



## Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /  
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-  
speaking world

14 | 2017

Early American Surrealisms, 1920-1940 / Parable Art

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### Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

### Electronic version

URL: <http://miranda.revues.org/9812>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.9812

ISSN: 2108-6559

### Electronic reference

Alexander Howard, « Keep on Waking : Charles Henri Ford, Camp, and Surrealism », *Miranda* [Online], 14 | 2017, Online since 03 April 2017, connection on 28 April 2017. URL : <http://miranda.revues.org/9812> ; DOI : 10.4000/miranda.9812

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# Keep on Waking : Charles Henri Ford, Camp, and Surrealism

Alexander Howard

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## Modernism, Innovation, Camp

- 1 The American poet, multimedia artist, experimental filmmaker, and editor Charles Henri Ford (1908–2002) occupies a curious position in the annals of literary and aesthetic history. A difficult figure to pin down at the best of times, the oft–overlooked Ford was an important second–generation modernist little magazine editor and America’s first Surrealist poet.<sup>1</sup> If one looks closely enough, it soon becomes apparent that Ford was involved in many of crucial avant-garde scenes of the last century. However, despite the breadth and depth of his artistic interests and literary achievements, scant critical attention has been paid to the Mississippi-born Ford. That is, until relatively recently. Towards the end of the 1990s, a small number of critical studies that engaged with aspects of Ford’s literary and aesthetic output began to emerge. For example, in *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (1998), Joseph Allan Boone describes the manner in which Ford’s early experimental novel *The Young and Evil* (1933) “links configurations of urban space to the marginalized sexual identities and the practices that such sites engender” (Boone 257).<sup>2</sup> On a slightly different note, Dickran Tashjian, in his art–historical *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American AvantGarde 1920 - 1950* (2001), discusses some features of Ford’s various aesthetic and editorial ventures in depth.

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- 2 There is certainly much to admire in Tashjian’s account of the dissemination of Surrealism on the shores of the United States, which, amongst other things, considers the respective merits of Ford’s Mississippi–based modernist periodical *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929–1930) and his long–running art journal *View* (1940–1947), over the course of two consecutive chapters. Tashjian has some positive things to say about both magazines in *A Boatload of Madmen*. His praise for *Blues* is figured in terms of (primarily

unrealised) potentiality. In his estimation, Ford's second-generation little modernist magazine "had the potential of being both indigenous and international in its makeup" (Tashjian 138). Tashjian is similarly approving when he turns his attention to the later *View*. Tashjian singles out Ford's editorial efforts on this highly influential New York-based art journal for praise. He suggests, somewhat paradoxically, that Ford's editorial "eclecticism" ensured that *View* had, by 1944, "stabilized into something more than a catch-as-catch-can little magazine" (Tashjian 196, 200).

- 3 Despite the presence of these and other such flattering comments, Tashjian's appraisal of Ford's achievements is far from being unequivocally positive. Indeed, at times, he seems almost oddly determined to damn Ford with liberal lashings of the very faintest praise.<sup>4</sup> This is especially true when it comes to *Blues*. Having first posited that a heady "combination of naiveté and nerve allowed Ford to write to notable avant-garde figures and ask for contributions to a new little magazine starting out in the provinces of Mississippi" (Tashjian 138), he then suggests that *Blues* nevertheless failed to live up to expectations. According to Tashjian, "*Blues* was not on the cutting edge of innovation in the late 1920s. *The Little Review* and other magazines had beaten Ford to the punch earlier in the decade" (Tashjian 155). Yet Tashjian also feels compelled to add, with more than just a hint of condescension, that his intention here "is not so much to expose Ford's youthful enthusiasm (he was barely twenty years old) as to reveal the skill with which he created the *illusion of innovation*" (Tashjian 155, emphasis added). Finally, Tashjian brings proceedings to a close by suggesting that, even in these early stages, "Ford was a master of publicity, if not for the avant-garde, then certainly for *Blues*, and indirectly for himself" (Tashjian 155).
- 4 Tashjian's analysis is, in some respects, absolutely correct : the historical record shows that Ford did indeed display a remarkable flair for publicity and self-promotion from the very outset of his career in the arts.<sup>5</sup> In equal measure, however, we might just as easily say that Tashjian gets it wrong in certain ways when it comes to Ford.<sup>6</sup> I am thinking specifically of Tashjian's backhanded compliment about Ford's quasi – mystical ability when it comes to the task of conjuring up illusions of literary and aesthetic innovation. There is far more to Ford – and half – forgotten ventures such as *Blues* – than mere smoke and mirrors. This is something that I want to debate in the following article. In particular, I seek here to detail some of the ways in which we might indeed speak of Ford as an intuitive aesthetic innovator. This becomes clear if we consider the overarching trajectory of Ford's longstanding involvement with the Surrealist movement. In what follows, I want to propose that Ford, in his own inimitable fashion, encourages us to think critically about Surrealism. Accordingly, I want to scrutinize some of the ways in which Ford engaged with Surrealism over the course of his long and varied career. Drawing on published poetry, periodicals, experimental fiction, freshly unearthed archival material, and pre-existing secondary criticism, I aim to show that Ford was far more critically engaged than has been previously suggested.<sup>7</sup> In particular, I want to consider the manner in which Ford sought to conceptually transform Surrealism, both in his own work and in the output of similarly-minded writers and artists whom he inspired and influenced.
- 5 Of especial interest in this regard is what I will, in the final section of this article, describe as Ford's "Camp" sensibility. But first : what is Camp ? In a sense it depends on whom you decide to ask. For example, in the introduction to their co-edited collection *Out in Culture : Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Essays in Popular Culture* (1995), Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander

Doty posit that gays and lesbians relate to mass-produced popular culture *differently*, via “an alternative or negotiated, if not always fully subversive, reception of the products and messages of popular culture — and, of course, by producing popular literature, film, music, television, photography and fashion within mainstream mass culture industries (Creekmur and Doty 1). Developing this point, Creekmur and Doty note that many gay and lesbian producers and consumers of popular culture have, at different times, interrogated the ways in which they might be able to access culturally prominent — and predominantly heteronormative — modes and means of aesthetic representation without risking the loss of, nor denying, their status as queer agents. To put it another way, gays and lesbians have, according to Creekmur and Doty, often asked just “how they might participate without necessarily assimilating, and how they might take pleasure in, and make affirmative meanings out of, experiences and artifacts that they have been told do not offer queer pleasures and meanings” (Creekmur and Doty 1-2). Significantly, this is where, for Creekmur and Doty at least, the concept of Camp comes into play; they highlight the fact that “[f]or some time (at least since the model embodied by Oscar Wilde), this queerly “different” experience of mass culture was most evident, if coded, in the ironic, scandalous sensibility known as *camp* — perhaps gay culture’s crucial contribution to modernism” (Creekmur and Doty 2).

- 6 There are a number of things to be said about this far-reaching, initially surprising claim. Let us begin by considering what Creekmur and Doty have to say about the seemingly “scandalous sensibility” that goes by the name of Camp. By turns “casual and severe, affectionate and ironic,” Camp serves, or rather served, in Creekmur and Doty’s estimation, “to deflate the pretensions of mainstream culture while elevating what that same culture devalued or repressed, thus providing a strategy for rewriting and questioning the meanings and values of mainstream representations” (Creekmur and Doty 2). Interestingly, this take on the matter of Camp dovetails neatly with the stance taken by Susan Sontag in her seminal, if perpetually problematic “Notes on ‘Camp’” (1964). In these “Notes,” which are dedicated to the memory of the aforementioned Wilde, Sontag had cause to describe the Camp “eye” as having “the power to transform experience” (Sontag 277). The Camp “eye,” or “sensibility” is, for Sontag, “one that is alive to a double sense in which some things can be taken” (Sontag 281). This, she argues, “comes out clearly in the vulgar use of the word Camp as a verb, “to camp,” something that people do” (Sontag 281). “To camp,” in the sense that Sontag understands the term, is to engage with, or to seek resource to, “a mode of seduction” — a mode of seduction which, in her reading, “employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders” (Sontag 281). Moreover, as is well known, and as we will discuss later in this piece, Sontag strives in her “Notes” to emphasise, in a manner not all that dissimilar to Creekmur and Doty, the aesthetic character of this most ‘seductive’ of critical terms. Bearing all this in mind, I want in this piece to suggest that Ford always appreciated the importance and potential of Camp. I want also to suggest that he intuitively and positively responded to Camp’s tantalizing promise of an alternative, “supplementary” set of critical values and aesthetic standards detached from what Sontag once described, famously, as “the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment” (Sontag 286). Having done so, this article will draw to a close with a necessarily provisional sketch of some of the ways in which Ford’s discernibly Camp aesthetic and literary sensibility can be said to have underwritten his hitherto overlooked modification of Surrealism.

