

#1...

THE DRUGSTORE

WHAT IS A CITY?

- A portfolio without compartments , stuffed with papers, pamphlets, brochures, scraps of every size and texture? Perhaps.

WHAT IS A CITY?

- A septic tank, built by solid citizens to contain the unsolid? Possibly.

WHAT IS A CITY?

- A fabulous machine, a mechanism of crafty design, suppressing the actualization of most things , while at the same time carrying the appearance of being the cradle all possibility ? Most certainly.

Cities have always had the gift of provoking situations unimaginable, cross-fertilizations incongruous and bizarre, juxtapositions and counterpoints of concepts, patterns, psyches, individuals, residences, buildings, installations, thoroughfares, modalities, public and private spaces, aspirations, griefs, calamities, crimes, holy deeds.

Of what is the City compounded?

Oligarchs

Plutocrats

Rich;

Filthy Rich

Nouveau Riche

Opulent

Comfortable

Stable

Threatened

Tight

Uptight

Struggling

Deserving

Undeserving

With Assets

Without Assets

Out of Debt

In Debt

Pooooor!

Poverty Stricken

Impoverished
Destitute!
Degenerate!
Gone to the Dogs!
Literally gone to the dogs!

One finds that the neighborhoods of every class are immersed in the refuse of the neighborhoods of every other class. In addition one encounters a vague attribution know as the city's personality or character: Cultivated Boston; Laid Back San Francisco; Wide Open Chicago; Dynamic New York; Genteel Philadelphia.....

This quality does not reside in any single neighborhood or individual; it abides rather like a cloud generated by the incessant, furious, deranging, destabilizing clash of rights and values and violations occurring in each social interaction. As a matter of fact, if we take a closer look at civic character, so-called , what do we see?

Broken Glass Soot Shit Piss Expectorant Gravel Slops
 Toxic Wastes Garbage Trash Exhausts
 Suffocation Seaminess Sleaziness
 Backyards Alleyways Greasy Diners
Tenements
Asphalt Offices Stores Trolleys Noise
Congestion
 Shops Subways Soup Kitchens Missions
Government
 Deals Seductions Betrayals Depression
Therapies
Businessmen Students Artists Characters Odd-Balls
Suicides
 Religions Rituals Renewal Odd-Balls Museums
 Schools Hospitals Courts Jails

Overall rolls the oil slick of gray monotony that penetrates to the bone marrow of the urban experience. And there is much besides, happening all the time, that few, if any, notice.

The other day, (by way of example) , I witnessed a tall, tough, smirking thug viciously drag a fellow creature down the street. He was tethered at the end of a chain linked to a studded brass collar that had been soldered about his neck. This happened, mind you, in the very heart of the major downtown shopping area during the busiest part of the day!

Their motion was too rapid to be able to examine them at close range. The victim's body was hunched into a ball,

his face lowered to the ground. There was nothing the least distinctive about him, nor in his clothing, a faded pale blue laundry sack held in place around his waist by a knotted cord. Later their path was easily reconstructed through the two streaks of blood and skin from the victim's elbows and knees that had been scraped away on the concrete pavement.

....AND WHAT, YOU MAY WELL ASK , WAS THE REACTION OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC?

.....Is this some kind of advertising stunt?

.....That must be their TV crew down the street.

.....By whose authority is this being allowed ?

.....It must be part of the way of life around here.

..... I refuse to get upset!

.....There are places for people like that.

.....Hey! That' s private property , mister!

.....How boring this town is! Nothing ever happens here like.. like say in Paris or London or Bangkok or Casablanca

.....There's a sale on at Macy's.

....What was the verdict? Did he swing?

Before the entrance of the rectangular block of a modern glass-and-metal drugstore, master brought victim to rest. He placed him within a patch of concrete to the right of the self-opening glass doors. Then he stepped inside .
ffffffffffff

At the pharmacy he buys a box of condoms

At the newsstand he buys copies of 3 tabloid newspapers

At the oval lunch counter he seats himself on a high and swiveling red leather stool. Over cigarettes and several cups of coffee he dawdles through the newspapers for odd stories to gratify his contempt for mankind.

