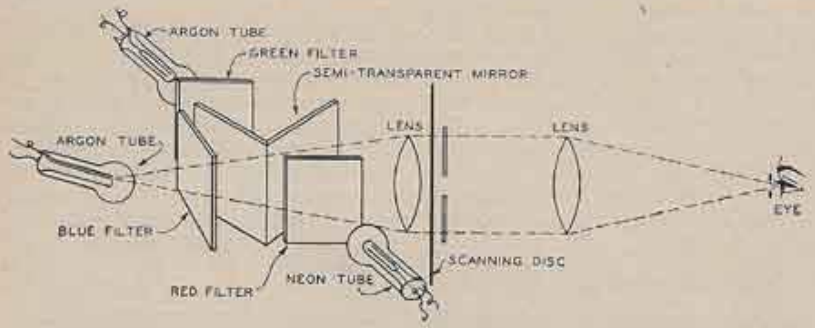
Television in Color

Natural Color Television Accomplished Through the Use of Three Sets of Special Photoelectric Cells and Color Filters

*By Herbert E. Ives**

OVER two years ago Bell Telephone Laboratories demonstrated a practical system of television. For the first time successful representations of objects at rest or in motion were transmitted electrically—over wires or through the ether—for considerable distances. The reproduction of the scene then transmitted was in monochrome—the orange-red color of the neon lamp. Recent developments of the laboratories, however, have made it possible to reproduce scenes with their true color values. The appearance of reality in the reproduced scene is thus greatly enhanced.



One semi-transparent mirror reflects red light from the neon tube; one reflects green light from one argon tube, and through both mirrors passes blue light from the other argon tube.

One of the most significant features of this new achievement is that it does not require completely new apparatus. The same light sources, driving motors, scanning discs, synchronizing systems, and the same type of circuit and method of amplification are used as in the monochromatic system. The only new features are the type and arrangements of the photoelectric cells at the sending end, and the type and arrangements of the neon and argon lamps at the receiving end. The outstanding contributions that have made the present achievement possible are a new photoelectric cell, new gas cells for reproducing the image, and the equipment associated directly with them.

New Type Photo-Cell

To render the correct tone of colored objects, it was neecssary to obtain photoelectric cells which—like the modern orthochromatic or panchromatic plate—would be sensitive throughout the visible spectrum. This requirement has been satisfactorily met. Through the work of A. R. Olpin and G. R. Stilwell a new kind of photoelectric cell has been developed, which uses sodium in place of potassium. Its active surface is sensitized by a complicated process using sulphur vapor and oxygen instead of by a glow discharge of hydrogen as with the former type of cell.

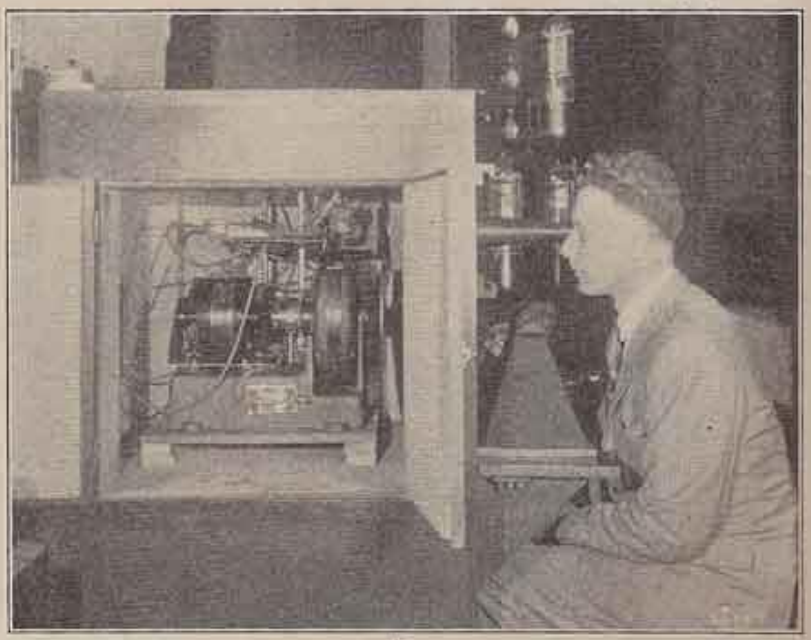
The response of the new cell to color, instead of stopping in the blue-green region, continues all the way to the deep red. Because the former potassium cells were responsive only to the blue end of the spectrum, objects of a yellowish color appeared darker than they should have and the tone of the reproduced scene was not quite correct. This disadvantage applied particularly to persons of dark or tanned complexion. When the new cells are used in the original television apparatus and with yellow filters—similar to those used in photographing landscapes in order to make the blue sky appear properly dark—this defect is corrected and the images assume their correct values of light and shade no matter what the color of the object or the complexion of the sitter. It is the availability of the new photoelectric cells which makes color television possible by their use.