## Mississippi, New York, Paris

- 7 In order to evaluate Ford's career-long interest in Surrealism, we need first to know a little more about his background. Ford was born on 10 February 1908, in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, into a relatively prosperous, and somewhat peripatetic, family of hoteliers. By the time he reached early adolescence, Ford had begun to feel increasingly isolated and creatively frustrated in the South, which he tended to figure in terms of conservatism and conformity.<sup>8</sup> Ford's frustration is palpable in his adolescent memoir, *I Will Be What I Am* (which spans the period between 1922 and 1928). In this unpublished document, Ford rails against what he perceives as the provincialism and cultural conservatism surrounding him in the South, whilst calling for "new sensations, new friends, [and a] new environment" (Ford *Will*, 91). What is more, Ford also emphasizes the fact "I must not live my life at home – sheltered and without pain. There isn't the slightest doubt but that I would become a hopeless neurotic. For that reason I must go to New York" (94). However, Ford lacked the requisite financial and familial freedom to relocate to New York at the time of writing (in 1928). Realizing this, he found other, inventive ways to circumvent his geographical and cultural isolation, be these things real or imagined.<sup>9</sup>
- 8 Modernist little magazine culture was particularly important for Ford at this early juncture in his life and literary career. It offered him a means with which to forge meaningful literary connections that also traversed significant geographical distances, whilst simultaneously affording him the opportunity to announce his arrival on what was by the late 1920s a decidedly overcrowded avant-garde literary scene. Charged by his reading of William Stanley Braithwaite's annual *Anthology of Magazine Verse*, and inspired by his initial encounter with the Harlem Renaissance poet Kathleen Tankersley Young, Ford began editing and publishing his *Blues : a Magazine of New Rhythms* in Columbus, Mississippi in February 1929.<sup>10</sup> Ford's *Blues* attracted a great deal of critical attention from a number of established literary figures. William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and Ezra Pound all singled *Blues* out for praise.<sup>11</sup> Pound, for one, had much to say about *Blues*, which he once referred to as Ford's "local show" (Ford, *Parents* 618). Pound certainly saw potential in Ford's project. We can see this in a letter Pound sent to Joseph Vogel on 23 January 1929, in which he states his belief that there was "a chance [in *Blues*] for the best thing since *The Little Review* and certainly the best thing done in America without European help" (Pound, *Letters* 223).
- 9 Pound's remark about Ford's Mississippi-based *Blues* being possibly "the best thing done in America without European help" is intriguing. In a roundabout fashion, this comment hints at a certain degree of cultural anxiety on Pound's part. Much like his modernist ally and long-suffering friend William Carlos Williams, Pound hoped that Ford's nascent "local" project would remain a strictly American affair. Bearing this in mind, it seems quite reasonable to suggest that sort of literature promoted in the nine issues of Ford's second-generation modernist magazine, would have rendered Pound somewhat surprised and left him more than just a little deflated. From the very beginning, Ford's *Blues* was a resolutely cosmopolitan affair. Ford, it seems fair to say, had no interest in merely showcasing instances of "local" American literary talent in his *Blues*. Instead, he desired to construct a textual "haven for the unorthodox in america and for those writers living abroad who though writing in english have decided that america and [the] american environment are not hospitable to creative work" (Uncredited n.p.).<sup>12</sup> Tellingly, this

textual haven, which was referred to as “the big blue blasphemous baby of Charles Henri Ford,” and which was also advertised, revealingly, as a “Bi-sexual Bi-Monthly,” assumed the form of a metaphorical crucible in which a variety of decidedly diverse, and, more often than not, openly queer outlooks were able to interact, clash, and flourish without fear of reappraisal or chastisement (Ford, “Scrapbook” n.p.).

10 We might say that Pound’s mistake was to assume that these issues pertained to locality, and to nationality. To put it another way, perhaps Pound failed to appreciate that Ford was less interested in the notion of nationality than in defining a distinctive literary and aesthetic sensibility of a non-normative persuasion, something that prefigures his subsequent engagement with ideas of Camp. Ford intuitively grasped the fact that the very nature of modernist little magazine culture, which Suzanne W. Churchill has described as uniquely “intimate and social” (Churchill 179), actively encouraged and aided the development of just such a creative sensibility, whilst also stimulating artistic associations between like-minded individuals who were sometimes separated by large geographical expanses, such as the Atlantic Ocean. In order better to achieve his aims, and so as more nimbly to sidestep his adolescent isolation, Ford proved himself quite willing to reach out, to take advice, and to accept “help” from European sources. Significantly, one source of assistance came from the well-known American expatriate poet and editor Eugene Jolas, who was based in Paris.

11 Ford clearly admired Jolas, so much so that he eventually approached him to join the editorial board of *Blues*<sup>13</sup>. Above all, Ford was much taken with Jolas’s influential second-generation modernist little magazine *transition*, in which, as an aspiring, artistically-inclined teenager living in the South, he first discovered surrealist-inflected instances of literary avant-gardism. Interviewed in 1987 by Bruce Wolmer, Ford details the way in which his initial encounter with *transition*, and his reading of Jolas’s work, shaped his own creative praxis. Ford’s response to the question “Who were you influenced by in *transition*?” is worth quoting in full:

Eugene Jolas himself. Later on I discovered Paul Eluard and André Breton and the poet Benjamin Péret. But my first surrealist thrill came from a nonmember [sic] of the official group who was, however, an advocate of surrealism — Jolas himself. I remember that distinctly. (Wolmer n.p.)

12 Ford’s response is highly suggestive, resonating in relation to his decades-long engagement with all things officially Surrealist, as both a committed “advocate” and, significantly, as an inquisitive non-member. In equal measure, Ford’s retrospective account of his initial introduction to Jolas’s *transition* is useful. It captures something of the sensual, almost physical “thrill” he experienced when first coming into contact with surrealist materials. This experience, when combined with, and complemented by, his subsequent reading of prominent Surrealist poets such as Breton, Éluard, and Péret, were to electrify many, if not all, of his subsequent literary, aesthetic, and editorial ventures.<sup>14</sup>

13 Knowing this, it should come as no surprise to find surrealist traces, elements, and tropes contained in the pages of Ford’s *Blues*. For example, contributions such as Parker Tyler’s poem “This Dreaming Image” allude to prominent works of literary Surrealism, whilst also dialoguing with established principles of Poundian Imagism.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in Édouard Roditi’s “Séance” we find an elliptical narrative scene informed by surrealist uncanniness, as well as motifs indebted to Freudian psychoanalysis. Finally, and wholly unsurprisingly, we find evidence of Surrealist influence in Ford’s various contributions to *Blues*. Consider his “Suite,” which owes a clear debt to the pioneering creative

experiments carried out by Surrealist writers like André Breton and Philippe Soupault. In the opening lines of this prose piece, which was published in the seventh issue of *Blues*, Ford achieves a disorientating, trance-like, and even hallucinatory literary effect through his use of long, winding, and unpunctuated sentences. Having generated a trance-like effect (in language that consciously approximates Surrealist automatism), Ford then alternates between longer sentences and shorter, more declamatory statements. This syntactical variability serves to heighten the disorientating sensation that one experiences whilst reading this example of Ford's early prose. All things considered, the formal patterning of this particular piece reads as an emulation of foundational Surrealist texts like Breton and Soupault's *Les Champs magnétiques* (1920). And much like *Les Champs magnétiques*, an internal logic and coherence underwrites the appearance of nonsensicality generated in this instance of Ford's early writing.

- 14 It is, however, just as important to note that whilst the short-lived *Blues* contained discernible surrealist elements, Ford did not conceive of his first literary and editorial venture, which was mainly concerned with what I have described elsewhere as the “belated renovation” of first-generation Anglo-American modernism, as a literary organ dedicated to the investigation and promotion of Surrealism.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Ford's formative experiences as both a writer and as a second-generation modernist little magazine editor helped him to refine some of the literary and publishing strategies that he was to use when later seeking to adapt pre-existing Surrealist precepts more to his own liking. Chief amongst these was the idea that inclusive, and simultaneously expansive, collaborative exchange could foster the conditions for the expression of new literary forms and aesthetic ideas. Notably, these collaborative exchanges were often conducted via that archetypally modern medium of everyday communication: the international postal network. This communication network had a particularly vital role to play when it came to *Blues*. Isolated in the Deep South, Ford had yet to meet any of his contributors when he started work on *Blues*.<sup>17</sup> Hence the importance of the postal network for Ford: it afforded him ample opportunity to establish friendships and working relationships with other artists and writers. Most valuably, it served to introduce him to the queer bohemian poet Parker Tyler (1904-1974), who was to play a significant role in Ford's life and literary career.
- 15 Parker Tyler had been born into a fairly peripatetic family in the American South (in New Orleans). Arriving in New York at the age of 20, Tyler quickly established himself in the historically queer enclave of Greenwich Village. Having struck up a correspondence with Ford (who was still in Mississippi), Tyler encouraged the younger poet to visit him in New York, which he did in January 1929. Not long after *Blues* went into print, Tyler also assumed an associate position on the editorial board of Ford's modernist little magazine. Tyler's role in the development of *Blues* denotes the beginning of what was to become an extremely fruitful period of collaborative exchange and dialogue with the likeminded Ford. After *Blues* ceased publication in late 1930, Tyler and Ford began work on their highly experimental text *The Young and Evil*. Drawn from their shared personal experiences as young single men in Greenwich Village, this scandalous, sexually brazen, and quasi-Rabelaisian novel is important for a variety of reasons. For one, it is a foundational text of what has come to be known as queer modernism.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, in the context of the current discussion, *The Young and Evil* can, in certain respects, be read as a companion piece to Ford's modernist little magazine. That is to say, like the earlier *Blues*, it can be conceptualized as a kind of non-normative textual haven, where, in the

words of Joseph Allan Boone, “homosexuality is the norm rather than the exception” (Boone 252). In other words, what we have here is a collaborative creative gesture that strives to, if we were to crib from Scott Herring’s critical account of queer slumming during the 1920s and 1930s, “reveal that entrenched boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality in an urban social scene are purely imaginary, that queer admixture might be more important than the stable identification of a stigmatized minority group (Herring, *Queering* 145).<sup>19</sup> Finally, in a fashion similar to the earlier *Blues*, epistolary exchanges carried along the postal network played an important role in the construction of *The Young and Evil*, which Ford and Tyler worked on separately from three very different locations : Mississippi, New York, and Paris.

