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# electronics

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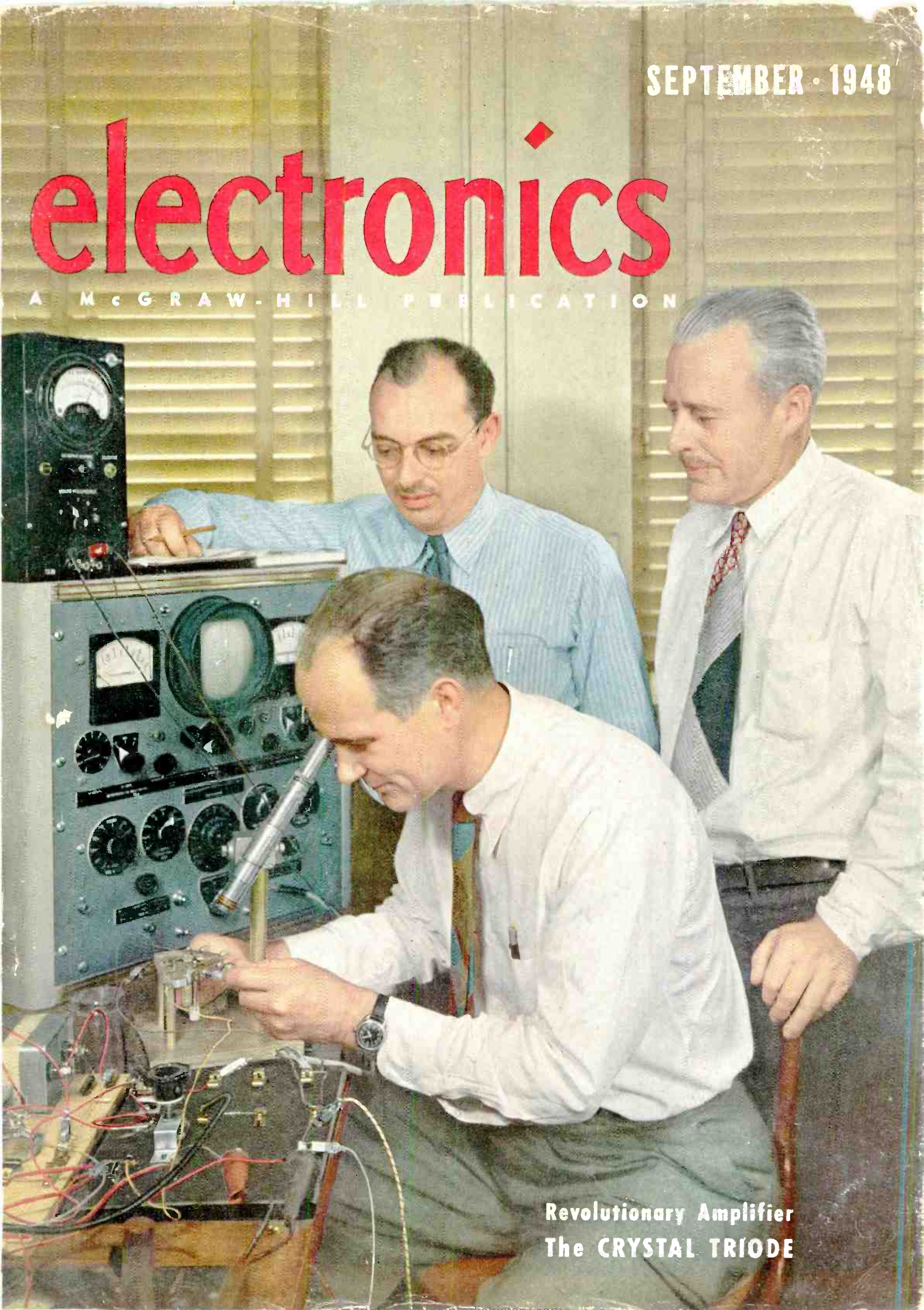

## Revolutionary Amplifier
## The CRYSTAL TRIODE

Dr. William Shockley, who directed the research, Dr. John Bardeen, who developed the theory, and Dr. W. H. Brattain, whose experiment verified it discuss physics of Transistor

