marshall McLuhan, Henry Miller, Marianne Moore, Harold Rosenberg, Raymond Roussel, Jean-Paul Sartre, Meyer Schapiro, Edith Sitwell, Wallace Stevens, Dorothea Tanning, Virgil Thomson, Carl Van Vechten, and William Carlos Williams, among many others. Texts by such well-known authors from a relatively broad variety of literary, political, and artistic worlds, locations, and generations appeared alongside stories, poems, letters, and artwork by children, young soldiers, prison inmates, and other so-called "untrained artists," including Ford's mother, Gertrude Cato. Ford and Tyler did little to call attention to these juxtapositions. If anything, they used size, typography, and color to suggest an eclectic if loosely configured continuity and equivalence, to level and expand the playing field in a singular way.

Other of Ford and Tyler's contemporaries confidently labeled art and people by category and sought to delineate clear boundaries among them. In an early review of little magazines for *Partisan Review*, for example, the critic Clement Greenberg described *View* as "a tabloid-sized

'poets' paper' put out by a group of American surrealists in New York. From it we gather that the surrealists are unwilling to say goodbye to anything. And that the American species identifies literature and art with its social life, and that this social life is complicated and satisfying. The gossip is good if you know the names; if you know the people I imagine it might get to be a little too much. Sometimes it is even a little too much for plain strangers."³ Greenberg despaired that, because of such cliquish socializing, little magazines like *View* had lost touch with real politics, when the times required clear editorial criteria and evidence of taking sides. In a letter to the editor published in *Partisan Review*, Tyler objected to Greenberg's misleading characterizations of *View* and the "shocking disregard of certain of his privately expressed opinions," countering that Ford did not identify as a surrealist and published mostly nonsurrealist contributions and noting that "Mr. G. may be plain to some of these people but he is certainly no stranger to them.... Mr. Greenberg was very friendly to a 'name' constantly in *View*—the undersigned—and thought enough of him to write him about an unpublished essay he was shown: 'Your description of the poetic muse is wonderful, even though I might be inclined to disagree with it.... There is an irresistible temptation to steal your ideas.'"⁴

Such exchanges evoke the particular but often provisional and contradictory ways in which people came together on the pages of little magazines and, by extension, in everyday life in New York during the 1940s. Greenberg's quite one-dimensional and dismissive labeling of *View*, meant to position himself well outside the magazine's aesthetic and social orbits, was an expression of opinion masquerading as hard objective truth; his reactive assertions reflected insecurities about where the "right place" to stand might be and with whom—politically, aesthetically, socially, and sexually—at a moment when such clear distinctions were mostly hypothetical abstractions, impossible to sustain in the day to day. Tyler was quick to respond and refute Greenberg's assertions with evidence from his own personal experiences with the critic. From his perspective, there could be no disinterested strangers.

View magazine, edited by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler
LEFT TO RIGHT: June 1943, cover by Man Ray; December 1943, cover by Pavel Tchelitchew; March 1945, cover by Marcel Duchamp

View magazine, edited by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler
March 1945, interior spread by Frederick Kiesler



Tyler and Greenberg's exchange indirectly points to a problem of space and spatial perception. Tyler saw complex continuities where Greenberg alleged discrete and compulsory divides. From the late 1930s into the mid-1940s, New York was famously flooded with intellectuals, writers, and artists—some escaping Europe because of World War II and others fleeing America for New York for less immediately urgent yet personally significant political, social, and cultural reasons. They could not escape each other; the worlds they all hoped to inhabit were too small, too financially and intellectually interdependent, and too physically proximate. They wrote each other letters expressing emotional attachments or personal slights, along with offering advice on each other's work; they incorporated or challenged each other's political and cultural positions in print and most certainly in person when they encountered one another in bars and restaurants, at political and cultural events, and in each other's homes; they complained about each other in their diaries; and later they mentioned—or more frequently pointedly failed to mention—each other in their memoirs. Collectively, they could never constitute any kind of official group; friendships among them, if one could even use that term consistently, were often fleeting or opportunistic, sometimes compromised by shifting political and sexual alliances. If there were couples, triads, and closely knit small groups, these were always susceptible to shifts, expansions, and contractions. For every constellation of relationships articulated in a conversation, letter, painting, drawing, or photograph, there are others—and other members—not captured in any single iteration. Similarly, if individual works of art, poems, or essays were not exhibited or published, many were still certainly circulated among and read by heterogeneous others in relation to texts and images that were. They circulated regardless of institutional sanction and limited public venues, and were rarely substantially distinct from the work that did receive public exposure. The differences were a matter of degree, not kind, and could have been easily bridged by social interactions and gossip, by coming together in various ways.

