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Moving Image & Sound: Basic Principles

Format Research Paper

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POLAVISION: “Immediately Visible Living Images”

Polavision is an instant motion-picture film system created by Edwin Land in 1977, during his last years at the Polaroid Corporation. The Polavision package was comprised of the Polavision Land Camera, Polavision Phototape Cassette, and the Polavision Player. The entire system was designed for use by amateur filmmakers, in the style of their already popular instant still camera, the Land Camera, and SX-70 instant film. To give some context to this bygone format, some background history of Polaroid Corporation is helpful.

Edwin Land was an ambitious and creative man, leaving Harvard after a year to begin research for what would later become a lucrative business in light-polarizing products¹. Land attracted enough investors with his idea for light-polarizing headlights to begin manufacturing polarizing plastic sheets (under the title Polaroid Corporation), leading to a contract with the U.S. Military to produce eyewear and other tactical equipment during WWII. It was during this time that Polaroid began collaborating with Kodak, who recognized the many photographic applications for light-polarizing material². The end of the war signaled a need for innovation within the company, leading to the creation of instant film, called SX-70, in 1947. This marked another pivotal moment in the relationship between Kodak and Polaroid, with Polaroid contracting with Kodak to produce the celluloid negative backing for their new instant film³.

¹Blout, pp 39-41.

²Bonanos, pp 21, 31.

³Bonanos, p. 42.

After several years and continuous changes in company leadership on both sides, Eastman Kodak changed their attitude in 1968 and became more competitive with Polaroid, refusing to produce any more film for the SX-70 film stock unless given permission to use the technology themselves to produce instant film. The relationship deteriorated from then on, further worsened by the subsequent release of Kodak's instant still cameras, EK4 & EK6, and PR-10 film in 1976, during which time Polaroid was making finishing touches to their new instant motion-picture film, Polavision. Polaroid immediately filed suit against Eastman Kodak for patent infringement and thus began one of the longest and most expensive cases to date, ending nearly ten years later with a substantial payout by Kodak to Polaroid⁴.

The release of Polavision and combined sour dealings with Kodak marked a low-point for the company, although they continued to flourish despite these difficulties. Polavision's time was short-lived enjoying only a modest following until its discontinuation in 1979⁵. The format's downfall was most likely due to high production costs and slow sales, and the prior release of Sony's Betamax⁶, in addition to the limiting nature of the format itself. The maximum length was about 42ft (for about 2 minutes and 40 seconds of viewing time)⁷ there was no sound, and the film stock required optimal filming conditions, with plenty of light, among other things. On top of those drawbacks, the price of the package upon release was \$675.00. The demise of Polavision also contributed to the bankruptcy of Eumig⁸, which Polaroid contracted to produce all of the Polavision equipment.

⁴Bonanos, p. 115.

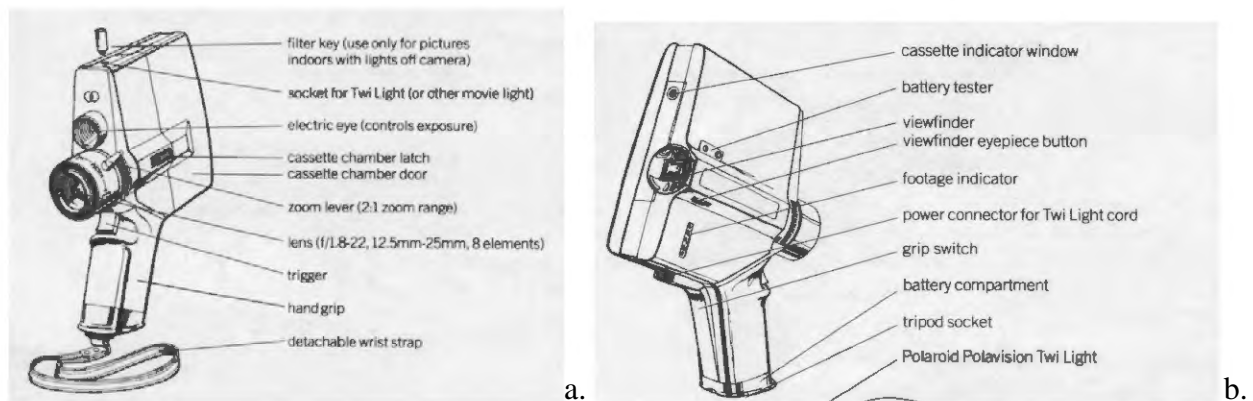
⁵Blout, p. ???

⁶Bonanos, p. 115

⁷Katelle, p. 188.

⁸Bonanos, pp.112-113.

The Polavision Land Camera is a handheld camera with a 12.5-25mm manual zoom lens for focus positions of either 6-12ft or 12ft to infinity⁹. Exposure is automatic - non TTL CdS Photocell (non through-the-lens, Cadmium Sulfer) that uses a light meter (f/1.8-22) powered by the camera's hand-grip trigger, and there is a socket for the optional TwiLight movie lamp attachment. The viewfinder is a single-lens reflex that contains a light-level and 'film-remaining' indicator. The camera runs at a set speed of 18fps on four type AA alkaline batteries and includes a battery-check button. A latch mechanism opens the door to the chamber in which the Phototape cassette is inserted.

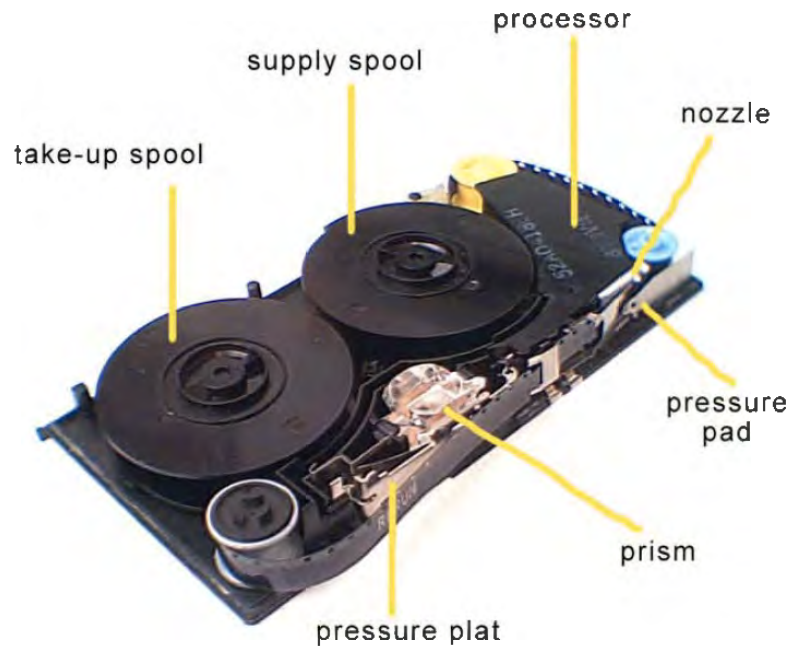


With a film width of 8mm, frame size of 4.2 x 5.7 mm, and 8mm type-S perforations (pitch, 0.1677"; perforations 0.045 x 0.036"), the Phototape is essentially black and white super-8reversal film stock, with these innovations: The film base is imprinted with stripes of red, blue, and green, in triplets, which act as filters to form an additive color process. The film is housed in a 15 x 70 x 130 mm plastic cassette¹⁰ that is then inserted into the Polavision Player for instant

⁹Kattelle, p.188.

