

frenetic slapstick laced with pungent wit. Popular entertainment has descended into TV and movie "situation comedies" or fresh-frozen, committee-produced monologues. Can one imagine *The Jack Paar Letters* or Johnny Carson's? Even one of Groucho's last endeavors in entertainment, a quiz show, *You Bet Your Life*, had more genuine humor than today's canned comedies, nearly all predictable one-joke efforts. The only humor produced by these witless enterprises is the clash of wet noodles when the simpletons of rival networks collide in their discovery of the same tired idea, e.g., *Captain Nice* vs. *Mr. Terrific* or *The Munsters* vs. *The Addams Family*. Groucho, too, had ideas as shopworn as early vaudeville, but it was harsher humor and therefore tinged with the unpredictable. Even the names of his movie roles show this flair for the zany that has disappeared into America's melting pot. Dr. Hugo Z. Hackenbush and Captain Jeffrey T. Spaulding were such monuments that Groucho's correspondents have kept on using them as names.

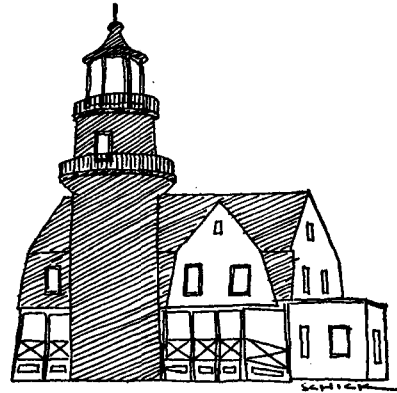
Groucho's fourteen-year career in television left him as angry a young man as Fred W. Friendly. He wrote to Goodman Ace in 1960: "For me, the only good thing about TV is that it has allowed me to earn far more money than I deserve." A short chapter on Groucho's grouchiness lists his 1954 effort to engage his sponsor, the Chrysler Corporation, in a pre-Ralph Nader drive for safety: "Perhaps the ads next year should read 'prettier, faster and safe' . . . The average car driver in a modern automobile is a sitting duck. There is nothing to protect him. The records show he would be far safer on a battlefield." Groucho's gift of prophecy did not always go unheeded. He wrote to Nunnally Johnson during the midst of the Profumo affair in 1963: "I predict that someday London will be the next Paris."

The best section of *The Groucho Letters* is his exchange of broadsides with the late Fred Allen. As with the collection of Allen's letters that followed two autobiographical volumes, these show the spontaneous, tornadic intensity of Groucho far more than earlier, more self-conscious works. Some spark strikes fire when wits write letters to other wits. There

is hazard in it, too, as Groucho warned his brother Gummo before giving a speech to an audience of comedians: "When they laugh it's because (like me) they've just thought of something they're about to say themselves."

The range of this wit is in *The Groucho Letters*, from Eddie Cantor to T. S. Eliot to Walter Kerr to

James Thurber to Harpo. Like most collections of letters, it rewards minimum concentration with maximum reward. But if a reader is even slightly self-conscious and if he rides the bus or subway, this is not the book to buy. On opening to any given page, he is likely to laugh, chortle, and guffaw—which, as Groucho would say, is a great name for a law firm.



## Weekends at the Cove

Here is an old seal sleeps  
Like a rock, dun as mud, dull  
As the bottom of the summer.  
Coming back from a Sunday sail  
You see him, brown bulk in the sun,  
Think you hear him snoring—some noise  
Lower than wind in the pale birches—  
Point him out to the smart visitors.

Fat landmark on the foam-humped shore,  
He might be a century old, might  
Bear weathers and scars distance heals,  
Might even be dead, kept by stark salt,  
But monumental like the stone-falls  
That are abutments on high water—  
And so you kneel and scour the deck  
For bottle caps to pelt him with.

These break and shine across the air,  
Some short, some true as a circle knows.  
Grudging the grace of weighty things,  
The seal moves, lives, makes for the sea;  
Where he goes down is a gold shadow  
Failing in the wake of your shouts,  
And the many Sundays you sail after  
Will not raise him again.

—ROBLEY WILSON, JR.

