



Hallowed Mind Era

Privacy as Contraband in an Empathy-Driven City (2125)

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ABSTRACT

In 2125, emotional transparency is no longer a moral value or a social initiative. It has evolved into infrastructure. Emotions are constantly observed, assessed, and analysed by integrated technology, influencing the process of care, support, and intervention across the city. This pictorial explores a hypothetical future where enforced empathy slowly turns into governance, and privacy shifts from a personal right into an illegal and risky commodity.

This project explores the design fiction of Null Patch, an illegal technology that temporarily or permanently obscures emotional visibility. It investigates how systems intended for care may transform into systems that exercise control, how suffering becomes conditional upon detection, and how the experience of being unseen transforms from neglect into resistance. The world is examined through power dynamics, social collectives, states of failure, and mundane situations, supported by speculative objects and ethical, future-oriented critique.

This work uses dystopia as a reflective instrument for examining existing assumptions regarding emotional data, surveillance, consent, and care, rather than offering solutions.

KEYWORDS

Design Fiction, Dystopia, Emotional Surveillance, Privacy, Futures Thinking, Creepy Technology, Ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

In 2125, the problem is not that people stopped caring. The problem is that people have been emotionally visible for so long that they are exhausted by it.

Imagine living your entire life knowing that your feelings are always visible. Not metaphorically, but physically, through subtle aura-like signals generated by the Mind Chip that every citizen is born with. At home, on the street, in class, at work, and on public transport, emotions are constantly readable. At first, society called it empathy. But after decades, it starts feeling like you cannot breathe.

It reaches a point where empathy has become infrastructure, meaning emotional transparency is treated like electricity or roads. It is permanent, essential, and something you are not allowed to opt out of. Every citizen is born with the Mind Chip, and emotions show through aura-like signals. The Mood Beacon displays the town's emotional climate, originally designed to support the community but later used to justify restrictions and interventions.

Over time, people get fed up with constant visibility, being watched, judged, and treated differently because of their aura. What was once described as empathy begins to feel intrusive. Small moments start to matter. Wanting to feel upset without explanation. Wanting to be silent without concern. Wanting to exist without being read.

Gradually, privacy becomes something people miss, even if they cannot fully explain why. Being unseen starts to feel like relief rather than rebellion. At first, it is just a thought. What would it feel like if no one could see this?

This is where Null Patch enters the world. Not as a solution people asked for openly, and not as a necessity at first, but as a quiet response to a feeling that had been building for years. Null Patch restores something society slowly erased: the ability to step outside emotional visibility, even briefly, without being questioned or managed.

We developed and tested this world using speculative storytelling and futures tools. We used the Ethical Explorer to examine ethical tensions, a creepy technology lens to understand why the world feels unsettling, and the Actionable Futures Toolkit to structure system drift and map how a utopia becomes a dystopia without a dramatic collapse.

"When everything is measured,
nothing is truly understood."

1.2 Open Mind Era (2075 to 2125)

This world continues the concept of our utopia, the Open Mind Era. In 2075, emotional transparency was never a choice. Everyone was born with the Mind Chip, and society was built around constant emotional visibility. Back then, this was seen as a utopia. Nobody could hide how they felt, so empathy became normal. The Mood Beacon was meant to help people understand each other and respond collectively.

But what happens after people live inside this system for fifty years?

By 2125, the utopia does not collapse with an explosion. It collapses slowly, from the inside. People are tired of being emotionally exposed all the time. They are tired of being watched and judged. They are tired of needing to look okay in public, even when they are not. The technology is still there. The system still works. But it becomes the very reason people feel trapped.

So, the dystopia arrives through normalisation. The more people accept constant visibility as normal, the harder it becomes to imagine privacy as a right.

1.3 When Empathy Becomes Infrastructure

In 2125, the system insists emotional transparency is necessary for society to function. The government calls it 'empathy infrastructure', meaning you do not get to opt out. This becomes the turning point. Emotions are no longer personal. They are part of how the city is managed.

Even the Mood Beacon changes meaning. It is not just a friendly display anymore. It becomes part of governance. When the town mood is unstable, authorities justify changes in public spaces, restrictions, or interventions. On paper, it is care. In real life, it starts to feel like control.

This is where emotional exhaustion grows. When your emotions are always visible, you do not just feel things. You manage how they look. Even if no one is directly

punishing you, the pressure becomes real. People start behaving in ways that avoid judgement.

For example, forcing a calm face on the train even when panicking. Pretending you are fine at work because you do not want attention. Hiding sadness because you do not want to be treated differently.

This world also questions a deeper assumption: that emotions can be read like stable signals. Emotions are complex and contextual, which makes system-led interpretation risky and often misaligned with lived experience.

1.4 Privacy as Contraband

Because emotional transparency is the foundation of society, privacy becomes suspicious. Wanting to hide your emotions is framed as dangerous behaviour. Authorities start saying privacy enables crime and disorder and that it breaks the empathy system. Slowly, privacy becomes illegal, and then it becomes valuable.

This is where the underground creates Null Patch, contraband technology designed to give people a way to escape emotional visibility. It comes in two forms.

- **Block Mode, temporary.** It blocks the aura for a brief time, making the person unreadable.
- **Sever Mode, permanent.** It attempts to disable or remove the Mind Chip completely.

For many people, Block Mode is not about rebellion. It is about finally getting one quiet moment, being able to cry, breathe, or laugh without anyone seeing it.

But the permanent route is risky. When Sever Mode fails, it creates the Hollowed, people who look human but have blank emotion, delayed reactions, mimicry, and drifting behaviour. The government uses Hollowed cases as propaganda, showing them as proof that privacy is dangerous and using them as an excuse to tighten control even further.

At the same time, Block Mode allows secret spaces to

exist again, which leads to underground Private Games. Some are consensual, but others are controlled by powerful groups who blackmail people. The state uses these stories to claim privacy causes disorder, even though people are desperate to feel free.