The rough hewn undistinguished public mass wanders in and out under the bright lights concentrated over the automated entranceway like bubbles in bathwater. The crowds hardly notice the villain seated at the coffee counter. Still less did they concern themselves with the fate of his slave lying face down and helpless out on the pavement.

An outrage! you will say: and indeed it was. However, not to perpetrate an injustice on the population of our great city, (one must be excessively careful in such matters) , the accreted pollution dropping through the air made it well-nigh impossible to determine the human or animal nature of the creature crouched on all fours before the drugstore . Or, if he should prove to be human, whether he did not in fact enjoy lying in this odd posture, and should therefore be allowed to exercise his

civil rights. Or to reach decisive conclusions of any kind about any of the issues of Right versus Wrong stemming from his remaining there under conditions so incredible that no-one could possibly believe it even if it were so, which it was.

Shortly thereafter the walls of the drugstore were shaken by the reverberations of a terrifying sigh . It may have come from anywhere: the accumulations of city dirt and mud in their struggle to liberate themselves from its spotless and antiseptic walls; the regrets of centuries of those who had walked the city's precincts without hope of relief; an avalanche precipitated through the troposphere by the discharges of cosmic rays. Or it may have been nothing more than the mere settling of the foundations of the building, which is bound to occur periodically and about which one can do nothing. In any case, this heart-rending shudder was universally ignored.

During the interval of time in which Nothing continues to happen, the salesclerk stationed at the cash register behind the candy counter - he who, of all people, by virtue of his many years of service, should have acknowledged this timeless sigh - maintains a bored and weary indifference.

The thug remains slumped at an acute angle to the bakelite coffee counter in the innermost alcove of the mechanized, immaculate and air-conditioned drugstore. He sits erect, nonchalant, and almost motionless - possessed of a species of motionlessness that in no uncertain terms, says : if you don't mind my business, I will probably not be tempted to mind yours. A nasty crone seated to his left and drinking cups of coffee in endless succession dribbles a fortune in jewels . Hideous shadows of vindictive thoughts cross her mind as she greedily masticates her coffee and scratches her backside with a carved ivory toothpick imported from the Far East.

The crippled and abject creature keeled over before the glass doors automatically opening and closing through the agencies of electronic eyes gave no signs of recognition . Discharges of mucus and saliva poured out of his nose and mouth as he vomited frequently, the half-digested contents of his guts spilling over and sinking into the surrounding island of concrete. No doubt about it! The rough-hewn undifferentiated mass public was assured of a nasty time of it, struggling to avoid this expanding lake of human wastes. Although an impartial

observer might have concluded that people found nothing out of the ordinary by being constrained to avoid an expanding sewer of putrefying organic debris while entering the precincts of any commercial enterprise in the service of the public domain.

Indeed, while entering any building !

The salesclerk , after lathering his face with Barbasol superfoam shaving cream , (taken from the stock) , stands at the cash register behind the candy counter and shaves himself with an adjustable Gillette razor holding a Wilkinson's stainless steel blade , (taken from the stock). A customer, a middle-aged woman, self-conscious and postured for confrontation, faces him down . She is the quintessence of urban civilization, snobbish and sophisticated . Her couture is costly, fashionable and reliably hideous. Everything about her exudes calculation, fear of public opinion, fastidious care.

She tells him right to his face : " You're creating a bad image. "

Now the manager, a portly man a few years away from retirement, his wrinkled face bobbing above dull clothing concealed beneath a pharmacist's white lab coat, steps down from his stool at the pharmacy where he has been juggling minute doses of medications to stride across the store to the candy counter. He walks right up to the salesclerk, brandishes a fist - right or left is immaterial - and sputters:

"I'll....I'll...FIRE you, if you don't stop doing that at once! If .. if I ever again catch you...PILFERING! to begin with! "

The pharmacist gazes in awe at the fastidiously dressed socialite, whose scornful stare remains fixed on the salesclerk. who continues to shave in total indifference.

