

VIEWS & REVIEWS

CHANNELS:

Comments on TV

MARYA MANNES

M. MANNES: (*On entering the apartment of an egghead*) So you finally succumbed!

EGGHEAD: (*Sheepishly*) Yes—the Conventions did it.

M. M.: I notice you don't keep it in the living room.

E. H.: Good heavens, no. Death to conversation. There it sits, waiting—a blind-eyed presence. I keep it in the study so that looking at it is a voluntary, not an automatic, thing.

M. M.: How much *do* you look at it?

E. H.: Very little—maybe twice a week—a couple of shows on Sunday.

M. M.: What makes you turn it on on those occasions?

E. H.: (*After a thoughtful pause*) Well, there are about three or four shows that I make a specific point of seeing, like "See It Now" or "You Are There" or "Meet the Press"—you know, that kind of thing. Or a whole play like *Hamlet* or an opera.

M. M.: Those are the Sunday ones. What about all the weekday nights?

E. H.: I only turn it on then if we happen to be home without friends and too tired to read—or not music-minded.

M. M.: In other words, if you have nothing better to do.

E. H.: Exactly. That's the funny thing about TV as it now stands—it's only a substitute, a sort of hole filler. We lead such a full life that there is little time to be filled. (*Pause*) When people are at the house and the conversation is good, I would never think of turning it on . . . except under rare circumstances.

M. M.: Such as?

E. H.: Well, such as "Author Meets the Critics," for instance. That's a stimulating and literate show productive of *more* conversation. The

only other times I can think of would be a speech by some very important figure.

M. M.: Don't you and your friends ever turn it on just for entertainment?

E. H.: But friends *are* entertainment. If I really crave entertainment with a capital "E," I'd rather go to a play or a movie. Most plays and movies on TV are either so slight or so poor or so abortive that they are not worth looking at.

M. M.: They are to over twenty million families.

E. H.: I think you would find that the people who get most out of TV are those who probably get least out of life.

M. M.: Isn't that a bit drastic?

E. H.: I don't think so. If your life is full of interests—work you enjoy, people you love, music, theater, books, gardening—there just isn't time for TV. Why, even the shows I make a point of catching—when the time comes around and I happen to be talking to somebody or absorbed in reading something or even polish-

ing shoes, damned if I don't just forget and miss them!

M. M.: About those Sunday shows that you try to see: Would you miss a cocktail party or a dinner—or a day in the country—to see them?

E. H.: No, I would not.

M. M.: But you say they are good and worthwhile.

E. H.: Yes, but they are still synthetic—and I still prefer reality to synthesis.

M. M.: Hasn't TV become a part of real life?

E. H.: (*Smiling*) You may have me there. I suppose TV has become a part of life, and I suppose I own a set solely because of that.

M. M.: Aren't you doubling on your tracks?

E. H.: I don't think so. Any medium of mass communication as powerful as TV is of necessity a part of life, and I have no patience with people who ignore it or say "Wouldn't have one in my house for a million bucks!" If you do *not* have one in your house you miss certain things—few as they may now be—that you can get nowhere else, things that may have a profound influence on our national thought and behavior.

M. M.: Yet TV remains a very unimportant part of *your* life.

E. H.: Yes—but that may not always be so. For one thing, it will be forced to improve, bit by bit. For another, the day may come when we may have to *pay* in order to see the kinds of shows we want.

M. M.: We?

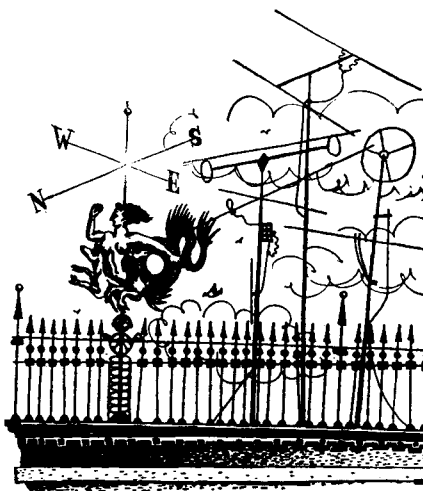
E. H.: All right, all right, call us what you want—eggheads, snobs, intellectuals—we're used to it. But I have a feeling that if I knew a certain excellent show was coming on which I could see—without commercials, mind you—only by putting a quarter in a slot—well, I would certainly put a quarter in the slot and stay home to see it.