The way these relationships took shape and were perceived is also reflected in how these individuals articulated space within their paintings, drawings, and photographs, and how space was theorized by them and others. At the time pictorial space was not simply an assumed by-product of a particular artist's alliance with figuration or naturalism versus abstraction, but rather it was constitutive of the artist's sense of the relationship between illusion and reality, between bodies on both sides of the picture plane, and ultimately between life and art. "Transparency" was one of the key terms artists and critics used to articulate these relationships and to distinguish between fundamentally different conceptions of space. Almost always the term appears at a critical moment in a rehearsal of the history of Western painting, because how this history was told was also a central indicator of how distinctions were being drawn. For example, within one of his versions of this history, included in a 1944 essay entitled "Abstract Art," Greenberg describes the fifteenth-century Italian and Flemish painters' conception of the canvas as a "transparent rather than an opaque surface," claiming that when, at the end of the nineteenth century, French painters began to transform this "uniformly smooth and transparent surface behind which the picture used to take place"—what he calls "its window pane"—they were acknowledging "the brute flatness of the surface on which [the artist] was trying to create a new and less deceptive illusion of the third dimension."⁵ According to Greenberg, this undermining of illusion, perfected by Cézanne and the cubists and embraced by the contemporary artists he considered most promising, reflected the positivism of the best philosophical and political intelligence of the time, to the extent that "fiction, under which illusionist art can be subsumed, is no longer able to provide the intensest aesthetic experience."⁶

Pavel Tchelitchev
George Platt Lynes, c. 1937–1942
 Oil on canvas
 45 ½ × 33 ¾ inches
 115,6 × 85,7 cm



In a review a few months earlier, he had already positioned this art-historical lineage in contrast to what he described as the neo-romantics', surrealists', and others' "[return] to the academic" as evidence of "a yearning to put their art into a more explicit relation with the rest of their lives than post-cubist painting and sculpture seem to allow. Cubism, or abstract art, gives the artist no room to express his *immediate* feelings about sex, for instance."⁷

Lincoln Kirstein responded to "Abstract Art" in a lengthy letter to Greenberg, taking him to task for almost all of his assertions about painting and, in particular, for his claims about the function of the window pane: "The mechanics of an early Titian or a late Bellini, even of a Breughel, certainly of Vermeer, that is how the paint is put on, is not so much a question of surface, as of the descriptive quality of the forms described in air. The question of the atmospheric envelope, edges, transparency of flesh, differentiation of materials, the complete visual effect, is not involved with the picture as a window, but with the interests of the artist to depict objects with the greatest love and interest."⁸ For Kirstein, Tchelitchev, an artist Greenberg identified with neo-romanticism and surrealism, was one of the greatest contemporary artists to build on this legacy, compounding multiple perspectives into a complexity that reflects "the multiplicity of daily reference."⁹ Kirstein and Greenberg seem to be in agreement, at least with respect to the qualities that differentiated the painters that each championed from the painters that each did not—their disagreement seems to adhere to a matter of preference for or aversion to references to daily life. But this leaves the role of illusion or fiction, and the transparent window, in an awkward place with regard to both arguments unless one recognizes that where Greenberg viewed illusion as increasingly irrelevant to the positivist realities he claimed were exemplary of his time, for Kirstein, illusion could constitute a reality that was integral to both of their times.¹⁰

Paul Cadmus
Study for *Seeing the New Year In*, n.d.
Ink on paper
7 ½ × 8 ¾ inches
19.1 × 21.9 cm

George Platt Lynes
Male Nude, 1952
Gelatin silver print
7 ¾ × 7 ½ inches
18.7 × 19.1 cm





Tchelitchew may not have used multiple perspectives or what came to be called “double-images” in the numerous erotic drawings he did for Alfred C. Kinsey (see pp. 36–37, 40–41), but these illusionistically rendered drawings referred to life, not fictions. These drawings—along with contributions by Paul Cadmus, George Platt Lynes, and others—were intended, in part, as research materials, but they were complemented by first-hand experience. After watching Lynes having sex in New York at a specially arranged sex party, Kinsey remarked on his great skill: “He made love better than anyone I have ever witnessed.”¹¹ For others, such images functioned as vehicles for fantasizing about the circumstances of their making or about previous personal experiences, the viewer not necessarily recognizing or knowing any of the individuals involved.¹² They activated the spectator, who, in turn, projected fantasies into them or recognized the realities of their own lives in them, in a reciprocal process.