A series of chuckles, rhythmically configured at regular intervals, can be heard coming from the lunch counter. Evidently the browser of newspapers , the sardonic and insolent lout , has discovered several items titillating to his warped sensibilities: an infant's death in a tenement fire; a massacre in South America. The eyes of the dowager seated to his left glower in his direction. She has been personally insulted.

His chuckling persists nevertheless, intercut with belches and smirks, sounding in turn brash, smug, self-conscious, cynical,

attention-seeking . His ridiculous little brown beard wags beneath his chin as the two buck teeth of solid gold at the front of his mouth scintillate in the glare off the interminable banks of neon lights which, much as in a morgue, bathe the drugstore in a fine powdery glow.

The pharmacist is not going to fire the salesclerk. He's hung on for 25 years, longer than the pharmacist , almost as long as the caffeine-soaked hag at the lunch counter. He's not a bad employee; there's nothing cheeky about him. It's only that, after so many years of undeviating servility the salesclerk feels, (justifiably in my opinion) , that he's earned the right to shave when and where and how he pleases.

The most his employer can do is to deduct the cost of the stock from his salary. In fact , he's afraid to do even that ; the salesclerk might well interpret it as a provocation to steal from the till. Realizing his utter helplessness, the pharmacist is reduced to issuing wild and meaningless threats. His eyes dart about the room. He begs forgiveness from the customer, the one dressed in contemporary fashions vaunted for their imaginative collage of so many repulsive features. Her eyes, blazing hostility , stare him down. She does not understand. Even if she does understand, she does not understand. It is not her business to understand. It is rather her duty to not understand!

She tells him right to his face : " He's creating a bad image. "

Somewhere in the outside world, not too far away, the bell tolled 3 o'clock . The entire world shook, as if guilty of a murder. People in the milling crowds thought they were going blind, but continued to act as if nothing unusual were happening, not realizing that everyone else was thinking the same thing. Large rusted metal cans, dented and crushed, sailed through the air to clatter on the heads of pedestrians, some filled with rat odors, others with the rotting remains of vegetables. Long blueprint cylinders dropped like hailstones, clanging with the sounds of metal bars, stubbing the naked toes of children. Streetcars derailed , while distinguished executives, staggering down the city streets beneath their weighty burdens of civic pride, were convinced they were losing their minds.

In the relentless decay of the slave parked outside the glass self-opening doors there was no let-up . Pigeons swarmed about the swelling pools of refuse, pecking angrily at the undigested bits of succotash disgorged with his offal. He spoke not a word, yet may have been weeping - who is to say? How could one tell, as his face was totally lacking in expression? A shaggy Irish Setter, one of the friendlier species of dog, nestled close to him and licked the pus from the facial wounds inflicted by the cruel blows of his master.

Reading the newspapers and turning aside from time to time to punctuate the air with rhythmic chuckles, the bully raps the lunch counter's bakelite surface with the brass knuckles on the fingers of his right hand; the left droops below the counter, manipulating his balls. He also glares, in the manner of an idiot, at the black waitress fast asleep on a step ladder in the darkened pantry. Perhaps he despairs of communicating a species of irony comprehensible only to the highest forms of intelligence!

A young woman is browsing through the cosmetic shelves : facial creams, talcum powders, soaps, rouges, lipsticks , mascaras, hairnets, pins, curlers, broaches, tissues and the like. They fill up the entire aisle, from the floor-to-ceiling windows at the front to the telephone booths at the back. Not free from care, yet the whimsy of the moment has rendered her carefree. She, like the kangaroo in its outback, the alligator in its native bayous , like vultures perched on lightning- blasted branches or the liver fluke swimming gaily in the depths of its sheep! - is in her element.