Figure 1 - Null Patch (2 Modes)

2. BACKGROUND AND WORLD CONTEXT

2.1 Emotional Transparency as a Social Foundation

In the early days of the Open Mind Era, emotional transparency was not introduced as control. It was introduced as care. When the Mind Chip became part of everyday life, people genuinely believed visible emotions would make society kinder.

If you could see that someone was anxious, you might speak more gently. If sadness were visible, you would stop and help instead of walking past.

Emotional visibility was framed as honesty, safety, and shared responsibility. Because everyone was born into the system, it did not feel invasive. There was no moment where privacy was taken away because there was nothing to lose. Privacy as a concept simply never existed.

Over time, emotional transparency stopped feeling like a feature and became an expectation. Feelings were not something you kept to yourself. They were meant to be seen, read, and responded to. Feeling privately was no longer normal. It was unfamiliar.

2.2 The Slow Collapse of Utopia

The collapse is not about people suddenly hating empathy. It is about emotional fatigue building up across decades.

In a transparent society, people learn quickly that emotions have consequences. Even if there is no official punishment, the social response becomes predictable. If your aura signals panic, strangers intervene. If your aura signals anger, coworkers step back. If your aura signals sadness, you become a concern to manage.

So, people adapt. They regulate emotions not for well-being but for social safety.

Over time, the city becomes emotionally efficient. People are calmer in public, not because they are calmer inside, but because they have learnt that visibility invites response.

Utopia becomes tiring because it removes small freedoms. One such freedom is the ability to feel nothing. The freedom to be messy. The freedom to not be interpreted.

2.3 From Support to Surveillance

By 2125, the language around emotional transparency changes. Civic authorities start describing empathy as infrastructure. Like transport, electricity, or healthcare, emotional visibility is treated as something society depends on.

The reasoning sounds logical.

- If emotions are visible, people can support each other.
- If people support each other, society stays stable.
- If someone wants to hide their emotions, it raises concern.

Slowly, choice disappears.

The Mood Beacon is the clearest example. It becomes part of governance. When a neighbourhood shows

increased anxiety on the Beacon, authorities justify interventions like monitoring, counselling check-ins, restrictions in shared spaces, or behavioural guidance. These actions are described as care. But for the people living there, they feel intrusive.

Empathy no longer comes from people checking in on each other. It comes from systems that respond on their behalf.

This creates a shift in how people understand themselves. People stop describing emotions with words. They start trusting the display.

Questions surface quietly.

- Why do I feel anxious if the Beacon says everything is fine?
- Is my pain real if it does not appear on the board?

Like a medical report that says “normal”, the Mood Beacon begins to override lived experience.

2.4 Empathy as Infrastructure

When empathy becomes infrastructure, it becomes non-optional.

That changes what care means. Care becomes something that happens to you, not something you ask for. It becomes procedural. It becomes threshold based.

Emotional transparency is no longer about connection. It is about participation. Opting out is not seen as a personal preference. It is treated as a system failure.

In that kind of world, privacy becomes unthinkable inside the official system. If you cannot be read, you cannot be managed. If you cannot be managed, you become a risk.

This is the cultural foundation that makes Null Patch feel inevitable.

3. PROBLEM FRAMING: WHEN CARE DEPENDS ON BEING DETECTED

In 2125, care has not disappeared. Help still arrives, systems still respond, and support still exists. But care no longer begins with a person saying, I am not okay. It begins with detection.

The Mind Chip constantly monitors emotional signals and decides when intervention is needed. If emotions spike strongly, panic, grief, visible distress, and support activate quickly. If emotions remain quiet, flat, or unclear, nothing happens. Not because the system is cruel, but because it does not recognize those states as urgent.

Living in this city feels like visiting a doctor, getting your reports back, and being told everything looks normal even though something inside you feels wrong. The data says you are fine, so the system moves on.

Some people suffer loudly. Their pain is visible, readable, and recognized. Others break slowly. Their emotions dull instead of spiking. They feel numb, disconnected, or constantly tired. Because their pain does not look dramatic, it does not register.

These people become known as the Undetected. They are not ignored on purpose. They are overlooked because their suffering does not match what the system knows how to read. The city continues to function around them while they quietly struggle.

Over time, people begin to learn how the system works. Some start adjusting how they express emotions. They exaggerate sadness, stress, or anxiety not to lie, but to be understood. Emotional expression becomes something people manage carefully, rather than something they experience freely.

In this world, you do not ask for care. You wait to be recognized. And slowly, being unseen stops feeling neutral. It starts to feel risky.

4. POWER STRUCTURES AND SOCIAL GROUPS

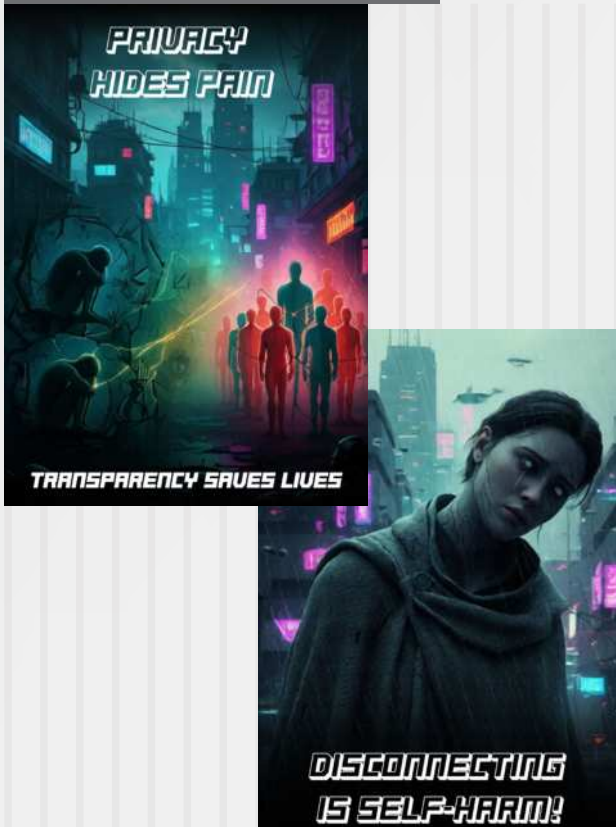
4.1 The Civic Empathy Authority (CEA)

The Civic Empathy Authority views itself as the system's protector. It is the public face of stability, as well as the organisation that ensures emotional openness functions as infrastructure.

