CinemaScope’s Significance in *How to Marry a Millionaire*

CinemaScope was a widescreen technique based on the use of an Anamorphoser, a wide-angle lens which was invented by Frenchman Henri Chrétien in 1926 (Dewhurst 126). The Anamorphoser shot panoramic scenes, compressed them “onto one strip of 35 mm film” and then re-expanded them for projection “on a giant curved screen” (Dewhurst 126-127). In 1953 studios and exhibitors adopted CinemaScope as a solution to the film industry’s economic crisis, which occurred largely in part by the proliferation of home television (Bazin). The film industry thought that CinemaScope’s widescreen pictures would revive theatre attendance since their “cinematographic image” heightened a film’s verisimilitude to a point that was unparalleled by television (Bazin). When spectators watched widescreen pictures they felt as if they were a part of the diegesis because the dissimilarity between “filmic vision,” what the camera sees, and “natural vision,” what they would see if they were actually inside the diegesis was reduced (Bazin). Since the spectators of widescreen pictures were immersed in the diegesis of the film they were watching, they also became spectators of “dramatic theatre” (Brecht 113). Dramatic Theatre, according to playwright Bertold Brecht, was a form of theatre that believed that a play was “great art” when the audience could relate to its characters (Brecht 113). *How to Marry a Millionaire* is a
film that shows how CinemaScope’s panoramic images increase the verisimilitude of the mise-
en-scene which in turn encourages spectators to see it in theatres.

*How to Marry a Millionaire* is a comedy about three roommates looking for love in New York City (Negulesco 175). The roommates are played by the top three female names of the 1950’s, Marilyn Monroe, Lauren Bacall, and Betty Grable (Zanuck 157). Since, *How to Marry a Millionaire* was CinemaScope’s second production it was up its director Jean Negulesco to ensure that it lived up to the hype created by Spyros P. Skouras, President of Twentieth Century-Fox. Skouras remarked that “CinemaScope [was] going to be a name that [meant] quality” and that it would only be used for the “very best product” (Zanuck 157). Negulesco was undaunted by the challenge to produce a quality film and he made it his goal to employ CinemaScope so that it “[brought] the audience into the [movie’s] action” by making them feel like they were in the same room as the stars (Negulesco 175).

CinemaScope’s anamorphic lens provides intimacy in *How to Marry a Millionaire*’s interior scenes because it extensively captures the mise-en-scene. For example, there is a scene where Bacall’s character, Schatze, walks into a showroom and models her dress in front of the guy that is pursuing her. When Schatze finishes modelling, she climbs up the showroom’s stage and finds a place amongst nine other models. What is striking about the shot of Schatze and the other models is their staging. The models are on different steps on the stage, and there is a horizontal distance of a couple meters between the first model and the last model but the location as well as the physical appearance of each model remains distinct (i.e.: each model’s full body is shown in the shot, no body parts are cut off). The shot even encompasses the whole width of the showroom so it reveals all characters in the scene like Schatze’s reclining admirer in the fore-
ground, the showroom attendant in the middle-ground, and the models in the background. Cine-
maScope, in this respect is capable of freeing the director from the movement of the camera be-
cause it films a wide scope of action while keeping the camera immobile (Koster 171). In the
showroom scene Negulesco does not have multiple long shots of various groups of models to
show how many there are in the showroom; instead, he is able to film the entire group in one stat-
ic long-shot. Lastly, CinemaScope keeps everyone “in focus at all times” so there is no need for
close-ups of each model to show their individual actions since everyone’s actions are clearly per-
ceptible in the shot (Koster 173).

