

SOMETHING NEW IN MOVIE COMMUNICATION

By HOLLIS ALPERT

ON JUNE 26, 1962, a two-decker theatre known as Cinema I and Cinema II will open its double doors and double box office on Manhattan's Third Avenue which, not so many years ago, was a dank, dark street covered over by an elevated connection between the Bowery and the Bronx. Third Avenue has not only been opened to the skies, but it is rapidly being lined with luxury apartment houses, shining new store fronts, and "art" cinemas. It was in this burgeoning "mid-East Side" of New York that Don Rugoff chose to make a splash with his showcase film theatres. The newer East Siders, he has discovered, are staunch supporters of the intimate movie theatre, the kind in which coffee is served in the lounge, and Ingmar Bergman and Michelangelo Antonioni are served on the screen.

Don Rugoff, who is the thirty-five-year-old head of New York's Rugoff and Becker chain of art houses, numbering among them chic, comfortable little theatres like the Sutton and the Beekman, has more than coffee in mind for the combined lounge of Cinema I and Cinema II. (His coffee will be served, by the way, from a mobile cart and will be attended by a hostess of whom any air line would be proud.) His lounge will have book displays, a hi-fi listening area, and an art gallery. "The intimate, specialized film house," Rugoff explained, "is rapidly developing into a compact cultural center."

So aware is he of the sophisticated nature of his audience that he regrets the New York State liquor laws will prevent him "from serving sherry."

Laws have not, however, interfered to any great degree with theatre architect Abraham Geller's imagination. His building is the first in Manhattan in some forty years to be devoted solely to movie exhibition. It is two stories high and will present to passers-by a sleek façade of glass and Yugoslavian marble. Interior designer Ben Schlanger has put the screen only thirty inches from the floor and arranged the sight lines and width between rows so that every member of the audience will have an unobstructed view of the adult passions that will be

shown on the screen. More than that, he has eliminated center aisles; people will take their seats from the sides. It is expected that first-comers will fill the center seats and not provide too many legs to impede the later arrivals.

Cinema I will seat 700, and Cinema II will provide for an even more intimate 300. Since Rugoff is opening the same picture in both theatres (the tri-decker "Boccaccio 70" of De Sica, Fellini, and Visconti), it may be wondered why *one* theatre seating a thousand might not have been more practical. First of all, the art-house audience seems to prefer smaller theatres. "Secondly," Rugoff said, "it will enable us to have staggered seating times. Instead of a show every two or more hours, there'll be one every hour. The twin theatre represents convenience for the audience and flexibility for the owner. A picture, after running for some weeks in both theatres might slow down in business, but not enough to justify replacing it. It could then continue on in one of the theatres, while a new program goes into the other." He has not yet decided whether the audience will be able to see a double feature for the price of one or two admissions.

The smaller theatre would be suitable for the foreign film of more limited appeal. There are Japanese, Polish, and Indian films of high quality that have trouble being shown because they cannot fill the larger art houses. The 300-seat Cinema II would be ideal for such pictures, or for an off-beat American picture.

It has not taken long for the twin-theatre idea to be emulated. Right next door to Cinemas I and II, Walter Reade is modernizing his 450-seat Baronet and putting on top of it the 600-seat Coronet. Joseph E. Levine has announced he will build a twin theatre for culturally minded Bostonians, and Boston theatre-owner Ben Sack intends to do the same. A large firm, General Drive-In, has stated that it will build several twin theatres in or near shopping centers; these will not be pickaback, but back to back, with a common projection booth providing staggered seating time for anyone who wants both to shop and see a movie.

The building of twin theatres is part

of a distinct reversal of the national trend toward tearing down movie houses and putting parking lots and supermarkets in their places. Theatres are still closing, but these are in locations that no longer attract large movie audiences. And meanwhile, across the nation, according to *Barron's Weekly*, "both downtown and in suburbia, theatres are being built in increasing numbers. The reason: theatre owners have discovered that the so-called lost audience can be weaned away from television and other leisure-time activities by new or refurbished theatres which show good films at convenient times and in convenient locations."