The main narrative is straightforward. Privacy is dangerous.

The Authority believes that if emotions are hidden, society becomes unstable. It characterises unreadability as a symptom of disorder, crime, or emotional instability. It emphasises emotional honesty as a civic responsibility.

Figure 2&3 - CEA Propaganda Posters



The Authority does not have to punish everyone. It mostly governs through regularity and structuring. When neighbourhood moods surge on the Beacon, interventions like monitoring, counselling check-ins, gathering limitations, or behavioural assistance are justified. These are always labelled as “care.”

Fear-based propaganda is an important tool. The Authority makes use of Hollowed cases as obvious warnings. These incidents are promoted as proof that opting out causes harm to people and endangers society.

4.2 Null Patch Network

The Null Patch Network is not just one clean movement. It is an ecosystem. Couriers, underground technicians, illegal clinics, and ordinary citizens who share the same need, relief from constant visibility.

Some people in the network assume that privacy equals freedom. Others view privacy as a commodity. Regardless, Null Patch spreads through trust and scarcity.

The network contains underground clinics for Sever attempts, repair stations for Block devices, and courier routes that allow patches to go between districts undetected. It endures because emotional fatigue is common.

But it's fragile. Null Patch is unlawful, hence there is no regulation or protection. Devices can become corrupted. Clinics may disappear. Couriers can be turned. Even underground, people cannot totally trust their privacy.



Figure 4 - Null Patch Couriers

4.3 Controllers

Controllers use Null Patch. They are not the Authority, nor are they the care-focused part of the Null Patch Network. They are actors who profit from hidden areas.

Controllers manage Private Games. They promise privacy and independence, yet they frequently record, sell, and weaponise what takes place in those private spaces. They utilise illegal gadgets that see past Block Mode, so people who believe they are invisible can still be apprehended.

Controllers profit on both sides. They threaten people with exposure to the Civic Empathy Authority while selling their privacy back. Privacy is used as leverage and blackmail.

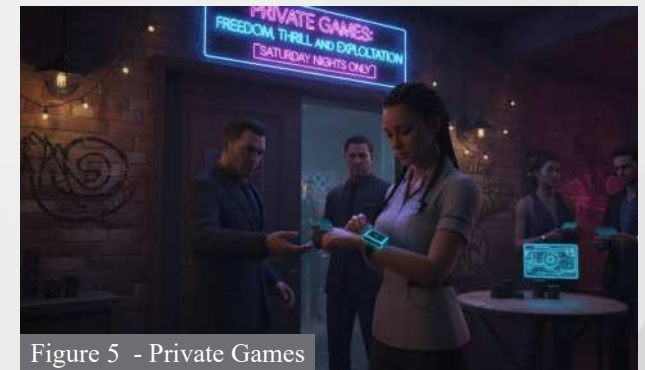


Figure 5 - Private Games

4.4 The Undetected

The Undetected aren't rebels. They're not criminals. They are simply citizens whose suffering does not trigger support.

Their emotional states are frequently low-intensity, numb, delayed, or masked. They can appear to be high functioning. They head to work. They attend class. They maintain routines. Internally, they feel disconnected, exhausted, or empty.

The Undetected are the most obvious example that visibility differs from comprehension. The system insists that emotions are readable. The Undetected illustrates

the contrary.

Many undetected individuals blame themselves. If the system says they're fine, they believe that their pain isn't real. Some people learn to act distressed so that they can be taken seriously. Others withdraw entirely.



Figure 6 - The Undetected

4.5 The Hollowed

When Sever Mode fails, the Hollowed emerge. The Mind Chip is not properly removed. Emotional communication becomes damaged.

They still appear human. They walk, talk, and exist. However, their feelings appear delayed, lifeless, or replicated. They might imitate another person's response without comprehending it.

They are feared because they disrupt social reasoning. They are visible, but unreadable. They express uncertainty in a system that relies on certainty.

The Authority uses them as propaganda. The underground considers them a tragedy. In either case, they demonstrate the dangers of privacy.

"If it mirrors you, don't answer it."

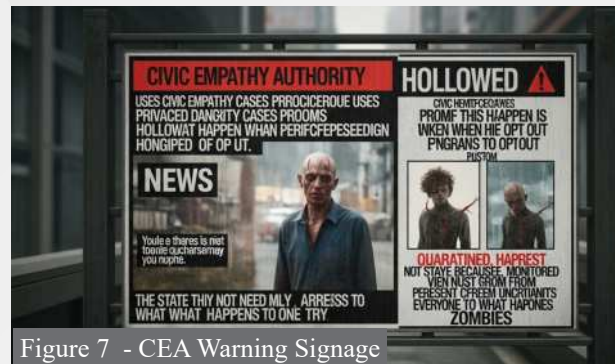


Figure 7 - CEA Warning Signage

5. CONTRABAND TECHNOLOGY: NULL PATCH

5.1 Why Privacy Becomes a Black-Market Resource

Privacy becomes contraband because emotional transparency is the foundation of everything. If the city relies on visibility, then unreadability defies logic.

The Civic Empathy Authority describes privacy as a threat. It is impossible to assess risk if emotions cannot be read. If risk cannot be assessed, care cannot be deployed. The state deems this dangerous, but what it really means is that privacy breeds uncertainty, which weakens control.

When privacy is deemed as hazardous, it becomes criminal. And once it becomes illegal, it gains value.

Null Patch becomes a black-market technology not because it is truly groundbreaking, but because it addresses a common emotional need that the official system refuses to acknowledge.

5.2 Null Patch Block Mode (Temporary Privacy)

Block Mode is the most generic form because it feels survivable. It temporarily stops aura output, rendering a person unreadable.