With what wild abandon does she shoplift any and all articles for which she might at some future time, have some conceivable use. Her fingers, nimble as a harpsichordist's , with an agility rendering their gestures transparent, stretch compulsively through the shelves. Within her tiny pocketbook fabulous caverns lay concealed. Therein infinitely many entities may forever disappear.

And with such grace! does she quickly discriminate between the many varieties of goods: Dream; Dill ; Flip ; Flap ; Sparkle; Sudzy; Fragrance; Fresh Air; Free Breathe; Monotone; Pearly; Curly; Flush; Blush; Ozone...., to select precisely the objects of her desire , those products evolved through the unalterable laws of the marketplace and tailored meticulously to the gratification of her sophisticated appetites, to the glorification of

immaculate living, comfort, cleanliness, commerce, to the deification of the highest standards of living!

Her agitation increases with her labors. It is assuredly through some ambient miracle of time and place that more merchandise spontaneously appears on the shelves! As her movements swell in complexity and speed, cans, boxes and tubes, bottles and jars are sent tumbling to the floor where they roll about, sowing havoc throughout the store. At the same time mountains of items, exhibiting an incredible variety of packagings and forms, climb to the ceiling : tubes of moth-balls, cans of bobby pins, jars of facial creams, deodorant sprays , shaving creams and after-shave lotions, in mauve, aquamarine, chartreuse, turquoise, umber, ochre, gentian, lavender, lilac , mustard, charcoal, lichen!

In the face of such indisputable testimony, no-one pays the least attention.

The salesclerk persists in his shaving; helpless, the pharmacist shouts at him from the other side of the candy-counter.

At the lunch counter the tyrant emits his rhythmic chuckles at regular intervals, sometimes tapping the silver cleats on the toes of his boots against the rubber ledge along the foot of the counter, sometimes clicking the spurs on their heels against the metal cylinder connecting his stool to the floor. The name of his gang is sewn onto the back of his black leather jacket. From its upper right pocket dangles an iron cross. A blackjack hangs from his belt. His blue jeans, ripped in several places, are smeared with long streaks of motorcycle grease. The density of this grease is greatest around the hips ; that's where he likes to wipe his hands. The longest streak extends from his belt all the way down to his socks and perhaps even to the cuffs of his dungarees, these being buried in his boots and bulging around his ankles.

Very shortly he will be responsible for the production of a vulgar, low pitched, impardonable oath in the form of a guffaw. When this happens, (and it will, very soon) , the crabby old lady will stare at him. The black waitress will drag herself over to him and ask if there is anything else he wants. The salesclerk will interrupt his shaving to mutter something about the morals of the young. The indignant socialite will state, once again "He's making a bad scene. " The shoplifter will just continue on with her work .

Yet when all of these things, which are bound to happen, do , the lunch counter bully will become the center of attention only because he will have employed one of the traditional ways of getting attention. He would not not be getting attention, though using a customary means of attention-getting, nor would he be getting attention in spite of his not using a traditional attention- getting gimmick . He will not bring about real change. Nothing he is about to do will result in any alteration of the grandiose Laws of Nature. Nor should it have been expected that he would have brought about real change. Nor should one hope that real change ever will, or can, occur.

Were the adumbrated resonances of this animalistic grunt to cause the frigid atmosphere and antiseptic aroma of this setting, in which he guzzles his coffee , stubs his cigarettes and prunes the tabloids for choice distractions culled from the world's barbarities, suddenly to crumble to dust , even this would not bring about real change. Nor would the panic, horror and suffering consequent upon such an occurrence contradict the normal functioning of the universe of beings animate or inanimate, nor of any immutable forces , natural or supernatural.