- 16 Ford sailed to France in May 1931, ostensibly to finish work on *The Young and Evil*, to which we will return later. He continued to correspond with Tyler once he reached the French capital. According to Steven Watson, “Ford arrived in a Paris that had been thoroughly colonized by expatriates and he immediately negotiated his way through its social circuits” (Watson n.p.). Soon after arriving, the socially adept Ford established himself as a member of Gertrude Stein’s salon, where he was first introduced to his future lover, the displaced Russian Neo-Romantic painter Pavel Tchelitchew. Whilst living in Paris, Ford also had ample opportunity to establish artistic and literary contacts, and to seek out more in the way of thrills, whether of a sexual or surreal nature.<sup>20</sup> What is more, as will later become clear, the first-hand experience and detailed knowledge of the Parisian art-world that Ford accrued during this period was to set him in exceptionally good stead when he was forced to return to New York on the eve of the Second World War, especially when it came to the issue of his subsequent critique and attempted modification of Surrealism.

## Commitment, Collaboration, Chainpoems

- 17 Ford interspersed his time in Paris with various trips abroad, returning periodically to the United States throughout the 1930s. It was on one such return trip that Ford formed a productive working relationship with James Laughlin, the Connecticut-based editor and publisher of *New Directions*, with whom he published his first full-length collection of poems, *The Garden of Disorder* (1938). Around the same time, Ford was also involved in the creation of the 1940 imprint of Laughlin’s annual *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*. Ford’s creative and editorial contributions to the 1940 volume of *New Directions in Prose and Poetry* are noteworthy ; they reveal much about Ford’s interest in, and his commitment to, the promotion of Surrealism on the shores of the United States. As well as highlighting new developments in poetry and prose, the 1940 edition of Laughlin’s anthology served as a showcase for Surrealism in America, including as it did a substantial “Surrealist Anthology” edited by Nicolas Calas, a “Surrealist Pocket Dictionary” (also by Calas), and a number of curiously entitled “Chainpoems” which had been selected for inclusion by Ford.<sup>21</sup>
- 18 Ford’s chainpoem venture was a collective experiment, featuring a variety of poets from a number of different countries. Before work on a chainpoem began, a preliminary list with the names and postal addresses of the selected “chainpoets” would be circulated amongst the chosen contributors. In receipt of this list, one of the selected poets would then write an opening line, before sending the manuscript to the

next [poet] on the list (which has been drawn up in advance by whoever starts the chainpoem), together with the list itself, and so the chainpoem revolves to completion. Anyone may decide he has written the concluding line, in which case he makes copies of the chainpoem and sends one to each chainpoet on the list. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 19 These literary experiments are interesting because they productively complicate notions of poetic autonomy. In Ford's words, a chainpoem was

not only an intellectual sport but a collective invention. However, it is not a product of social collaboration in the sense that architecture is. Each poet is architect, supervisor, bricklayer, etc., of the construction. The blueprint of the chainpoem is the anonymous shape lying in a hypothetical joint imagination, which builds as though the poem were a series of either mathematical or dream progressions. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 20 Based as they are in a "hypothetical joint imagination," Ford's chainpoems attempted poetically to approximate Carl Jung's conception of a collective unconsciousness. Ford's phrasing certainly has a Jungian ring to it. For instance, his evocation of an "anonymous shape" residing at the bottom of a "joint imagination" is evidently indebted to Jung's famous definition of the psychoanalytical archetype. As described in Jung's seminal essay "On the Psychology of the Unconscious" (1917), the typical primordial archetype is an "idea that has been stamped on the human brain for aeons. That is why it lies ready to hand in the unconscious of every man. Only, certain conditions are needed to cause it to appear" (Jung 69). Reading this, we get the sense that Ford's chainpoem venture represented an ambitious attempt to tap into the hidden reservoir of these "greatest and best thoughts of man [which] shape themselves upon these primordial images as upon a blueprint" (Jung 69).

- 21 But this is not all. Whilst outlining the method of collective composition, Ford emphasizes the avant-garde heritage of the chainpoems:

[A]fter the first line is written, the problem of each poet, in turn, is to provide a line which may both "contradict" and carry forward the preceding line. The chain poet may attempt to include his unique style and make it intelligible to the poem; in which case the chainpoem will have a logical and spontaneous growth. Alternatively, using the surrealist approach, he may automatically add a line that springs from whatever is suggested by the preceding line. (Ford "Chainpoem," 369)

- 22 Ford's chainpoems were, as we can see, indebted to Surrealist approaches. More precisely, the chainpoems were inspired by the technique of Surrealism automatism, and, in particular, "le cadavre exquis" (or "exquisite corpse"), which was a method of collaborative practice in which a series of images or words were collectivity assembled. Mary Ann Caws notes that this well-known Surrealist practice "combined communality, performance, and personality" in order to take "the measure of the collective mind" (Caws *Erotics*, 223). Caws also suggests that the point of this playful creative practice "is both collective and automatic: the unleashing of the marvelous or the irrational in a group, with each individual effort working toward the final result greater than the sum of its parts" (Caws *Erotics*, 228). Ford's chainpoems should be thought of in similar terms. Best thought of as a transnational version of Surrealist exquisite corpse, one that was, significantly, conducted across the international postal relay system, the chainpoems were intended as playful poetic extensions of an irrational, subjective, and collective imagination.

- 23 The following, self-evidently titled “International Chainpoem” serves to convey a clear sense of the depth and breadth of the collaborative poetic network as envisioned and established by Ford:

When a parasol is cooled in the crystal garden,  
 one spire radiates and the other turns round;  
 a toad, the Unwanted, counts the ribs’ teardrops  
 while I mark each idol in its dregs.  
 There is a shredded voice, there are three fingers  
 that follow to the end a dancing gesture  
 and pose a legend under the turning shade  
 where the girl’s waterfall drops its piece.  
 Then balls of ennui burst one by one,  
 by and by metallic metres escape from ceramic pipes.  
 Oh sun, glass of cloud, adrift in the vast sky,  
 spell me out a sonnet of a steel necklace. (Ford “International,” 370)

- 24 Themes of circularity are foregrounded in this chainpoem, as “one spire radiates and the other turns round” under the similarly “turning shade”. In addition, the formal patterning of this “International Chainpoem” follows the same pattern of surreal inversion and incongruous juxtaposition displayed in many of the other chainpoem collaborations published in the 1940 edition of Laughlin’s *New Directions*. Notions of transmutation also inform this particular chainpoem. For instance, “teardrops” seemingly cascade from a “girl’s waterfall’ before turning into “balls of ennui’ which then “burst one by one”. Similarly, on a related note, a process of clearly discernible process of alchemical transmogrification can be discerned in the poem, as “the crystal garden” gives way to an image of “metallic metres” leaking from “ceramic pipes”.
- 25 Whilst of variable quality, poems such as the above are indicative of Ford’s desire to branch out and establish increasingly expansive networks of poetic communication. There are two points of interest to be borne in mind here. The first concerns the manner in which this collaborative, circular project – featuring as it does poetic voices of a regional and cosmopolitan persuasion – complicates conventionally received critical wisdom as regards deracination.<sup>22</sup> The second centers on the way in which the chainpoem venture has been organised along specifically Surrealist lines. This becomes apparent when we consider the list of those who contributed to Ford’s chainpoem venture. Almost all of Ford’s contributors to the aforementioned “International Chainpoem” were, in some shape or form, inspired by Surrealism<sup>23</sup>. Two lines belong to the British poets Dorian Cooke and Norman McCaig, who were members of the sadly overlooked “New Apocalypse” (which was itself an off-shoot of surrealistically-inflected Neo-Romanticism). Four lines belong to Americans: Ford, the faithful, trusted Parker Tyler, Gordon Sylander, and George Marion O’Donnell. The remaining six lines belong to Japanese “VOU” poets, who were led by Katue Kitasono, himself a devotee to the Surrealist cause. Yet we would do well to remember that these chainpoem writers were not officially associated with the Surrealist movement as conceived and controlled by the infamously draconian figure of André Breton. Sometimes referred to disparagingly as the “Pope” of Surrealism, Breton’s watchful, even suspicious, guardianship of the Surrealist group has been well documented. Determined to maintain his position at the head of the Surrealist table, Breton oversaw participation in, and expulsion from, the officially sanctioned movement, entry into which remained a closely guarded privilege limited to a relatively small circle of accredited participants. Surrealist accreditation, or lack thereof, seems not to have

concerned Ford in the slightest. Certainly, this lack of official accreditation did not prevent Ford from repeatedly affirming his commitment to the Surrealist enterprise.

## Surrealism, Somnambulism, Imaginationism

- 26 Ford articulates his commitment to the precepts of Surrealism in his poetry of the late 1930s and the early 1940s. Consider the following lines, which are taken from Ford's collection *The Overturned Lake* (1941):

To tone down language is to tongue-tie the pulse,  
meter of mood, tape-line of longing,  
and so we are boosted by the measureless dream  
and awake to an algebra whose symbols cry havoc. (Ford *Lake*, 51)