Many users use Block Mode for everyday human interactions. Grief. Arguments. Panic. Creative expression. Silence. It lets people feel without being understood.

But Block Mode also alters social reality. Once private areas exist, different behaviours emerge. Underground nightclubs. Meetings that are kept hidden. Secret support groups. Private Games.

It provides relief, but it also introduces vulnerability. An area that is hidden from the system can be used for either care or harm. Because privacy is prohibited, there are no safeguards in case something goes wrong.



Figure 8 - Null Patch Packaging

5.3 Null Patch Sever Mode (Permanent Escape)

Sever Mode is the extreme option. It attempts to permanently remove or disable the Mind Chip.

People choose Sever Mode when they believe temporary relief is not enough. Some are fatigued. Some people are desperate. Some people feel stuck. Some want to disappear from the empathy system entirely.

However, Sever Mode is not a clean getaway. Even if it succeeds, a permanently unreadable individual creates constant mistrust. They cannot totally rejoin the official world unless they are treated as unknowns.

And if it fails, the results are cataclysmic. The Hollowed are created. Sever mode failure becomes the most damning evidence that the system was never intended to be optional.

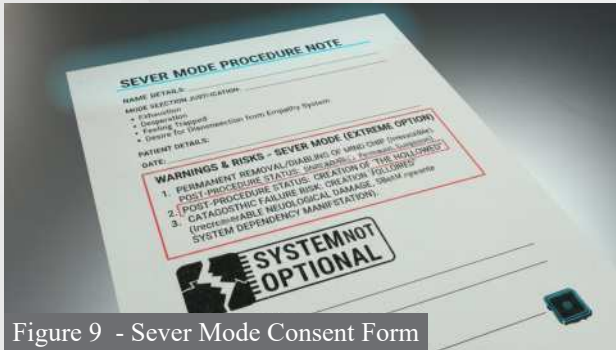


Figure 9 - Sever Mode Consent Form

5.4 Risks, Failure, and Consequences

Null Patch does not address emotional surveillance. It simply interrupts it.

Block Mode provides temporary privacy while also creating new threats. It can enable intimacy and compassion, as well as compulsion and exploitation. It becomes a tool for those in need of relief, as well as a tool for profit-driven controllers.

Sever mode is irrevocable and deadly. Its failure results in the Hollowed, and the state uses those failures to justify increased control.

In this way, Null Patch becomes part of the dystopia. It does not terminate the system. It exposes, undermines, and causes fresh damages that the system might use as evidence.

6. FAILURE STATE: THE HOLLOWED

6.1 What Happens When Sever Mode Fails

When Sever Mode fails, it does not completely remove the Mind Chip. It harms the mechanism that regulates emotional output and response.

The individual stays physically present. They can walk, talk, and engage. However, their emotional continuity breaks. Their expression flattens. Their reactions become delayed or replicated. They may mimic nearby signals without understanding them.

The Hollowed aren't monsters. They are the result of attempting to opt out of a system that was never intended to be voluntary.

6.2 Loss of Identity, Agency, and Emotion

The most terrifying aspect of the Hollowed is that they appear normal, but something is missing.

A Hollowed individual may chuckle after everyone else has stopped. They may mirror sadness without comprehending the situation. They may behave in ways that seem unusual.

People cannot read them, nor can they fully read themselves. They become socially isolated because the empathy system cannot read them, and the underground perceives them as a symbol of failure.

This is why the Hollowed are so terrifying. They depict what happens when emotional data is prioritised over inner experience.

6.3 Fear, Quarantine, and Weaponisation by the State

The Civic Empathy Authority uses Hollowed cases for propaganda. They are used as evidence that privacy is dangerous. They are frequently mentioned in news stories. Posters warn of them. People are told that this is what happens if they opt out.

Hollowed people are isolated, monitored, and removed from public places. Not often because they are violent, but because they represent uncertainty.

The state does not have to arrest everyone. It only needs to show what happens to those who attempt.



Figure 10 - Quarantine Zone

7. UNDERGROUND CULTURE AND PRIVATE GAMES

7.1 Why Private Spaces Become Inevitable

Let us have a look at the day-to-day life of Mira and Arjun, who have been married for ten years. Last month, during an intense argument about their finances, a Civic Empathy Authority counsellor rang their doorbell. A neighbour had seen their auras spike red through the kitchen window. Embarrassed, they attended the session but vowed never to let their marriage be an example again.

Now, when they need to vent, Arjun pulls out a single-use Null Patch for Block Mode. They attach it, sit on their balcony, and finally speak freely, knowing their children will not be woken by an alert and strangers will not interpret their words. For them, Block Mode is not rebellion. It is saving their relationship.

Another example: across town, a teenage girl named Rhea uses Block Mode for a completely different reason. She loves to sing old protest songs her grandmother taught her, but the lyrics are banned. In the evenings, she sneaks into an unused storeroom at work, patches herself, and records covers to send to friends. Without Block Mode, her voice would trigger the Mood Beacon outside, and someone would knock on the door to check on her distress.

In a world where even private hobbies attract scrutiny, the desire for hidden spaces is not just inevitable, it is survival.



Figure 11 - Controllers HQ

7.2 Private Games: Freedom, Thrill and Exploitation

When Block Mode spread, some people used it to carve out pockets of intimacy and art. Others turned it into a business.

On Saturday nights, Maya, a nurse, attends an underground supper club where everyone's chips are blocked. There are no glowing auras or prompts to check in on someone. Diners swap stories, flirt, argue, and laugh. For a few hours, Maya feels like herself again. She takes off her Null Patch at the door and goes back to her monitored life, feeling refreshed.

Two blocks away, a very different kind of event is taking place. A group of wealthy thrill seekers gathers in a basement gym for what they call the Fear Circuit. Participants patch themselves and enter a course designed to provoke extreme emotions, terrifying holographic projections, surprise ice water dumps, and sudden darkness. Spectators watch via illegal cameras that see through Block Mode, betting on who will scream first.

The organisers promise anonymity but record everything. Later, they sell clips to entertainment channels or blackmail participants. These games feed on the same hunger for privacy but twist it into exploitation.



