BOOK REVIEWS

The Great Audience

By Gilbert Seldes. Published (1950) by Viking Press, 18 E. 48 St., New York 17. 229 pp. 5½ × 8½ in. Price $3.75.

Twenty-five years ago Gilbert Seldes in *The Seven Lively Arts* presented the then daring proposition that the popular arts—movies, radio, comic strips, vaudeville, etc.—should be assessed by the same critical standards which apply to the fine arts. He contended that the influence of such widely popular artists as Chaplin, Gershwin or Herriman merited serious esthetic consideration. Now, in his latest work, *The Great Audience*, he has reassessed the position of the mass arts and resituated them in a larger social frame of reference, feeling that, while their relation to the fine arts is now secure, the dominant mass entertainments—radio, movies and television—have taken on an additional significance as media of mass communication.

To his task Mr. Seldes brings an unusual combination of qualifications—a lively and sympathetic affection for the popular arts, bolstered by wide practical experience in television, radio and the movies, together with an incisive critical temper unencumbered by political or intellectual prejudices. Out of the tremendous upheaval and chaos resulting from the relocations now taking place in the entertainment field he has not only grasped and clearly analyzed the significant organizational and distribution problems, but has also offered reasonable proposals for reorganization of our existing political and economic framework.

He recognizes that the popular arts have certain characteristics which set them off from the fine arts, notably the fact that they are not made for the ages, but created to be quickly enjoyed and forgotten.

In his analyses of present-day conditions in the movie industry, Seldes proposes reorganization of the industry to meet the threats of television and diminishing box office receipts. He upsets many widely touted beliefs of the movie industry, such as "Nearly everyone goes to the movies," "the movie industry is the fourth largest in the U.S.," and that most of the profits of the industry come from production and releasing of movies. He points out that the manufacture of motion pictures actually ranks about forty-sixth, that the great bulk of movie profits comes from distribution and exhibition rather than from manufacturing, and that public opinion polls made for the industry have indicated many startling facts as to who actually goes to the movies today. The great majority of those who go to the movies today are under twenty years of age. After twenty-five, people gradually stop going to movies geared to adolescent tastes. Between thirty and forty, more than half the population of the U.S. does not go to the movies more than once a month, while after fifty half the population never goes at all. Thus the claimed eighty million paid attendances a week actually represent between thirteen and fifteen million individuals.

Movie manufacturers, faced by the loss of overseas markets, the inroads on a joint audience by television, and the enforced separation of manufacturing and exhibition facilities under antitrust regulations, find themselves in a precarious position. Part of the trouble lies in the standardized movie product itself, which Seldes claims has degenerated from the telling of a story to being the embodiment of a popular mythology gauged for the taste of the perennially adolescent movie audience, itself predicated on a fixed rate of birth and age turnover. Seldes proposes that the movies try to recapture their lost audiences by production of more varied and mature films and by increasing secondary channels of distribution for them along the lines of the "art" (or "sure seater") theater and the now vanished newsreel theater circuits. The financial success of "Hamlet" has proved that even a serious "class" film can, with proper exploitation and distribution, provide adult movie fare and at the same time make money.

In the competition of movies and television for the same mass audience, Seldes presumes three courses of action: (1) *a merger of interests* whereby the movie producers could make special films for television and movies for their own theaters, and use the latter for showing both films

and television features, (2) *compromise*—Hollywood may become a special manufacturing unit for television, at the same time making films for more mature and specialized movie audiences, (3) *active competition*—the movie industry might concentrate on action films, westerns and Technicolor musical extravaganzas where television cannot successfully compete.

Seldes believes television can be most effective in straight dramatic productions, where the artificial is immediately obvious and out of place, as well as in its presentation of sports and vaudeville. By combining live news events and newsreel film a unique documentary form might be developed. In an effective reorientation of the popular arts, television may capture the mass audience by presenting sports and vaudeville, radio may survive by presenting documentary, cultural and musical features, and movies by concentrating on the production of fiction and extravaganzas.

Provocative, thoughtful and well documented, *The Great Audience* is surely one of the most intelligent and searching examinations of the popular arts to appear in many years, significant for the industrial specialist and the general reader alike. To Seldes, the popular arts are of enormous significance in the culture of a democracy, and their development and control should be the concern of every citizen, since we are all in some degree affected by them whether we are aware of it or not.—THOMAS BARRY HUNT, 752 Greenwich St., New York 14.

Movies for TV

By John H. Battison. Published (1950) by Macmillan, 60 Fifth Ave., New York. 376 pp. + numerous illus. 5¾ × 8½ in. Price $4.25.

The recent growth of television has provided employment for many new people who find themselves in an unfamiliar world. Also, many old hands in advertising and the theater feel the lack of basic information on a new art and science. It is to these people that this book is directed.

To quote the jacket, "This book . . . provides information both on technical equipment and on program planning, needed to insure the best results from movies on television, including a great deal of experienced advice on technical and artistic details which may cause trouble."