It really is not all that uncommon in large cities to come across buildings crumbling through mechanical or structural defects, or under the weight of years, or through the inappropriateness of their architecture. Or for other reasons. The daily papers always carry items like:

*Building crumbles through sheer discontent.

Conspiracy

not ruled out.

*Window washer slips, topples skyscraper.

*Monstrous crater opens up. Caution advised.

*Paramedics re-suffocate victims.

The drugstore is collapsing, its walls crumbling to fine dust! Crowds of fascinated spectators are gathered on the surrounding streets to witness giant cinderblocks, huge panes of cracking polarized windowglass, buckling girders and beams , mint-green ceramic tiles and myriads of brick fragments fly through the air, raining down upon the heads, opening up fissures in pavements and streets

All merchandises, hair-sprays, hand lotions, jellies, soap powders, toothpastes, colognes, deodorants, facial creams, lipsticks, mascaras, nail polishes, shampoos , conditioners, rouges, waxes, salves are congealing into

a turbulent gook, with scattered bits of glass, plastic and cardboard gyrating about. It floods the floor-space, engulfs and sweeps away the drug counter, the candy counter, the coffee counter, the rows upon rows of shelving. Gaining momentum it rolls out into the street in the form of giant breakers that consume pedestrians in folds of their encompassing troughs. Within this vortex float crushed cartons, pulverized bones, a billion pills, mounds of magazines, newspapers and other trash, shoelaces, clothing, screams, cries of agony, limbs twisted and torn, spurting blood, gobbets of flesh, insatiable hungers, perpetual thirsts, petty anxieties, idiotic reflections and bottomless miseries all climbing steadily, steadily, towards the sun!

The ground opens up as the caravansary of ruins sinks through the earth's crust to the mantle. Nothing will be left but fragments of metal, concrete, glass, ash, slime and dirt. Columns of smoke and furtive bursts of flame reach to the heavens. The sudden silence horrifies more than the maddening thunder that preceded it.

The vestiges of the creature in bondage are washed away. The collapse of the drugstore has merely completed the process of his disintegration. The undigested contents of his viscera are inextricably

mixed with the wreckage, the stones, twisted metal, gravel, splinters of glass, compost, effluvia. His bones cannot now be separated from those of the dog who, alone, loved him; nor his fingernails from its claws; nor his sinews from its sinews. The widening cesspool from his crushed organs blends into a mound of

Cresting the mound, like the smoldering residue at the mouth of a volcano, sleeps a layer of shaving cream foam. Although every cinder in this heap is indistinguishable from all others, each had originated in a unique location on the psycho-physical entity formerly identifiable as the salesclerk. Much research will reveal that two of these minute particles can trace their origins to the same patch of his right cheek. From every cubic inch of this pile it should be possible to scrape together particles which, properly concentrated, might be returned to the right cheek of an individual known the salesclerk who, in a previous incarnation, stole razors and shaving cream.

Even his razor, can of shaving cream and mirror can (why not?) be

reconstructed .The same process can be invoked to produce a nose, (perhaps from what was once his nose), two eyes, (from his presumably former eyes), the left cheek, navel, right and left ankles, thigh bones, liver, skull, palms, fingers, etc..... etc... Until at last we see , standing before us once again, the familiar form of the salesclerk !

Nor is it inconceivable, (and it is truly remarkable what conceptions may be maintained), that, given all the stuff lying around and floating freely in the air, the very mechanism of catastrophe itself might not be entirely reversed. That, for the delight of the civilized world, through an integrated sequence of interlocking steps one might recreate a brand-new glass and plastic drugstore, complete with self-opening doors, fluorescing magnesium tubes, surfaces spotless in all respects, and shelves piled to the rafters with tons of frivolous merchandise.

One cannot deny the possibility that the enormous vortices of green and white plastics swirling at ferocious speeds, that tumble through the city streets and into the sewers and reach to the oceans, might not suddenly reverse their trajectories and, hardening into tough rectangular blocks, arch in knotted solitons against the flood. Watch their rise, hoisted as if by invisible cords through mazes of intricate adjustments that settle them, like the blocks of a Rubik's Cube, back into their former niches.