¹⁰ Super8data.com – 1: Polaroid_polavision.

processing and projection.



Processing

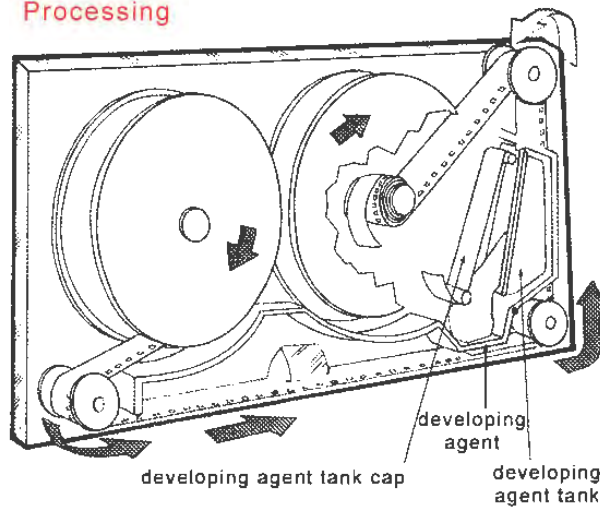


Image credit: http://www.super&data.com/database/articles_list/polaroid_polavision.htm

The film comes in several stocks: 608: additive color film, ASA 40, 38.5 ft.; 617 and 618: B&W, panchromatic, ASA 125, 38.5ft. The 608 phototape was altered from its original black and

white form by a process of “stamping” the film with photosensitive dyes resulting in six layers: a polyester base, an additive color screen, and alkalai guard or protective layer, a positive image, negative image, and antihalation layer. Much like the lenticular Kodacolor, made by Eastman Kodak from 1928 to 1932¹¹, which used lenticules (a layer of microscopic lenses arranged into a grooved pattern) embossed onto film stock and a separate system of colored camera and projection lenses, the Polavision additive color process uses the formation of *temporary* lenticules embossed onto the film’s polyester base layer. The film then goes through a process in which portions of film’s photosensitive gelatin emulsion is exposed opposite the lenticules to form lines, which are then colorized. The unexposed emulsion is removed in a bath and a dye color is applied. Between each exposure and dyeing step, an adhesive layer and new layer of photosensitive gelatin are applied. The process is repeated for each color, resulting in consecutive, contiguous rows of color¹². There are 180 colored lines per millimeter of film¹³. Edwin Land explains in more technical detail:

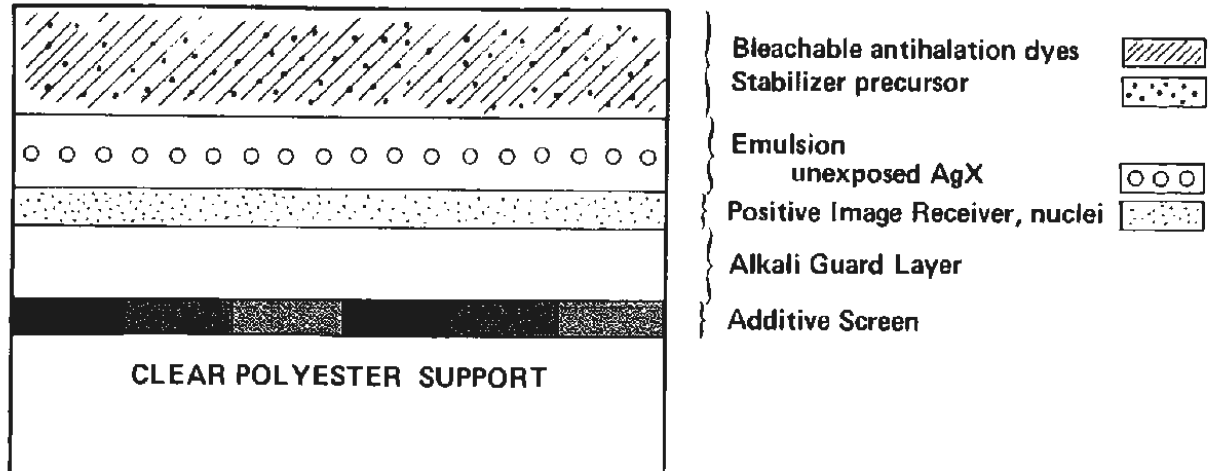
*“We form such a series of lines by lenticular exposure of a thin layer of dichromated gelatin, wash away the unexposed gelatin, and dye the lines that remain. We repeat the process to complete an untrafine array of alternating color stripes in the pattern of green, blue, red, green, blue, red, and so forth. After the lenticules have been used to form lines they are removed.”*¹⁴

¹¹Cumming, Vancouver City Archives Blog.

¹² Land, U.S. Patent, p. 10.

¹³ Super8data.com, No author, *Polavision: Filme, Pero Tambien Proyecto*.

¹⁴ Land, *Introduction to Polavision*, p. 228.



a. Film before exposure.

Image credit: Edwin Land, Introduction to Polavision, p. 6.

In his article in *Photographic Science and Engineering*, “Introduction to Polavision”, Land includes some useful images, one in particular which compares his process to the similar Dufaycolor process, and shows the difference in granularity and precision evident in Polavision’s technology:

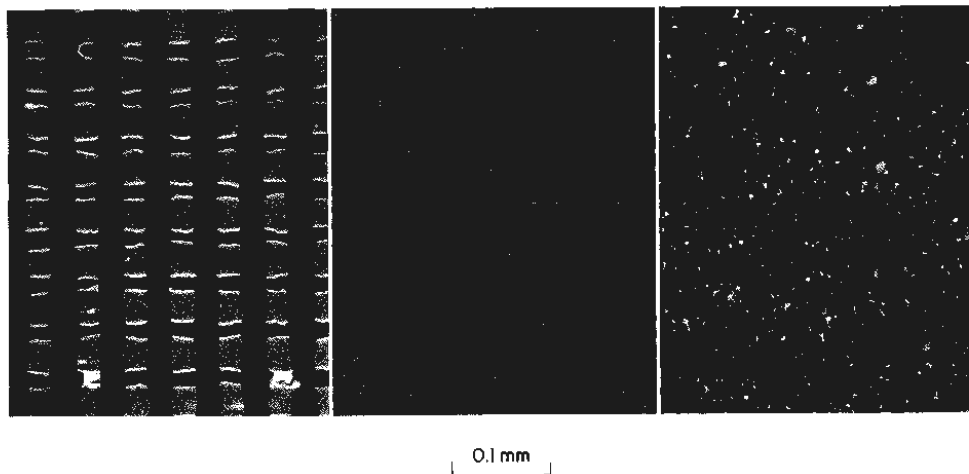


Figure 12. Micrographs of a Polavision screen with 1500 triplets (4500 lines) per inch, between a Dufaycolor screen (left) and an Autochrome screen (right), all at the same magnification. The Dufaycolor screen, with about 600 of each color element per linear inch, had many irregularities, and its manufacture was slow and costly. The Autochrome screen used a mosaic of dyed starch grains. Its principal limitation was that the starch grains were statistically distributed, so that the effective size of a picture element was not the size of an individual grain but rather the size of an aggregate of grains of the same color, which averaged about five times the size of an individual grain.

Image credit: Edwin Land. *Introduction to Polavision*, p. 229.

The film is contained within a plastic cassette (not referred to as a cartridge). Housed in the cassette are several mechanisms for development of the film. The film in an unused cassette displays a label that reads “UNEXPOSED” , viewable through a small slot where the film is to be exposed in the camera. Upon completion of exposure, the end of the reel is labeled “EXPOSED”. The cassette is inserted into the Player, which causes two metal contacts to close a circuit and initiate the development process: the rewinding motion unseals a reagent chamber, releasing a thin layer (6.5-10 microns) of fluid (tetramethyl reductive acid)¹⁵ over the film out of a tiny nozzle, spread by the film’s movement over a capstan as it rewinds. At the end of this process, a notch in the film triggers the pre-printed label on the film to read “RERUN” instead of “EXPOSED”. Tension from rewinding pulls a metal plate that stops the process and starts a 45 second waiting period, which allows for the processing to complete and chemicals to stabilize. The entire development process takes approximately 90 seconds, after which the cassette automatically plays, rewinds, and ejects¹⁶. Joseph A. Stella, from Polaroid Corp., best describes the exact development process undergone within the cassette (and how this unique development technique achieves an immediately projectable film print) in a patent for a later adaption of the Polavision cassette technology:

“When processed by coating the inner layer with a thin uniform layer of processing fluid or liquid, the chemicals contained in the processing fluid permeate the inner layer to the emulsion to develop exposed silver halide grains and render them essentially transparent. Unexposed silver halide grains migrate by diffusion to the positive image-receiving interface at which they are transformed into an opaque silver image in varying degrees of density. During and after development of the images, the antihalation dyes in the inner layer are bleached to become

¹⁵ Land, *Introduction to Polavision*, pp.1, 9.

¹⁶Katelle, p. 188.

colorless. The negative image in the emulsion is sufficiently low in covering power relative to the positive image that the film strip may be viewed by projection of light in a direction proceeding through the inner layer, the processed emulsion layer and the remaining positive image carrying portions of the film strip and the color screen.”¹⁷

The Polavision Player is the designated playback device, with a 12 inch plastic screen and carrying handle. The image is viewed by rear projection within the player, which contains a 150 watt 21.5 volt DNF halogen lamp (100 W, 12V, EFP in European model). In addition to the development system described above, insertion of the Phototape Cassette initiates playback, during which the lamp shines through a prism within the cassette. The light “passes through a Fresnel lens to make its rays parallel, then through a pair of cross lenticular screens that spread the light horizontally and vertically to fill the average viewing angle required for viewing in a home setting”¹⁸. Within the player, the film inside the cassette at varying speeds: slow motion (4,6,9 fps) and normal (18fps) ¹⁹. When the film finishes playing, the lamplight reaches a photocell that sends a signal to turn the lamp off and rewind the film²⁰.

¹⁷Stella, patent description.

¹⁸ Land, *Introduction to Polavision*, p. 1.

¹⁹ Super8data.com – No. 4: polaroid_landplayer

²⁰ Land, *Introduction to Polavision*, p. 1.

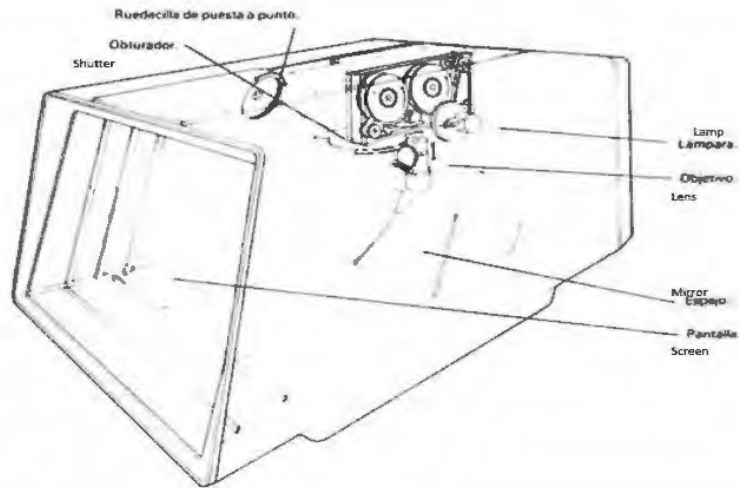


Image credit: super8data.com: No author, Polavision: FilmePeroTambianPoyrecte

Upon release of Polavision, there were mixed reactions to both filming and processing. Some viewed it as a very clever and useful innovation; convenient and practical, with many applications for teaching the basics of film production. The colors were reportedly bright, saturated, and the picture sharp. Some even viewed the inability to edit the film (as it was permanently attached to its cassette), as an opportunity to emphasize the importance of preparation and planning a narrative storyline²¹. This characteristic, however, was also one of many drawbacks to this system, combined with circumstances within the photography and motion-picture market at the time, that contributed to the failure of Polavision. To begin with, Sony Betamax was released two years prior to Polavision, establishing video as a big contender in the motion picture industry, particularly in regards to amateur filmmaking and news production, which were both major targets of the Polavision products. As stated earlier, Kodak attempted to release its own version of Polaroid's already popular instant still film, and began researching ways to develop instant motion picture film, but was sued by Edwin Land, who felt

²¹Lohmann, p.59.

that the actions taken by Kodak were almost personal²². For all intensive purposes, there was no competitor in the same league as the Polavision system; television has already taken its place at the forefront, and one might view Polavision as a kind of missing link, or bridge between the two (especially in regards to its additive color system).

