

## *Surfaces*

The City was made with no horizontal Surfaces at human scale. No counters, no bars, no curbs, no benches, no bannisters, no ledges, no sills, no tables, no wide railings, no low walls. All had been removed or radically renovated some time before, recently enough for the People to remember well the convenience of setting down a hot drink, resting a weary elbow, perching up a piece to watch the world go by—those parts that still moved—but too long ago now for anyone to keep complaining about it.

The Pamphleteers, who had sensed early on a reduction in adequate Surface area, acted quickly, boring holes through their materials such that they could be affixed to doorknobs, printing business cards on sufficiently rigid stock for the crevice into which they would be wedged, neatly twisting and curling takeaway menus and circulars through gates and fences. They are the innovators. Theirs are the kind of catapult projectiles which lodge themselves in between the bricks laid for the battlements and become part of the castles.

The Commuters were forever frustrated with the changing of seasons and the cruel counterpoint of their transit system's climate measures, from the elevated tracks to the underground, half the year blistering cold wind into sweltering steam heat and the other half the sun's sick still rays into unyielding blasts of icy air piped through vents sagging with wet dust, which the Commuters knew very well went fluttering into their lungs with every inhale, bringing them all one step away, two steps toward certain death. Among the the Commuters, some had experienced this change in Surface policy as having had a personal dimension. A number of them had seen their names engraved in memorial plates near their best-liked cupholders and armrests at considerable expense (gifts from their Families), only to see them unceremoniously removed. Some of their number became involved in litigation with the City, which is ongoing, but not likely to resolve in their favor.

In lieu of a supportive built environment, a minor oral culture developed among the Commuters, and they took to holding Objects for each other as they removed Layers or put Layers back on. "Would you hold this for a second," they would ask, and others would take the Object for a second, or others might gesture toward the ends of their arms to indicate they were already full of Objects, or still others might gesture with their heads into the side-distance to indicate that no, they had not even a second to spare, they were waiting to be whisked away or else encumbered by other responsibilities.

All of the litter slid off of the platforms and onto the tracks where it caught fire and burned until the drainage pipes emptied with the rising tide to snuff it. Station Guards slept in hammocks and wired headquarters at the first sign of suspicious activity on their small video monitors. When the Police arrived at least four were needed and often more on account of there being nowhere to put the Objects removed from the pockets of their Suspects as they were frisked.

The precise angles of the new Surfaces had been carefully decided upon and varied somewhat across the City according to the particular needs of each area and the historical significance of certain types of angles to certain neighborhoods, which the Designers had taken

into account and which the Residents were thought to appreciate. When one was alone, the fact of these angles and the need for relief made it hard to get by without frequent crouching and stretching, although it was getting to the point where even the floors were usually beveled or dimpled or both beveled and dimpled, except for in the oldest and most carefully regarded plazas, where whole committees had to meet every month and worry everyday about the imminent beveling and dimpling of their beloved landmark Surfaces.

One could sometimes, with great luck and precarity, place an Object onto a Surface at the apex of its rake and then scramble down to the terminating edge, performing whichever two-handed task was necessary before the rolling Object rejoined one at that lower elevation. Or, if the Surface was especially dirty, (and this could be counted on only rarely, directly after a municipal holiday, perhaps, or some large event in the stadiums,) an Object could be set down in such a way that a very small task might be completed in the time before it toppled over, on account of the mildly adhesive properties of the dirt and the crud and the grime already on the Surface. It was of great annoyance to others, of course, when these methods were attempted without success, resulting in spills or worse, and in practice most chose to carry only those Objects small enough to fit between their knees with their back in kind of an oblique leaning posture against a beam (where the Authorities had yet neglected to barb the beams and drive stakes into the ground around them on all sides).

Staircases, you might think, could be expected to provide some reprieve to those Users who had just descended them. And indeed at the bottom of a flight, one is presented, from behind, with a number of eligible landings. Lest they get the wrong idea, though, small plaques had been fabricated and affixed to the risers between each tread: *up* arrows to the left and *down* to the right, to signify an active route of egress. The point had been so well ingrained that even when the Patrol was slow to enforce the clearance of a well, it didn't take too many kicks to the spine or to the shins by a valiant citizen-enforcer before even the most desperate stragglers gave up their defiance and rose to their feet.

When a flat, solid Surface did turn up, (and here it is necessary to remember that truly this was rare, that I have not exaggerated more than Narrative makes necessary to say that *none* existed, for in fact it was practically none, but still of course some, as I hope was understood)—but when one did turn up, one ready to accommodate human proportions, usually as a result of some construction work necessitating the placement of temporary bins or some municipal device having been knocked over onto its tall, broad side, perhaps in a storm or in an accident or by some vandals, People congregated around it as if drawn by bells to a delightful scandal in the street.

A loose reception committee would form around those who had first discovered the Surface, protecting the hierarchy of their order as they waited for one of the Sitters to be driven from their post by bodily compulsion, forced to resume the tedium of standing life and with nowhere to place their Objects. And People did take advantage of this opportunity to place their Objects and did place a great many Objects on the Surface, many of which would remain there throughout the goings of those who had set them down and the comings of those who had more Objects to place there.

This could go on for days, but only in the days, dying down in the nights, after curfew, and resuming promptly upon first light in some semblance of the formation which had left the previous evening with promises for the continuity of leadership and peaceful transitions of power. It only ceased, but always did, within perhaps a week, when the waste of the Sitters combined with the waste of those creatures who had fed on that first waste in the nights grew entirely untenable. Out of self-respect, no one would sit on such a filthy Surface, save those who were probably already on the ground.

— Maxwell Paparella, October 2015