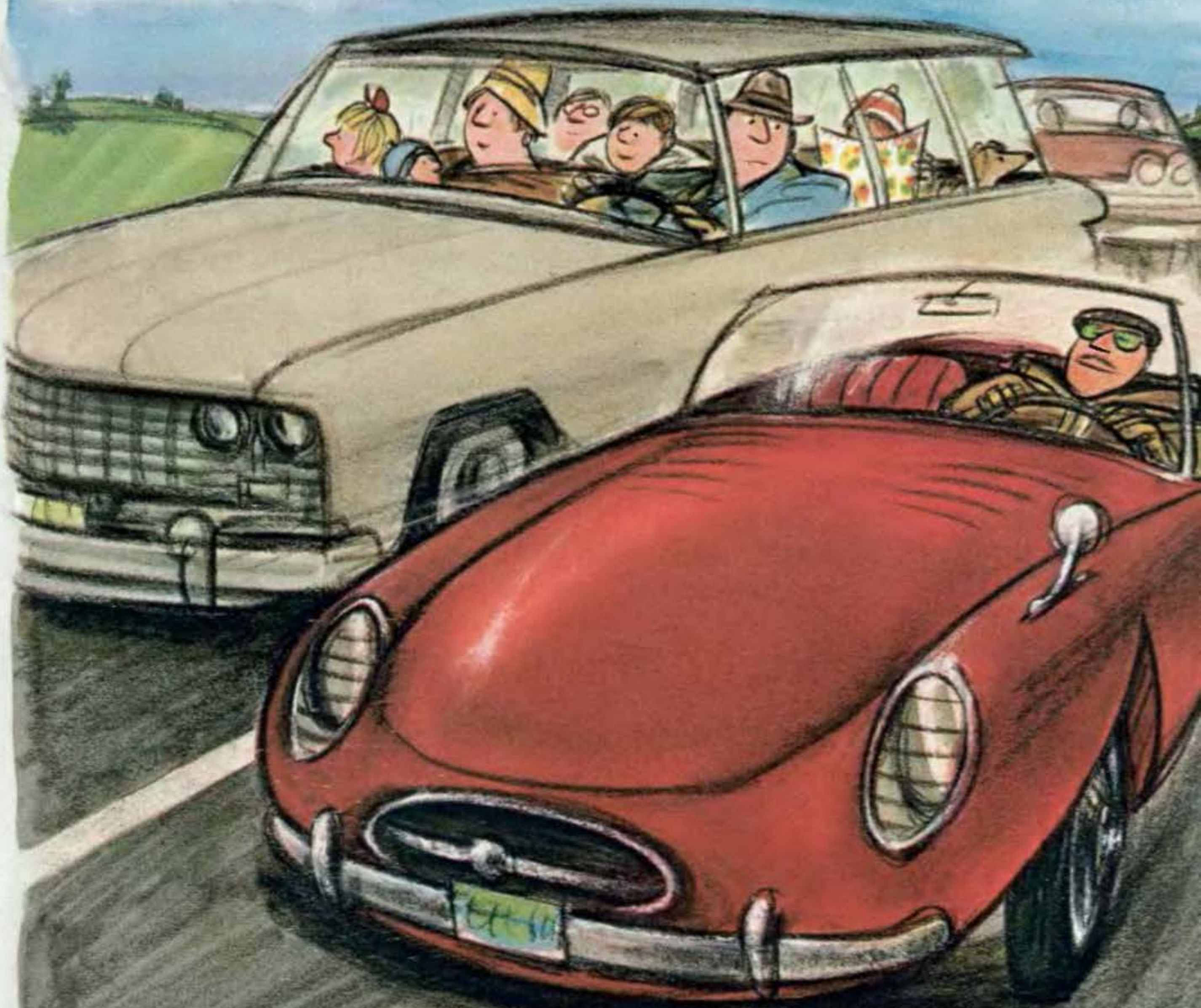


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Saxon

thing can happen, but only certain things persist. They do so for a reason, and one may ask what it is. When I was a student, I was told that a scientist asks how, never why, yet what is truly interesting is not just the fact, for instance, that living creatures are constructed almost entirely of four natural elements—carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen—but why just those four, because then you realize that it has to be so, that there is nothing accidental about it, that only those four will do the job that is to be done. Nature is prodigal and random in her outpourings, but in the constant competition for the necessities of life, what works well is retained and what works less well is constantly discarded. The result is that there is a tendency toward constant improvement. Life is made not only to endure but to prevail. This is the way organic design works. It is design by hindsight rather than by forethought. In that sense, it is just the opposite of technological design. Technological design works by setting specifications and trying to achieve them. Organic design works by continuous selection among random variations. We are the products of editing rather than of authorship. The organic process at first sight seems slow and very wasteful, but we should think well of it, for it has given us the most intricate mechanisms we know. The most complex computers are child's play compared to the simplest living cell. We could never invent the form of Vitamin A that the retina uses for vision. This is the way that not only anatomy but also behavior develops. An organism cannot tolerate clumsy behavior any more than it can tolerate faulty anatomy. But if the competitive pressures are not too intense, some strange behavior can be tolerated, at least for a while."

We were passing the statue of Hans Christian Andersen, and stopped for a moment to look at it. Some pigeons joined us. Dr. Wald smiled. "You know, my colleague B. F. Skinner once told me about an example of what he called superstition in pigeons," he said, chuckling. "You see, you can teach a pigeon that pecking a lever will bring food, and, further, that it will get the food only if it pecks the lever, say, two hundred times in five minutes. Well, the pigeon learns this, and after a while it realizes also that it can peck that often in less time, so it sits on its roost until two minutes are left, and then rushes over and pecks furiously, reaching the two-hundredth peck as the last second passes. Now some time goes by, and one day, as it pecks for the two-hun-

dredth time and the food comes, this pigeon happens to be standing on its right leg, with the left leg raised, and it gets the idea in its head that the food came because it raised its left leg. Ever after, when it pecks for food, it raises that leg. Well, now, suppose a little later, as the food arrives, the pigeon happens to have its right wing ruffled. It cannily thinks the food came because it ruffled its wing. Then it always pecks for food with its left leg raised and its right wing ruffled. Dr. Skinner ended the story by saying that as you watch the pigeon, you begin to believe it, too."