Such images, including those made for Kinsey, may now reside in archives, and most did not circulate so widely during these artists’ lifetimes, if much at all, but their intended functions cross over to the paintings, drawings, and photographs that did. The act of viewing and being viewed as bodies in space, point of view being established and highlighted through extreme foreshortening, tightly cropped close-ups, deep or alternately quite shallow pictorial space—in the latter case, complete with figures pressed up against or almost falling out of the picture to produce exaggerated trompe l’oeil effects—or the inclusion of doubled images via mirror reflections or transparency suggest that the artists didn’t simply aspire to a particular aesthetic gleaned from the distant or more recent past, such as Italian Renaissance painting or surrealism. They desired active relationships with a kind of image making that refashioned the world while recording it at the same time, an approach that was broadly sympathetic to these aesthetics from the past.

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Throughout their collaborations, from *The Young and Evil* to *View*, and in their own individual work, be it writing or image making, Ford and Tyler shaped a mode of experience that Tyler called “erotic spectatorship.” Erotic spectatorship, according to Tyler, is a “collaborative vision: an entente between the thing seen and the see-er—as though organic nature’s repetitiveness were a response to the spectator’s desire to perpetuate natural images; consequently, we might assume the tendency not only of art, but of reality, to make us see only what it is desirable to see.”¹³ This process begins with concentration on particular details in images and, through them, hallucinating into being more deeply desired imagery, often based on memories summoned by the original image’s details. It is a somewhat Proustian process but willed into existence, often over time and repeated viewings, through a deeper experience beyond the surface of the thing. In a 1944 essay entitled “The Erotic Spectator: An Essay on the Eye of the Libido,” Tyler provides a number of examples but describes in greatest detail his experiences of looking at a color reproduction of a painting by Audrey Buller of morning glories encircling a tree stump in a subway advertisement issued by The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Because he rides the subway often, Tyler notes, he has many opportunities to study this ubiquitous image. And, although the painting it represents is by an artist with whom he is unfamiliar, he finds the image itself at once “marvelous and familiar.”¹⁴ “We do not need to have read that arch-interpreter of simple images, Proust,” he writes, “to know that, presented to the visual complex of eye-plus-memory, an object is automatically encrusted with associations attached, not only to the class of objects, as perceived in average experience, but also



TOP
Charles Henri Ford
Portrait of Parker Tyler, c. 1948
 Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1985
 20 × 16 inches
 50.8 × 40.6 cm

BOTTOM
Charles Henri Ford
Parker Tyler in Drag, c. 1940–1943
 Gelatin silver print, printed c. 1985
 20 × 16 inches
 50.8 × 40.6 cm

complicated with memories related to delicate patterns of vision that correspond to the actual patina laid by time on surfaces of paintings and statues, transforming their quality to one degree or another.”¹⁵ When art and “life” meet up through the attentive gaze of the erotic spectator, metamorphosis occurs both within the image and within the reality it denotes, forming a double-image, if not triple, and so on, often through the perception and articulation of particular details—what Tyler calls “the connoisseurship of sight.” As a result, life becomes imbued with a sort of magic realism, one seen and then made, either in the mind or in additional works of art.

Tyler developed a parallel process for cinema to counter what he frequently called “the whole reality-myth of film,” which he viewed as a rational effort to formally summarize “normal behavior”—to present it as reality itself as opposed to embracing worlds created by, for, and with the camera that are unconcerned with reality in this sense.¹⁶ For him, the great problem of his time was “the world which group and individual find to live in and their capacity to change this world according to needs and desires or passively to be changed by it. Imaginative workers in the experimental-film field have contributed insights into this human problem by ingenious exploitation of the film’s aesthetic possibilities.”¹⁷ In this remark, he echoes Kirstein’s 1944 description of magic realists who “try to convince us that extraordinary things are possible simply by painting them as if they existed.”¹⁸

This is how Tyler could then imagine himself as a Hollywood diva by internalizing the illusions of Hollywood and projecting them back out as his own, illusions without reference to “reality,” which the camera—in most cases, Ford’s camera—captured once again (see p. 32). Tyler and Ford’s world may feel like a lost one to some, but not for the reasons one might think. During the 1940s, their world was not marginal with closed, cliquish borders. Some just chose to describe it as such. Their work and that of many of their contemporaries—like all art—is best viewed when one rejects presumed inevitabilities and suspends quick judgments. Its apparent specificity was always part of something, in relation to others, temporally bounded and yet still unfolding. It was not part of a settled history that has been, and continues to be relegated by some to an anachronistic past. At the time, the question was, in part, “Which past?” All of it was up for grabs, contested. When looking across institutional archives and personal collections and understanding how all of this work was made and experienced, a portrait of the time expands, revealing its imbrication with the fantasies that made it more real for those who lived it day to day.