- 27 "Comedy of Belief" contains a number of allusions to the central tenets of Surrealism. To begin with, Ford's remark about the "tape-line of longing" can be read as a reference to the primary role that desire plays in Surrealist thought and literature. According to Jennifer Mundy, "[t]he word desire runs like a silver thread through the poetry and writings of the surrealist group in all its phases" (Mundy 5). For the Surrealists, "desire was the authentic voice of the inner self" (Mundy 5). Notions of love and desire certainly play an important role in Breton's work. For instance, in his poetic meditation *L'Amour fou* (1937), Breton asserts that love can function "as a fundamental principle for moral as well as cultural progress" (Breton *Love*, 77). According to Breton, literary activity represents "a tried and tested means" with which "to fix the sensitive and moving world on a single being as well as a permanent force of anticipation" (Breton *Love*, 77). That is to say, concentrated poetic activity can provide a means with which we can better understand (the objects of) our desire and affection.
- 28 Ford's declaration that "we are boosted by the measureless dream" also relates to conceptions of Surrealism. As is well known, Breton and his followers looked to the Freudian unconscious and the attendant psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams for artistic inspiration. Dismissing formal divisions between conscious and unconscious states of existence in *Les Vases communicants* (1932), Breton argues that "[t]he poet to come will surmount the depressing idea of the irreparable divorce between action and dream" (Breton *Vessels*, 146). Breton also argues that via a fusion of conscious and unconscious states of perception, the Surrealist poet might restore "man to the heart of the universe, extracting him for a second from his debilitating adventure and reminding him that he is, for every pain and every joy exterior to himself, an indefinitely perfectible place of resolution and resonance" (Breton *Vessels*, 146). This allows us better to understand Ford's reference to the "measureless dream" in his "Comedy of Belief." Following Breton, Ford is suggesting that a committed exploration of the "measureless" reservoirs that underpin subjective perception might awaken a new kind of poetic "algebra" whose seemingly irrational "symbols" might "cry havoc" and thereby tear apart previously held antimonies pertaining to objective and subjective experience.<sup>24</sup>
- 29 Equally, Ford was not content merely to praise or reaffirm conceptual notions set forth in Bretonian Surrealism. Rather, he sought also to differentiate his approach and outlook from that of the card-carrying members of the Surrealist group. This becomes apparent when we consider Ford's "Notes on Neo-Modernism" (c.1944). These fragmentary notes, which are tucked away in a folder of miscellanea in Ford's archive at the Harry Ransom Center in Austin, Texas, are significant. They shed light on the scale of Ford's dialogue

with Surrealism. Reading these notes, we get the sense that Ford had grown frustrated with orthodox Bretonian Surrealism. This much is evident in the section of Ford's "Notes on Neo-Modernism" which proffers a "Critique of Pure Surrealism". This commentary reads both as a critique *and* as a call to arms. Suggesting that as a "vice nouveau" orthodox Surrealism "has lost its appeal, [and] its novelty" (Ford "Notes," n.p.) Charles Henri Ford here announces his divergence from the aesthetic strictures outlined by Breton.<sup>25</sup>

- 30 Conscious of the fact that Surrealism had begun to attract significant amounts of public and critical attention in the United States during the late 1930s and early 1940s, Ford proposes, in highly suggestive language, to bring Surrealism "out from [the] underground" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). In his critique, Ford envisions a transformative reworking of what he believed to be a conceptually stunted Surrealism. *Imaginationism* is the so-bad-it's-almost good name that Ford gives to his proposed modification of Surrealism. Ford also emphasizes the avant-garde heritage of Imaginationism. He states that "[j]ust as Surrealism came out of Dada – so Imaginationism was born of Surrealism" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). Furthermore, in his reckoning, "[t]he Imaginationist is the son of the Surrealist – with an Oedipus complex" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). Ford reasons that "Imaginationism [is] more revolutionary than Surrealism because [it is] less passive, more active" (Ford "Notes," n.p.). The distinction he makes here between the active and the passive helps us better understand the difference between Imaginationism and Surrealism. Elsewhere in his notes, Ford alludes to Breton's description of Surrealist automatism as a fundamentally passive activity, which is dependent on placing oneself in a receptive state<sup>26</sup>. In Ford's conception of Imaginationism, he wholly rejects the notion of unconscious passivity: instead the conscious mind also needs to be actively engaged. The following analogy succinctly demonstrates this distinction:

The surrealist is the somnambule who walks in the depths of the unconscious.

The imaginationist is also the somnambule – but he has awakened while in the unconscious, and keeps on waking. (Ford "Notes," n.p.)

- 31 Ford here contrasts the figure of the passive, sleepwalking Surrealist with the more proactive, conscious Imaginationist. Ford is effectively suggesting that a sort of somnambulistic blindness has marred the conceptual and aesthetic merits of Bretonian Surrealism. Whilst too harsh an assessment, the point that Ford is trying to make here is that orthodox Surrealism often seems overly reliant on the insights afforded by constant and, in his estimation, *passive* recourse to the unconscious.<sup>27</sup> Where the orthodox approach sees the Surrealist practitioner firmly located in, and constrained by, the unconscious, for Ford, the lessons of the unconscious are there to be consciously and artfully applied.<sup>28</sup>
- 32 There are a number of important and potentially revealing things that need to be said regarding Ford's critique of Bretonian Surrealism. To begin with, it should be noted that Ford's proposed critique is not as ground-breaking as it purports to be. For one thing, the language in which Ford couches his critique is evidently indebted to Breton's seminal *Communicating Vessels* (1932). This much becomes evident when we read Ford's remarks about somnambulism in relation the vision of Surrealism articulated in a well-known passage featured in Breton's treatise, where the self-styled Magus of Surrealism characterises the ideal communicating vessel as

a *capillary tissue*, without which it would be useless to try to imagine mental circulation. The role of this tissue is, we have seen, to guarantee the constant

exchange which must occur in thought between the exterior and the interior worlds, an exchange that requires the continuous interpenetration of the activity of waking and that of sleeping. My entire ambition has been to give here a glimpse of its structure. (Breton *Vessels*, 139)

- 33 In this particular extract, Breton seeks to foreground the dialectical nature of the relationship that exists between notions of interiority and exteriority. In her useful critical account of *Communicating Vessels*, Mary Ann Caws suggests that it is precisely this dialectical relationship between the interior arena of subjective experience and the exterior world of facts and figures – realms personified by the respective figures of sleep and wakefulness – that resides at the heart of Breton’s study. In her adroit summation, “[t]his passing back and forth between two modes is shown [in Breton’s reading] to be the basis of surrealist thought, of surreality itself” (Caws *Reflections*, 91).
- 34 Accepting this, what can we make of Ford’s critique of Surrealism, and his consequent theory of Imaginationism? Upon re-reading both his “Notes on Neo-Modernism” and “Imaginationist Manifesto,” it now seems as if Ford was either unfamiliar with, or wilfully misinterpreted, Breton’s dynamic conception of Surrealism outlined in *Communicating Vessels*. The former is impossible. Archival research has shown that Ford was well aware of Breton’s *Communicating Vessels* before he sat down to compose his thoughts on the future of Surrealism. Indeed, he singled it out for significant praise on more than one occasion. This comes to the fore in a letter Ford sent to Tyler on 5 April 1939: “Breton I find very sympathetic, I gave him my Garden of Disorder with dedication to Andre Breton, Lenine de la Revolution Surrealiste and just finished reading his Les Vases Communicants, and have bought other of his books. I find I have been underestimating him all along, (though not the accomplishments of the surrealist painters), through not having read his works. I’m lunching Friday with him and will take photos” (Ford “5 April 1939,” n.p.).<sup>29</sup>
- 35 Did Ford chose to misread, deliberately or otherwise, the Surrealist message contained in the pages of Breton’s text? The possibility certainly exists. Were this the case, such a glaring oversight would surely and severely dent Ford’s standing as a dedicated follower, let alone consistent critical thinker, of Surrealism. Still, in his defence, it is worth remembering that the document we are dealing with here is fragmentary, provisional, and *unfinished*.<sup>30</sup> In the end, we can only speculate about the way in which Ford might have chosen to develop the critique of “Pure” Surrealism that he had begun to fashion in his “Notes on Neo-Modernism” and the complementary “Imaginationist Manifesto”.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, what *does* remain clear is Ford’s burning desire to strike out on his own, and to use Surrealist techniques and precepts as he sees fit. He makes this clear at the very end of his fragmentary notes on the future of modernism and Surrealism. In this concluding section, which is entitled “Light of the Imagination: De Imaginationis,” Ford suggests, revealingly, that “[i]nstead of automatism I would propose autonomy” (Ford, “Notes” n.p.).<sup>32</sup>
- 36 Yet Ford also insists that “Imaginationism does not reject anything in Surrealism – it merely transforms everything” (Ford “Notes,” n.p.). This is where critical notions pertaining to the concept of “Camp” begin to come to the fore. Mark Silverberg’s critical account of the so-called New York School of poetry is useful in this regard. Silverberg postulates that the alternative (and subversive) set of aesthetic standards underpinning Camp cultural production appealed to post-war New York School poets such as Frank O’Hara and John Ashbery because it “put emphasis not on breaking with the past but on

remaking it through stylization, exaggeration, and theatricality” (Silverberg 142). Silverberg observes that the New York School poets, a number of whom Ford championed and published in the early 1950s, were interested “in working with American culture as they found it—exposing, playing up, and camping up its quirks, absurdities, and odd (queer) mannerisms” (Silverberg 135).<sup>33</sup> Silverberg’s assertion concerning the New York School’s desire to work with culture as they found it also resonates in relation to Ford’s theorization of Imaginationism, which claims not to reject, but to *reconstitute*, Surrealism. Somewhat more modestly, we might say that Ford, in a manner which prefigures the New York School’s desire to remake the American culture which surrounded them, sought not to reject, but rather to rework, or, more specifically, to *camp*, Surrealism.

## Camp, View, Growing Up Surreal

- 37 Ford makes his feelings about the value of Camp known in the following piece of poetry, which was published posthumously in an obscure collection of loosely defined haiku and collages entitled *Operation Minotaur* (2006) :

A truly candid  
Novella is tonic. One  
Without camp  
Falls flat. (FORD *Minotaur*, n.p.)<sup>34</sup>

- 38 Ford’s late poem, whilst brief, serves a number of different functions.<sup>35</sup> To begin with, it operates in what we might describe as a self-conscious and characteristically self-referential fashion. Ford is referring here to the novel he co-wrote with Parker Tyler in the early 1930s, *The Young and Evil*. Ford’s aforementioned early novel is important for a number of different reasons. As previously mentioned, it is a primary instance of what is known as queer modernism. The literary critic Juan A. Suárez argues that “[a] recurring yet understudied trait in queer modernism is its receptiveness towards “low culture,” manifest in the frequent attempt to fuse experimental modernism with popular energies” (Suárez 185).<sup>36</sup> This is precisely what we get in *The Young and Evil*. In it, Ford and Tyler self-consciously foreground their awareness of trends in contemporaneous avant-garde writing:

Theodosia was reading. Julian was lying on his back and heard her voice: Wyndham Lewis says that a page of a servant-girl novel smashed up equals a page of Gertrude Stein. What Julian said Mr. Lewis means is that he thinks Miss Stein is purely negative, but he has no better word for the behavior of the organism than negative; Miss Stein is writing or walking. In one way these are the same. In neither case is she smashing the pages of a servant-girl novel. Theodosia was pleased. Suppose we go dancing tonight at the Tavern (Ford and Tyler 98).