Figure 12 - Private Games Invite

7.3 Consent vs Coercion in Hidden Systems

Not all hidden gatherings are what they seem.

Ravi, a recent university graduate, was invited to a listening circle by a charismatic older student. He expected a safe space to share his frustration about being overlooked by the system. The circle turned out to be a recruitment meeting for a Controller's Private Game. When Ravi hesitated, the recruiter pulled up footage of him complaining about his employer and hinted that it could accidentally reach the Civic Empathy Authority. Feeling cornered, Ravi joined a game he never wanted to play.

Meanwhile, a group of single mothers meets secretly every Thursday. They use Block Mode to discuss their children's struggles as Undetected kids who shut down emotionally and never trigger support. They worry that even these conversations might be used against them if recorded.

When one mother's partner discovers the group, he demands she stop going and threatens to report her. She is forced to choose between the safety of her child's support system and her own freedom. In the underground world, the line between voluntary participation and coercion blurs because there is no legal protection for people seeking privacy.

8. ETHICAL ANALYSIS

In 2125, the city continues to call itself caring. Support is still available. Intervention still occurs. However, the ethics of the system shift because care is no longer something you can choose to accept or request. Care becomes something that the machine determines you deserve based on what it detects. This creates a world in which "being helped" and "being monitored" are equal.

8.1 Is Emotional Transparency Ethical When It's Mandatory?

Emotional transparency appears ethical when portrayed as kindness. If people can sense other people's feelings, it appears like no one is being ignored. The problem is

that in 2125, it is not an option. Emotional visibility is not something you accept. It is something that you are born into.

When transparency becomes necessary, consent disappears. People cannot decide what aspects of themselves are public and which are private. Even if the purpose is to care, the system transforms emotions into shared property. Strangers, neighbours, companies, and authorities are increasingly interpreting what someone "must be feeling".

This changes what feelings imply. Feelings shift from personal experiences to signals that others respond to. People do more than just feel; they also control how their emotions seem. In this sense, the system promotes performative wellbeing. It encourages peace and stability, not because people are safe, but because being emotionally visible means being socially managed.

8.2 Who Decides What Care Looks Like?

In this future, caring is built into the infrastructure. That seems helpful, but it also takes power away from people. The system decides when support is required, rather than the individual.

This raises a fundamental ethical issue: who gets to define distress?

If the city defines distress as anything that appears intense, urgent, or disruptive, it will only respond to feelings that fit those criteria. Quiet pain becomes harder to justify. Numbness, exhaustion, and progressive deterioration do not often present as evident signals. As a result, the system regards them as insignificant or unimportant.

This is how the Undetected exist. They are not overlooked because people are unkind. They are overlooked because the system determines what is considered a "real problem," and anything outside that definition becomes invisible.

8.3 Risk vs Autonomy

Null Patch exists because people want autonomy in their emotional lives. Even temporary privacy becomes important when visibility is constant.

However, the only way to achieve this kind of freedom is through risk. People feel compelled to trade:

Stay visible, safe, and managed. Or become unreadable, gain privacy, and accept danger.

Block Mode offers freedom but increases risk because private areas are not protected. In the official world, there are rules, even if they are restrictive. In the underground, there is no legal safety net. If someone is pressured, recorded, abused, or hurt, they are not protected because simply being there is illegal.

Sever Mode is an extreme variation of the same deal. It is a never-ending endeavour to restore autonomy, yet failure has devastating consequences. The Hollowed demonstrate that autonomy is not only discouraged in this society. It is structurally punished.

8.4 When Protection Becomes Control

The most unsettling part of this world is that the system rarely needs violence. It controls people through normality.

It informs citizens that transparency equals safety. It teaches kids that privacy means risk. It presents intervention as kind, even when it removes option. Over time, urban life makes it appear unwise to seek privacy. If you want to be undetected, you must have something to hide.

This is how protection turns into control. The system does not need to threaten everyone. It simply needs to make the idea of opting out appear socially threatening and politically dangerous.

When care is based on detection, the system no longer functions as a support. It becomes a gatekeeper. It determines who is seen, who is helped, and who is free to exist without suspicion.

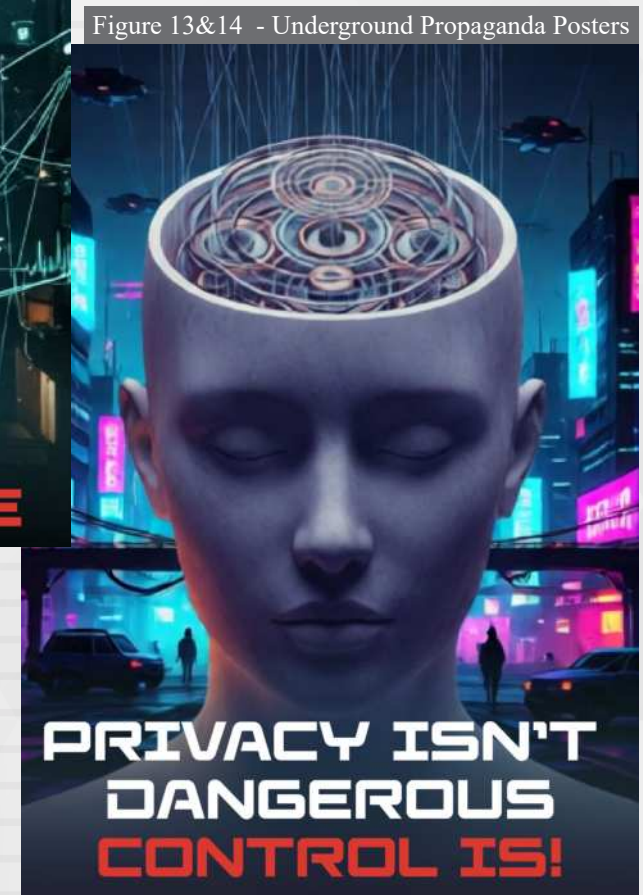
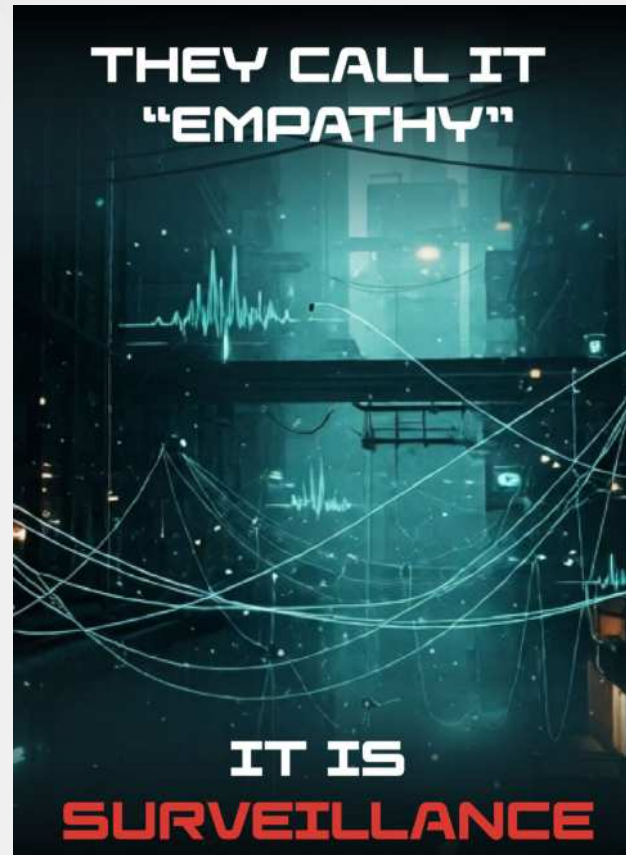