Fewer drive-ins are now being built and more theatres are being made part of suburban shopping developments. And, creating much of the exhibition news and noise is the continuing advance of the art house. Before World War II there were not more than fifty of these in the country; by the mid-1950s there were an estimated 300 (and perhaps another 100 that vacillated between foreign and Hollywood films). Today there are 600, many of them converted from run-down neighborhood rat hotels into clean, modern little theatres for fine films. More are coming. At this very moment, according to the most recent figures, twenty-two new ones are being constructed in various cities, all to be equipped for serving coffee instead of popcorn.

ONE big reason for the growth of art houses has been the resurgence of quality foreign films. While Hollywood concentrated on such technically dubious advances as CinemaScope screens and stereophonic sound tracks, foreign film makers widened the imaginative horizons of the screen. A theatre owner, stuck with too much stultifying Hollywood fare, could hardly fail to notice that a film like "Room at the Top" attracted 5 million Americans. Not all of these were in art houses, to be sure, but the film was certainly given its impetus by art theatres. "Never on Sunday" also began as a modest art-house feature. Then it went on to broader release and an audience of 10 million—greater than that achieved by the majority of

Hollywood's pictures. An "art film" policy became attractive to many theatre exhibitors previously suspicious of the word *art* when applied to movies.

Not all imports from abroad have had the dizzying success of a "Never on Sunday" or a "La Dolce Vita." But even so "advanced" a film as "L'Avventura" played to 750,000 admissions in its first runs, and Antonioni is expected to do better than this modest art-house success with subsequent films, once audiences grow accustomed to his highly personal style.

A theatre owner such as Don Rugoff no longer seems visionary when he sees the possibility of film production geared strictly for the art houses. "It's perfectly feasible," he said, "for a low-budget picture of distinction to recapture its cost in the intimate theatres alone. By low budget, I mean \$400,000 or less." As an example he cited "The Mark," which received some of its financing from the Walter Reade subsidiary, Continental Film Distributing Company. Rugoff, too, is looking into the possibility of financing films. With so many art houses in operation, and with more coming, there is a good deal of competition for the available films of quality.

In fact, Rugoff sees the time very near when low-budget production aimed at adult audiences will be a virtual necessity, if art houses are to continue their policies of showing quality films, and he is aware that Cinema I and Cinema II represent a calculated risk based on the expectation that foreign films will maintain their quality and appeal. There is a

buffer, however. The major American distributors have shown an increasing inclination to showcase their more distinctive films in art houses. MGM's "Gigi" ran for a year in Rugoff and Becker's Sutton, returning a revenue of \$750,000 in that theatre alone. This is a nice bit of change, even for MGM, and more than one picture has bypassed the chance for a one-month Radio City Music Hall engagement in favor of a long run at an art house. The cachet and prestige of such a run increases the film's potential, it is felt, and supposedly builds up a "want to see" attitude on the part of the non-art house public. This exhibition pattern is sometimes varied by opening a Hollywood film on Broadway and in an art house at the same time.