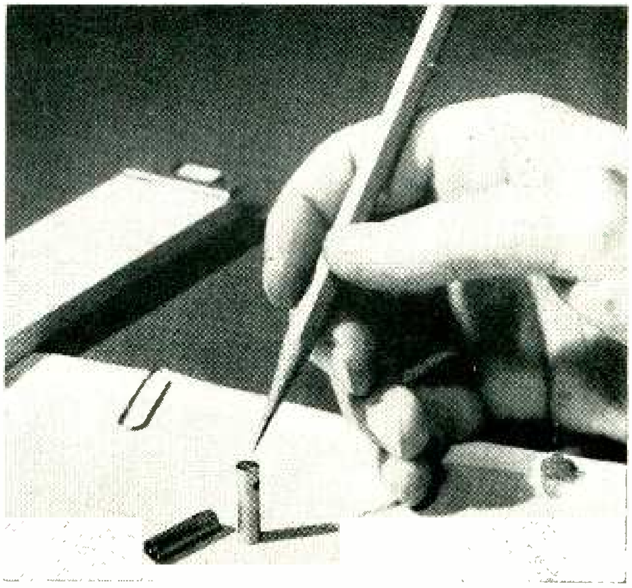

FIG. 1—Because of its simplicity the Transistor is even smaller than most subminiature vacuum tubes. The amplifier itself can be no larger than its associated coupling components

# The TRANSISTOR— A Crystal Triode

Germanium crystal with two cat-whisker contacts has characteristics of grounded-grid triode amplifier, provides 20 db gain, 25 milliwatts output at frequencies up to 10 megacycles. It will replace vacuum tubes in many applications and open new fields for electronics

A NEW DEVICE, operating on an entirely new principle and capable of many functions of the electronic vacuum tube, but having neither an evacuated envelope nor a hot cathode, was announced early in July by scientists of the Bell Telephone Laboratories. Known as a TRANSISTOR (TRANSfer resISTOR), the device is essentially a triode form of the well known germanium crystal diode.

In its present experimental form the Transistor is a metal cylinder 3/16 inch in diameter and ⅝ inch long, as shown in Fig. 1. Inside the cylinder, Fig. 2A, is a block of germanium soldered to a metal disc to which it makes low resistance contact and that grounds it to the cylinder. Two 2-mil tungsten wires make contact with the upper face of the germanium at points about 0.002 inch apart.

An input signal, Fig. 2B, in series with a small positive bias voltage, is applied between the grounded face and the input cat whisker (emitter). A large negative bias voltage is applied between ground and the output (collector) point contact. The output signal appears across a load resistor in series with the negative bias. In this manner a power gain of 100 (20 db) is obtained between input and output of a Transistor. The terminal characteristics of an experimental Transistor are shown in Fig. 2C (see the *Phys. Rev.* p 230, July 15, 1948.) This is an early unit having a gain of about 15 db. The characteristics are typical of later units having an average gain of 20 db.

Because of its unique properties, the Transistor is destined to have far-reaching effects on the technology of electronics and will undoubtedly replace conventional electron tubes in a wide range of applications. The Transistor requires no heater or filament power and uses the power supplied by its bias sources with high efficiency. Under typical operating conditions it draws only 0.1 watt from the bias sources (about a tenth the power consumed by a flashlight bulb) and delivers 25 milliwatts of useful output, thus having an overall efficiency

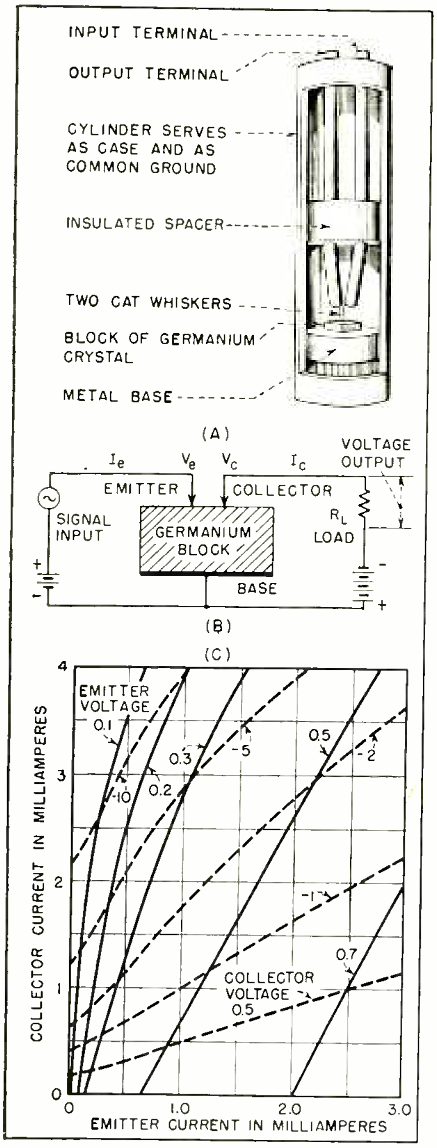

FIG. 2—Crysal triode (A) consists of two cat whiskers connected to separate input and output circuits (B) to give characteristics (C) that produce high amplification

of 25 percent.