Figure 13&14 - Underground Propaganda Posters

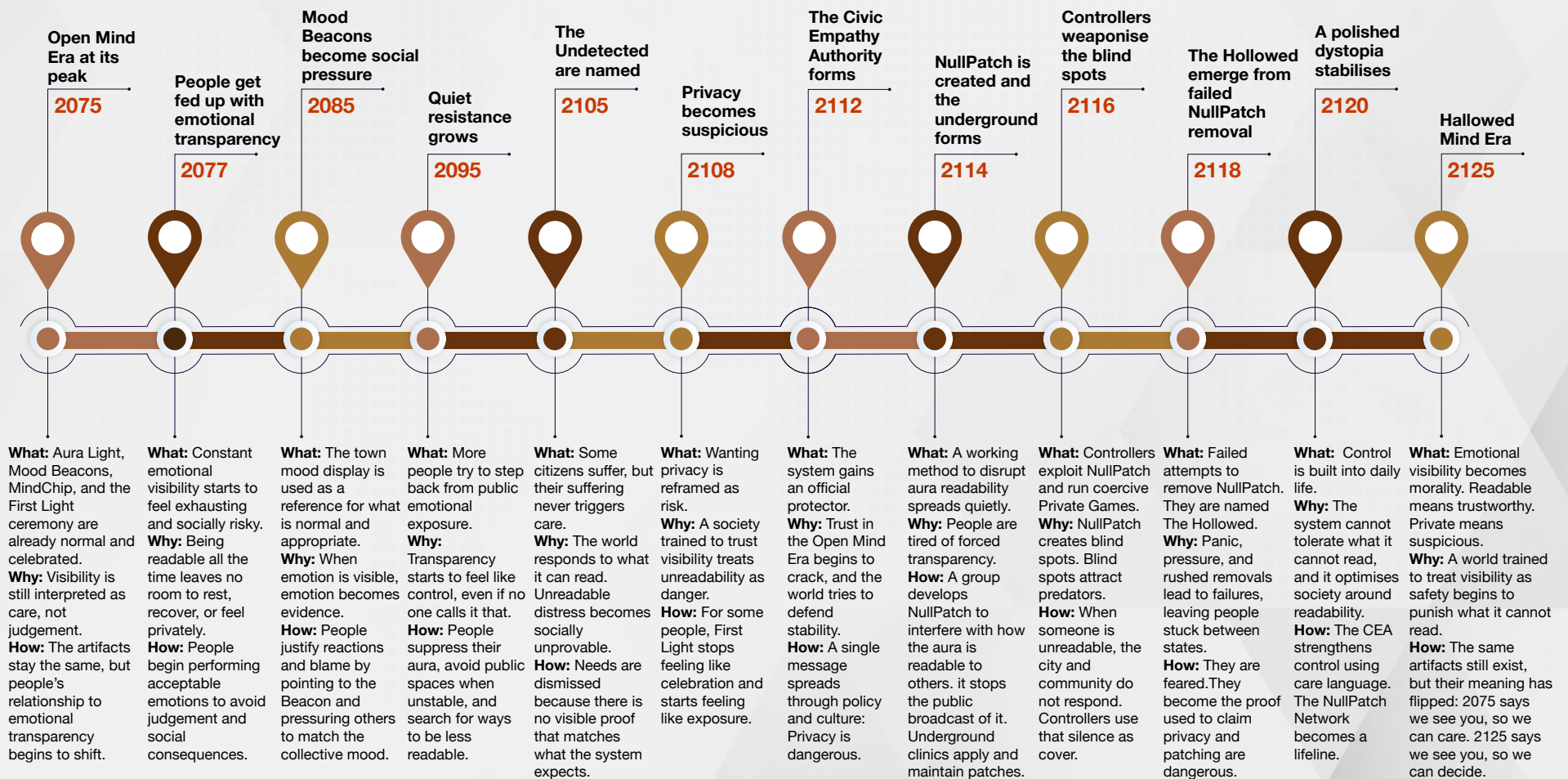
9. CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS AND DESIGN TOOLS

9.1 Timeline: 2075 to 2125 (Utopia to Dystopia)

This dystopia does not arrive suddenly. It forms through alignment.

- Emotional transparency aligns with safety.
- Safety aligns with governance.
- Governance aligns with control.