Another purpose for CinemaScope’s breadth in *How to Marry a Millionaire* is to flaunt
the mise-en-scene. The most obvious eye candy in *How to Marry a Millionaire* is delivered in
the shot where Monroe’s character, Pola is chatting on the phone while lounging in a chair and
draping her legs on top of the ottoman that is front of her. The shot is positioned so that Pola’s
body sprawls out diagonally across the frame. Pola’s upper body takes up 2/3 of the left side of
the frame while her bare legs occupy 1/4 of the bottom of the frame. The downward orientation
of Pola’s reclining figure directs attention to her legs, which are prominently in the centre of the
foreground. The motive for placing her legs in the center of the foreground is to give onlookers,
particularly males, gratuitous entertainment. In fact, one of the reasons why *How to Marry a Mil-
lionaire* had three popular females as leads was because Skouras wanted to make CinemaScope a
vehicle for films that offered “bigger [stories] and more action…” and the only way that these
films could survive financially was if illustrious stars were in the cast (“Important Announce-
ment”). Hence, the trio of Bacall, Monroe, and Grable spearheaded *How to Marry a Millionaire*
an amalgamation of “two Broadway stage plays — The Greeks Had a Word for It, by Zoe Akins,
produced on the stage by William H. Harris Jr, and Loco, by Dale Eunson and Katherine Albert (“Important Announcement”).

An additional highlight of CinemaScope in *How to Marry a Millionaire* is that it emphasizes the vastness of the film’s surroundings and their social implications. *How to Marry a Millionaire* features detailed extreme long shots of the New York City skyline and of Maine’s countryside in order to contrast city scenery and country scenery. Exterior shots aside, the singular interior shot that stands out is when the former owner of the girls’ apartment, Freddie, breaks in and walks around its spacious living room. CinemaScope allows the camera to film the entire expanse of the living room in all its barren glory — the only furnishings in the room are two chairs and a lamp. The living room’s lack of furniture coupled with its generous size aptly reflects the dismal economic situation of the apartment’s inhabitants. Bacall, Monroe, and Grable’s characters are all poor bachelorettes who are barely making ends meet. They sell their furniture so they can pay for their rent and they socialize amongst New York’s elite in the hopes of snagging a rich beau who will pamper them for the rest of their life. Essentially, Schatze, Pola, and Loco are as empty and broke as their furniture-less living room suggests.

Besides effectively filming *How to Marry a Millionaire*’s mise-en-scene, the CinemaScope wide-angle lens was also used to project widened images onto a “screen [that was] curved in the form of a cylindrical segment, axis vertical, and concave towards the audience” (Dewhurst 130). What this means is that in order for *How to Marry a Millionaire*’s widened images to appear in theatres they passed through a compensating lens and then were projected onto an exceptionally longitudinal screen (Dewhurst 130). The compensating lens reverted the flattened images on the filmstrip to their original widescreen format and the projection of these images filled
the whole area of the longitudinal screen. The longitudinal screen was specifically made for the projection of widescreen images thus, it too became known as widescreen.

The catalyst for the implementation of these wider screens and the CinemaScope lens as aforementioned was the rise of television. TV’s were electronic systems that displayed visual images on a small square screen. TV's small screen of made them a product that was suitable for familial enjoyment as their compact size meant that they were portable and did not occupy a lot of space in the living room. Additionally, TV’s gave people the freedom to watch entertaining or informational programs whenever they wanted in the comfort of their own home; they no longer had to go to the theatres and see a movie at a specific showtime. Despite the conveniences of location and time that TV offered it could not impart the same image quality as widescreens. The square shape of TV screens squashed the width of the images that it showed which resulted in audiences seeing subpar renderings of a program’s mise-en-scene (Bazin). On the other hand, when CinemaScope films are projected onto a widescreen the width of their images is not compromised. This is because the projected images of a CinemaScope film fitted widescreen dimensions perfectly. Ergo, all the mise-en-scene from a film was visible to the audience when they watched a film on a theatre’s widescreen.

