

30. There's a religious pressure group boycotting the film.

31. The play was just through town last summer, or has been advertised for this summer.

32. Too many damn college film societies showing movies for free.

33. Who wants to pay to see something that belongs on TV?

34. Who wants to pay to see home movies?

35. People are going to wait until the film hits the suburbs.

36. People are going to wait until the film is on TV next year.

37. The college kids are out of town.

38. It should have come out last year; now it's dated.

39. Well, they never should have made the picture anyway.

40. People don't want to see a movie that their psychiatrist has to explain to them.

41. That star has made too many pictures this year.

42. They showed too much of it in the coming attractions.

43. The ads were better than the picture turned out to be, and word-of-mouth killed it.

44. That bitchy critic kept pounding away.

45. (For musicals only:) There's nothing to hum.

46. They didn't sneak preview it enough.

47. They gave it away with too many sneak previews.

48. The studio tried to kill it.

49. The public smells it. I don't know how the hell they do it, but they do.

50. Wish to hell we knew.

It is important to note that a film *never* drops dead because of inadequate publicity. That's only fair. There are a lot of valid reasons to dump on the publicist without using this one.

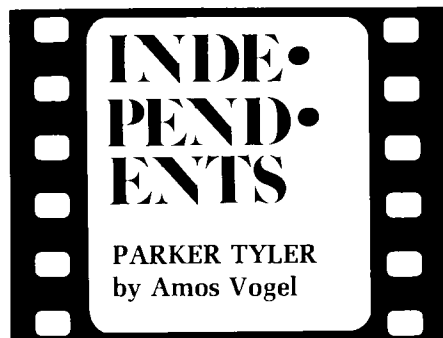
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of her Creative Film Foundation, the first of its kind for the avant-garde. Simultaneously, he lectured; wrote his classic *RASHOMON* analysis for a special Cinema 16 publication; supported grant applications by filmmakers; participated, most forcefully, in Cinema 16's "Poetry and Film" Symposium with Maya Deren, Arthur Miller, Willard Maas, and Dylan Thomas; wrote monographs on avant-garde directors for *Film Culture*; and authored many film books, including *Charlie: Last of the Clowns*; *Sex, Psyche, Etcetera in the Film*; *Classics of the Foreign Film*; *Underground Film*; *The Shadow of an Airplane Climbs the Empire State Building*; *Screening the Sexes*; and *The Three Faces of the Film*.

Justice cannot be done here to the complexity of his writings. But the nature of his commitment was quite clear: a firm conviction that film could be an art and that it was necessary to explore its aesthetic potential, "ritual forms, the epic sensibility, the mythic premise, the identifiable human situation." To do this, however, the rule applying to all art was indispensable: *the necessity of form*, of structuring image, content and style into an "organic" *Gestalt*.

It was this key element in Parker's criticism that led, in later years, to increasing conflict with avant-garde tendencies toward formlessness and a benevolent, undifferentiated acceptance of anything caught by anyone in front of any camera ("fetish footage"). It will become an ever more essential corrective to the history of the American avant-garde favored by the New American Cinema movement to study Parker's incisive criticism of the Cult of Universal Tolerance (the validation of a work as art residing in its having been made), of Universal Mutual Admiration (the self-serving narcissism of perfect artists ecstatically back-slapping each other in acts of "blurbism" instead of critique), of trends that substituted "perception" for "feelings"; and his insistence, finally, that the term "avant-garde" include Dreyer as well as Brakhage. Thus, while strongly supporting the movement, his stance was ever a critical one. "All love implies judgment"; only infatuation is uncritical.

Even if one disagrees with some of Parker's evaluations (he tended to under-rate Warhol and the anti-illusionists), his analyses are indispensable to any understanding of the current state of the American avant-garde: for this gentle, deceptively "innocent" man, of unflinching grace, humor and kindness, simultaneously displayed a stubborn seriousness that insisted, unfashionably so, on the moral and humanizing functions of film and avoided coddling in favor of the rigors of an analysis both intellectual and poetic; no one, including this writer, was then exempt from his shafts and judgments. It is precisely for this constant, informed, and loving perusal of one's artistic, intellectual, and moral stance that I and others will miss Parker the most. ❄



Every death is a possible beginning deflecting the living from their routines to examine with a fresh, anguished eye, the departed and themselves. Unfashionable questions of "values" and "meaning" arise, and memories become a function not merely of past but of future. In this sense, it would be an insult to Parker Tyler to compose an obituary on his leaving us; for his influence and relevance will abide with those he touched and with all others who, in a quiet and explosive hour, will learn of him in the future.

The bald truth is that the evolution and present dilemma of the American film avant-garde cannot be understood without reference to this man: a true, pure, life-long, unrepentant champion of its cause. He was central to it—as observer, critic, teacher, helper, lover. He was the first critic to write seriously about it (when it was not even fashionable), the only one whose life was devoted to a continuing confrontation with it. While other critics saw nothing but Hollywood, Parker continued, over almost four decades, to insist that the future of film art rested with these much-maligned stepchildren of the industry, whose poverty-stricken, non-commercial films explored the infinite plastic potential of the medium. To the

extent that he dealt with Hollywood (as in his seminal *Magic and Myth of the Movies* and *The Hollywood Hallucination*), he approached it with amused, incisive irony, employing psychoanalytic insights and his poetic sensibility to reveal their latent mythological intent and manipulation of our unconscious.

But his real commitment was to the film poets, from Buñuel, Dali, Cocteau, and Duchamp to their American heirs who were to surpass them yet experience crisis amidst sudden acceptance. As a poet of note, as a distinguished art critic (his studies of Florine Stettheimer and Pavel Tchelitchew are models of their kind), as a friend of the leading avant-garde artists of his day, as editor of *View*, the internationally famed surrealist journal, it was inevitable that Parker would strike out in a direction opposite to that of the conventional film reviewers, positing the avant-garde cinema firmly within the tradition of modern art. From 1947 on, he wrote carefully analytic program notes (still the most perceptive of their kind) for the Cinema 16 film society, championing the then unknown Peterson, Broughton, Brakhage, Markopoulos, Maas, Anger from their very first productions. He was the only critic who praised these artists at a time when all others either disregarded or laughed at them.

Even more important were his close relationships with these artists, the endless theoretical talks, the voluminous correspondence (often extending over years and continents), the loving criticism, the (literally) daily concern, the seriousness with which questions of theory and practice were handled. A close friend of Maya Deren, he became a director (with Rudolph Arnheim, Meyer Schapiro, Barney Rosset, Joseph Campbell, and the present writer)