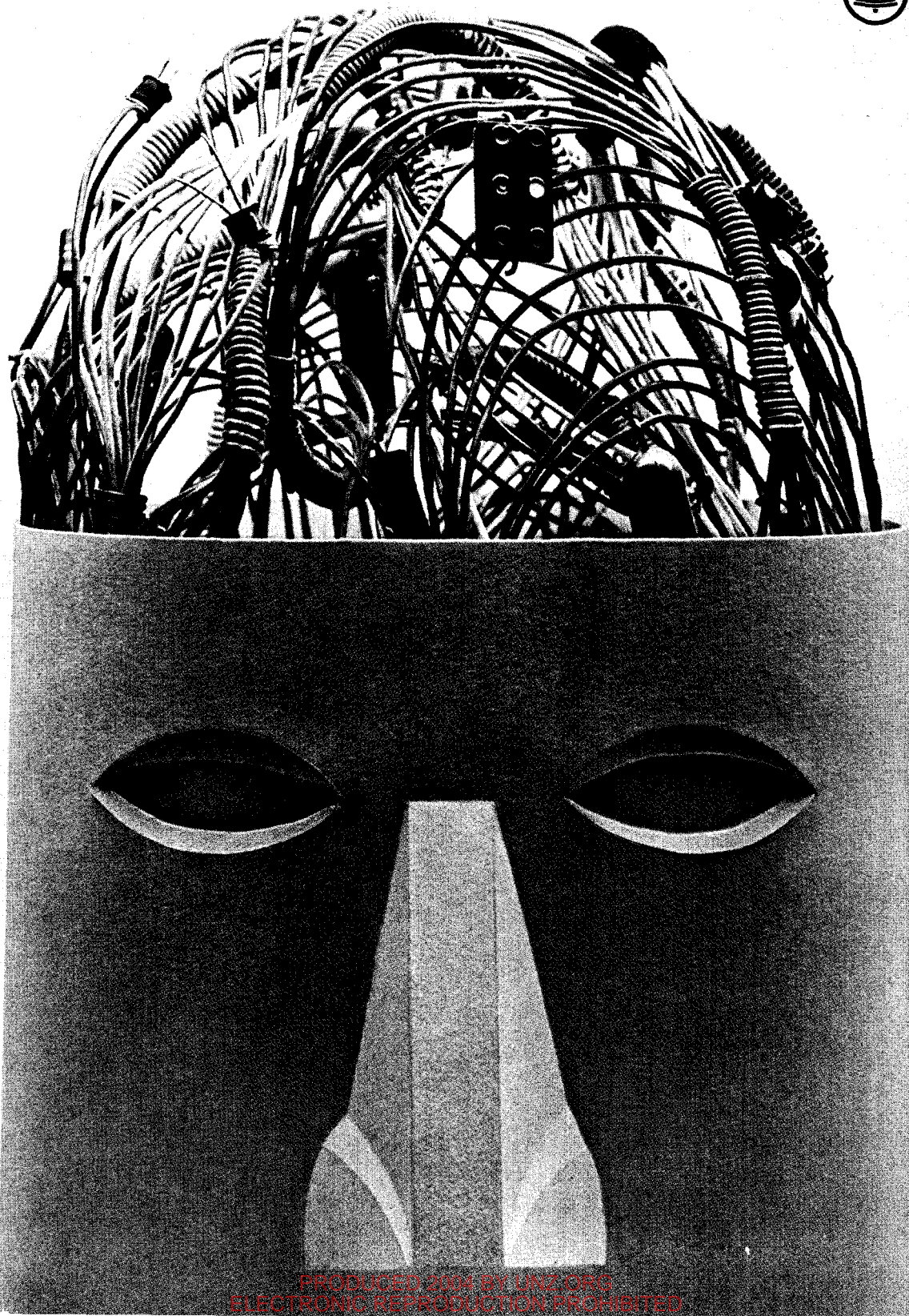
# Your brain and our phone system are a lot alike

Both were designed to last a lifetime. Both consist of close to ten billion components, nerve cells or transistors, relays or memory modules. Both occasionally malfunction and cause missed connections, misunderstand-

ings, static and heat. Both start each new day determined to do better. And both usually succeed. Today, we were able to complete over 295 million phone calls, some of them yours. We hope your brain had a good day, too.