The Transistor is smaller than a subminiature vacuum tube. It seems likely to have a useful life of many thousands of hours because of its simple, sturdy construction. Where portability and low battery drain are essential, as in hearing aids and personalized radios, the Transistor appears ideal. In equipment using large numbers of amplifiers, large-scale computers being an extreme example, the absence of a heater makes it possible to place many Transistors in confined space without creating difficulties in heat dissipation.

Although cost factors have not been thoroughly explored, Transistors should be no more costly to manufacture at present than the 1N34 (high back-voltage) germanium diode, which lists for replacement at $1.20 and is obtainable in large lots by equipment manufacturers at $0.53 apiece. These prices are slightly higher than the prices of a corresponding vacuum diode (6H6). However, present costs of crystal diodes are not representative of inherent costs. The industry has spent about 40 years mechanizing production of vacuum tubes and has written off engineering and plant costs over that time. If crystal devices (diodes and Transistors) prove as successful in practice as they now appear to be, they too will be put into mechanized production and their cost reduced. Ultimately they should be cheaper than comparable vacuum tubes because of their simplicity and because they do not require evacuation, which is the most difficult step in producing vacuum tubes.

There are limitations to the use of Transistors in their present state of development. The power output is restricted to about 25 milliwatts per unit, or 50 mw from a push-pull stage. A Transistor capable of developing several watts output does not seem feasible at present. Parallel operation of two or more units is possible, however, and could be used to increase the power to a load several fold. The upper frequency of operation is limited to about 10 megacycles by transit time within the germanium. Thus the Transistor is at present useful at audio, video, and the lower radio frequencies, but is unsuited to vhf and uhf applications. Furthermore, the noise generated within a Transistor is appreciably greater than that produced in vacuum triodes.

If the requirements of an application for which the properties of Transistors are suitable justify their cost when they first become commercially available, there remains a temporary obstacle to their immediate use, namely engineering this new device into the circuit. One of the principle problems requiring development is matching the input and output impedances of the Transistor to the circuit. The input impedance of the Transistor is low because the bias in the input circuit causes current to flow in the forward direction through the point contact of the emitter. On the other hand, the output impedance of the Transistor is about a hundred times higher than the input impedance because its bias causes current to flow in the reverse direction through the point contact of the collector. These impedance levels are the opposite of those for vacuum tubes and require a new approach to the coupling circuits between amplifier stages. Intensive work on this problem is underway. The Transistor thus opens new fields for clever design and inventive talent.

### Illustrative Applications

In announcing the Transistor, BTL scientists demonstrated several typical electronic devices in which it was used. A booster amplifier for telephony illustrated its application to voice-frequency amplification. A similar video amplifier was also demonstrated. Its low power-supply drain makes it suitable for telephone and television repeater service. In fact, it requires no more power than that usually available at a subscriber's set from the central office batteries that are connected to the line. Use of a Transistor as an oscillator showed the versatility of the unit. Use in a radio receiver for the standard broadcast band illustrated its practicality.

The radio receiver contained no tubes. It consisted of a broad-band r-f amplifier, a tuned r-f stage, local oscillator, mixer, three stages of i-f, second detector, and four stages of a-f amplification, the last being push-pull. A total of 11 Transistors were used in the amplifier stages, with 2 germanium diodes for the mixer and detector stages, and 2 selenium rectifiers for the power supply. The receiver brought in local stations, delivering 25 mw of audio power to its loudspeaker.

At low power levels crystal diodes and triodes, in conjunction with printed circuits, make possible the extension of electronic techniques. Existing equipment can be made more compact. Transistors, having no filament, are operative the instant power is applied.

### Research Background

Research work in semiconductor materials began at least 24 years ago. Germanium and other semiconductors have been used as rectifiers because of their unilateral conductivity. These employ a single point contact; the input and output circuits are not separated. The two-contact arrangement is the practical outcome of a long program of scientific research on semiconductors.

Although investigation of semiconductors at BTL dates back a number of years, with the end of the war a concentrated basic research program was undertaken. Groups in the Physics Department were reorganized. Additional personnel were taken on, particularly theoretical specialists. The groups consisted of paper-work men and laboratory experimentalists who could pass problems from office desk to lab bench and back as the program unfolded. The fact that pure research paid off relatively quickly, in so spectacular a way, is testimony to the ability of the men who carried out the program and to the facilities with which they worked.

