PHOTOPLAY
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HOLLYWOOD'S GREATEST ENIGMA—
TELEVISION

How will this great unknown entertainment affect our movie going? An authority answers all your questions

by
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WHENEVER people ask me whether television will take the place of the movies, I blush, pant rapidly, stammer, and finally manage to ask them whether they think the automobile will ever take the place of the horse. To which they reply (if they bother to reply at all, and some of them do not) that the motor car has already taken the place of the horse, which is exactly what I want them to say. Because, if you examine that statement carefully, it turns out to be one of the silliest on record. For certain common purposes, the car has displaced the horse; but even that was a long and tedious process. There were as many horses between the shafts in 1912 as there were before Ford ever tinkered or Selden took out a patent. What's more: if the motor car had merely taken the place of the horse, it would be comparatively unimportant today. Actually, millions of people own cars who never owned—because they couldn't afford to own—horses.

Later, people said that the movies never would take the place of the horse—I mean, of the theater. And there, too, the facts are illuminating. To be sure there used to be eighty legitimate theaters in New York City and now there are less; there used to be shows with living actors in hundreds of small towns, and now there are not, unless the Federal Theater comes around. But, again, if the movies had merely taken the place of some other form of entertainment, they wouldn't be important, Hollywood would lack dazzle, and you would not be reading a magazine devoted to the pictures. The movies are important, not for what they displaced, but for the new things they did; for the new art they created; above all, for the new millions to whom they brought entertainment—millions who didn't know the theater at all.

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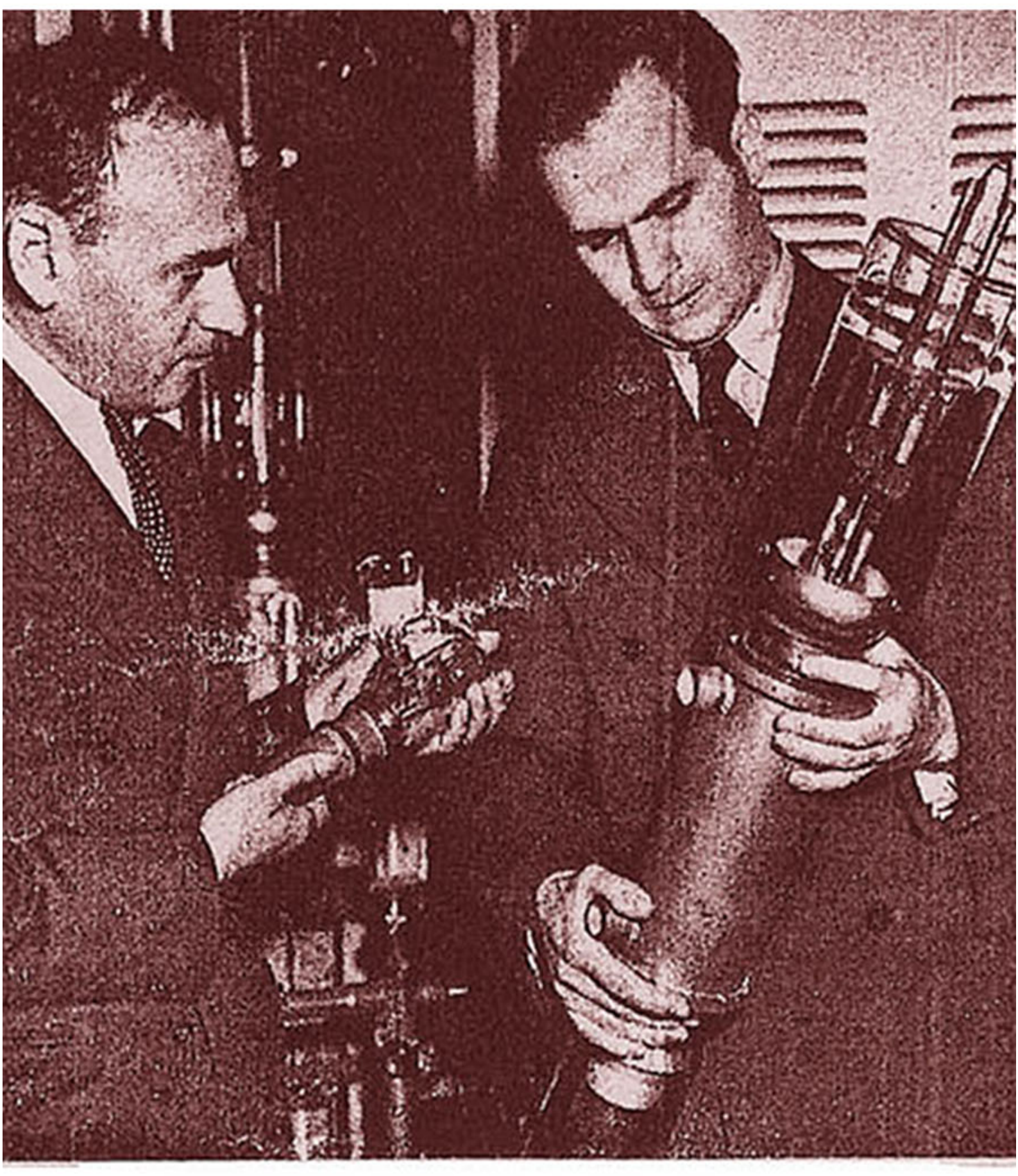

Author and Dr. Peter Goldmark, television engineer, inspect new equipment

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The above ought to make clear my slant in this matter. Actually, I refuse to make short-range prophecies; for long-range, anything is possible in fifty or a hundred years. We have speeded up invention so much in the past two generations that in a century all our present forms of entertainment may be outmoded and forgotten.