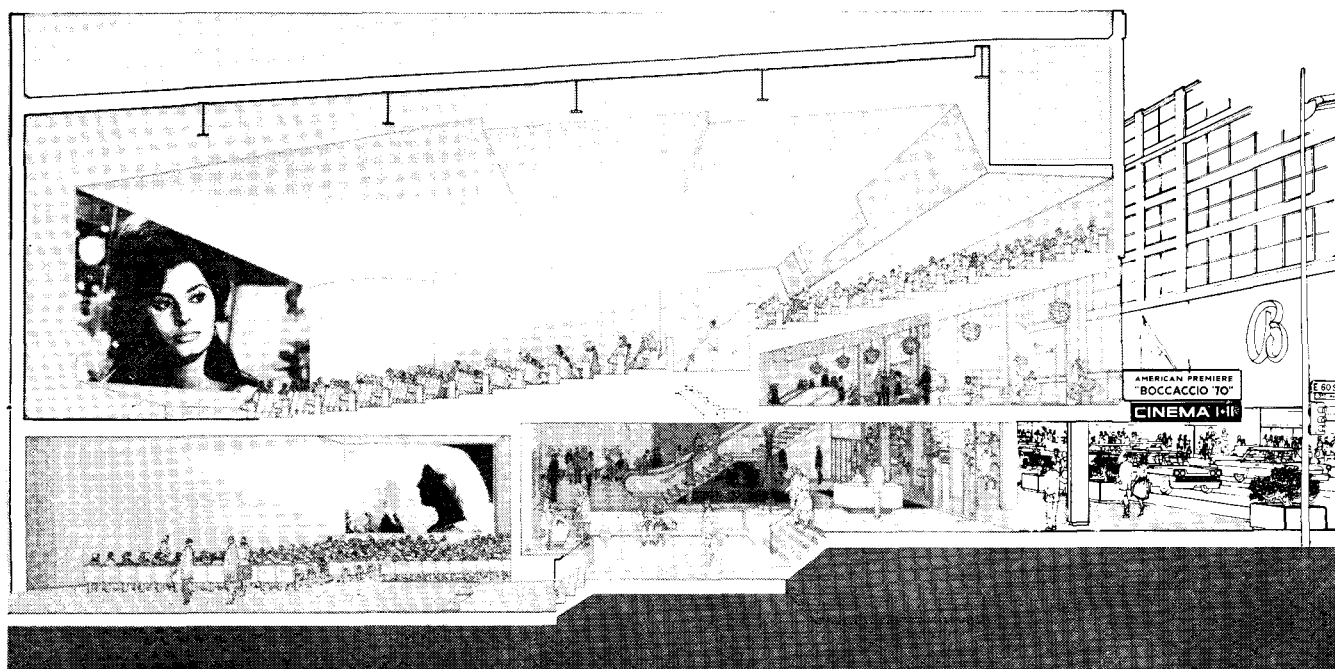
THE prestige that accrues to a picture through this kind of showing is predicated on the assumption that the art-house audience is by and large an intelligent audience. Rugoff wholeheartedly subscribes to this assumption. "In choosing an art house theatre site," he said, "it's more important to consider IQ than wealth." No small amount of wealth appears to be concentrated near Cinema I and Cinema II, but Rugoff is not counting only on a public drawn from the immediate neighborhood. By the end of the year Third Avenue, between thirty-fourth and seventy-second streets, will have at least seven art houses, a Broadway of the East Side, but more sophisticated.

To Rugoff it is significant that no comparable construction is going on in the live-theatre field, other than for a

sponsored project like Lincoln Center. Live theatre, he feels, is being embalmed, while films attract an increasingly large number of culture-minded patrons. Nevertheless it is still true that one third of the art-house audience is concentrated in New York City. "What does well in New York," Rugoff said, "is what influences the art houses in the rest of the country."