- 39 This passage is typical of *The Young and Evil*. Throughout the novel, explorations of avant-gardism are interspersed with regular forays into the popular sites of low culture: dive bars, dance clubs, and drag balls “too large to be rushed at without being swallowed” (Ford and Tyler 152). Standing in for the authors, Karel and Julian offer a running commentary on the various scenes they witness:

The negro orchestra on the stage at one end was heard at the other end with the aid of a reproducer. On both sides of the wall a balcony spread laden with people in boxes at tables. Underneath were more tables and more people. The dance-floor was a scene whose celestial flavor and cerulean coloring no angelic painter or nectarish poet has ever conceived. (Ford and Tyler 152)

- 40 Admittedly, there is a self-consciously “poetic” dimension to this co-authored depiction of the “celestial” dance-floor. However, Karel and Julian’s attention soon wanders elsewhere:

They found Tony and Vincent at a table with K-Y and Woodward. Vincent spoke with the most wonderful whisky voice Frederick! Julian! Tony was South American. He had on a black satin that Vincent had made him, fitted to the knee and then flaring, long pearls and pearl drops. (Ford and Tyler 153)

- 41 The penny now drops: our narrators are less interested in aesthetic representations of the “angelic painter” or the stereotypical gauche, “nectarish poet” than in meeting interesting people. Specifically, they are interested in meeting figures like the “black satin” clad Tony and Vincent:

Vincent had on a white satin blouse and black breeches. Dear I’m master of ceremonies tonight and you should have come in drag and you’d have gotten a prize. He had large eyes with a sex-life all their own and claimed to be the hardest boiled queen on Broadway. Frederick he said you look like something Lindbergh dropped on the way across. (Ford and Tyler 153)

- 42 Much like their fictional counterparts, the co-creators of *The Young and Evil* were evidently enchanted with the figure of this wide-eyed drag queen. In this respect, we might say that Ford and Tyler epitomize what Justus Nieland describes as “the joyous hum of public being, physically undone by collective scenes of sympathy, and ever-attentive to intimate potential of public spaces, finding new homes for feeling in uncanny places” (Nieland 2). When read in such a fashion, it soon becomes clear that the authors of *The Young and Evil* seek to depict to suitable public “spaces” (in this instance an underground drag ball) that are capable of producing new, intimately charged, non-normative regimes of feeling.

- 43 The non-normative regimes of feeling which Ford and Tyler privilege are of a distinctly Camp persuasion. Camp is quite literally foregrounded in *The Young and Evil*, which George Chauncey describes as “perhaps the campiest novel of them all” (Chauncey 17):

baggage grand cocksucker  
fascinated by fairies of the Better  
Class chronic  
liar fairy  
herself sexual  
estimate crooning I’M A CAMP fire girl. (Ford and Tyler 164)<sup>37</sup>

- 44 Given over to innumerable such depictions of characters dolled-up in drag and “camp[ing] like mad” (Ford and Tyler 167), *The Young and Evil* utilizes textual tactics such as parody, whilst simultaneously eschewing fixed conceptions of character. In this manner, the various non-normative figures populating the textual fringes of *The Young and Evil* anticipate Moe Meyer’s subsequent proposition that “identity is self-reflexively constituted” (Meyer 4) by visual acts of gendered performativity.

- 45 Meyer’s suggestion comes in a critical volume given over entirely to the discussion of the politics and poetics of Camp. Meyer’s complex theoretical account of Camp is particularly useful for those interested in getting to grips with this most elusive, protean, and contested of critical terms. Meyer defines Camp as “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to exact a queer identity, with enactment defined as the production of social visibility” (Meyer 4)<sup>38</sup>. In his estimation, it logically follows “that all queer identity performative expressions are circulated within the signifying system that is Camp” (Meyer 4). In short, for Meyer at least, “queer identity is inseparable and

indistinguishable from its processual enactment, or Camp” (Meyer 4). Thus, according to Meyer, “Camp is political; Camp is solely a queer (and/or sometimes gay and lesbian) discourse; and Camp embodies a specifically queer cultural critique” (Meyer 1). Admittedly, Meyer concedes that this rather forthright take on matters might come as something of a surprise to those critics who are unfamiliar with Camp. In his own words, such an “expanded definition of Camp, one based on identity performance and not solely in some kind of unspecified cognitive identification of an ironic moment, may come as a bit of a jolt to many readers” (Meyer 4), especially readers of the aforementioned Susan Sontag.

46 Meyer is highly critical of Sontag, whom he holds largely responsible for having unhelpfully “complicated the interpretations [of Camp] by detaching the signifying codes from their queer signified” (Meyer 4). Fabio Cleto’s account of Sontag’s famous 1964 essay “Notes on Camp” helps us to understand what Meyer is getting at here. As Cleto reminds us, “Sontag’s essay disseminated camp as the cipher for contemporary culture, as a refined – and, most infamously, apolitical – aesthetic taste for the vulgar and the appreciation of kitschy middle-class pretensions” (Cleto 10). Because of this, various critics, include Meyer, have tended to accuse Sontag of “turning a basically homosexual mode of self-performance into a degayified taste, a simple matter of ironically relishing an indulgence in what is ‘so-bad-it’s good’” (Cleto 10).

47 For Meyer, such a “degayified” account of Camp is unforgivable: all the more so given that historical analysis confirms the specifically homosexual origins and politicized connotations pertaining to the term<sup>39</sup>. This leads him to assert that literary critics such as Sontag have effectively, if unwittingly, “killed off the binding referent of Camp—the Homosexual” (Meyer 6). As a result, in Meyer’s reading, the discourse of Camp has become increasingly “confused and conflated with rhetorical and performative strategies such as irony, satire, burlesque, and travesty; and with cultural movements such as Pop” (Meyer 6). This, in Meyer’s eyes, simply will not do. For him, there was, is, and will always be only one kind of Camp:

And it is queer. It can be engaged directly by the queer to produce social visibility in the praxis of everyday life, or it can be manifested as the camp trace by the un-queer in order [...] to provide queer access to the apparatus of representation.<sup>40</sup>  
(Meyer 4)

48 Bearing this in mind, it behoves us to consider what Meyer would make of a marginalized literary and aesthetic figure such as Charles Henri Ford. As a queer writer and artist who came of artistic age in what was a closeted period of history, Ford, who, as *The Young and Evil* clearly demonstrates, was well aware of the value of Camp as a non-normative signifying system and practice, would probably be of great interest to a critic such as Meyer. But can the same be said of Ford’s interest in some the very same “rhetorical” strategies that Meyer decries whilst discussing Sontag and Camp? One gets the impression that Meyer would not approve. In a sense, though, that is wholly beside the point. We are, after all, concerned with the life and work of a man who intuitively grasped the aesthetic advantages of Camp long before Meyer, and, for that matter, Sontag, arrived on the scene. We are, that is to say, dealing with a man who lived through and engaged with all that which Meyer and Sontag came to theorize retrospectively. Turning our attention to Ford’s literary output of the late 1930s and the early 1940s, it appears that, at least when it came to his own work, he proposed to camp Surrealism via processes of self-conscious exaggeration and theatrical poetic stylization<sup>41</sup>. This becomes

clear when considering the closing lines of the following poem, which was included in *The Overturned Lake* :

this is a jingle for your jaw,  
pearl-planted, a rant for the blest hee-haw

of the pink bee storing in your brain's  
veins a gee-gaw honey for the golden skillet

set to heat on my heart's rubies

BABY WITH REVOLVER HOLDS HURRICANE AT BAY (Ford *Lake*, 38)

- 49 Notice how Ford's quirky "Song," featuring as it does playful instances of alliteration and child-like rhyming, mimics the infectious and infuriating advertising ditties of American commercial radio, concludes with a playful nod in the direction of André Breton's collection *The White-Haired Revolver* (1932). Another thing that strikes us here is just how different in both form and content Ford's stylized "Song" is from that of his aforementioned "Comedy of Belief," which, we recall, also featured in *The Overturned Lake*. Where Ford's lyrical "Comedy" is formally decorous, measured, and fairly easy to understand, his exuberant and exaggerated "Song" flirts, self-consciously, with notions of metaphorical incongruity and outright nonsensicality. Still, there is a discernible Surrealist element present in this particular poem. We can see this in the final line of Ford's "jingle for your jaw." Having been carried along by campy and almost nonsensical babble in the preceding lines, the theatrical mock newspaper headline that confronts the reader in the final line of the poem creates a palpable rupture through which overtly surreal imagery rushes.
- 50 What are we to make of such poetry? Edward B. Germain's introduction to Ford's *Flag of Ecstasy: Selected Poems* (1972) is useful in this respect. Germain makes the basic but important point that Ford's Surrealist poems do not "read like translations from the French" (Germain 9). In his estimation, Ford's Surrealism is wholly "American in its hilarity and ingenuousness and its fascination with sex and slang and the lyrics of popular songs" (Germain 9). Of particular interest here is the reference that Germain makes to the strain of seemingly irreverent humor, or hilarity, coursing through Ford's poetry. This observation underpins our understanding of Ford. Reading poems such as the irreverent, over-the-top, and perhaps even flippant, "Song", we are left with the impression that Ford just wants to have *fun*. However, there is more to it than that, and this pertains to yet another definition of Camp.
- 51 I have in mind here the well-known notion of "High Camp" put forward by Ford's queer contemporary Christopher Isherwood in *The World in the Evening* (1954). In this novel, Isherwood makes the following claim: "High Camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance" (Isherwood 110). Isherwood's comments should be borne in mind when considering Ford's output of the 1940s. When Isherwood's comments on Camp are read in relation to poems such as Ford's "Song" and his aforementioned "Imaginationist Manifesto" we begin more fully to appreciate that Charles Henri has no interest in rejecting – or simply making fun of – Surrealism; rather, he is interested in making fun *out* of it. Serious about Breton's avant-garde movement from the very beginning of his career, the more mature Ford seeks now to rework Surrealism by exaggerating its underlying absurdities and latently queer quirks.