M. M.: That's the voluntary viewing, the element of personal choice, isn't it?

E. H.: Yes. You have to pay for what you get. And the price of the set is only part of it. (*Looking suddenly at his watch*) Damn!

M. M.: What's the matter?

E. H.: Oh, well, never mind. I wanted to catch that Marciano fight, but it's too late now.



Hollywood's Defense in Depth

ARTHUR KNIGHT

AS IS TRADITIONAL after the first wondrous éclat of a new invention, Cinerama's triumph was soon followed by revelations that there had been a great many other achievements in film depth that Cinerama had barely beaten to the wire. Hard upon its debut came news that there were also Natural Vision, Stereo-Techniques, and others, all embodying 3-D. The thwarted pioneers behind these developments all pointed out that Cinerama wasn't "true" 3-D, and that the public would do well to hold its breath—and its purse—for the real thing. The one handicap of these others, vis-à-vis Cinerama, was that their processes required the spectator to wear polarized glasses, while all a Cinerama viewer needed was a pair of eyes and a ticket.

The exciting thing about Cinerama is the sense it gives of "audience participation." The roller-coaster sequence is already famous. For a few frenzied moments the spectator feels himself to be actually in the front car of an amusement-park scenic railway, dashing down the steep inclines, racketing around the banked curves, climbing again to the next nerve-numbing drop. Some have even become slightly airsick viewing the cross-country plane trip that serves as Cinerama's grand finale.

Cinerama was followed into New York by Natural Vision's "Bwana Devil." "Natural" in this case means "polarized glasses." Spectators at "Bwana Devil"—those who kept their glasses on—instinctively ducked as an aborigine hurled, or seemed to hurl, his spear directly at them. On top of "Bwana Devil" came Columbia's "Man in the Dark," also shot on the

Natural Vision Cameras, and featuring "the new Mono-color"—sepia. Its illusionary tricks include forceps that probe at the spectator's brain and a repulsive spider that seems to swing right out into the viewer's eye. At one point the hero himself plunges off a roller coaster straight into the laps of the customers. "Man in the Dark" hurls just about everything at its audiences except an acceptable story. But such considerations haven't bothered Hollywood. There is also "House of Wax," which achieves its heights of artistry by bouncing Ping-pong balls at the audience and backing the operating end of a cancan dancer into the lens. The panic is on!

Paramount is already shooting a film on its own 3-D system (called, appropriately enough, Paravision), while R.K.O. has rushed into the act by contracting for a new type of camera, the creation of the veteran stereo inventor John A. Norling. R.K.O. closed the deal without even waiting to decide how the camera could be used. All these techniques require the viewer to wear special glasses.

CinemaScope

But lurking in the wings is yet another process, the announcement of which has rocked the industry. Its

name was sensibly changed from Anamorphoscope to CinemaScope by its sponsors, Twentieth Century-Fox, who claim that the device will not only eliminate the need for glasses but can approximate the effects of Cinerama with far less drastic changeovers in equipment and house seating plans. Already the press and potential exhibitors have been permitted a peep at a portion of Fox's first CinemaScoped spectacle, the Biblical best-seller "The Robe," as well as another film featuring the obviously congenial talents of Marilyn Monroe, Betty Grable, and Lauren Bacall. Following a series of private demonstrations for industry executives, the company boldly announced that *all* its "production output forthwith" would be concentrated in the 3-D field.

So the battle has already been joined between the proponents of true stereoscopic photography—with glasses—and those who hold that the illusion of depth provided by Cinerama, and presumably CinemaScope, should be enough to satisfy anyone. In the middle, understandably bewildered by the press barrage of claims and counterclaims, stand theater owners and public.

FUNDAMENTALLY, the theory of stereo vision—seeing "in the round"—is not difficult to grasp. Its basis is the physical fact that each of our two eyes views an object from a slightly different angle, an angle determined by the distance from pupil to pupil. When these two separate images fuse in the brain, an impression of depth is created.

Soon after the art of photography had been discovered, in the first half of the nineteenth century, these same principles of stereoscopes were put to practical application in the stereopticon. Today, with the advent of color stereo transparencies, one of our grandparents' most popular diversions has almost regained its former eminence.

In the film versions of this process, such as Natural Vision and Stereo-Techniques, the two images are projected simultaneously upon a single screen instead of appearing side by side as in the photographic stereoscopes. Separation is achieved through the polarized glasses distributed to