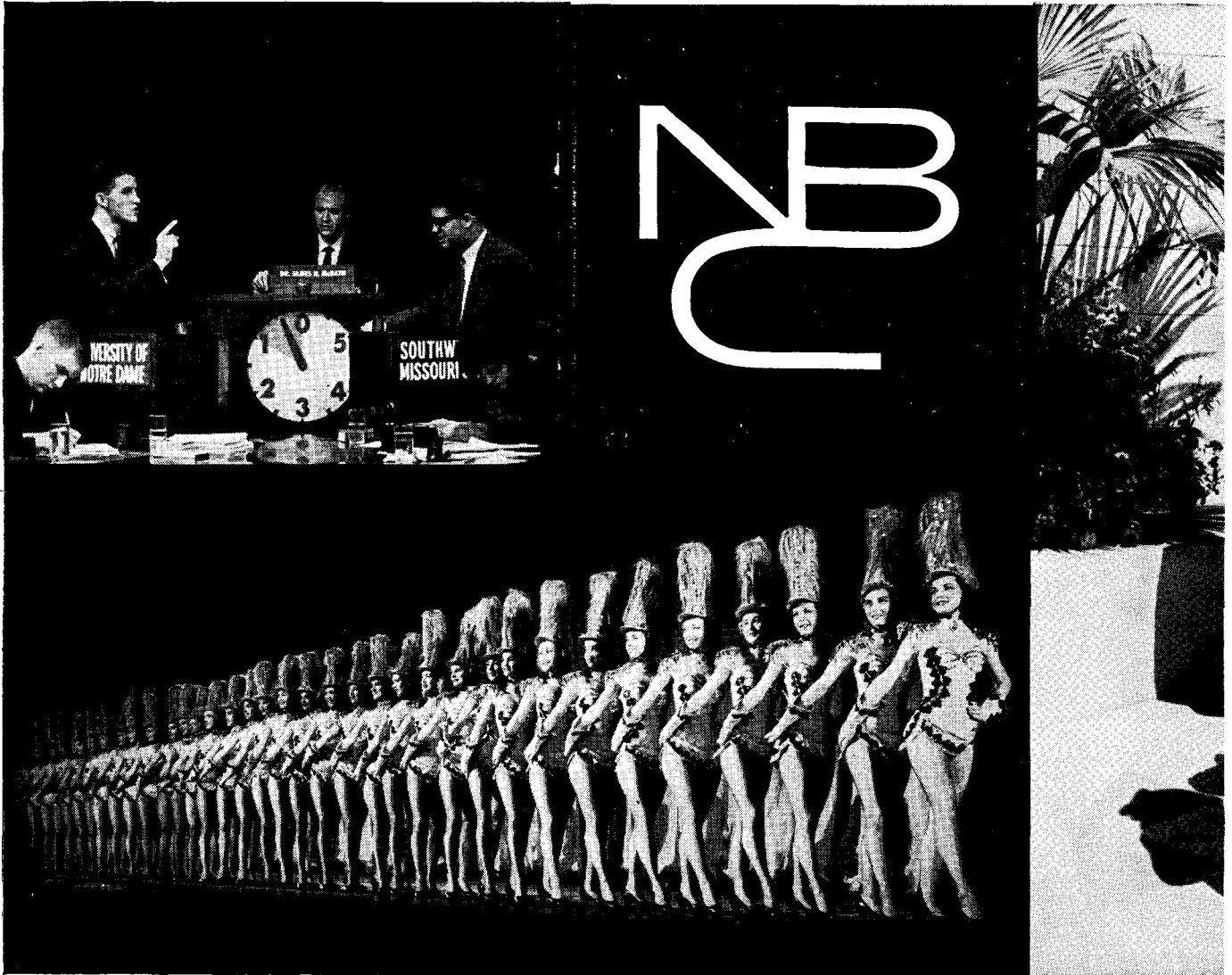
Meanwhile the big screen has gone in for progress, too. The Cinerama Corporation, allied with MGM, is producing mammoth Cinerama features, and is in the process of acquiring and converting theatres for their showing. Loew's Capitol in New York will shortly have 2,000 of its 3,600 seats removed and its decor keyed down to a monotone, so that nothing will distract the audience's attention from the huge screen which will occupy the entire fourth wall. By the end of the year there should be at least sixty of these "super-Cinerama" centers in the U.S.

This theatre-building activity is obviously a reaction both to increased movie attendance—up from a recent low of 33 million weekly admissions to a present 44 million—and to audience selectivity. Whatever an American's desires in movies, it appears he will soon have a theatre to provide for them, whether it be the overpowering images and stereophonic sounds of Cinerama, or the deluxe, intimate comfort of Cinemas I and II. Both are moving boldly into the future—and tacitly admitted by both camps is the miscalculation of the past decade, the assumption that there was one movie audience instead of several.



Artist's rendering of how double-decker theatre idea works.