- 52 Camp also comes to the fore in Ford's main editorial project of the 1940s. Ford put his first-hand knowledge of European avant-gardism to good use in the pages of his influential New York-based periodical *View*, which served as a vital conduit for the dissemination of Surrealism on the shores of the United States. Simultaneously serious and irreverent, the cosmopolitan *View* is also a prime example of Isherwood's High Camp. In this regard, *View* serves as a counterweight to Ford's earlier *The Young and Evil*, which engages with what Isherwood would later call "Low Camp".<sup>42</sup> Ford's long-running art journal, which was commercially inflected, elegantly presented, and replete with discussions of avant-gardism, represented a concerted attempt to make alternative forms of fun out of pre-existing models provided by orthodox Surrealism. Functioning both as a textual home away from home for the displaced Europe intelligentsia and as a showcase for local American talent, Ford's *View*, in the words of Catrina Neiman, "set the stage for what was to come: it succeeded in popularizing the avant-garde" (Neiman xvi).<sup>43</sup> Stamatina Dimakopoulou corroborates this assertion in her recent critical account of *View*. Furthering Neiman's claim, Dimakopoulou argues that Ford's periodical, which championed aesthetic movements of a predominantly figurative persuasion (most visibly Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism), "constitutes an important backdrop to the emergence of America's first international avant-garde, not despite, but because of its resistance to the emergence of Abstract Expression" (Dimakopoulou 739]). Significantly, in Dimakopoulou's estimation, "[a]s the consonance between aesthetic and political radicalism could no longer be sustained, Surrealism in *View* encouraged an opening out to mainstream and popular cultures that were elided from the early experiments of the Abstract Expressionists" (Dimakopoulou 739).
- 53 Ford's desire to facilitate an encounter between the avant-garde and the mainstream in the various issues of his periodical did not sit comfortably with the displaced Breton. Exiled in New York during the 1940s, Breton soon came to regard Ford, whom he had already marked out as something as an awkward character, as a potential aesthetic competitor when it came to the matter of Surrealism<sup>44</sup>. Breton's decision to found the Surrealist magazine *VVV* (1942-44) whilst based in New York can be read as an implicit response, or perhaps even a rebuke, to Ford's decision to establish *View* in 1940. At the same time, realizing that Ford was better placed when it came to the promotion of Surrealism in America, Breton tried, somewhat belatedly, to bring Charles Henri into the official Surrealist fold, via the offer of a position on the editorial board of *VVV*. It is highly feasible that the authoritarian Breton did this in order to nullify the threat that Ford posed to his aesthetic authority. However, Ford evidently had no desire to toe the official party line.<sup>45</sup> He declined, having swiftly grasped the none-too-subtle implications of Breton's ostensibly altruistic offer. Having turned his back on Breton in a decisive assertion of intellectual and aesthetic independence, Ford continued on his own way, and in so doing, he forged the path for a host of younger (Camp) American poets and artists who could claim to have consciously grown up with Surrealism without feeling any obligation to subscribe to any sort of orthodox party-line.<sup>46</sup>
- 54 The recollections of a number of prominent younger American poets such as Kenneth Koch and Ted Berrigan corroborate Edward B. Germain's previously cited assertion that Ford did, in fact, foster the conditions for the emergence of Surrealism in the United States. Indeed, Koch went as far as to attribute his understanding of Surrealism to Ford's *View*: "I think I started writing poems I liked more when I was seventeen or eighteen. I wrote a poem when I was just eighteen, maybe on my birthday, called "For My Eighteenth

Birthday” or “Poem for My Birthday” and it was influenced by French surrealism in so far as I understood it. I understood it mainly from a surrealist magazine called *View*” (Kennedy n.p.). Similarly, the second-generation New York School poet Ted Berrigan was particularly effusive in his praise for Ford: “About reading at Le Metro, how about the first Wednesday in June? It’s free admission, and contributions, you wouldn’t make more than maybe twenty-five dollars (or less), but there are a lot of us who sure would like to hear you read. Your poetry and your old magazine, VIEW, paved the way for so much of what many younger poets feel is really happening now, when so many other poets were being so boring and so ordinary” (Berrigan n.p.). I want now to bring this discussion to a close by suggesting that curious readers keep Berrigan’s remarks about Ford having “paved the way for so much of what so many younger poets feel is really happening now” at the forefront of their minds when they next encounter this vital, yet hitherto neglected figure. If they do, they will soon find themselves face-to-face with an artist, writer, and curator whose work has not only stood the test of time and critical judgment, but also who forces us to reconsider some of our assumptions concerning the nature of avant-garde praxis.

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## NOTES

1. Edward B. Germain comments on Charles Henri Ford's status as America's first Surrealist poet in his introduction to Ford's mid-career retrospective, *Flag of Ecstasy: Selected Poems* (1972): "When he began publishing in 1929, Ford was unique: America's surrealist poet. In retrospect, he is seminal. What he accomplished in 1930, most American poets hadn't even imagined. In the pages of his magazines, *Blues* and *View*, he introduced and encouraged surrealism while it passed into the spirit of hundreds of American writers. In his own work he creates the wonder, the wit, and the erotic beauty that have made surrealism the most significant of all modern influences upon poetry" (Germain 9).
2. Juan A. Suárez also considers *The Young and Evil*, which Ford co-wrote with the queer poet and critic Parker Tyler, in the sixth chapter of *Pop Modernism: Noise and the Reinvention of Everyday Life*. Urbana and Chicago: Illinois University Press, 2007.

3. In part building on critical advances made by Tashjian in *A Boatload of Madmen*, Joanna Pawlik also considers Ford's involvement with certain Surrealist émigrés in New York during the Second World War. See Joanna Pawlik, *Negotiating Surrealism: Postwar American Avant - Gardes After Breton* (DPhil, University of Sussex, 2008).

4. Tashjian is not the only critic to have damned Ford with faint praise. Many reductive criticisms have been levelled at Ford's aesthetic and literary practice over the years. Too obscure, too strange, too surreal: these are some of the familiar refrains that follow Ford. Consider Michael's Kimmelman's review of Ford's posthumous retrospective at the Mitchell Alpus Gallery (New York City) in 2003. In it, he argues that Ford was a dilettante, a character, peripatetic. The fashion for him now seems partly tied to his longevity – Ford as a relic of New York gay life in the 1930s – and to admiration for his being publicly out of the closet when few other men dared to be. Also to his multimedia, venturesome sensibility. His life was more interesting than his work, though. The art is ephemeral. Creatively installed, the show does the best it can to evoke Ford's lively spirit. But absent the man himself, it may leave you wondering what the fuss is about. (Kimmelman n.p.)

Kimmelman's reference to Ford's "multimedia, venturesome sensibility" is of especial interest. I would suggest that it is precisely Ford's "venturesome" literary and aesthetic "sensibility" that provokes such a strong reaction in Kimmelman. Stretched as it is across numerous decades and many different aesthetic disciplines, Ford's "multimedia" sensibility poses problems for those critics who might want simply to pigeonhole his work. Ford's formal diffuseness thus becomes an easily reached proverbial branch with which to beat him. In part, this might explain why Ford has been overlooked in accounts of cultural production during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

5. In the earliest stages of his career Ford looked to the American modernist poet Ezra Pound for advice regarding issues of (self-) promotion.

6. This is certainly true of Tashjian's reading of *Blues*. As we will soon see, Ford conceived of his modernist little magazine as a sort of textual forum conducive to the articulation of queer poetics and aesthetics. However, Tashjian chooses not to address this aspect of Ford's first editorial venture in *A Boatload of Madmen*.

7. Tashjian raises the issue of Ford's capacity for analytical thought whilst discussing the poet's interest in Marxist political theory, which came to the fore in the 1930s. Tashjian suggests, somewhat disparagingly, that it is virtually impossible "to imagine that Ford had succumbed to abstract ideas. He was hardly a theorist of aesthetics, let alone politics, and rarely engaged in any critical writing, which he mostly left to [his confidante and collaborator Parker] Tyler" (Tashjian 165). One of the aims of this article is to refute suggestions such as those proposed by Tashjian.

8. Where Ford once saw uniformity, the academy now sees multiplicity. "There are Native Souths," Michael P. Bibler writes, "queer Souths, black Souths, Latin Souths, global Souths, immigrant Souths, revolutionary Souths, experimental Souths, apocalyptic Souths, undead Souths, divine Souths, visceral Souths, traumatic Souths, gratuitous Souths, boring Souths, imagined Souths, remembered Souths, forgotten Souths, no Souths, celluloid Souths, graphic Souths, aural Souths, pop Souths, swamp Souths, eco-Souths, branded Souths, red Souths, blue Souths, folk Souths, rural Souths, urban Souths, sick Souths, weird Souths, punk Souths, hippy Souths, hipster Souths, hip-hop Souths, dirty Souths, western Souths, coastal Souths, island Souths, mountain Souths, and on and on" (Bibler 153).

9. We need, of course, to take Ford's overwrought comments about his regional isolation with a small pinch of salt. We need also to acknowledge the fact that this melodramatic adolescent had most likely already begun mentally to codify, to borrow from the important work of Scott Herring, "the metropolitan as the terminus of queer world making as many have come to know it" (Herring 4).