The group on semiconductors, led by William Shockley, one of this country's leading solid-state physicists, was seeking answers to three basic questions: (1) physically, what is a semiconductor, (2) how does its physical nature produce its observed properties, and (3) how does the fabrication and processing of the material affect its physical nature? Among the semiconductors studied were silicon, copper oxide, and germanium.

A great deal of empirical information had been amassed on these substances during their use, particularly as detectors in microwave equipment ("Crystal Rectifiers," H. C. Torrey and C. A. Whitmer, McGraw-Hill, 1948). In particular it was known that their resistivities were determined chiefly by impurities, and furthermore that their resistivities could be varied over wide ranges by applying various external influences (light in the case of photocells, electric potential in the case of rectifiers and detectors, or temperature in the case of Thermistors).

### Theory of Conduction

Modern physics has developed a detailed concept of the construction of matter and consequently an understanding of the mechanism of conduction. In metals there is approximately one free electron that can be used for carrying current for every atom; in insulators there are practically no free electrons. By free electrons is meant electrons so loosely associated with their atoms that they can easily be induced to move to adjacent atoms.

In semiconductors there is only about one current-carrying electron for every millions atoms, but this number of carriers can be varied 1,000-fold by changing the physical environment of the material. Such a change in the number of carriers is effectively a change in the resistance of the material. For example, light falling on a barrier layer changes its resistance. Alternating voltage applied to a selenium rectifier or a germanium diode changes its resistance so that current flows predominantly in one direction. Likewise, a high potential applied externally (without making contact) to a semiconductor should change its resistivity. Using a sheet of germanium as one plate of a capacitor, Shockley and his colleagues measured the change in resistance produced by changing the voltage across the capacitor. The change in resistance was much smaller than anticipated in the light of prevailing theory. Conclusion: something wrong with theory. So John Bardeen, a theoretical physicist in the group, devised a theory of surface states that would account for the measured change as well for older known effects unexplained by previous theories.

To review the old theory for a moment, it was known that conduction in semiconductors could take place by two mechanisms, operating either separately or simultaneously. In some types of semiconductors the electrons, as usual, moved under the influence of applied voltages and thus provided a current flow. Such semiconductors are called N-type because conduction is by negative (electron) charges. In other types of semiconductors, in which there is a deficiency of electrons, the current flow consists of the movement of virtual positive charges (images of electrons) that are actually empty places from which electrons have been removed. Such semiconductors are called P-type because conduction appears to be by positive charges, are shown in Fig. 3.

The two types of conduction had been identified with impurities. For example, as shown in Fig. 3B, silicon alloyed with a minute percentage of phosphorus is an N-type (electronic) conductor. Physically, the effect is explained by the fact that phosphorus has five valence electrons. Four of these form bonds with the four valence electrons in a silicon atom (thus binding the atoms together), leaving one electron free for carrying current.

If the impurity is boron (Fig. 3C), which has only three valence electrons, there is one incomplete bond between each boron and its neighboring silicon atom, leaving a hole in the structure. Because the percentage of boron impurity is very low, not many silicon atoms are so bound. Hence the hole in the bond of one silicon atom with a boron atom can be filled with an electron from an adjacent silicon atom under the influence of an external electric field. However, this action leaves a hole from which the electron came. This hole is free to be passed from atom to atom and hence to carry current. Whereas a negative electron will migrate from a negative region toward a positive region when voltage is applied, a hole will migrate from a positive region to a negative one. (In P-type —hole—conductors the electrons would have no place to go if it were not for the hole, so, although the electrons do move when current flows, it is the presence of the hole that makes their motion possible. Thus, to physicists, conduction is by (owing to the presence of) holes. Such action takes place in germanium.

The new theory suggested new experiments, which, when performed, called for refinements in the theory. While W. H. Brattain and John Bardeen were following up the consequences of the refined theory of surface states they invented the Transistor. With it they discovered a surface layer having peculiar characteristics.

To account for these characteristics, they postulated and later showed by experiment that there is a thin layer of electrons at the surface of germanium. This surface layer would prevent the penetration into the body of the semiconductor of an externally applied field and thus account for the smallness of the changes in resistance observed in the capacitor experiment. The field created by these surface electrons causes the formation of holes in the adjacent material, and these holes conduct current. The conducting layer may be caused by an excess of impurities near the surface such as boron that accept electrons into bonds and thus create holes, or by a space-charge barrier layer. Between this P-type layer and the N-interior is a rectifying barrier.