The development of color television has been greatly simplified by the fact that as far as the eye is concerned any color may be represented by the proper mixture of just three fundamental colors—red, green, and blue. This fact was utilized in the development of color photography, and all the research that had been done in that field was available as background for color television. A host of methods of combining the three basic colors to form the reproduced image was available but, insofar as the sending or scanning end is concerned, a method was developed which has no counterpart in color photography. The method of "beam scanning"—used in the first television demonstration[1]—has been employed.

Color Filters

To apply this method to color television, three sets of photoelectric cells are employed in place of the one set used before. Each of these sets is provided with color filters made up of

[1] *Bell Record, June, 1928, page 325.*



The disc and motor drive for the color television apparatus are the same as for monochromatic television. The mirror and colored filters are in the small box behind the disc, at the right side of the cabinet. Note the disposition of the tubes.

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sheets of colored gelatine. One set has filters of an orange-red color which make the cells see things as the hypothetical red sensitive nerves of the retina see them; another set has yellow-green filters to give the green signal, and the third set has greenish-blue filters which perform a corresponding function for the blue constituent of vision. The scanning disc and the light source are the same as with the beam scanning arrangement use in monochromatic television. The only difference is in the photoelectric cells, and thanks to the tri-chromatic nature of color vision, it is only necessary to have three times the number of cells used previously to reproduce all colors. Three series of television signals, one for each set of cells, are generated instead of one and three channels are used for the transmission of the television signals.

The complete apparatus at the receiving end. On the left is the synchronizing panel and on the right are the amplifiers for three channels. In the center is the cabinet containing the scanning disc, the argon and neon lamps, and the color filters.

The photoelectric cell container, or "cage," has been built in a somewhat different form from that used in our first demonstration. There three cells were used arranged in an inverted "U" in a plane in front of the object. In the new photo-cell cage twenty four cells are employed, two with "blue" filters, eight with "green" filters, and fourteen with "red" filters. These numbers are so chosen with respect to the relative sensitiveness of the cells to different colors that the photoelectric signals are of about equal value for the three colors. The cells are placed in three banks, one bank in front of and above the position of the scanned object, one bank diagonally to the right, and another bank diagonally to the left, so that the cells receive light from both sides of the object and above. In placing the cells they are so distributed by color as to give no predominance in any direction to any color. In addition large sheets of rough pressed glass are set up some distance in front of the cell containers so that the light reflected from the object to the cells is well diffused.

The television signals produced in the color sensitive photoelectric cells through the color filters are no different electrically from those used in monochromatic television. Three sets of amplifiers are required, one for each color, and three communication channels in place of one, but the communication channels are exactly similar to those which were used with the same scanning disc before.

For color television the three images must be received in their appropriate colors, and viewed simultaneously and in superposition. The first problem was to find light sources which, like the neon lamp previously used, would respond with the requisite fidelity to the high-frequency signals of television, and at the same time give red, green, and blue light. With such lamps available a decision would have to be made as to how the three colors could best be combined to form a single image.