Another factor in its downfall was probably its poor image quality, with photography critics noting a grainy, high contrast image (due to its dense composition from so many emulsion layers) that could only be viewed when situated properly, at the perfect angle to the player's screen²³. Lenny Lipton, in *Super8 Filmmaker*, notes that the camera was loud, and the image projected was very high contrast, with skin tones appearing washed out in most cases²⁴. A user also had to be wary of ensuring the film was completely dry directly following the development process, sometimes needing to play the film repeatedly to stabilize the emulsion or risk incurring streaks, blotches, or bubbles onto the images²⁵. The cost of the system was also without a doubt a major factor, and Polaroid eventually decided to write down the product. The retail price continued dropping over the years from \$675 in 1977 to \$50 in 1983²⁶.

Video technology was about to change the entire the motion picture industry, monopolizing the market for much of what Land hoped to sell in Polavision. Instantaneity, the primary quality of Polavision that Land heralded as it's biggest selling point was not as important to the market as Land believed, and whatever importance people placed in it was treated to by the development of video²⁷. At the same time, Japanese still camera companies were beginning to chip away at

²²Bonanos, p. 128.

²³Katelle, p.189.

²⁴Lipton, in *Super-8 Filmmaker*.Film-tech.com.

²⁵Czach, p. 6.

²⁶ Display Ad. 50. *Newsday*.

²⁷Czach, p. 16.

the market for instant photos, Polaroid core product line, offering easier to use cameras with the high-quality image of 35mm, along with faster processing labs²⁸.

The vision that inspired Land to develop Polavision was both naive and innovative, attempting to offer the tangible experience of moving-image creation while appealing to the “American modality of television”²⁹. Polaroid took a creative approach - if not somewhat old-fashioned- to marketing Polavision, sometimes doing door-to-door sales and in-home demonstrations with families³⁰. Polavision offered unique functional and creative applications and was explored by many filmmakers, including Stan Brakhage and Andy Warhol. Charles and Ray Eames were great proponents of Polavision, describing it as a medium that was well suited to narrative filmmaking in its limitations, encouraging a more thought out and story-like approach to making home movies. The Eames were even contracted to create a promotional film entitled *Polavision*, before their series of Polavision *Vignettes; Kite, Macbeth, Lucia: The Chase, Bicycle, and Mask* (1978)³¹.

Considering its brief production, there remain many collections (however small) of Phototape Cassettes that are in need of preservation. The format poses some interesting and unique obstacles to this end, namely the Phototape’s existence within a cartridge, and the question of whether to separate the film from its cartridge or not. To conduct a proper transfer of a Polavision film onto another format (film, video, or digital), the film must be removed from its cassette. The option of recording the image straight from the viewer seems less than ideal, given the viewing experience is already subpar, if you happen to obtain a functioning Polavision Player that will not destroy the films. The Players themselves are also problematic, as they must be

²⁸Wayne, *New York Times*.

²⁹Czach, p.3.

³⁰“Polaroid Reports Loss of 23.1 Million in Period”. *New York Times*. 1979.

³¹Czach, p. 18.

completely dismantled in order to repair them, and very few people have the parts necessary to do so. Elizabeth Czach, describes the interesting issue that arises when removing the films from their cassettes, in that once you remove them, they cease to be Polavision films³², but are unable to be played in a normal super-8 film projector because of their density. Being super-8 film, they are subject to the same environmental needs of regular polyester film, although the color may be more stable due to the additive process.

It's interesting to note that Polaroid stopped production of their instant film a few years ago, but was recently brought back from the dead by the Impossible Project, which used their old cameras and produced compatible film (admittedly lower quality, but they're working on it). Polaroid was rumored to be so protective of their patents that they wouldn't allow another person or company to use their development formulas to save Polaroid's beloved instant film. They have since opened up and started collaborating with Impossible, and a format that may have become obsolete has been revived. The fact that instant images are essentially ubiquitous, since the advent of digital photography, complicates the popularity of Polaroids film in particular. There is something to be said for the tangible quality and iconic shape and look of Polaroid film. With Polavision, Edwin Land was trying to offer a similar experience of motion pictures in a way that hadn't been done yet. If Edwin Land's goal was to create something unique, he succeeded, but the life and death of Polavision serves as evidence that novelty can only carry an idea so far.

³²Czach, p. 21.

References

*Title quote from Lenny Lipton, “Polavision: Will It be the Big-Mac of Super-8?”, cited below.

Blout, Elkan. “Polaroid: Dreams to Reality”. *Daedalus*, Vol. 125, No. 2, Managing Innovation (Spring, 1996), pp. 39-53. Published by MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Web: JSTOR. October, 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20013438>

Blout worked at Polaroid from 1943 to 1962 and served in a variety of roles, including Associate Director of Research, Vice President and General Manager of Research, and Operating Policy Committee. In this essay, he describes a brief history of Polaroid and provides a perspective of Edwin Land based on his own personal experiences. He gives context to developments and transitions that occurred in the company, sometimes in defense of Land and in consideration of the company’s reputation.

Bonanos, Christopher. *Instant: The Polaroid Story*. 2012. Princeton Architectural Press.

Instant... is a comprehensive and critical history of Polaroid Corporation. With less attention to technical detail and more on the psychology of Edwin Land and his cohorts, the book outlines the relationships the Polaroid had to other companies and how their products evolved to meet the demands of a rapidly changing visual culture and photography market.

Czach, Elizabeth. “POLAVISION INSTANT MOVIES: Edwin Land's Quest for a New Medium. *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* , Vol. 2, No. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 1-24. Published by [University of Minnesota Press](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41167080)

Web. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41167080>.

Czach’s essay focuses on Edwin Land’s creative process and intentions in developing Polavision. She offers insights about Polavision’s role in the changing perspectives on narrative filmmaking and the cinematic / home-movie experience during the late 70s and early 80s.

Kattelle, Alan D. *Home Movies: A History of American Industry 1897-1979*. First Edition, pp. 187-189. Transition Publishing.

Kattelle was a notorious amateur film format collector and scholar, as well as former advisory board member of Northeast Historic Film. *Home Movies* is a comprehensive and enthusiastic catalog of amateur motion-picture formats, complete with technical details and historic information. In his section on Polavision, he mixes personal review with technical details to provide a modest, but informative overview of the format.

Land, Edwin H. *Photographic Products and Processes for the Production Therof*. November 8, 1966. Patent No. 3,284,208. Web. United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The patent for Polavision Phototape (then unnamed?) which described with upmost detail every aspect of Polavision film. This document was also invaluable to providing an accurate summary of the technology, although at times the dated language was difficult to interpret.

Land, Edwin H. "Introduction to Polavision". *Photographic Science and Engineering: Official Journal of the Society of Photographic Scientists and Engineers*. Volume 1. Issue 5. Pages 225-236. University of Virginia Library.

This article published by Edwin land himself was the key source of technical information and served to inform most of the technical processes covered in this essay.