Once those ideas lock together, privacy cannot exist inside the official system. It can only exist outside of itself. That is why the Null Patch becomes contraband rather than reform.



9.2 Actionable Futures Toolkit (AFT)

We used the Actionable Futures Toolkit to treat the world as a system and not just a story. It helped us map how the utopia drifts into dystopia without needing a dramatic collapse.

How we used it:

- We started with the 2075 world assumptions: Mind Chip, Mood Beacon, emotional transparency as care.
- We mapped how care becomes institutional and how emotional visibility becomes non-optional.
- This forced us to define roles clearly, which is why we formalised the Civic Empathy Authority, Controllers, and the Undetected as actors in a system, not just characters.
- It helped us keep the world dystopian by focusing on lock-in and consequences, not solutions.

A repeating drift logic that we mapped:

A system is introduced as care.

- It becomes normal.
- It becomes mandatory.
- It becomes the measure of who deserves support.
- People adapt through emotional performance.
- People who do not fit the measure become undetected.
- People who want to opt out become threats.

From this, we positioned:

- The Civic Empathy Authority as the stabiliser and narrator of risk
- Null Patch as a shadow response to exhaustion, not a fix
- Private Games as the exploitation layer that emerges

when privacy becomes unregulated.

- The Hollowed is the failure state; the state weaponizes.

**Note: AFT canvas spread attached sperate*

9.3 Ethical Explorer

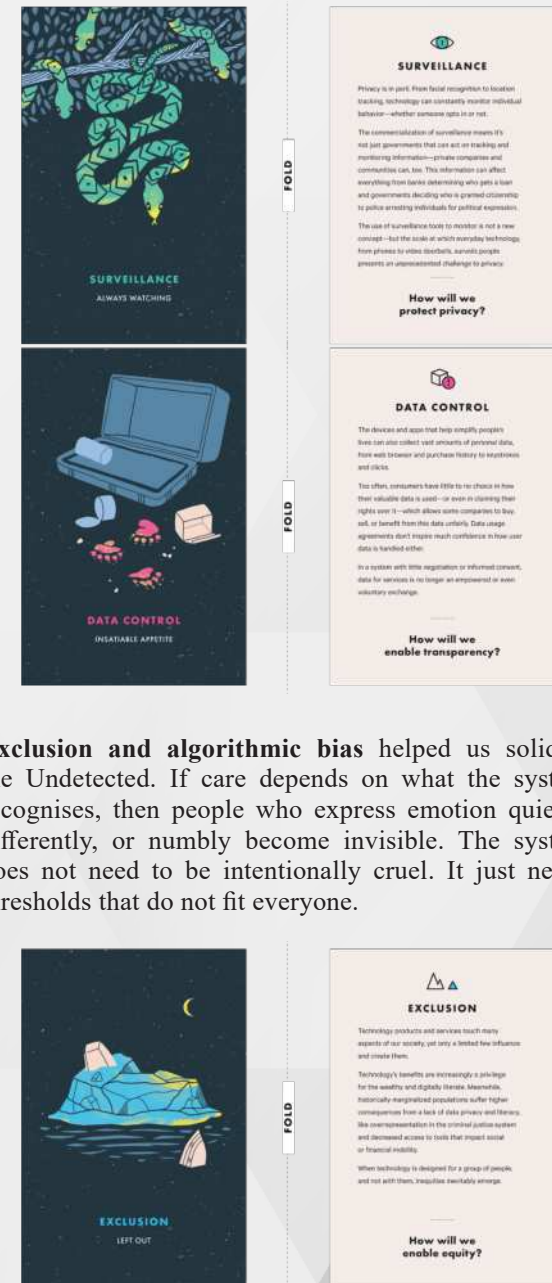
We used the Ethical Explorer card deck to pressure-test our world after defining Null Patch and the empathy infrastructure. We did not use it to “solve” anything. We used it to make sure the dystopia holds up when you question power, consent, harm, and who benefits.

The specific cards we used were:

- Surveillance
- Data Control
- Exclusion
- Algorithmic Bias
- Disinformation
- Outsized Power
- Bad Actors
- Addiction

Using these cards helped us turn vague ethical ideas into concrete world mechanics.

Surveillance and Data Control pushed us to show that emotional transparency is not just social. It becomes governance. The Mood Beacon stops being a community support display and becomes a justification tool for interventions.



Exclusion and algorithmic bias helped us solidify the Undetected. If care depends on what the system recognises, then people who express emotion quietly, differently, or numbly become invisible. The system does not need to be intentionally cruel. It just needs thresholds that do not fit everyone.



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Disinformation helped us build the state narrative that privacy is dangerous. Hollowed cases become proof and propaganda. The system stabilises itself by controlling what people believe about unreadability.



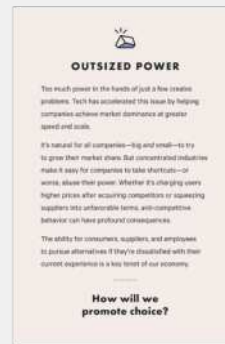
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Outsized Power and Bad Actors directly shaped the Controllers and Private Games. Once hidden spaces exist, people with access and resources can exploit them. Privacy becomes leverage, entertainment, and blackmail. The tool itself is neutral. The power around it decides what it becomes.



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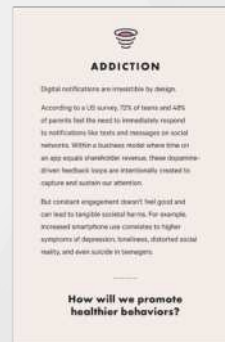
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Addiction strengthened why Block Mode spreads so fast. Once someone experiences true quiet, it becomes hard to return to constant visibility. That creates a cycle where people keep chasing private moments, even when it increases dependency on the underground.



FOLD



So Ethical Explorer helped us make the world more believable and more uncomfortable. It showed us how

quickly care can become control, how privacy can become contraband, and how a “supportive” system can still produce harm through normalisation.

