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| The Flower Thief (1960) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| *The Flower Thief* is a feature-length experimental film produced by the American artist Ron Rice in the North Beach section of San Francisco amidst the dwindling of that region’s once-vibrant Beat culture. The film follows its titular protagonist — portrayed by Taylor Mead — as he meanders about the city. *The Flower Thief* depicts his encounters with various beatniks and authority figures in a loose, episodic structure, and touching on prevalent themes of the budding ‘60s counterculture such as social disengagement, drugs, spontaneity, and queerness. Valuing improvisation over scripted narrative and flaunting various technical imperfections, *The Flower Thief* was heralded upon its New York release as a major work of the New American Cinema movement, and has subsequently been referred to as ‘the purest expression of the Beat sensibility in cinema’ (Sitney 300). It was produced on a shoestring budget and was shot with outdated black and white 16mm film stock that gives the image a washed-out luminosity. The soundtrack — a haphazard sonic collage that Rice assembled with a quarter-inch tape recorder — shifts disjunctively between musical sequences, poetic interludes, and excerpts from movie soundtracks and lectures on mental illness. In addition to securing Rice’s position within the ‘60s avant-garde, *The Flower Thief* also launched Mead’s career as an underground film star. |
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| Further reading:  (Archer)  (Batten)  (Carmines)  (Mekas)  (Rice)  (Rice, A Statement)  (Sargeant)  (Sitney) |