Observe next how the billions of bits of glass, rising like myrmidon legions in swarms, spin about, buzz like distempered ghosts, insects, goblins, fiends, darting in every direction, colliding and springing apart, leaping high into the air, to redescend and fix one upon the other into resurrected forms of jars, goblets, vases, crucibles, snifters, plates, retorts, animals, flowers, seashells, paperweights, dishes, ashtrays, crystal balls, light bulbs....

Nor are they the lone participants of the frenzy, the mad feverish dance! Scraps of paper, shredded fabrics, strips of cardboard, rubber, plastics, liquids, aromas, metals, flames, gases, nay, even opinions, observations and points of view. All to what end?

A modern drugstore , during the busiest part of the day, in the heart of the shopping district in the downtown area of some great metropolis somewhere in wherever it happens to be at any given moment in time!

The reconstruction of the retrograde image of the catastrophe begins with the echo of an oath. Under the

right set of conditions, an exceptionally sensitive ear might be able to detect the lingering residues of very high overtones of the loudest, most commanding noise in that coarse

guffaw. One will have to wait until the unconscionable din of traffic fades away, late in the evening, or even after nightfall. Hold onto those upper overtones! Retrace their trajectories until they hover at their source. Reverse the regime of rarefaction and compression that brought them to their present state, gather up whatever molecules which may still be hanging around. Eventually we will succeed in the rediscovery of all the original components and overtones of that departed resonance, that was the cause of all the trouble in the first place, resonance full of humanity, terrifying yet fascinating, mingling insolence, callousness, satire, irony, malice, suspicion, fear and ignorance all together in its thick miasma.

This tail-end of the shadow of an utterance can be carried, with minimal aberration, to a microscopic patch of dirt and slime taken from the interior of the young gangster's vocal cavity. Particles zig-zag up diagonally from the ground, carousing like specks in a beam of light, like ballerinas hopping nervously on tip-toe, twitching to a wild cosmic melody, sucked into the consummation of that deep-chested, cosmically vulgar and unprintable guffaw, cradle of history and source of all subsequent events.

The contours of his lips define the shape of an obscenity. Adjacent to them, jaws, mandibles, cheeks, throat, Adam's apple take up exaggerated poses. Other organs follow: the left eye; the left ear; the other eye; a piece of the nose. The other ear lies on the ground, scattered in the dust, destined never to reform. There had never been any bodily necessity for more than a few specialized portions of flesh or bone. Only small patches of skull will be coming back: the lower jaw and chin and a few circular discs, like sea-shells, placed at the very apex of the scalp to cover parts of the brain better left concealed.

Unprotected and exposed, his head fills up with veins, nerves, sinews, ligaments and other connective tissue in bizarre knot configurations, precariously balanced against collapse by loopholes in the laws of gravitation anticipated by modern theories.

A giant artery runs, like a stove pipe, from the left side of the lower gum , bending at the base of the (vacant) skull and straightening out near the back of the right eye. A single strong tendon connects chin to mouth. From a stiff cartilaginous shaft rising from the hips straight to the top of the head, the nose, intertwined with veins, arteries, lymph nodes, axons, epithelial cells, tissue complexes, etc., hangs like a bulbous fruit suspended within the dense canopy of a rain forest.

A large nerve cruises slightly above his disembodied lips. Originating behind the ear, it partially follows the line of the left jaw, then climbs past the right nostril to a place just above the (missing) right eardrum. Its' gyrations are excruciating to watch: lest we forget, death and resurrection is a harrowing experience. Were one to clip the two ends of the nerve to the terminals of an oscilloscope , the monitor would display a succession of sharp, sawtooth waveforms dancing across its screen. Just the sort of thing, in fact, that one expects to find in the damaged nervous systems of all victims of modern urban progress!