Methods of Reception

Several methods of reception are possible. For displaying the transmitted image to a large audience a grid[2] could be employed similar to that used for the earlier demonstration but it would consist of three parallel tubes instead of a single one.

Thus far the television images have been received in a manner similar essentially to our method for monochromatic television. The surface of a disc similar to that used at the sending end is viewed, and the light from the receiving lamp is focussed on the pupil of the observer's eye by suitable lenses. To combine the light of the three lamps, they are placed at some distance behind the scanning disc and two semi-transparent mirrors are set up at right angles to each other but each at 45° to the line of sight. One lamp is then viewed directly through both mirrors and one lamp is seen by reflection from each, as illustrated by the accompanying diagram.

The matter of suitable lamps to provide the red, green, and blue light has required a great deal of study. There is no difficulty about the red light because the neon glow lamp which has been used previously in television can be transformed into a suitable red light by interposing a red filter. For the sources of green and blue light nothing nearly so efficient

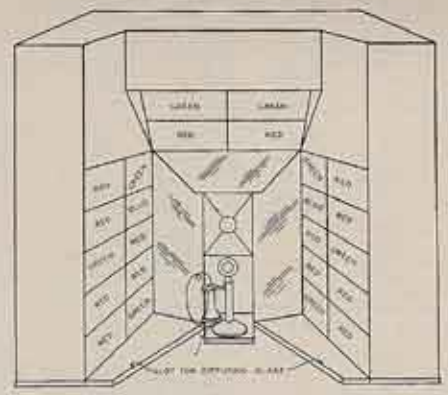
Side view of sending apparatus with cabinet doors removed. With the exception of the photoelectric cabinet at the left, the apparatus is identical with that used for monochromatic television.

[2] *Bell Record, May,* 1927, *page* 319.

as the neon lamp was available. The decision finally made was to use another one of the noble gases—argon—which has a very considerable number of emission lines in the blue and green region of the spectrum. Two argon lamps are employed, one with a blue filter to transmit the blue lines and one with a green filter transparent to the green lines of its spectrum.

These argon lamps unfortunately are not nearly so bright as neon lamps and it was, therefore, necessary to use various expedients to increase their effective brilliancy. Special lamps to work at high current densities were constructed with long narrow and hollow cathodes so that streams of cold water could cool them. The cathode is viewed end-on. This greatly foreshortens the thin glowing layer of gas and thus increases its apparent brightness. Even so it is necessary to operate these lamps from a special "I" tube amplifier to obtain currents as high as 200 milliamperes.

The receiving apparatus at present consists of one of the 16 inch television discs used in our earlier experimental work. Behind it are the three special lamps and a lens system which focusses the light into a small aperture in front of the disc. The observer looking into this aperture receives, through each hole of the disc



How the grouping of the colored filters before the color-sensitive photoelectric cells is arranged.

as it passes by, light from the three lamps—each controlled by its appropriate signal from the sending end. When the intensities of the three images are properly adjusted he therefore sees an image in its true colors, and with the general appearance of a small colored motion picture.

Difficulties Presented

Satisfactory television in colors is a far more difficult task than is monochromatic television. Errors of quality which would pass unnoticed in an image of only one color may be fatal to true color reproduction where three such images are superimposed and viewed simultaneously. In three-color television any deviations from correct tone rendering throw out the balance of the colors so that while the three images might be adjusted to give certain colors properly, others would suffer from excess or deficiency of certain of the constituents. A further source of erroneous color exists at the scanning end. If the light from the object were not distributed equally to all the cells, the object would appear as if illuminated by lights of different colors shining on it from different directions.

Color television constitutes a definite further step in the solution of the many problems presented in the electrical communication of images. It is, however, obviously more expensive as well as more difficult than the earlier monochromatic form, involving extra communication channels as well as additional apparatus.

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