On page 128 the author says, "But the reader of this book will not normally be expected to have much to do with the technical side." And on page 246, "This book is not intended to produce engineers, producers, or even technicians, but after reading and studying it the reader should be well prepared for any job in the film department of a television station that does not require specialized technical knowledge. It should be equally helpful to anyone else who is concerned with films for television."

Obviously any single book which treats such a wide variety of subjects must touch upon each rather lightly. But for the person who wishes to gain a quick broad view of these subjects, Mr. Battison presents it with an easily read seminarrative style that is clear and pleasing.—C. L. TOWNSEND, National Broadcasting Co., 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York.

Preparation and Use of Audio-Visual Aids

By Kenneth B. Haas and Harry Q. Packer. Published (1950) by Prentice-Hall, Inc., 70 Fifth Ave., New York 11. i–xii + 327 pp. including 36 pp. appendix and 7 pp. index. Profusely illus. 6 × 9 in. Price $4.65.

This is the second edition of a well-known textbook. The first edition was "aimed at industrial and store personnel trainers." In this revision the authors attempted to broaden its appeal and usefulness, but much of the original plans remains.

The authors have compressed into a relatively few pages an enormous amount of information about every type of audio-visual aid. The book contains many lists of criteria for materials and rules on utilization of them. Although the authors keep the viewpoint intensely topical and devote very little space to theoretical considerations such as the psychology behind the use of audio-visual materials, the book is so complete that it constitutes a reference work in the field. All of the well-known instructional aids and some of the less well known are included. Two of the best

chapters are on using the blackboard and on setting up and operating an audio-visual laboratory. The chapter on the laboratory will be especially useful to schools of education. The authors have made good use of line drawings to enliven the text. Since the illustrations are so good it is surprising to find no examples of charts, such as pie charts and bar graphs.

The book is so full of ideas and hundreds of practical suggestions that the compression necessary to get these into a small space has resulted in some subjects being slighted. It is impossible, obviously, to explain photography in two or three pages or outline objective research methods in one page. This book, therefore, is not a thorough discussion of any one phase of audio-visual education but is an overview of the whole subject. There is an appendix on sources of materials and equipment.—PAUL R. WENDT, College of Education, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis 14.

Current Literature

THE EDITORS present for convenient reference a list of articles dealing with subjects cognate to motion picture engineering published in a number of selected journals. Photostatic or microfilm copies of articles in magazines that are available may be obtained from The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., or from the New York Public Library, New York, N.Y., at prevailing rates.

American Cinematographer

vol. 31, no. 10, Oct. 1950

Choosing a 16Mm Camera for Professional Work (p. 342) L. ALLEN

New Technicolor System Announced (p. 354)

vol. 31, no. 11, Nov. 1950

Economy Prime Factor in Producing Films for TV (p. 377) H. A. LIGHTMAN

Advantages of Variable Shutters in 16Mm Cine Photography (p. 386) J. FORBES

vol. 31, no. 12, Dec. 1950

New Technicolor System Tested by Directors of Photography (p. 414) L. ALLEN

Surgical Cinematography (p. 417) F. C. ELLS

New Camera and Tripod Carrier Developed at MGM (p. 418) F. FOSTER

British Kinematography

vol. 16, no. 4, Apr. 1950

Technical Requirements of a Mobile Studio Unit for Feature Films (p. 109) B. HONRI

Modern Kinema Equipment: III., Accessory Equipment and Film Mutilation (p. 122) R. A. RIGBY

Improvements in Large-Screen Television (p. 126) T. M. C. LANCE

vol. 16, no. 5, May 1950

Maintenance of 16Mm Print Quality

I. The Renter's Problems (p. 152) E. F. BRADLEY

II. Problems in the Field (p. 154) M. RAYMOND, JR.

vol. 16, no. 6, June 1950

High-Diffusion Screens for Process Projection (p. 189) H. McG. Ross

vol. 17, no. 2, Aug. 1950

Science and the Motion Picture (p. 42) R. WATSON-WATT

The Evolution of the Newsreel

I. Introduction (p. 47) H. THOMAS

II. The Early Days of Newsreels (p. 47) K. GORDON

III. The Development of the Sound Newsreel (p. 50) W. S. BLAND

IV. The Future of the Newsreel (p. 53) H. THOMAS

History and Development of the Colour Film (p. 57) R. H. CRICKS

vol. 17, no. 3, Sept. 1950

Electrical Devices as Applied to Special Effects

I. Problems of Remote Control (p. 84) J. Gow

II. Miscellaneous Equipment (p. 85) F. GEORGE

Electronics

vol. 23, no. 8, Aug. 1950

Improved Deflection and Focus (p. 94) C. V. BOCCIARELLI

vol. 23, no. 12, Dec. 1950

Color Fundamentals for TV Engineers (p. 88) D. G. FINK

vol. 24, no. 1, Jan. 1951

Color Fundamentals for TV Engineers, Pt. II (p. 78) D. G. FINK