Situationwise

THE uncrowded area in front of the Hotel Biltmore's private entrance to Grand Central Station is occasionally used on chilly days by sandwich men—those luckless souls who walk the streets carrying advertising signboards over their shoulders—as a place to rest and warm up. A man we know who was waiting to meet a friend at that entrance eavesdropped on two men who had just come in from the cold with large "INCOME TAX PREPARED \$2" placards, and this is what they said:

FIRST MAN (*leaning, boards and all, against a small marble ledge*): The weather's really getting to me lately. I can't take it the way I used to.

SECOND MAN (*his hands seemingly sewn into the pockets of an old Army overcoat*): That's the trouble with this work—it's seasonal. The jobs open up only before income-tax time, when it's still too cold out. Nothing's ever open in the summer.

FIRST MAN: I see where Georgie has a steady thing going, though, hauling boards for a regular company.

SECOND MAN: Yeah. He knows somebody. It's all politics.

FIRST MAN: Well, like they say, the advertising game is just one big rat race.

SECOND MAN: You said a mouthful.

Murray the K's World

OUR man Stanley walked into the office last week looking rather tired and dimmed. "Just got back from



what's not happening, Baby," he said. "Just been where it's not at." And he deposited the following notes on our desk:

"April Fool's Day, went right out to Roosevelt Field, in Garden City, to converted hangar, once film studio, for opening of new night club, called Murray the K's World. Scene forced and jarring, like misplaced italics or frozen smile. Outside walls of hangar were painted white, with black-and-red trim. Result resembled combination roller-skating rink and adobe pizza parlor. Inside décor resembled combination gym, art gallery, ocean-liner ballroom. Walls were thickly hung with black-and-white canvases—painted Op. Around walls, several feet above eye level, were little movie screens, round, square, diamond-shaped. Dance floor was glossy wood, surrounded by black-upholstered benches and black linoleum-tile standing room. Corners were filled with little round black tables. Against side walls were stands selling hot dogs, hamburgers, Cokes, tacos. Above stands were large free-form platforms, supported by white stilts. Left platform was loaded with sound and lighting equipment. Right platform was loaded with musical instruments for entertainers. Beside entrance, and at head of crescent staircase, was two-decker platform, also on stilts, with black tables for V.I.P.s; that is, press and Murray the K's friends. Bar was across room from V.I.P.s. Suspended from ceiling in center of room was another platform, loaded with movie projectors and the like, and bristling with slim steel ladders, occasionally lowered to floor to let maintenance men, in red parkas and red sweat pants, climb up and deliver reels of film for projection on screens. Whole place had air of ship, plunging into space or to bottom of the sea.

