

A stylized, high-contrast illustration of a human face. The face is rendered in black outlines against a yellow and orange background. The left side of the face features a large gear and a circular element. The right side shows a dark, rounded shape representing the ear. The background is filled with faint, abstract patterns and lines, suggesting a mechanical or technical theme.

# CONDITION

a short story

NICHOLAS ANTHONY

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## ULTRAVIOLENCE

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Critical.

Thinking. Theory. Condition.

*Beeeeeeep.*

Students lined up even though modern school bells don't ring.

“Bubbles and tails.” I requested as I ushered them into the hallway from the music room. Silent, with cheeks inflated, they held their own hands behind their back. “Thank you, Corrie, for being my caboose. Jacob, awesome staying in the two green squares, that is an Indian Buck.”

Operant conditioning was the way that we have run schools. Indian Bucks, slips of paper cut into dollar bills with a Native American framed in antlers, reinforced the “good.” As a positive behavior support system, it rewarded the student who did what is expected instead of punishing the “bad” ones. They used them to purchase animal erasers, video game print pencils, and fidget toys.

Antecedent. Behavior. Consequence.  
Cue. Behavior. Reward.  
Bell. Line-up. Indian Buck.

It was the cheese at the end of the maze, instead of the threat of poison. It was the first step to prep mice for the rat race. It was operant conditioning to reduce freewill to habit and routine.

The transparent push to train the workforce to chase pieces of paper.

Graduating clockwork oranges fueled the machine.

Bell schedules, lunch lines, seating charts, protocols and procedures were all methods of assimilation. We were just simplifying habit loops.

This was *The Power of Habit*.

Students started to not think in school as parts of higher level functioning turned off. We trained them for higher education by creating shortcuts in cognition. We trained them to fall in line.

The teacher demanded conformity and then graded on creativity. The school graduated the *exceptional*, conditioned for exemplary. The corporations employed the collaborative and innovative.

Conditioning kept the mind numb with boredom.

Breaking the routine led to critical thinking.

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The fluorescent lights rush in.

I catch flashes of orders and the television.

The hospital hallways have the same green square tiles as the school.

“Push 50ccs of adrenaline.”

*...and it is a race to the extreme right... to be the candidate with the A-plus-plus-plus instead of the A-plus-plus rating...*

“There’s another hole. We need more gauze.”

“Get these people out of here.”

They close the blue curtain.

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Critical Thinking.

*Beeeeeeep.*

“Alright, boys and girls, that’s the bell. It’s Creative Writing Time.”

Critical thinking disappeared as the frontal lobe redirected the tasks to the autopilot in the dinosaur brain. How was the brain supposed to learn and be innovative, when it was constantly being reminded to switch off to run a program?

“Mr. Thompson,” Corrie asked, “If we fill the Headdress with Indian Bucks, can we have the popcorn and pj party tomorrow?”

“I think we can.” I encouraged, “if everyone does their very best.”

A divergent “best.”

Actions versus Academics.

Routine. Habit. Boredom.

Imagination. Choice. Excitement.

A pool of drool collected on the loose leaf blurred the blue lines of the ruled paper. “Jacob, wake up.” I tapped him on the shoulder.

Sleeping in class was a consequence of best behavior.

It was an unintentional product of order in the classroom.

The system that kept kids contained, conditioned, and comfortable prevented actual education. Convenience for the teachers confined the very future we were trying to shape. Habits of embracing authority for comfort made a hibernating populous.

Conditioning kept the power in place.

Breaking the habit led to critical theory.

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*...these rich conservatives have an undereducated rural lower-class ready to defend them with enough...*

“Keep applying pressure. I’m gonna intubate him.”

*... as if the zombie apocalypse is coming...*

“I said get these people out of here.”

Critical Theory.

*Beeeeeeep.*

“Alright, everyone pencils down. Turn your papers into the yellow tray, and line up for recess.”

Tan walls. Fenced in recess areas. Calming containment.

Schools had become prisons and asylums.

Schools had become a perpetuation of power.

Schools had become maintenance of systemic prejudice.

The debate in prison was if it is punitive or corrective. Some think it was for punishment. Others called it the Department of Corrections. Similarly both made the most selfish egotistical beings in the world fit into the world.

Regardless, both became the Department of Education.

Making mistakes and exploring alternatives, could never have had office referrals and prize carts.

Questioning authority and challenging injustice, could never have had permission forms and safety seats.

The pursuit of power instead of happiness was a product of fear. The students are playing King of the Playground.

“Jacklyn, we make sure the slide is clear, before we go down because our friends—”

“Ouch! Mr. Thompson!”

“Henry, we do not kick! I mean, we keep our hands and our feet to—”

““Owwwwwww,” tears erupted from Jacklyn’s eyes.

Recess Ultra-violence.

We had not been conditioned like 6655321.  
We were the opposite of Alex the Large.

We never treated ourselves with a drug that made us sick, with our eyes forced open, staring at rape and war. We stuffed popcorn and candy into our mouths as we watched gore and guns, death and destruction. A movie screen of operant conditioning rewarded us with sugar to reinforce an affinity for ultraviolence.

Real horrorshow.

Conditioning kept the television on.

Breaking the boredom led to critical condition.

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*...we continue to be the only industrialized nation that has not taken action to...*

“120. Charge. Clear!”

My chest was like a shotgun explosion.  
The shock rang in my ears like the recoil.



*Beeeeeeep.*

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Critical Condition.

*Beeeeeeep.*

“Line-up! Alright restroom break everyone and then back to the classroom.”

My students organized into a single-file train, with Corrie as the caboose. She was my favorite. She refused to be conditioned. She would’ve been great.

Larger than life. Corrie the Large.

“Last person out, turn off the light... Henry, did you wash your hands? No? Go back... Let’s go.” We made our way down the hall.

Conditioned, they stayed in line. Even as the intercom announced that the school was on lockdown. Even as the rhythmic pops brought the ultraviolence into the elementary wing. Even as they fell in line.

Even as I raced back to the caboose, toward Corrie.

We were tempered for this with television.

We were trained for this with drills.

We were conditioned.

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“150! Charge! Clear!”

*Beeeeeeeeeep.*

Conditioned to move on to the next routine tragedy.

“Again. Charge! Clear!”

Conditioned to jump to the next habitual horrorshow.

“He’s gone. Stop. Stop! He’s gone.”

Conditioned to cure boredom with the next ultraviolence.

“Call it.”

Critical.

Thinking. Theory. Condition.

*Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.*



# MODERN GODS

Without freethinkers.

Without major changes to the way we educate ourselves.

Without empathy.

Civilization, as we know it, is doomed.

But laughing at the absurdity and darkness,  
we gain perspective.

Because it is only when we suffer who we are that we will suffer  
for whom others want to be.

Because if we can't grasp to be pulled from the mire soon,  
we'll be irreversibly buried in our own egoism.

Modern Gods offers artistic endeavors and products  
which compel uncomfortable reflection and,  
with others, lively, if heated, debate.

As a fictional universe, Modern Gods combines  
novels, songs, artwork, and videos to create one big story.

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