Lipton, Lenny. "Polavision: Will It Be the Big-Mac of Super-8?", in *Super-8 Filmmaker*. July/August 1977. Posted by Douglas Meltzner, 2011. Web. http://8mmforum.film-tech.com/cgi-bin/ubb/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=get_topic;f=1;t=001374

Lohmann, Karl Jr. *Polavision: New Tool for Teachers of Filmmaking*. Journal of the University Film Association. Vol. 31, No. 3 (Summer 1979), pp. 57-60. Published by University of Illinois Press for the University Film & Video Association. Web: JSTOR. October, 2013.

In this detailed review of Polavision, Lohmann presents the format as a unique medium for teaching the basics of film production. With its fast processing time, simple concepts such as framing, story building, and basic focus and exposure principles are easily demonstrated. He includes specific details about mechanical arrangement and description of the additive color process, as well as processing. His descriptions are uniquely simplified and he includes his own experience of using the format in one of his classes.

Prokoski, Francine. *Low-Cost Instant Surveillance System*. In SPIE Proceedings. Vol. 0339. Hypergeometric Function. Avron, S. Hecht. pp 92-96. June 1983.

This article details an adapted use of the Polavision system as an instant surveillance system. It was included in this bibliography as an example of the unique solutions it posed to the moving-image market at the time.

Stella, Joseph. Motion picture film cassette having removable film stripping web. Patent No. 4,212,521. United States Patent and Trademark Office.

Wayne, Leslie. "Polaroid Gropes for Another Winner". February 3, 1985. *The New York Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Display Ad. 50. *Newsday*. 1983. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

(No author listed) "Polaroid Reports Loss of 23.1 Million in Period". 1979. *The New York Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

These short news clips contained some useful financial information.

Websites:

Polavision, Polaroid's Instant Home Movies. Harvard Film Archive Collections Blog. 2009. Web. 2013. <http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/hfacollections/2009/06/30/polavision-polaroids-instant-home-movies/>

The Land List. *Film: Polavision; Cameras: Polavision; Accessories: Polavision*. 2002. Web. 2013. <http://www.rwhirled.com/landlist/landfilm.htm#PTAPE>

The Land List is a comprehensive website detailing many products created by Polaroid, including film, cameras, accessories, with technical specifications and general descriptions and explanations of the technology. Although not very precise about chemical processes, the details are well organized into lists and include links to related products listed through the website.

Super8data.com. Carlos Pradera Jordana. Spain. 2007. Web.

* “Polavision: FilmePeroTambienProyecte”. Unknown Author. Retrieved from super8data.com but url was lost and unable to be retrieved (website can be a bit of a maze). This article was translated for me from Spanish to English by Lorena Ramirez-Lopez, and provided some great images and explanations of technical processes. Article is included here, following the bibliography.

- 1) http://www.super8data.com/database/articles_list/polaroid_polavision.htm
- 2) http://www.super8data.com/database/film_list/film_polaroid/polaroid_polavision618.htm
- 3) http://www.super8data.com/database/film_list/film_polaroid/polaroid_polavision617.htm
- 4) http://www.super8data.com/database/projectors_list/projectors_polaroid/polaroid_landplayer.htm
- 5) http://www.super8data.com/database/cameras_list/cameras_mekel/mekel_300.htm
- 6) http://www.super8data.com/database/manufacturers_list/e_eumig.htm

Super8data is a very minimalist website (behaving much like a database) consisting of extensive technical information about all-things super-8. The pages listed above were very useful in deciphering the more technical terminology included in the Polavision manuals, journal articles, and patents.

Film-tech.com:

Film-tech is a web forum for the motion-picture industry. An innumerable amount of topics are discussed and experienced technicians offer advice for questions and issues ranging from projection to production and equipment repair. I found a thread on Polavision and noticed a post of Lenny Lipton’s article, cited above, which I had not come across in other research outlets. It’s an honest and straightforward review, with some helpful insights.

The City of Vancouver Archives Blog. Exploring Lenticular Kodacolor. Jesse Cumming. 2012. Web. <http://www.vancouverarchives.ca/2012/12/exploring-lenticular-kodacolor/>

This article gives a brief explanation of Kodacolor, the early attempt at additive color film made by Kodak.



POLAVISION: FILME, PERO TAMBIEN PROYECTE

Cuando Vd. lee o escucha los anuncios y la publicidad que le asegura, «Polavisión, el nuevo y revolucionario sistema de cine, llevado a cabo por Polaroid, el cual permite la proyección de una película en color prácticamente después de

rodarla», no va a tener más remedio que creérselo. Si encima se le asegura que el sistema es cosa de niños en su manejo, fácil de encontrar y que reproduce fielmente las escenas filmadas, créaselo también. La polavisión, desvela para

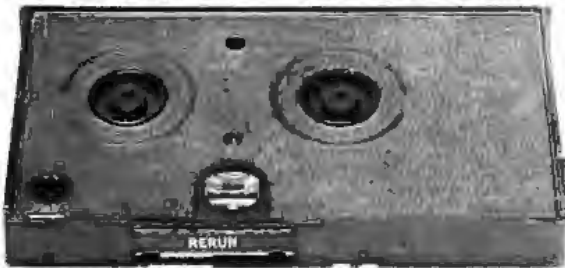
los periodistas el pasado junio en Montecarlo, corre el peligro de ser la gran atracción de la Photokina. De todas formas, es la novedad realmente extraordinaria de la firma de Colonia, en el campo cinematográfico. Y, sin

embargo, no se trata de cine en el sentido habitual de la palabra...

Su filosofía. — Está implícitamente contenida en su modo de empleo, casi telegráfico (e imaginario), en 20 palabras: «Introduzca el cargador en la cámara,

regule la distancia y el zoom, puede durar durante 155 segundos; introduzca el cargador en el proyector, aguarde 90 segundos». Se podría añadir, dirigiéndose a cualquiera que no sea un sinvergüenza incurable: «Imágenes perfectas, y asombro garantizado». Porque es muy cierto que la Polavisión supone un entrenamiento que no defrauda, no excesivamente caro (menos, desde luego, que un videocassette), fácil, que entusiasmará a los animadores de pelculitas familiares y abrirá a los cineastas veteranos un camino paralelo, fértil y estimulante en sus posibilidades estilísticas, para su creatividad: la concepción de un trabajo completo, pensado, desarrollado y concluido en 155 segundos. ¡Pruébelo! Una vez dicho esto, el lector alérgico a la técnica y poco interesado en saber qué tesoros de ingenio, qué

la cámara (también especial), y el proyector (indispensable para revelar y luego proyectar la película, pero que no puede admitir ni bobinas ni cualquier otra película «clásica»). **La película de Polavisión.** Constituye, evidentemente, la gran innovación del sistema, y su fabricación, que no es nada fácil, como vamos a ver, moviliza toda una serie de tecnologías a cual más audaces. Esquemáticamente, podemos decir que esta película es una especie — muy particular — de reversible blanco y negro cuyo soporte ha recibido previamente una serie microscópica de líneas paralelas a modo de rejillas, transparentes y alternativamente coloreadas en azul, verde y rojo. Al ser expuesta a través de esta red filtrante, el estrato sensible se revela de tal forma que todos los granos tocados por la luz quedan