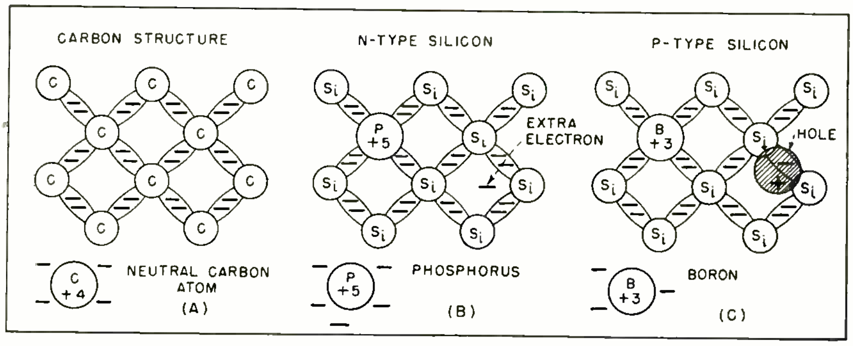

**FIG. 3**—Conduction within a semiconductor depends on the interatomic bonds formed by the electrons. Current flow in a pure semiconductor is difficult to produce (A). If an impurity having an excess electron (B) is added then that electron can carry current. On the other hand, if the impurity lacks the required number of electrons for the bonds (C) the hole thus created also makes conduction possible

When a single point contact is made, the surface layer determines the conductivity for reverse currents or small forward currents. For large forward currents there is an increase in the concentration of carriers (electrons and holes). In either case (forward or reverse current) a large part of the current is carried by the surface conducting layer within an area of interaction very close to the point. Within this area the conductivity, which is mainly by holes, is much greater than elsewhere in the semiconductor. The second point contact for the Transistor is added within this area of interaction.

### Transistor Characteristics

In a Transistor, the positive point contact causes the release of holes in the surface layer of the germanium, which is prepared in a similar manner to a high back-voltage rectifier. These holes spread away from the point, flowing in all directions along the surface (but not into the body of the semiconductor). The holes reach the other contact point 0.005 cm away, in less than a ten-millionth of a second. This is the transit time that limits present performance to frequencies below about ten megacycles. From this observation, it is estimated that the holes travel at the order of 100,000 centimeters per second. Higher applied potentials and smaller spacings, as used in vacuum tubes to increase high-frequency performance, may reduce this transit time. That there are holes capable of moving from 10 to 100 times this speed is known from estimates of their thermal velocities.

The negative bias applied to the collector causes a very small current to flow from the germanium in the absence of hole conduction produced by the emitter. When the positive bias is applied to the input, however, holes are attracted to the output point contact, which is biased negatively, and these are absorbed, thus increasing the current in the output circuit. Variations in the input current change the number of holes released toward the collector and thus vary the output current proportionately. The Transistor circuit thus closely resembles a grounded-grid triode circuit.

In a grounded-grid vacuum triode the current from the cathode is controlled chiefly by the potential between it and the grid (ground); the plate potential has little effect. In the Transistor the positive bias (about 1 volt) of the emitter (cathode) causes a small current to flow into the semiconductor. The negative bias (up to 50 volts) of the collector (anode) is made large enough so that it withdraws about the same current (a few milliamperes) from the semiconductor. While the collector is a poor emitter of electrons, it is a good collector of holes. A variation of the number of holes in the surface around the two point contacts is produced by changes in the input voltage of the emitter. This variation changes the current (carried by holes) to the collector by a factor of from one to two times the change in emitter current, depending on the operating bias. Furthermore, this change in current flows in the high impedance of the output circuit, of the order of 10,000 to 100,000 ohms. The voltage change produced in this high-impedance circuit by the change in current is thus proportionally large, of the same order of magnitude relative to the signal voltage input as the ratio of reverse to forward impedance of the point contact. There is a corresponding power amplification of the signal.

Because the output circuit can influence the input circuit only by electronic conduction, for which the surface resistance is high, there is little coupling from output to input, and the circuits, one of low impedance (low power) and one of high impedance (high power), are properly isolated for use in unilateral amplification.

The d-c characteristics of a typical experimental Transistor, Fig. 2C, show the interrelation of the four variables, the two currents and the two voltages. If two are specified the other two are determined. The effect depicted by these characteristics shows that, in addition to the forward amplifying action, the collector current lowers the potential of the surface in the vicinity of the emitter in proportion to the collector current times a constant internal resistance, and thus increases the effective bias on the emitter. This describes the nature of the back coupling that exists. Under certain operating conditions this coupling, which represents positive feedback, can cause instability. Thus, although the principle of operation is vastly different, the Transistor has the properties of vacuum tube amplifiers in many respects.—D.G.F. and F.H.R.