10. Ford first met Kathleen Tankersley Young at the Carnegie Library of San Antonio, Texas, on 22 February 1928. For a more detailed account of Ford's relationship with Young, see my *Charles*

*Henri Ford: Between Modernism and Postmodernism* (2017). For a critical account of Young's involvement in Ford's *Blues* venture, see Chapter 6 of Eric B. White's *Transatlantic Avant-Gardes: Little Magazines and Localist Modernism* (2013).

11. For instance, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Gertrude Stein argued that “[o]f all the little magazines which as Gertrude Stein loves to quote, have died to make verse free, perhaps the youngest and freshest was the *Blues*” (Stein 260). On a related critical note, Ford's modernist little magazine was once singled out by Frederick J. Hoffman in his canonical account of *The Little Magazine: a History and Bibliography* (1947), who celebrated *Blues* as “self-conscious, enthusiastic, and daring” (Hoffman 290).

12. I have preserved the original typography and punctuation of this piece.

13. Jolas did indeed accept Ford's offer of a place on the editorial board of *Blues*.

14. Discussing the issue of Surrealism and influence with Asako Kitaori in 2000, Ford argued that his introductory encounter with the work of the Surrealists “electrified [his] output” (Kitaori, “Catalyst”).

15. For a detailed critical treatment of Parker Tyler's early poetics and his dialogue with Poundian Imagism (as developed in *Blues*), see David Arnold's *Poetry and Language Writing: Objective and Surreal*.

16. At the same time, Ford's “belated renovation” of modernism also had much to do with his desire to differentiate his second-generation *Blues* from Jolas's more overtly radical *transition*. For a detailed account of Ford's proposed modification of Anglo-American modernism, see my article *Charles Henri Ford's Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms and the Belated Renovation of Modernism* (Howard 2014, 161-95).

17. Ford's isolation should be borne in mind when considering the sixth issue of *Blues*. Appearing in July 1929, the so-called “expatriate issue” of *Blues* represented something of an editorial coup for Ford. The sixth *Blues* features a remarkable array of contributors, all of whom the precocious Ford had contacted through the post. This issue opens with Stein's portrait of the French avant-gardist Georges Hugnet and closes with Harry Crosby's mystical, stream-of-consciousness “House of Ra”. Sandwiched between Stein and Crosby's pieces are the contributions of numerous first- and second-generation modernist expatriate writers including Hilda Doolittle (H.D.), Walter Lowenfels, Eugene Jolas, Kay Boyle, Leigh Hoffman, Harold J. Salemson, George Linze (translated by Salemson), and Laurence Vail.

18. See Joseph Allen Boone's *Libidinal Currents* and Sam See's “Making Modernism New: Queer Mythology in *The Young and Evil*”, *English Literary History* 76 (2009).

19. One also thinks here of Daniela Caselli's recent account of *The Young and Evil*. “And yet,” Caselli cautions, “this is not a book that encourages a tour of the Village and a discovery of its sites; rather it is one that creates a queer underworld as a mythological place” (Caselli 113). One might also think of Margaret Gillespie's critical treatment of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936). “Be it at poetic or diegetic levels, as gender or genre,” Gillespie writes, “*Nightwood* can only unsuccessfully pass as decent, legitimate, or “straight.” “Form” and “content” in this novel collude in the services of the deviant and inauthentic to perform a travesty of signification that flouts dominant culture's hermeneutics of depth, and de-robes as chimera the illusion of stable, gendered selfhood” (Gillespie 10).

20. Tashjian points out that upon reaching Paris, Ford “did not immediately infiltrate the Surrealist group. Although he met individual Surrealists like Man Ray and Jacques Baron, he was perhaps too distracted by the gay life that Paris offered. Then, too, he was understandably drawn to Jean Cocteau, who was anathema to the homophobic Breton” (Tashjian 157).

21. Prior to publication in Laughlin's *New Directions*, Ford's “Chainpoem” venture had been announced in the April 1939 issue of *Poetry*.

22. I have in mind Scott Herring's account of the relationship between the avant-garde and the urban cityscape: “It is hard to disagree with [the] intimacies between modernism and the

metropolis, yet it is also not too difficult to see that the urbanized orientations of modernist studies can take a graceful swan dive into metronormativity. In its tried-and-true formulae, a hallmark of a modernist text – new or old – is a breakaway from the region in terms of migration and affect. Its keyword is deracination, and it likes to think that it has uprooted itself from provincialism as a way of life and the provincial as a geographic entity when it leaves any pretty how town behind” (Herring “Regional,” 2-3).

23. “International Chainpoem” in order of appearance (and geographical location): Takesi Fuji (Tokyo), Katue Kitasono (Tokyo), Charles Henri Ford (Paris), Dorian Cooke (London), Norman McCaig (Edinburgh), Gordon Sylander (Madison), George Marion O’ Donnell (Belzoni), Parker Tyler (New York), Saburoh Kuroda, Nagao Hirao, Syuiti Nagayasu, and Tuneo Osada (all Tokyo).

24. In equal measure, however, it should also be pointed out that a few well-placed (and certainly well intended) poetic allusions to certain Surrealist precepts do not a critical intervention make. Bearing this in mind, we need to proceed with a certain degree of caution when discussing a relatively short text such as Ford’s “Comedy of Belief” alongside Breton’s extended theoretical treatise. As is well known, *Communicating Vessels* represents one of Breton’s most detailed, painstaking, and often contradictory attempts at reconciling Marxist notions of historical materialism and Freudian theories of the unconscious. In Margaret Cohen’s estimation, *Communicating Vessels* “constitutes a linchpin in [Breton’s] defense of surrealist praxis against the French Communist Party” (Cohen 124). In it, “Breton turns the psychoanalytic notion of the dream against the version of the material/ideal opposition underwriting the French Communist Party’s refusal to admit that surrealist imaginative activity might have practical social consequence” (Cohen 124). As Cohen notes, Breton is, in this particular instance, reacting against “the separation that vulgar Marxism draws between material praxis, teleological activities focusing on the realm of facts and the politico-economic sphere, and surrealism’s “ideal” dwelling in the land of aesthetics, subjectivity, desire, [and] dream” (Cohen 124). Suffice to say, there is nothing in Ford’s playful “Comedy of Belief” that even comes close to matching, or approximating, the sheer intellectual scope and complexity of Breton’s exacting *Communicating Vessels*.

25. On a related note, we might well argue that Ford also seeks to deviate away from the various political strictures associated with Bretonian Surrealism. It seems that art always came first for Charles Henri Ford. This is something that Tashjian discusses in his account of Surrealism in the United States. According to Tashjian, Breton’s insistence that Surrealism and Marxism could function productively in a dialectical relationship would have meant relatively little to Ford. Indeed, despite occasionally expressing a vague interest in revolutionary politics and historical materialism during the 1930s, it seems that “any avant-garde position on the left that did not elevate Marxism above art would have [had] some appeal to Ford” (Tashjian 165). NB. Ford rarely troubled himself with overtly political matters – revolutionary or otherwise – in his poetry. Sometimes, as in his early poem “A Curse on the War Machine,” Ford might obliquely express his displeasure at the prospect of (political) violence. Very occasionally, as in his early long poem “The Garden Disorder,” Ford will refer fleetingly to famous political figures, such as the architect of the 1917 October Revolution: “Lenin has withdrawn to a dialectic paradise and counts with sociological eyes / the biffs of the nightsticks, the devil’s police” (Ford *Labyrinth*, 5). However, it should be noted that such instances are few and far between in Ford’s oeuvre.

26. In his foundational instructional account of literary automatism, Breton implores the aspiring Surrealist artist to “[p]ut yourself in as passive or as receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talent, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything” (Breton *Manifestos*, 28).

27. Of course, Ford was by no means the only person to take issue with the perceived passivity of Surrealist automatism. The prominent Surrealist renegade Salvador Dalí was, like the dissenting

Ford, unsatisfied with automatism. Indeed, as Mary Ann Caws has shown, his eventual theorization of a paranoid critical method “was to undermine the concept of Surrealist automatism, which seemed to Dalí far too passive” (Caws *Dalí*, 74).

28. In this respect, Ford desire to rework Surrealism anticipates John Ashbery’s assertion that “[r]eal freedom would be to use this method [literary automatism] where it could be of service and to correct it with the conscious mind where indicated” (Ashbery 5-6).

29. Ford makes a similar point in yet another letter addressed to Tyler: “Les Vases Communicants is one B’s most brilliant works of prose; I’m reading it 2<sup>nd</sup> time as first time I read I didn’t have the eye on the translation. Other books of his I’ve read recently: Position Politique du Surrealisme; L’Amour Fou; Second Manifeste du Surrealisme. It’s easy, as I said, to underestimate the surrealist movement if one judges it only by the painting products.... However, Breton is an orthodox surrealist in his art-judgments, in spite of the “independent” line taken in the manifesto. His group meets at 2 Magots on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays & Sundays. My lunch with him lasted from one until night during which time we had a lot to say: I told him I was shocked at his puritanism in the Sex Conference in Variétés wherein he protested against discussing pederasty, so I bluntly said it must have been because of an inhibition and he agreed” (Ford “Undated Letter,” n.p.).

30. Ford’s tendency towards the fragmentary and the unfinished is characteristic. The American writer and composer Paul Bowles recognized as much. We get a sense of this in a letter that Bowles sent to Ford on 18 March 1964. In it, Bowles suggests that “Blues Ten sounds good, but I feel sure that by now it’s a project of the past, since you do change your mind with the wind, don’t you?” (Bowles n.p.). N.B. Ford did eventually publish a tenth issue of *Blues* in 1989. Edited by Ford, *Blues 10* appeared as a guest issue of Michael Andre’s New York-based periodical *Unmuzzled OX* (26).