This throbbing axon , stable nowhere save at its mooring points, springs back and forth unpredictably and with unprincipled violence. The pieces of skull about his refashioned brain rise up at such moments in hideous sympathy .

Ribs , armbones, collar shoulder blades have returned basically to where they should be and support his loosely draped black motorcycle jacket. Exposed haunch bones protrude below his frame; at least he will have something to sit own. Highly visible in conformity with his subconscious desires, his swollen genitals lie out in the open. The belt about his waist holds up all that is left of his blue jeans: a single grease-encrusted denim strip disappearing into the top of his right boot.

ECCO HOMO! Oath, lips , skull patches , eyes, an ear, a piece of nose, jangling nerves , rib cage, arm, shoulder and collar bones, leather jacket, exposed genitals , posterior, belt, grease -soaked pant strip !!!

One element , without which all our efforts against the stream of time are but exercises in futility, remains to be added: Thought .

Without thought, what is even the handsomest, the most masculine of men ? Anything more than the viscera at the base of the butcher's block? Other than a mere laundry sack bursting with seeping chemicals. wastes, and gross

appendages? It is thought that shall percolate through, shall saturate these sordid remnants, shall permeate this crackling, creaking, wheezing, whining, sputtering simian ratatouille ! At least one, and at most, one thought.

A deep thought, a lonely disembodied thought, a thought cut away from all contexts and associations, stripped of gossip, slander, technical jargon, lessons of history, categorical imperatives, excluded middles, skirmishes on distant redoubts, the price of soap. All the absurdities people dish up on a moment's notice in order to appear well-informed. A thought of the utmost simplicity, yet comprehensive, radiating out from the skull patches around the top of his head and visible on the oscilloscope screen .

Like : "WHERE THE HELL AM I ? "

By the introduction of this insidious motif, this intolerable quandry, unendurable obsession and goad against all solace , we restore more than one anomalous homo sapiens : we re-invent a complete trouble-maker!

From his flagellated lips will henceforth issue forth nothing but miseries, woes, provocations, envy, rebelliousness, badgering, litigation, complaints, swearing, tedium, groans, nastiness, pettiness, malice, spite.

It's obvious that we've resurrected him at his worst ! Would it not be better to let him think something like: " What lousy coffee! " or " Water is composed of one part hydrogen with two parts oxygen. " , or even, "Hey you! You're a mother-fucken prick ! Did you know that? "

Alas! None of the above sufficiently conveys his existential dilemma, nor the congealed substance of Cosmic Angst. 1

Some of his fingers have returned : one index finger for emphasis; one middle finger for obscene gestures; enough stumps to support the pages of the daily newspaper which he scans for tidbits to stimulate his delight in the stupidity of mankind.

One may speak in general terms of a reconstruction in progress of the woman known as the shop-lifter. Her clothing is in an unrecognizable state. The stylish hat made from fur shamelessly ripped from the hide of some meek woodlands creature, that once perched awkwardly on the crown of her head, has become a Cossack's muff swaddling her left hand. Strings of jewels, iterated sequences of roughly congruent ellipsoidal stones, that once hung in

loops about her neck now dangle from ears, nose, fingers and navel. The stones shoot off random reflections from their burnt umber enamel coats of the light shed by an inexorable procession of emulsified neon tubes hanging below plasterboard soundproofing tiles. The turquoise polish that once colored her nails now covers her eyes.

Her shapeless body is being reshaped to a new shapelessness. It retains its basic features: piano legs, knotted navel, back twisted like a question mark, fat and flabby arms, prominent immunization scars, thick neck sinking through tired folds of flesh, brittle mouth, flaring nostrils, swollen red eyes bloated wide through belladonna.....

Slight differences emerge upon closer examination. For example, each eye has found its way into the other's socket. A copy of the left hand, in perfect mirror inversion, is now attached to the right arm, although it is a proper right hand that dangles from the left. The arms themselves, on the correct sides of the her body, have been rotated 180 degrees.