A further benefit of widescreens was that a “viewer’s angle of vision [got] widened regardless of where [they are] in the theatre” (Bazin). Widescreens were so immense that it did not matter whether a spectator was seated at the front or the back of a theatre because they were able to perceive the same wideness. On top of that, widescreen’s span contributed to the moviegoing experience by making spectators feel as if a film’s photographed reality was their reality. Widescreen figuratively plunged spectators inside a film’s diegesis by surrounding them by a “curved
and greatly enlarged screen” that showed the film’s action unfolding (Zanuck 156). Wide-screen’s width encompassed a viewer’s field of vision, the entire area that they saw when their eyes were fixed in one position, to the extent that they forgot that they were in a movie theatre. They became unaware of other people in the audience and the architecture of the theatre because the screen obscured their surroundings. Hence, they were sucked into the diegesis because the film’s images on the screen were all they could see.

Widescreen’s ability to immerse the spectator in the diegesis to the point where they could relate to or envision themselves as a character in the film helped to make How to Marry a Millionaire successful film. How to Marry a Millionaire premiered November 3, 1953 at the Fox Wilshire Theatre in Beverley Hills with a size of 50 feet by 23 feet (International Projectionist). Throughout its 95 minute running time there are no close up shots of Bacall, Monroe, or Grable. Close-ups they were deemed unnecessary in How to Marry a Millionaire because widescreen’s colossal size already inflated the proportions of images so that most shots of the characters appeared to be “in close-up anyways” (Shamroy 180). For instance, in the previously mentioned long shot of Pola chatting on the phone, her full body takes up almost half of the frame. Close-ups on each of her body parts are not needed because the long shot completely details her figure. Consequently, the spectator feels as if they are standing in the same room as Pola because the definition that they receive of her physical characteristics is similar to what they would see if they actually saw her in reality.

How to Marry a Millionaire’s presentation on a screen of a grand scale also allowed audiences to survey the wide scope of action that the CinemaScope lens captured. For instance, before How to Marry a Millionaire begins there is a scene that shows the Twentieth Century-Fox
symphony orchestra performing “Street Scene” a song composed by Alfred Newman. The scene features a shot that shows the dozens of musicians wielding their instruments. Widescreen’s ability to show a single long shot that reveals the place and actions of all the sections of the orchestra shows that it does not withhold a scene’s surroundings from spectators. Widescreen wants spectators to see as much of a scene’s surroundings as possible, which involves seeing what occurs on the far right and far left of the shot’s frame. Furthermore, by incorporating the entire orchestra, audiences are able to discern the spatial relationship amongst the different groups of musicians which enhances their absorption in the diegesis since they know the location of everything in the scene.

Overall, widescreen’s ability to immerse the spectator in the diegesis ties in with Skoura’s opinion that the film industry’s function is to provide the best entertainment (Skouras 148). For most spectators, a film with a believable diegesis is a good film because it helps them to escape their reality and enter the reality of the film (Brecht 113). Widescreen makes a film’s diegesis believable because it hypnotizes spectators into emotionally investing in and identifying with its characters (Brecht 113). Therefore, for spectators, the more a film feels like real life the more interesting it is to watch. All these principles link to Brecht’s concept of dramatic theatre. The dramatic theatre uses illusive techniques to blur the line between filmic reality and actual reality (Brecht 113). As a result, spectators of dramatic theatre fail to recall that they are in a theatre watching a fictional version of reality instead of reality itself (Brecht 113).

*How to Marry a Millionaire* is a film that absorbs spectators into its diegesis by employing CinemaScope to give intimate views of its mise-en-scene. Spectators feel as if they are in the same room as the characters because the widescreen swallows their field of vision so they cannot perceive anything be-
yond the images on screen. CinemaScope’s wide-angle lens provides sweeping views of How to Marry a Millionaire’s set and is capable of detailing objects and/or characters in long shot. For all these reasons, widescreen images surpass the limited scope of small square TV images. Moreover, the novelty factor and advantages of widescreen images enticed audiences to see How to Marry a Millionaire in theatres. Eventually the film would go on to become a record breaker making $36,000 grand eight days after its release (‘Picture Grosses’).