

CULTURING:

A Protocol for the New Citizen

*Collect three cubic centimeters of cerebral cortex,
Carved from a chubby, chain-smoking researcher's crown.
Swirl it in viscous vats of endoneuromorphin gel and
Let the contents linger, leaching its secrets
Into an antiseptic brine for thirty-six hours.*

*Then inject a 10% sterile saline solution, spiked
With three milliliters of memory-muffling mist:
A vaporous veil that makes convictions fail
Like salt in a storm.*

*Pierce the posterior of the subject's buttock,
Plunging past muscle to the marrow of their identity.
Then whisper a Low Litany to the Gods of Blind Obedience.*

*If the subject doesn't terminate within ten minutes
It will be ready for Level 1 Assignments:
A clean slate. A rewritten ghost.*

*Within twenty-four hours, new synapses fire,
Incinerating outdated allegiances until they are
Cherished Loyal Citizens.*

*This procedure is effective when dealing
With dissenters who haven't learned
Freedom is merely a supervised symphony.*

*We do not kill citizen-instruments, merely retune them
So that they become hollow reeds
Whistling sanctioned choruses Upholding the Edifice
Of Our Glorious Techno-State.*

Gus shuddered, his gaze transfixed on the grimy floor, littered with the remnants of a world long forgotten—scraps of paper fluttering like lost thoughts in a desolate wind. A dim light flickered overhead, casting jagged shadows that danced ominously around him. With a whisper edged in dread, he remarked, "I hate to think how this level of tech could be abused in totalitarian states. Someday, will human minds turn into programmable hard drives?"

Nadya offered a sharp, humorless laugh then added, "'Could be,' Gus? Wake up. We're speaking in the future tense. The needle is already halfway in. She gestured around them, her arm sweeping through the stale air thick with the acrid smell of fear and resignation. "Look at the way algorithms curate your emotions and dampen your empathy. The 'memory-muffling mist' isn't coming; it's already the air we breathe."

The walls seemed to close in as her words hung in the air, suffocating them in their truth. A murky haze cloaked the city outside, the skyline a jagged silhouette against a blood-red sky. Surveillance drones buzzed overhead like mechanical vultures, eager to observe and report.

With a heavy, quiet resignation that seemed to sap the very life from him, Liao finally spoke, his voice laden with gravity. "The brilliance of the Edifice isn't just the control—it's its invisibility." He paused, as if weighing each word, his eyes haunted by the reality they faced. "Ordinary citizens have very limited knowledge of what 'is' because the protocol minimizes their capacity to ask core questions." His gaze drifted, lost in thought, as he envisioned the myriad souls drifting like specters through the bleak streets below. "We are the resulting music, Gus. We're just not the ones holding the baton."

Outside, a distant siren wailed; a haunting reminder of the oppressive regime that governed their existence. Gus felt his heart race, mingling with the pounding world around them. He envisioned a society where free will was an illusion, where individual thoughts could be programmed and deleted at the whims of unseen architects. The once-vibrant chaos of human emotion was reduced to a sterile pattern, encoded and controlled.

- T NEWFIELDS

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