We have also speeded up economic confusion and military preparation so much in the past ten years that within fifty years the world may not have time or capacity for entertainment—by which I mean that too many of us may be dead. Anything is possible in a world so inventive, imaginative, enterprising, and stupid as ours.

But, for the immediate future, I do not think that television is going to take the place of the movies (or of the radio) and I have no concern in seeing that it does. Quite the contrary, I hope to enjoy all three. If I saw no future for television except as a replacer, I would have little interest in it. Like radio and the movies, television will have to create something of its own if it wants to become interesting and significant. I think it will.

When it does, will it have any effect on the movies? That's a different and a better question. Let me say at once that for a long time, whatever effect television may have will not touch the essential parts of a movie program. I foresee—on the basis of current experiments in television—two reasonable effects on the movies, one being only partial, the other, I sincerely hope, an improvement. Before giving you the details, I propose to pause and bring the readers of this magazine up to date in regard to recent television equipment and uses.

As you probably know, television is a name given to several methods for the instant transmission of visual effects—just as radio is a method for the transmission of audible effects. When you talk into a microphone, you set up certain disturbances which are transformed and transmitted electrically and are changed back into sound when they reach your radio receiver. When you move in front of a television camera (or scanner) you create certain disturbances which go through much the same process, and are turned back into pictures on your television receiver. Because these pictures follow one another at a certain speed, they seem to have motion, just as the quickly changing pictures on your movie screen seem to have motion. The scanners and receivers may be of various types, but the end result is pretty much the same. You get what seems to be a moving picture.

About a year ago, the average size of this screen was eight by eleven inches, or seven by ten—about the size of an ordinary business letterhead, turned sideways. This is still a common size, but two experiments are being made: for a table-set in which the picture is almost miniature, about half the regular size; and for a screen about two feet by eighteen inches; and, in addition, television pictures have been projected, by an ingenious invention, on a screen approximating the usual movie-house size. I know of no advantage claimed for the smaller size, except economy. The larger sizes are important. The small screen of television distresses people considerably at first; and, even after a year, the British public has registered its opinion that a larger size would be agreeable. I have a hunch that something approaching the middle-large size may become standard.

BUT size alone is not important. The picture that comes on the screen has to be clear; the moving figures have to be sharply defined; and those in the background must not blur (unless you use blurring for a special effect). Remember any movie you have seen lately and think of a long shot in a cabaret or on an athletic field. You have seen quite clearly little figures in the far background; you knew what they were doing and why they were there. Television is slowly working up to that same clarity and definition, but it has some distance to go.

If you want close-ups in television, you can get them, at the expense of the rest of the cast; if you use semiclose-ups, you may get three characters comfortably into your picture, but a fourth may not be clear, and you won't get any of them from head to foot. For that, you have to move them a little farther into the background—or wait for new cameras which are being perfected regularly.

Already cameras are in use which are

reported to be ten times as sensitive as those of a year ago; and a year ago the cameras were vastly better than those of 1936. So progress is made—and remains to be made. A "mob scene" of ten or fifteen has been televised, with reasonably good effect. But a lot remains to be done before the television director can handle a group of people as easily before his scanner as a movie director does before the camera.

I DON'T suppose the technical details about lights and tubes, upon which television scanning depends, are of great interest to the layman. But one thing has proved of overwhelming interest: the new use of the latest cameras. They are mounted on trucks, and, accompanied by an ultrashort-wave transmitter, roll to an appointed spot. Then one of the true miracles of modern days occurs. Because these mobile units can be set up near a grandstand and transmit to you a baseball game, pitch by pitch, hit by hit, errors and runs and put-outs—not a few hours later, but *at the very moment they occur*. Tennis matches, parades, inaugurations, boat races, horse races, prize fights, naval reviews, and any number of stunts are made instantly available, and the scanner gives you events completely, including accidental excitements.

Last year during the two-minute silence at the cenotaph in London, on Armistice Day, a man broke through the crowd and shouted out that the King and his ministers and all the notables assembled were hypocrites, planning another war—and he was seen and heard, at that very moment, thirty miles or forty miles away. Familiar as I am with the workings of television, that still strikes me as miraculous—and exciting.

Now this portion of television (which the British call "outdoor broadcasts") obviously competes with the newsreel, and this is one of the two points at which the movies will be affected by television. Not that the newsreel becomes superfluous. Let us say that you are busy on Tuesday afternoon—and are interested in the World Series game played that day. You can't watch the game on your television receiver, so if you want to see what happened; you go that evening (or the next day) to the movies—and you want the newsreel just as much. Television, in short, loses by being immediate and instantaneous, just as it gains. But a rival for the news-