El cartucho, con su propia óptica para su proyección.

minuciosidad de realización y que maestría científica representa el último producto del Dr. Land, ya está lo suficientemente bien informado sobre el asunto. Para el que quiera recorrer en nuestra compañía los principios del sistema, a continuación pasaremos a describir lo más claramente posible los tres elementos exclusivos e inseparables que permiten la práctica de la polavisión: la película Phototape (el cual, pese a ser una película Super-8, no tiene nada en común con las emulsiones convencionales),

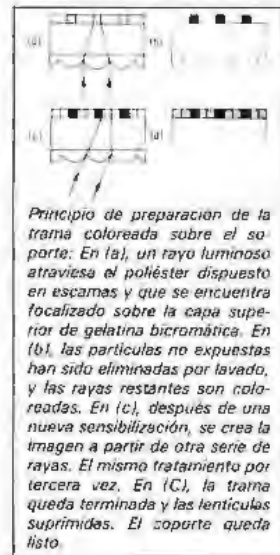
reducidos a conglomerados de baja densidad, y aquellos granos a los que la luz no ha alcanzado quedan disueltos, luego vueltos a reunir por migración, para ser reducidos a su vez a una capa de alta densidad. Al final del tratamiento, nos encontramos con la coexistencia de una imagen negativa muy pálida, con una imagen positiva muy «pesada» (tan pesada, que a simple vista nos parecerá tremendamente infraexpuesta), y con la trama de líneas coloreadas que no han sido alteradas por el

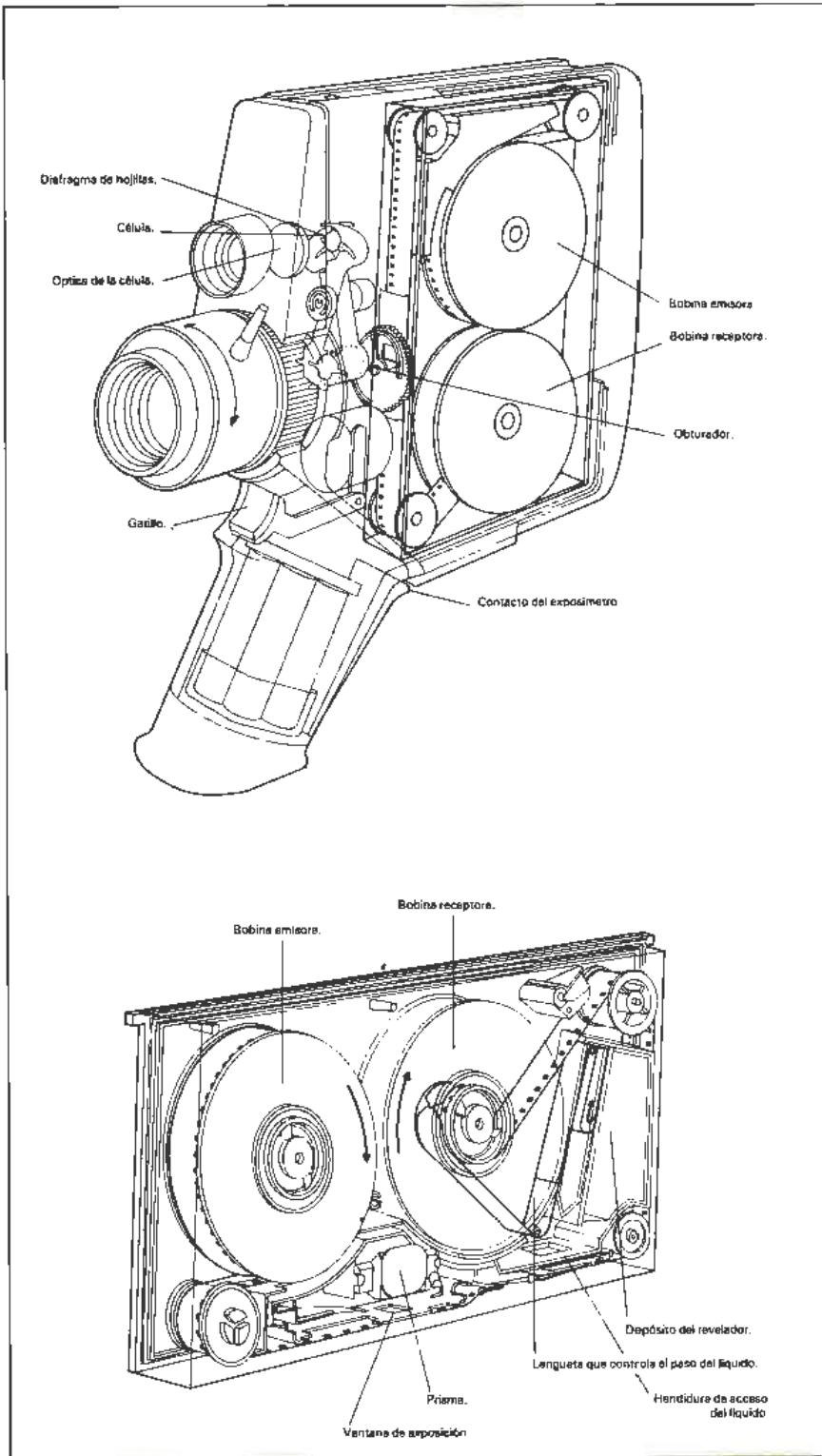


El «receptor» de mesa. Pantalla: 30 cm., en diagonal.

revelado. Si se hace que un haz luminoso intenso atraviese la película, nos encontramos con que el negativo parásito no retiene sino un mínimo de rayos, y su presencia es despreciable. Por contra, la luz que atraviesa el positivo ve modulada su intensidad en función de la densidad de los elementos de imagen, y su coloración determinada línea a línea mediante la red de microfiltros del soporte. Tenemos, por tanto, la restitución de una imagen positiva, y, aparentemente, en colores naturales, ya que el ojo humano, al no poder separar las líneas teñidas de azul, verde y rojo, realiza la síntesis de estas informaciones coloreadas. A fin de cuentas, nos encontramos en presencia de un sistema de color aditivo, como es el caso de las pantallas de TV en color, y como fue antiguamente con los procesos fotográficos Autochrome Lumière y Dufaycolor. He aquí la teoría — muy

simplificada — de la película de Polavisión. Como podemos adivinar, su aplicación ha vuelto a reavivar problemas que fueron objeto de apuestas bastante desafortunadas, pero ganadas a la postre. De entrada, nos encontramos con el problema del

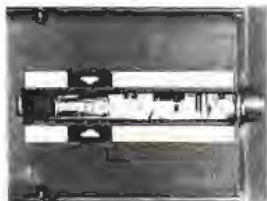




entramado del soporte. El Dr. Edwin Land nos lo explica: «En cuanto abordamos el problema de la producción de líneas microscópicas, finas, regulares, de gran precisión, nos vino la idea de «estampar», de cierta forma, una base de película, con la intención de formar unas finas lenticulas; luego el exponer una capa sensible a la luz al otro lado de dicha capa, a través de las lenticulas, para formar una imagen a base de líneas que más tarde se colorearían. Una vez realizada su función, dichas lenticulas serían suprimidas...». Esta fue, por tanto, la solución — fotográfica — adoptada.