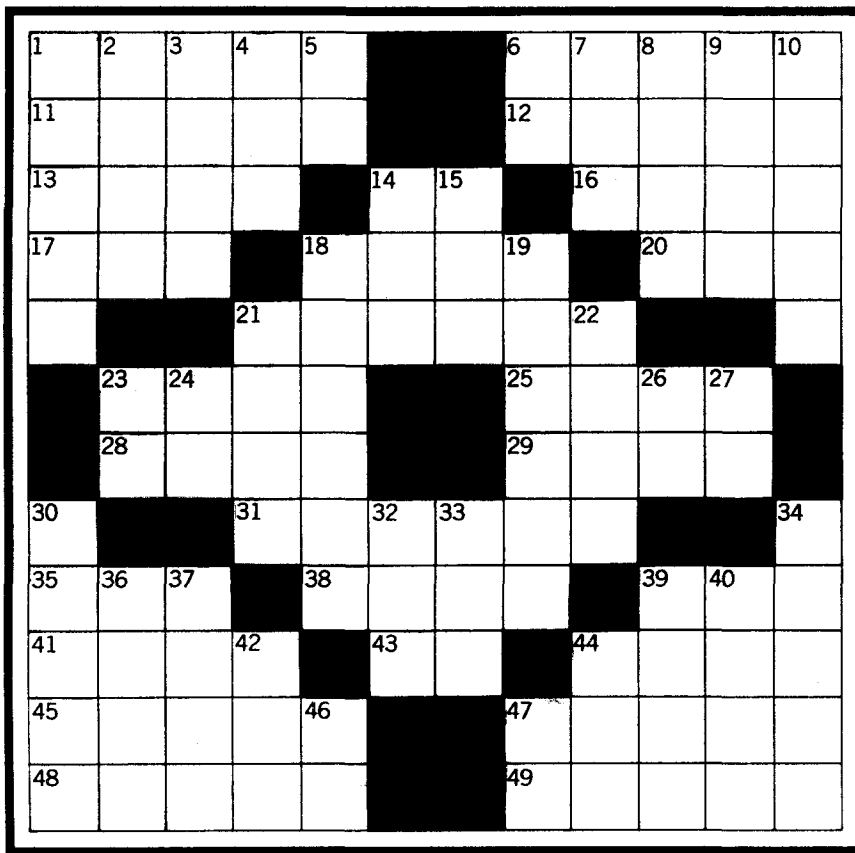
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# Kill some time while waiting in line at No.1. Compliments of Avis.



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## ACROSS

1. Rabbit or knockout
6. Florida city
11. Hollywood statue
12. Command
13. Man's first name, Ponce's last name
14. The spirit of\_\_\_\_\_.
16. Kiss Me\_\_\_\_\_.
17. Printed persuaders
18. Couples

20. Non-women
21. Railway stations
23. Sherlock Holmes' Baker St. address
25. Girl's name
28. How many Arabian nights?
29. Metal
31. Bends over
35. A limb
38. Hurt
39. Female deer

41. To judge
43. LXX
44. The Jones and the Sawyer boy
45. Mr. Stevenson
47. A flat cap for men or women
48. Cowboy circus
49. Baked, lima, or jelly\_\_\_\_\_.

## DOWN

1. White bear
2. Second-hand
3. Sergeants
4. Tin container
5. Sixty minutes (Abbr.)
6. U. S. State (Abbr.)
7. Annoy
8. First man
9. To allot
10. Girl's name
14. Soft drink
15. Into the valley of death rode the\_\_\_\_\_.
18. Entries of debt
19. Privates have one
21. God (Spanish)
22. Gentlemen
23. Voting age
24. XX
26. Preposition
27. In grammar, an article
30. Electronic eye
32. Killer's license number
33. Gold (Spanish)
34. Lies down
36. Do over
37. Canasta term
39. The dumb girl
40. A portent
42. Girl's name
44. Golf term
46. Downing St. address
47. Ammunition for toy gun

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