"7:55 P.M., first customers arrived. Admission, \$2.50. Minimum age, eighteen. Groups of boys. Clusters of girls. Few couples. Showed I.D.s at door, as proof of age. Girls, drivers' licenses. Boys, draft cards. Many girls wore bell-bottom trousers, white plastic belts, yachting caps. One girl throwback wore plaid Bermuda shorts and monogrammed blouse. Arrived alone. Many boys wore several layers of shirts; for example, red turtleneck, covered by blue denim shirt, open at collar, covered by white-and-blue striped button-down shirt with flowered tab. Everyone very covered up.

"First music was taped rock 'n' roll. Bad rock 'n' roll (as distinguished from good rock 'n' roll). Fresh numbers put

on before last ones ended. Constant interruptions created frenetic air. Volume way up. Nobody dancing. Everybody craned neck toward screens, where films by underground *cinéastes*—Stan VanDerBeek, Gerd Stern, et al.—were shown: films of gears, machines, riots, bare-breasted girls, lecherous medieval monks, Chamberlain, Churchill, Roosevelt, Murray the K, medicines, battles, dissections of word 'NOW' into 'NO,' 'OW,' and 'O,' a beating painted heart. Closed-circuit TV screen showed room filling up. When customers became aware of TV screen, some began dancing—alone, girls with girls, girls with boys, even some *pas de trois*. Dancers gyrated toward screen, with arms raised, like worshippers at mirror altar.

"Press bus arrived after 9 P.M. Some comments from passengers:

'Are you as innately hostile to this as I am?' 'Frankly, I'm going to get stoned as quickly as I can.' Murray the K and five dancing girls appeared on platform. M the K shouted trademark, 'Harrah Bay!' Audience responded with traditional 'Ugh!' Group called Young Rascals appeared on platform—trousers rolled up, black knee socks, round collars, short ties. Rascal with tambourines sprang about, slapping tambourines against himself. Drummer Rascal listlessly threw sticks in air. Rascal at electric guitar held still. Rascal at organ writhed, screamed, looked as though he were going to take microphone into his mouth. Girl sat on black bench, alone, trembling. Little enclaves of dancers were scattered among standees, now filling floor. One couple imitated boxing match. Another, with girl's dorsal surface against boy's ventral surface, swayed in place. Many boys shorter than dancing partners. One boy's head barely reached girl's neck, where he buried it. Standees began collaring members of press: 'Take my name down. I'm from C. W. Post College.' Or 'Adelphi University,' 'St. John's,' 'East

Meadow,' 'Syosset High.' 'It's definitely out of sight!' Or 'Too much!' Or 'Whacked out!'

"Line forming outside building, four abreast, all around block. People in front end of line could look in through picture windows and glass doors. A few slipped through onto dance floor. Guards rough. Michael Myerberg, who backs the place—face lined, eyes remote, coat worn like cape—spoke to guard. Surging crowd expelled from lobby. One boy made scratches on lobby door in departing. 'My boy friend's out there,' girl said to waiter in black-and-white checked pants, black shirt, black vest, black-and-white polka-dot tie. 'Can I go out and get him?' 'No,' said waiter. Boy friend slipped in anyway. Then couple left together.

"Dancers on floor completely oblivious of physical nearness of other bodies. Feet stepped on. Elbows in ribs. Dancers too busy watching TV screen to notice. Murray the K asked for more power on microphone. Noise deafening already. Woman with rhinestones pasted on cheek began frugging on V.I.P. deck. Group called Hollies appeared on platform. 'This is not real

soul music,' said boy, and lunged forward to chin himself on platform edge. Succeeded. Applause. 'It's a place for hacking around,' said N.Y.U. boy, grabbing reporter. 'But I must say the feeling they did express in whatever sound they might have made was emotionally stirring, right?'

"Left Murray the K's World around midnight, on press bus returning to Manhattan. Thought Op and false chic and press-consciousness and bad rock 'n' roll all drawing together might be good sign. Like image on TV screen that draws together into single dot before fading out completely."

LUNCHING at Barbetta's, we overheard the following conversation between a well-dressed businessman and an imperious white-haired lady, whom we took to be his mother:

HE: Then why don't you go stay with David and Cynthia on the Cape for a while? You'll have a good time.

SHE: Now, Michael, you know perfectly well I never enjoy having a good time.



*"I took a thorn out of his paw a couple of years ago,
and he's never forgotten."*