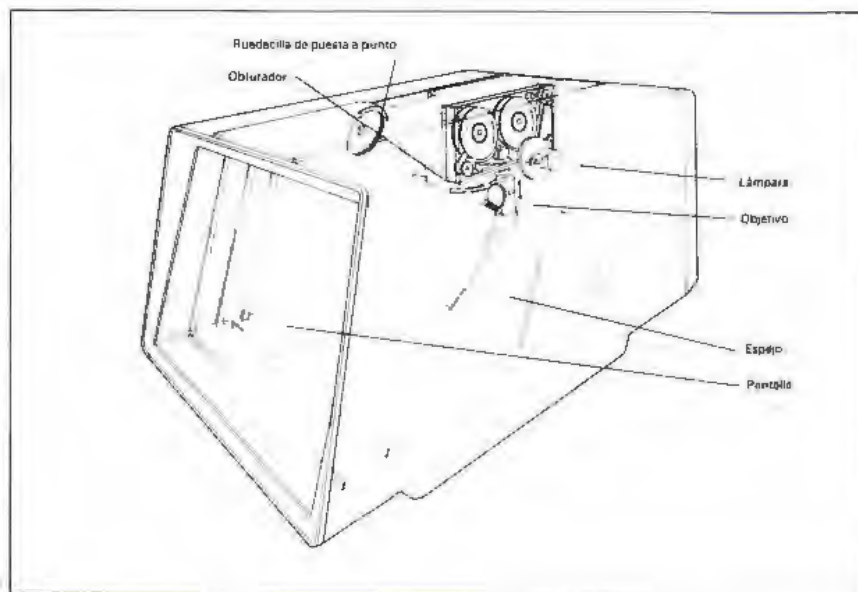
El soporte de poliester recibe entonces una serie de estrías paralelas cuyo perfil se asemeja a la disposición de las tejas de un tejado. En la cara opuesta, se deposita gelatina bicromática. Una serie de rayos luminosos que pasan a través de unas microlentillas semicilíndricas, quedan focalizados sobre la emulsión provisional. Esta última se lava, con lo que las partes no expuestas quedan disueltas, mientras que las otras permanecen. Estas son las rayas que se han de colorear, digamos, en rojo. Una nueva sensibilización, y una nueva exposición, atacando esta vez a las lenticulas bajo un ángulo diferente. Lavado, coloración en azul de las rayas restantes, colocadas justo al lado de las rojas. Tercera operación idéntica, a fin de colocar las rayas verdes en los espacios que han quedado vacíos, y, a continuación, supresión de las lenticulas. Al final de esta operación, nos queda el dotar al soporte de su correspondiente emulsión. A partir de la trama, quedan expuestas de la siguiente forma: una capa alcalina de protección, una capa insensible que «recibirá»

más tarde la imagen positiva útil, una capa de plata sensible, y una capa que contiene a la vez coloreantes anti-halo blanqueables y un producto que ulteriormente participará en la estabilización. Podremos apreciar que, en esta etapa, hay toda una serie de nuevos problemas que han quedado genialmente resueltos. Para empezar, para que la resolución de la emulsión sea superior a la de la trama (180 líneas coloreadas por mm.), ha sido necesario el adoptar una emulsión de un grano muy fino. Esto es fácil de realizar. Pero, por otro lado, sabiendo que el positivo y el negativo serían conjuntamente proyectados, tras un revelado sin lavado ni aclarado, ha sido necesario el determinar la cantidad de plata estrictamente necesaria



Cámara de proyección.

para que éste metal pueda justo cubrir la superficie de la imagen sin hacerla opaca por su sobrante (y el Dr. Land ha encontrado, experimentalmente, que hace falta un gramo de plata por metro cuadrado, lo que corresponde a una capa de un espesor de uno a dos gramos: ¡de ensueño, vamos!). En fin, era necesario el poder provocar y controlar la migración de los granos no expuestos en la capa receptora (positivo), y la reducción rápida en su sitio de los granos expuestos (negativo). La alquimia Polaroid ha tomado buen cuidado de ello. A falta de poder exponer en estas páginas todos los prodigios



(archipatentados), y concretamente la puesta a punto de un cierto revelador, el ácido tetrametilredúctico, tiene el poder de desaparecer sin dejar residuos visibles tras haber cumplido con su cometido, resaltamos solamente que la gran astucia de la Polavisión reside en la cohabitación final de un negativo cuyos granos son lo suficientemente pequeños y están lo bastante dispersos en una capa espesa, con un negativo cuyos granos están estallados y como «apelotonados» en una capa 25 veces menos espesa que la de un positivo de grano fino común. Usando una comparación bastante grosera, y con perdón de los puristas, podemos decir que la película Phototape impresionada por la imagen de un gato negro sobre fondo blanco, aparecería tras su revelado como sigue: Las zonas de apariencia perfectamente negra (superposición de una capa negativa muy transparente y de una capa positiva opaca, ya que sus granos están tan



Caratula trasera del proyector.

apretados que parece un espejo); y las zonas de apariencia blanca (superposición de una capa negativa de un gris bastante sombrío, pero que se «dulcificará» mediante una vigorosa iluminación, y de una capa positiva transparente, ya que sus granos han sido destruidos). Entre las dos capas, resumido, reside toda la diferencia que tendría a nuestros ojos si, mientras que observásemos un paisaje, se dejase caer sobre el mismo una fina lluvia, ligera y dispersa de granitos de plomo, a unos tres metros de donde nos

hallamos (lo cual no alreraría casi nada nuestra visión: es el negativo), así como una sábana de la misma lluvia, pero muy densa e irregular, a 5 cms. de nuestros ojos (sólo podríamos apreciar el paisaje a través de los resquicios de dicha lluvia: es el positivo). Otras reacciones han sido teniendo lugar durante y tras el revelado:



Cámara: alojamiento del cargador.

blanqueamiento de la capa anti-halo y una estabilización de las imágenes rigurosamente controlada en cuestión de (sigue en la pág. 73).