31. Judging by Ford’s handwritten notes, it seems that he is mostly concerned with the (pure?) versions of Surrealism articulated by Breton in the first and second *Manifestos*.

32. Once again, Ford can be said to have anticipated John Ashbery’s subsequent comments about the application of Surrealist literary methods and personal autonomy.

33. Ford played editorial host to a number of New York School poets in his *Little Anthology of the Poem in Prose* (1953). Appearing in Laughlin’s yearly *New Directions*, Ford’s *Prose Poem* anthology was initially conceived as a collection of “texts sacred and secular, ancient and modern” and “a dynamic alliance of the spiritual and aesthetic” (Ford “Poem,” n.p.). In this historically diverse anthology, not only do the writings of William Shakespeare and Franz Schubert sit side-by-side; they do so alongside the “Two Meditations” of the first-generation New York School poet James Schuyler. In a similar fashion, Allen Ginsberg’s “Psalm” sits in close proximity to the “Proverbs” of Paul Goodman, with “The Folding Up” of the prophet Mohammed sandwiched in-between. Including emerging younger American writers such as Ginsberg, Schuyler, Ashbery, and the bona-fide American Surrealist Philip Lamantia, Ford’s collection of modern poets reads as a roll call of those that would ultimately come to define *The New American Poetry* (as collated by Donald Allen in 1960).

34. *Operation Minotaur* also features a number of photographs taken by Ford’s travelling companion and artistic collaborator, Indra B. Tamang.

35. Haiku came to be Ford’s preferred poetic method in his later life. He was particularly interested in the juxtapositional logic underpinning the haiku form. As he suggested to Asako Kitaori, “[t]he thing about the haiku is it’s very flexible as to content and the form is fascinating because of its brevity and it can be a very concentrated content. It’s the most flexible form of poetry, much more so than the sonnet. I think [that’s] the first thing that attracted me to the haiku, but it’s not what attracts me now particularly, but it ends up being surrealist because of the superimposition – two unrelated things that make a whole which seems to be a collage” (Kitaori “Catalyst”).

36. Other critics also consider the peculiar formal mixture of *The Young and Evil*. In his analysis of queer modernist mythology, Sam See suggests that “Ford and Tyler’s text shuttles between two collective, and to them, similar, experiences – those of the queer community and literary modernist culture at large – to blur the line between the strange and common, the queer and the mainstream, in American modernism” (See 1076).

37. Ford and Tyler are referring to Beatrice Lillie’s rendition of the song “I’m a Campfire Girl,” which was popular in the gay (urban) world of the 1920s and 1930s.

38. Perhaps these remarks about the “production of social visibility” might also be said chime with Ford’s aforementioned desire to bring Surrealism out of the shadows.

39. Chauncey suggests that in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century “Camp represented a critical perspective on the world – or, more accurately, a stance in relation to the world—that derived from gay men’s own experience as deviants” (Chauncey 290). In this fashion, “Camp was at once a cultural style and a cultural strategy, for it helped gay men make sense of, respond to, and undermine the social categories of gender and sexuality that served to marginalize them” (Chauncey 290).

40. Staunchly queer, Meyer’s attempt to reclaim the discourse of Camp is often compelling. In equal measure, however, it is not completely foolproof. In assuming such an uncompromising position, Meyer in fact leaves himself open to potential criticism. Cleto is again helpful here. He suggests that Meyer’s theorization of queerness is both contradictory and problematic. For Cleto, a properly queer stance, one that breaks away from ideological interpellations of binarism, “enacts confrontationist tactics, in which the subordinate, the deviant, voids the categories of the dominant, replacing them with their opposites (multiplicity, diversity, instability, change, and surface)” (Cleto 14). In this way, “queer thinking” is capable of promoting a “sabotage of the manifold binarisms (masculine/feminine, original/copy, identity/difference, natural/artifice, private/public, etc.) on which bourgeois epistemic and ontological order arranges and perpetuates itself” (Cleto 15). Significantly, if such a queer deconstruction, or confrontational “sabotage,” is to be achieved, one needs at all times to resist overtures pertaining to totalisation and unification, fullness and permanence. This is where, according to Cleto, Meyer becomes unstuck. Cleto posits that Meyer’s overly rigid definition of queer subjectivity leaves no room for strategic manoeuvre, and also discloses “a will to ascertain a unified definitional ground [that] would thus devoid that very subjectivity of a specific positioning within culture” (Cleto 18). In turn, this impacts negatively on Meyer’s theorisation of Camp, which, lest we forget, is dependent upon precisely such a fixed conception of (historically effaced) queer subjectivity. Following Cleto, we might well assert that Meyer’s “all too specific” (Cleto 18) account of queer subjectivity forecloses certain avenues of potentially productive inquiry when it comes to the question of Camp. For instance, Meyer’s insistence that there can be only one (queer) kind of Camp effectively forces him to ignore that which Cleto describes as “the complex relation of camp to the phenomenology of pop and Kitsch, for that relation partakes of the Sontagian expropriation of a specifically gay formation” (Cleto 19).

41. In Jack Babuscio’s estimation, “camp emphasizes style as a means of self-projection, a conveyor of meaning, and an expression of emotional tone” (Babuscio 23). Tellingly, such issues of stylization and self-projection also come to the fore in Ford’s unpublished “From a Record of Myself” (1948). In this critical and campy text, Ford insists that “[f]orm will merely be the construction – very near to style but not identical. Style is the manner in which the poetry is put: much closer to the poet’s personality than the mere accidental and impersonal thing called form” (Ford “Record,” 140).

42. As described by a reserved and oddly prudish Isherwood, Low Camp is “a swishy little boy with peroxidized hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich” (Isherwood 110). Unlike Isherwood, Ford has no reservations about Low Camp. He revels in vulgarity in his pioneering Camp novel.

43. Ford's desire to popularize Surrealism also led to an implicit alignment with the Surrealist agenda of Breton's aesthetic *bête noire*: Dalí. For better or worse, it was Dalí who was largely responsible for the increased visibility of Surrealism in the United States during the late 1930s. An indefatigable self-promoter, Dalí's many American commercial commissions resulted in him being variously described as a profiteer, a popularizer, and a dilutor of orthodox Surrealism.

44. Ford's sexuality was an awkward point of contention for the notoriously homophobic "Pope" of Surrealism. Breton's homophobia has been well documented. Consider the following comment from the first session of the Surrealist "Recherches" (27 January 1928), in which Breton "accuse [s] homosexuals of confronting human tolerance with a mental and moral deficiency which tends to turn itself into a system and to paralyze every enterprise I respect" (Pierre 5).

45. According to Tashjian, "Ford was apparently asked to be editor of *VVV*, but declined the position for the same reasons that he refused to hew strictly to the Surrealist line in *View*. "I knew [Breton] would be looking over my shoulder," he later said, preferring a catholic stance for *View*" (Tashjian 211).

46. Indeed, no less an artist than Andy Warhol went as far to name his *inter/View* magazine in homage to Ford's *View*.

## ABSTRACTS

This paper focuses on the queer American modernist poet, novelist, and editor Charles Henri Ford (1908-2002). Beginning with his first modernist periodical *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929-30), I consider Ford's engagement with and commitment to Surrealism. I argue that *Blues* left a profound and lasting impression on Ford's (surreal) conception of cultural production and editorial praxis. *Blues* also signals the emergence of an important queer—or more specifically, *camp*—turn in Ford's nascent praxis, which comes to exert a significant pressure on his understanding of and approach to Surrealism in the 1930s and 1940s. During this time, Ford took it upon himself to bring André Breton's movement "out from [the] underground," and more fully into the view of the American public. At the same time, Ford proposed a reworking of Surrealism. This is where Ford's *camp* approach comes to the fore. Serious about Breton's avant-garde movement, Ford sought to transform Surrealism by exaggerating its underlying absurdities and latently queer quirks. We get a clear sense of this when considering Ford's main editorial project of the 1940s. Accordingly, I describe how, in the pages of his periodical *View* (1940-47), Ford oversaw the dissemination—and *camp* transformation—of Surrealism in the United States. When read in relation to the rest of Ford's varied and vibrant creative output, it is clear that this unfairly overlooked figure can be said to have fostered the conditions for the subsequent emergence of decidedly surreal—and demonstrably *camp*—sensitivity in postwar American culture.

Cet article porte sur le poète, romancier et éditeur américain homosexuel Charles Henri Ford (1908-2002). Il s'intéresse d'abord à son premier magazine, *Blues: a Magazine of New Rhythms* (1929-30), pour retracer le lien et l'apport de Ford au surréalisme et souligner l'influence de *Blues* sur la façon (surréelle) dont Ford associe production culturelle et praxis éditoriale. C'est également dans les pages de *Blues* que Ford commence à expérimenter une poétique *queer*, et plus précisément *camp*, qui va considérablement influencer sur sa conception du surréalisme dans les années trente et quarante. A cette période, Ford se donne pour mission de « mettre au jour » le

surréalisme de Breton pour le porter à la connaissance du public américain. Dans le même temps, il propose de transformer le surréalisme selon sa propre vision du *camp* : sans rien ôter au sérieux de la démarche surréaliste, il cherche à en exagérer les absurdités et les excentricités (au fort potentiel *queer*), comme le montre sa grande aventure éditoriale, *View*, dans les années quarante. A travers cette revue (1940-47), Ford poursuit son projet de diffuser et transformer (via l'esthétique *camp*) le surréalisme aux Etats-Unis. A la lumière de la production poétique à la fois variée et éminemment originale de Ford, il apparaît que ce passeur trop longtemps négligé a activement contribué à l'émergence d'une sensibilité résolument surréaliste (et que l'on peut qualifier de *camp*) au sein de la culture américaine de l'après-guerre.

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**Mots-clés:** avant-garde, camp, petits magazines, modernisme, queer theory, surréalisme

**Keywords:** avant-garde, camp, little magazines, modernism, queer theory, surrealism

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