It must be admitted that the mirror inversion of the right hand has not been a total success: some parts are in configurations appropriate to right hands, while others are in configurations appropriate to left hands. Thus: the middle and index fingers are right-handed; thumb, ring and little fingers are left-handed.

The object being held in this hand when the catastrophe struck has likewise undergone rotations and reflections: parts of the bottle of pink facial cream which at that moment was being shoved into the mysterious caverns of her pocketbook, maintain their pre-catastrophic orientations. The rest is in mirror-inversion. The substance of her partially mirrored, partially unmirrored right hand is thus penetrated throughout with pink facial cream and razor-edged glass slivers. Subjecting these pieces of glass to a uniform orientation in EITHER our universe OR the mirror-image of our universe, would put all the cheap smelly liquid back into the bottle. This explains the otherwise incomprehensible detail that, although most of the facial cream appears to be outside the bottle, wrapping like a boa constrictor around her hand, it defies the law of gravitation appropriate to liquids.

The brand name of this gunk also stitches itself inside, outside and around the right hand, the letters once again in mirror image, rotated, broken or dispersed. The bottomless pocketbook, turned inside and backwards, dangles

precariously from the fingers of her left hand, (attached, we recall , to her right arm) . Its teeming contents are no more. They have been swallowed up within that inaccessible void that lies between our universe and the mirror-image of our universe. Were it not for the embarrassing evidence of the bottle of pink facial cream, she might have evaded all suspicion of shop-lifting. After all, the merchandise she was stealing is not missing. Nor has it vanished; yet it is no more. Its' Being is in Nothingness: the region between the leather bag and the volume of 3-dimensional space occupied by the leather bag.

She may step freely through the self-opening doors of the reconstituted drugstore onto the streets of the great metropolis. She would, it is true, need to return the bottle of Epiderm to the shelf: as things now stand a physical impossibility. Or she could simply pay for it. This is also impossible: what money she had in her possession disappeared into the same region that claimed all her confiscated merchandise!

A new cause for perplexity: for how is it possible to imagine that one might exit from a modern-day drugstore, carrying an item off its shelves , in full view of clerks, managers, waitresses, customers, idlers, and not pay for it? And not have the money to pay for it?

The pharmacist's replacement is a barren silhouette of his former self. The white , once spotless, lab coat, is drenched with chemicals and exudes odors of bromide and sulphur. A left hand protrudes from the right sleeve. One black shoe rests on the floor, below the trouser, without an accompanying leg . Around its perimeter swells a black sewer of organic fluid; his remnants? There is the right eye; the vacant left eye socket. On the right side of a fleshless skull a tattered scrap of ear supports a rocking stethoscope.

You may have perhaps already observed that a floor to ceiling glass window, the one behind the candy counter and largely obscured by merchandise, has been allowed to remain shattered and splintered ! A standing reminder to all of us of the Principle of the Fragility of All Good Things.

The day and all the objects of day were bathed in a pregnant scarlet. In this subdued yet violent atmosphere,

everything cohered apologetically. The tongue of an Irish Setter walking backwards on the dirty pavement was attached to its owner only through being held in place by a kindly old widow , who walked with it at the dog's pace. Her own head was attached to her body only through the barest coincidence .

The sun, a deeply saturated blue ball, revolved like an afterthought in the indigo heavens. Its' light dripped in blotches , like watercolor streaks on wax paper, over mankind and mankind's thoroughfares. Gravity ceased to operate. Things remained where they were, rooted and moored, only because they had nowhere else to go. Were the world suddenly to be shaken by an unanticipated terror, widow and head would separate , dog and tongue fall apart, and the entire visible continuum disintegrate , tossed about like a pack of playing cards, wandering aimlessly without refuge or port of call .

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1One must supply these, you know, in modern fiction.