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What is Coming in Television

By HUGO GERNSBACK

NOW that television has actually arrived, and a number of radio stations are already broadcasting television as a regular thing, it behooves us to look into the future and see what is likely to happen during the next few months and the next few years. It is a foregone conclusion that history will repeat itself, and that we shall have a boom in television, just as there was a boom in radio in 1921 and 1922. There are, however, certain differences that should not be overlooked and, if these differences are carefully studied, we will avoid the pitfalls and the disappointments which the radio industry had to contend with in the broadcast boom period.

To begin with, I cannot repeat too strongly my previous admonition that television at the present time, and for some months to come, is not for the public at large. It is doubtful whether, for some years to come, television sets will be sold as radio sets are now sold, direct to the public. The problem of synchronization has not, as yet, been solved completely, although much valuable work along these lines has already been accomplished. The idea of "You push the button, we have done the rest," is not yet true in television.

Television just now is in its earliest stages of infancy, and may be compared to radio at its coherer and spark-coil stage in 1903. It took almost twenty years from that period for broadcasting to come about. Of course, the cycle at this time will be shortened considerably; but even the most optimistic today doubt whether television will be ripe for the general public within two years, at least.

In the meanwhile, it will be paradise for the experimenter and the amateur who will "build their own"; who will experiment, who will improve and do a thousand and one things to make television practical from the public's standpoint. For some time we will have the rotating disc and the neon lamp with us. As I have said before, editorially, this is only a transitory stage during the development and, in the end, the disc with its motor will not prevail. But at the present time we have nothing better; and the disc really does give results and is making, at least for the present, television practicable for us. What instrumentality we will be using for television one or two years hence, no one knows; but that does not matter. Every art has to go through its stages of development, during which a great deal of information must be gathered, and the keenest minds in the art concentrated on the problems; but from such beginnings the art will slowly evolve into greater and broader accomplishments.

As in the early days of broadcasting, hundreds and thousands of concerns will rush into the production of all sorts of television material, and a good start has already been made while this is written. A great deal of good material and probably much more poor material will be turned out by these concerns in the scramble for supremacy; but, just as in all other endeavors of this kind, it may be freely predicted that those with the best technical talent, and those who serve the public best, in an economic sense, will probably remain in evidence after all the others have been left by the wayside.

Particularly with television, a great deal of caution is necessary before any material is put out at all. Manufacturers should not rush into the market with half-baked production and with material that is not scientifically and correctly designed. Radio during the broadcast boom came in for a good deal of adverse criticism; because, seemingly, every shoemaker became a radio manufacturer over night and turned out the most impossible and incredible contraptions, which did not last for more than two months. It will probably be the same with television.

Already, in New York and other cities, small temporary booms have been created artificially by irresponsible retail establishments who sold "television" (?) material which is, in the first place, unfitted for use, and secondly, even though it had been all right, could not have been used because no one was broadcasting television impulses at that time. These practices only react against the merchants themselves, because, when a legitimate demand comes along, those who have been previously deceived and disappointed will probably be most cautious in investing their money in new devices.

The public at large should know that television is purely an experimental art at the present time and only those handy with tools and proficient in radio and general science should attempt to build a television receiver. Pretty soon, many television kits will be offered for sale; but even such kits, no matter how well made, are only for the experienced radio constructor and those mechanically and electrically inclined and handy with tools, and not for the general public.

The television fan should know, without being told, that results to start with will not be any too good. Unless you are within twenty miles of a transmitter, conditions are not apt to be favorable. Such a thing as receiving DX television, for the time being, seems doubtful; unless you can be satisfied to receive only occasional snatches of an image, or when it is impossible to distinguish a man's hand from a woman's face. In television today, we require a strong impulse and, even then, reproductions are apt to be not too good.

In the reception of radio broadcasting, the ear is not as sensitive to slight disturbances and variations as the eye. Static disturbances, battery trouble, loose connections, faulty synchronization of the disc, all tend to make for a poor picture and, for some time, it will be the general rule that the received images are, and must be, rather poor, except when you are very close to the transmitter. For that reason, television, wonderful as it is, even at present, should not be glibly talked to the public; and the public should not be led to believe that, next month, they will be able to purchase perfect television sets through which they can witness a ball game a thousand miles away, down to its most perfect details. That accomplishment, as yet, is in the indefinite future.

Let us go slowly, methodically, and the television art will grow into a tremendous thing. Let us keep our heads and not expect the impossible. Evolution in any art is a slow and orderly process. Let us bear with the necessary delays in perfecting television.

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Mr. Hugo Gernsback speaks every Tuesday at 9.30 P. M. from Stations WRNY (326 meters) and 2XAL (30.91 meters) on various radio and scientific subjects.