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Douglas Crimp, a beloved friend and fellow-traveler in the archives of queer collaboration, someone singular “among all the singular things in the world.”

1. Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, *The Young and Evil* (Paris: Obelisk Press, 1933; New York: Gay Presses of New York, 1988), p. 85. Citations refer to the Gay Presses edition.
2. Ford and Tyler, *The Young and Evil*, p. 85.
3. Clement Greenberg, “The Renaissance of the Little Mag,” *Partisan Review* (January–February 1941), p. 73. Greenberg was not alone in pigeonholing the magazine by category. Another critic, writing the same year for *The New Republic* described *View*’s general atmosphere as “definitely mauve.” “Little Mags, What Now?,” *The New Republic* (March 31, 1941), p. 424.
4. Parker Tyler, “View Objects,” *Partisan Review* (May–June 1941), p. 255. Tyler also notes that “View’s lone surrealist literary animator, Nicolas Calas, attacked Mr. Greenberg in its pages; thus Calas has been inflated into a group, or perhaps even, subconsciously, into a ‘gang.’”
5. Greenberg, “Abstract Art,” *The Nation* (April 15, 1944), pp. 450–451.
6. Greenberg, “Abstract Art,” p. 451.
7. Greenberg, “Review of the Whitney Annual and the Exhibition *Romantic Painting in America*,” *The Nation* (January 1, 1944), p. 24.
8. Lincoln Kirstein to Clement Greenberg, April 17, 1944. James Thrall Soby Papers, Getty Center, Los Angeles, box 3, folder 11.
9. Kirstein to Greenberg, April 17, 1944.
10. At the same time, Greenberg did acknowledge and disparage other unavoidable realities. For instance, in a 1945 review of a dance performance, Greenberg expressed the fear that “the tendency toward homosexualization of all sex in our society is becoming more and more apparent.”

- Clement Greenberg, “Art,” *The Nation* (November 3, 1945), p. 476. In a letter to Ford, Tyler writes with particular hyperbolic flair: “Don’t be terror-stricken but the heterosexual drive for the Inner homosexual is On. I don’t know whether I simply get in the way or whether my back is scarlet from the sun: I know I’m always hearing oncoming trampling of hooves (both communist and reactionary) not to mention the blown hot breath but when I open my eyes for the last precious instant there’s the Bull’s face right opposite mine saying wont [sic] I come up to the room for a while and he’ll borrow the Victrola from the couple downstairs?” Parker Tyler to Charles Henri Ford, August 22, 1936. Parker Tyler Collection, 1901–1982, Harry Ransom Center, Austin.
11. Alfred C. Kinsey to Samuel Steward, quoted in Barry Reay, *Sex in the Archives: Writing American Sexual Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), p. 72. The Kinsey Institute holds 600 photographs and 2,300 negatives by Lynes.
 12. Reay, *Sex in the Archives*, p. 88.
 13. Parker Tyler, “The Erotic Spectator: An Essay on the Eye of the Libido,” *View* (October 1944), p. 75.
 14. Tyler, “The Erotic Spectator,” p. 76.
 15. Tyler, “The Erotic Spectator,” p. 75.
 16. These are ideas that Tyler expressed repeatedly throughout his life, beginning with his first book on cinema, *The Hollywood Hallucination*, which was published in 1944. One of the latest articulations appears in Tyler, “Warhol’s New Sex Film,” *Sex Psyche Etcetera in the Film* (Middlesex, England: Pelican Books, 1971), p. 14.
 17. Parker Tyler, “The Film Sense and the Painting Sense,” *Art Digest* (February 15, 1954), p. 27.
 18. Lincoln Kirstein, “Introduction,” in *American Realists and Magic Realists*, ed. Dorothy C. Miller and Alfred H. Barr Jr. Exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943), p. 7.