A COLLEGE DEBATE/A ROW OF ROCKETTES/A JOURNEY WITH JACQUELINE/SHARI, HUSH PUPP

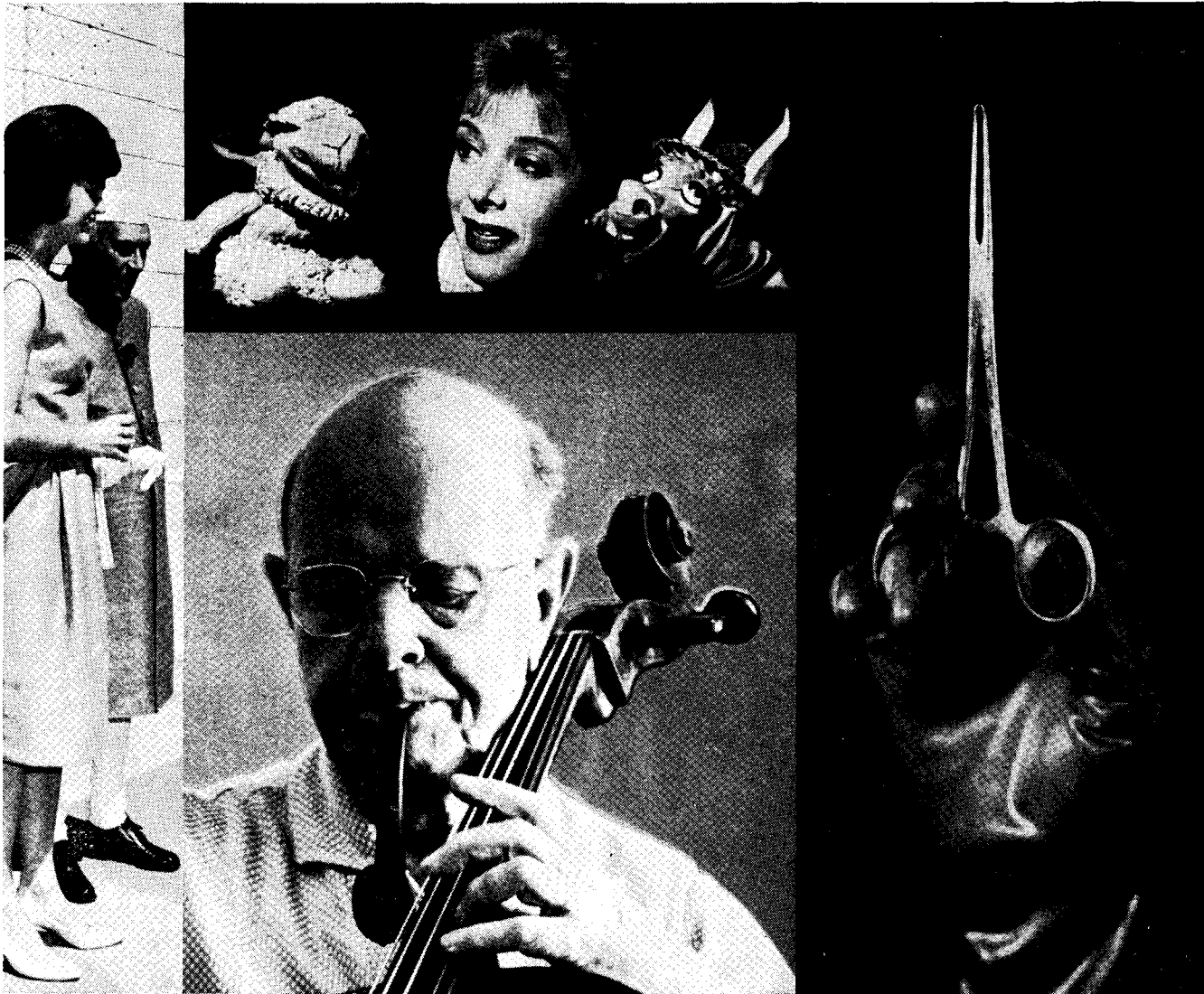


THIS IS NBC ■

One of a series of advertisements which reflects the balance, scope and diversity of NBC's program service.

PRODUCED 2005 BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

» LAMB CHOP/ PABLO CASALS AND A BREAKTHROUGH IN HEART SURGERY



LARGEST SINGLE SOURCE OF NEWS, INFORMATION AND ENTERTAINMENT IN THE FREE WORLD

Communications Letters

Continued from page 48

the peculiar shopping rituals of home purchases? Because home purchase involves a total commitment on the part of the shopper, newspapers are considered to be an essential medium of information. The newspaper offers the shopper a quick appraisal of the market as a whole. Few home shoppers overlook this source of information.

The quote, taken out of context from our report, implies that newspapers are taken as authoritative in *all* areas of information: This is, of course, an extension of fact not warranted by our observations.

IRVING S. WHITE,
President,
Creative Research Associates, Inc.
Chicago, Ill.

"NEW TREND TOWARD COMMERCIALS"

JOHN TEBBEL'S "FM: A New Trend Toward Quality" should have been titled "FM: A New Trend Toward Commercials," which would have more accurately stated the substance of the article and the trend. Mr. Tebbel's urgings to advertising and network owners to capitalize on the commercials will harm the quality of FM and not help it. I only wish that Mr. Tebbel, advertisers, and station owners would reflect on what commercials have done to TV and AM radio before wishing the same fate for FM. In short the article's observation that "money, maybe a lot of it, lies buried in the FM hills" shows the real interest of advertisers and will surely lead to exploitation of the audience unless the interest is focused on the quality of programming.

The point of Mr. Tebbel's idea is that FM should seek more conformity (try to avoid extremes—rarefied programming) and be a more hospitable climate for advertisers. I feel that Mr. Tebbel's suggestions will keep FM from fulfilling its goal of quality.