POLAVISION

(Viene de la pág. 69) tiempo. Añadamos a esto que el tratamiento se desarrolla a la velocidad de 2 metros por segundo; que coloca el depósito sobre la película de una capa de reactivo de 10 micrones (no más ni menos), y que éste «guisado» tiene lugar en el interior mismo del cartucho de la película. Por eso va dotado de un depósito, que deja caer el producto en el momento preciso a través de una hendidura calibrada, la cual será químicamente ocultada tras el tratamiento; también encontramos en la película una serie de muescas destinadas a desencadenar automáticamente determinadas señales de la cámara, el tratamiento, el recorrido, el rebobinado, así como, para una buena exposición, un sistema óptico integrado que permitirá iluminar la imagen en el sitio durante la proyección, sin necesidad de retirar la película del interior del cartucho. El cargador-laboratorio de Polavision sólo mide 130 x 70 x 15 mm., constituyendo una asombrosa maquinilla compuesta de una veintena de piezas. Y, si es francamente alucinante el constatar que funciona, no lo es menos el pensar que sus creadores están tan seguros de que, una vez producida en masa, funcionará igual de bien. Hay que reconocer que el Dr. Land es un genio de la química y de la mecánica.

La cámara. Ligerza y compacta, se beneficia de todos los «aditamentos de comodidad», y de una máxima reducción de las sujeciones técnicas. Pero esto no supone que se trate de un miserable aparato, como suele ocurrir cuando un fabricante lanza un nuevo producto al mercado. Su zoom manual, abierto a f:1.8, va de 12,5 a 25 mm., y se acciona mediante una palanquita que se puede mover en ambos sentidos. La puesta a punto se realiza mediante una varilla que no gira, pero que es escamoteable, y cuyas dos posiciones cubren respectivamente las zonas de 2 a 5 m. de 5 m. al infinito. Exposición automática con cadencia de 18 imágenes por segundo, y a la velocidad de 1/40 segundos, mediante célula CdS de óptica independiente, concebida para sensibilidades de 16 a 500 ASA (la película actual es de 40 ASA, pero ya sabemos que los químicos de Cambridge tienen una serie de recetas de sopa de gelatina escondidas bajo la manga, con lo que apostamos algo a que las películas más rápidas no se van a hacer esperar mucho). Un visor réflex

con lentilla regulable, y numerosas señales ordenadas mediante muescas hechas en la película misma. Comienzo del rodaje, atención a sus últimos 6 segundos, cargador terminado; así como señales de sobre e infraexposición, y testigo de distancia. Filtro de conversión escamoteable (la película está equilibrada para luz artificial), alimentación por cuatro pilas pequeñas (con una automática nunciada de 40 cargadores). Muesca para montar sobre trípode, control de pilas, pestaña para antorcha, contador y contacto de gatillo en el puño para accionar el exposímetro. Todo está bien concebido y bien realizado, sin ser feo, y de un empleo agradable; procurando imágenes muy satisfactorias y arrancando sin inercia el proyector.

El proyector. Se trata, de hecho, de un retroproyector compacto de mesa, portátil, con una pantalla incorporada de 30 cm. Precisemos que es absolutamente indispensable para el revelado un cartucho de Polavision para proyectar sin encadenamiento de las películas así obtenidas, que no acepta otra clase de películas, las cuales sólo pueden, a su vez, ser proyectadas por él (a menos que destruyamos el cartucho y montemos con cello, bastante precariamente, la película, para proyectarla en un proyector convencional superluminoso, sin tener garantía de obtener unos resultados aceptables, ni una imagen más grande, a riesgo de hacer visible la trama de la película). Este proyector no puede ser de más fácil manejo y de un mecanismo más simple: se introduce el cargador expuesto en la hendidura receptora; éste gesto basta para provocar el rebobinado automático de la película, la apertura del depósito del revelador, la impregnación del mismo por parte de la película (la cual, de tal forma, comienza a revelarse), la detención del cargador al llegar a su fin; el tiempo de espera suplementario — 90 segundos — para que el tratamiento obre sobre los últimos metros de película que hayan sido impregnados; el encendido de la lámpara, su bobinado para una primera proyección de la película realizada; la detención al final del cartucho; el apagado de la lámpara y la expulsión del cartucho. Y si se le quiere volver a proyectar, basta con introducirlo de nuevo. Si queremos interrumpir la proyección a la mitad del cartucho, basta con oprimir el botón de expulsión. Mencionemos que, durante el transcurso de la proyección, entran en juego dos ventiladores, que un disco

lógico es el que coordina toda la cibernética del proceso y, una muy hábil solución: que todo destello queda iluminado por la triple iluminación de la imagen. Destaquemos que la misma pantalla queda fuera de lo corriente: el haz que sale del objetivo es reflejado en un espejo, para atravesar a continuación una lente Fresnel que hace que los rayos queden paralelos; estos rayos, a su vez, atraviesan dos pantallas de lenticulas perpendiculares, que difuminan así la preciosa luz en el ángulo sólido juzgado como óptimo (un tanto estrecho, a nuestro parecer). Las imágenes, que conviene observar desde su eje, quedan a nuestro gusto un tanto sombrías con la lámpara de 100 w., pero se puede cambiar por una de 150 w. Las lenticulas de las pantallas generan una trama que no molesta demasiado (pero que, en conciencia, hay que destacar), bastante comparable a la de los tubos de TV de rejilla (del tipo Trinitron). Unas imágenes bonitas, sin grano aparente, tonalidad «optimista» en general en cuanto a los cielos azules, correcta en el rojo, un poco «triste» en los verdes, una calidad indiscutible de blancos y negros, quedando como únicos defectos de luminosidad los inherentes al automatismo incorregible e indesacoplable de la cámara.

En conclusión:

Es una innovación cinematográfica, pero que no puede ser medida con los standards del Super-8. Evaluada de una forma absoluta, podemos decir que es: un tanto floja en cuanto a la incompatibilidad y poca duración de sus cartuchos (2 min., 35 s.), por el reducido tamaño de la imagen obtenida, y su insuficiente luminosidad con una lámpara de 100 w., por la «mala voluntad» que puede engendrar en un usuario consciente de su complejidad y escéptico en cuanto a su fiabilidad y durabilidad. Pero en cambio resulta muy conveniente en cuanto a su calidad, su facilidad de manejo, el placer auténticamente nuevo que proporciona, y, que duda cabe, la prodigiosa inventiva de su creador, sin hablar de lo conveniente de su precio. Por supuesto, todo el material de Polavision es susceptible de perfeccionarse decisivamente: cámara XL, macro, exposición manual, proyector capaz de encadenar, mayor luminosidad, reproducción sonora, película de blanco y negro más sensible, etc. Todo esto ya caerá, especialmente si el consumidor responde, lo que deseamos de todo corazón. ■