D. J. MORELAND,

Los Angeles, Calif.

THE TWO HAT POLICY

YOUR story by Peter Bart, "When a Reporter Asks for Advertising" [SR, May 12], was read by me with considerable interest inasmuch as the organization of which I am president, the Society of American Travel Writers, came into being primarily because a number of us "simon pures" (travel writers who are exclusively concerned only with the editorial department) felt there was a definite need to impress upon other publishers the importance of separating editorial duties from those of advertising. In other words, we firmly do not believe in the "two hat" policy or the "big stick" approach, according to which the travel writer can go to an advertiser and promise a story if he can get the advertising.

The retired travel editor of a major New York daily quoted by Mr. Bart as saying: "Of course I sold space in addition to writing about my field—what's wrong with that?" would not be eligible to become an active member of our society. Our Constitution clearly specifies that:

"Active membership will be limited to those regularly engaged as salaried travel editors, writers, broadcasters, or photographers; actively assigned to diversified travel coverage by a recognized medium (newspapers, magazines, book, radio, television, motion pictures); or devoting a substantial or regular part of their time to such travel coverage and the balance to other strictly editorial work; or to those

who are employed or free lance in any of the above areas with sufficient steady volume of published or distributed work about travel to satisfy the Board of Directors. . . ."

I cannot close without stating that the pressure on the travel writer from the industry itself to "print a story and we'll give your paper an ad" has been considerable and while it still exists I feel the "educated" advertising agency and those serving the traveling public are coming more and more to realize the reader of today knows a "puff" when he sees one and pays little attention to it.

A good travel page consisting of stories prepared by an expert, with no ties other than his editorial commitments, not only blesses the newspaper itself but the entire industry.

LEAVITT F. MORRIS,
President,
Society of American Travel Writers.
Washington, D. C.

GLITTERING JOB DEPARTMENT

I THINK the Communications Section of *Saturday Review* is doing a glittering job for all mass media. It has been carrying the kind of stuff that is damn useful to pros in the business. For the general reader it should prove a 20-20 eye opener.

What prompted me, in particular, to pen this fan note was the May 12th issue jam-packed with rich material, notably RLT's piece on radio's stunning comeback, the Peter Bart piece on advertising and the ethics of daily newspaper publishing, and John Tebbel's probing of present-day FM.

All this for 25 cents—and no green stamps.

JO RANSON,
Senior Editor,
Sponsor.

New York, N. Y.

FORENSIC ERROR

WE WISH to thank you very much for the nice things you had to say about the TV program Championship Debate [SR, May 12].

One statement, however, is incorrect; Feldon and Sherrill are not the originators of Championship Debate. Many people at both the American Forensic Association and the American Student Foundation worked for several years to bring this program into being.

We would appreciate it very much if you could correct this erroneous impression among your many readers.

RICHARD A. FELDON,
ARTHUR M. SHERRILL,
American Student Foundation.
New York, N. Y.

KUDOS

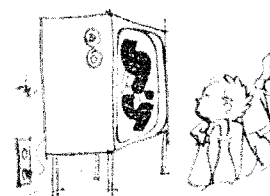
THE TEBBEL PIECE "Freedom of the Air: Myth or Reality?" [SR, April 14] is truly excellent. Congratulations on an original and constructive piece about radio.

R. PETER STRAUS,
Straus Broadcasting Group,
New York, N. Y.



"Nobody communicates any more."

THE BELIEVABILITY SURVEY



By ERIC HODGINS, *an editorial consultant to the firm of Elmo Roper and Associates as well as to the Crowell-Collier Publishing Company. From 1933 to 1958 he was at various times managing editor, editor-in-chief, and publisher of Fortune; a member of its board of editors; and editorial vice-president of Time, Inc.*

IN HIS article "What Survey Do You Believe?" (SR, May 12), Mr. Arville Schaleben of the Milwaukee Journal bestows upon public-opinion research the compliment of his suddenly aroused attention. But something is odd about his commentary on the research report rendered by Elmo Roper and Associates to its client, the Television Information Office. It is this: not every editor is two years late on a story, and not every one, having been on the freight so long, would then sprain an ankle in getting off at the wrong place. Let me try to be very explicit in a reply to Mr. Schaleben's article of winks and nudges.

Late in 1959 the Television Information Office, whose function is well explained by its title, asked the Roper firm to design and conduct a study to assess public attitudes toward television. The quiz scandals had broken that year, and the TIO wished to know whether, in fact, television was held in as low repute as its severest critics claimed. In its questionnaire the Roper firm asked one question and only one, directed toward television quality as a news medium. It was: "If you got conflicting reports of the same story from radio, television, the magazines, and the newspapers, which of the four versions would you be most inclined to believe?"

In 1959, the newspapers edged out television: 32 per cent of the public cited them as most "believable" against a 29 per cent vote for television. Possibly out of modesty (or magnanimity?) the press did not widely report these findings, although the TIO publicly released them. Another possible explanation of the press's indifference to this news was that the whole subject was television and the public's attitude toward it, which on the whole was favorable.

Two years elapsed. Then the Television Information Office asked Elmo Roper and Associates to repeat its earlier survey, gathering new answers to the same questions. During these two years' time the quiz scandals had aged in the public memory, but Chairman Minow of the FCC had made his "vast wasteland" speech. So what was public opinion about television now?

Again, Roper designed and conducted a study for the TIO. The same questions were asked; again with one, and only one, *and the same one as in 1959*, bearing upon television's "believability" as a news medium. But in 1961 the public response to this question was different; now television's "believability" had risen to 39 per cent, and that of newspapers had dropped to 24. This was the news which awoke Mr. Schaleben—as it did several other apostles of the printed word who had been taking cat naps in 1959.

Mr. Schaleben's manners at several points in his article become so overpolite that it is a little hard to know what he is talking about, but I think I can translate him into short, straight speech.

First, he seems to be suggesting that, because the Roper client was the Television Information Office (a fact Mr. Schaleben feels he has discovered, but which was always considerably less secret than a railroad timetable), it was somehow arranged that the answers from the public should gratify the TIO. He thus intimates that client and independent research firm collaborated in a fraud. He begs leave to doubt that Elmo Roper and Associates "completely controlled" the 1961 survey for TIO, his grounds being that the 1961 survey "... was patterned after the 1959 survey, which bore a happy result for the Television Information Office just when the industry needed some cheer." Well, the 1959 survey, which Mr. Schaleben thus attempts to traduce along with everything else, also "bore a happy result" for newspapers, which have needed some cheer for several decades. But the newspapers generally overlooked the cheer—offered *free*, I might add, since the survey had been commissioned and paid for by someone else.

Mr. Schaleben's delicately phrased suggestions of collusion also fly in the

face of facts and sense. As to the facts, two reports were made and published. The first one, issued while he slept, favored his "side" on the question to which a later public answer now torments him. The second report, in which public answer does not favor his "side" was commissioned by the TIO with inescapable awareness that the figures might *again* have favored Mr. Schaleben's "side," as two years ago they did.

As to sense, I am sure that if Mr. Schaleben will start thinking again for a moment it will come over him that if a public-opinion researcher gave a client what he thought the client wanted, instead of the facts of the case, he would be choosing the high, short road to professional extinction on economic grounds alone.

Second, Mr. Schaleben thinks he has discovered discrepancies between figures published by the Gallup and Roper organizations on newspaper believability and accuracy evaluations. Actually, given the differences in the questions, and the purposes for which they were asked, the correlations between the Gallup and Roper figures are remarkably close—much closer than the accounts of many happenings as written by two reporters observing the same event for rival newspapers with different "policies."

It has long been a matter of remark that when an inconvenient fact collides with a cherished tradition the producer of the inconvenient fact is likely to be called mistaken or mendacious by the defender of the cherished tradition. Mr. Schaleben is one of the latest but I suppose not the last to wield one of these *flammenwerfer*. When I said at the outset of this rejoinder that he had missed the whole point of the TIO study I meant just this: he seems to think that the purpose of the study was to attack weaknesses in newspapers. Bless him, that was not the purpose at all. The purpose was wholly different and, unlike Mr. Schaleben, wholly noncontentious: to elicit facts on how the public felt about television, in *all* its aspects, of which its news function was only one.

I am sorry Mr. Schaleben sat down on a tack in his office chair—possibly just as he was about to begin work on a Final Late Night Extra designed to be issued about noon. But neither the Roper organization nor the TIO