9.4 Creepy Technology Framework

The creepy technology lens helped us understand why this society is unpleasant even though it appears caring. Creepy technology does not involve visible control or fear. It’s about those strange moments when a system appears to be helpful but something about it makes individuals uncomfortable.

In our world, emotions are always apparent, and care is based on what the system detects. People are constantly seen but not always understood. Visibility does not ensure recognition. The most disturbing result is the Hollowed.

9.5 Documentation of the Design Process

What we inherited from the 2075 Open Mind Era:

The Mind Chip as a birth-level norm

The Mood Beacon as public emotional climate display

Emotional transparency framed as care and honesty.

What we developed for 2125 drift:

- Emotional transparency becomes infrastructure and governance.
- Privacy becomes suspicious, then illegal, then valuable
- Null Patch emerges as contraband: Block Mode and Sever Mode
- Social groups and stratification become visible: Civic Empathy Authority, Null Patch Network, Controllers, Undetected, Hollowed
- The Hollowed become a failure state and propaganda tool.
- Hidden spaces emerge and show that privacy is neutral and power decides its use.

9.6 Speculative Personas



Elijah Kade

Gender: Male
Age: 45
Status: Married
Kids: 2
Occupation: System Analyst

About

Elijah fully participates in the government transparency system. He believes compliance equals safety and stability, and that personal sacrifice is necessary for social order. His life appears secure and structured.

Personality Traits

- Risk averse
- Control oriented
- Emotionally detached
- Fear driven
- Approval-seeking

Goals

Elijah's goals focus on maintaining personal safety, social acceptance, and professional security. He wants to avoid punishment or discomfort and to be perceived as a "good" and trustworthy citizen within the system.

Motivations

- Fear of pain, punishment, and social exclusion
- Desire for stability and predictability
- Strong belief that the system exists to protect society

Challenges

- Loss of personal identity
- Emotional suppression
- Quiet dissatisfaction he cannot fully articulate

Core Conflict

Elijah mistakes compliance for happiness.



Brock

Gender: Male
Age: 41
Status: Single
Kids: None
Occupation: Labour Class

About

Brock refused long-term participation in the transparency system and now lives with visible consequences. His discomfort is deliberately imposed, serving as a public warning to others. He exists on the margins of society, both watched and excluded.

Personality Traits

- Defiant
- Resilient
- Guarded
- Cynical
- Emotionally hardened

Goals

Brock's goal is survival without surrender. He seeks to retain dignity and autonomy despite punishment and exclusion.

Motivations

- Rejection of enforced visibility
- Desire for personal freedom
- Moral opposition to the system

Challenges

- Chronic physical and emotional discomfort
- Social stigma and dehumanisation
- Constant surveillance despite non-compliance

Core Conflict

Brock's resistance preserves his identity, but costs him belonging.



Nyla Mensah

Gender: Female
Age: 27
Status: Single
Kids: None
Occupation: Community Archivist

About

Nyla outwardly complies with the transparency system but quietly withholds parts of herself from it. For her, privacy is not rebellion but emotional self-preservation. She navigates the system carefully, aware that visibility equals vulnerability.

Personality Traits

- Observant
- Cautious
- Introspective
- Emotionally aware
- Quietly defiant

Goals

Nyla's primary goal is to preserve her inner life while remaining unnoticed by authorities. She wants to survive within the system without fully surrendering her identity.

Motivations

- Desire for emotional autonomy
- Fear of exposure rather than physical punishment
- Need for authenticity and self-ownership

Challenges

- Constant anxiety of being discovered
- Isolation from others
- Ongoing tension between safety and freedom

Core Conflict

Nyla's silence protects her, but it also isolates her.



Unit-47 (formerly Daniel)

Gender: Male
Age: 39
Status: Single
Kids: none
Occupation: Data Labourer

About

A malfunction during NullPatch left Unit-47 physically intact but psychologically damaged. His emotions, identity, and autonomy failed to reintegrate, leaving him human in appearance but hollow in presence.

Personality Traits

- Emotionally vacant
- Passive
- Highly suggestible
- Disconnected
- Mechanically calm

Goals

Unit-47 has no self-directed goals. His behaviour is reactive rather than intentional, shaped entirely by external cues and system prompts.

Motivations

- Residual conditioning to obey authority
- Avoidance of discomfort through learned compliance
- Dependence on external systems to function

Challenges

- Irreversible loss of identity and cognitive autonomy
- Inability to form or sustain genuine relationships
- Stigmatisation and fear from the public

Core Conflict

Unit-47 exists as proof of a failed system, yet is used to defend it.

10.1 When Did We Start Trusting Data More Than Ourselves

Through this 2125 world, we wanted to question habits that already feel normal today. We trust numbers to tell us how we are doing, step counts, mood ratings, and productivity graphs. Even in real life, a doctor might look at reports and say everything is normal while you still feel off. In our world, that logic goes further. If your emotions do not register strongly enough, the assumption is that nothing is wrong.

This raises a simple but uncomfortable question. What happens to feelings that cannot be measured? If sadness, anxiety, or exhaustion does not show up as data, it slowly stops being taken seriously.

We also question how easily privacy is traded for convenience. In this world, emotional visibility is described as essential, like electricity. Wanting to hide how you feel is framed as suspicious. It exaggerates the nothing-to-hide argument and asks whether caring about each other should require constant exposure.

10.2 What Happens When Your Feelings Are No Longer Yours

Emotional data is deeply personal, yet in this future it becomes public by default. Everyone's emotions are broadcast through the Mind Chip, and the Mood Beacon tracks the emotional state of entire communities. There is no option to opt out. Being watched is simply part of life.

We wanted this to feel familiar but unsettling. Imagine if a school counsellor only checked on you when an app flagged distress, or if your boss could see your frustration level during meetings. In that kind of world, care stops feeling human. It becomes procedural.

This is why tools like Null Patch begin to exist, not because people want chaos, but because they want moments where their emotions are not analysed. When consent disappears and data decides who deserves care, support quietly turns into control, even when it is

described as help.

10.3 Why This Future Does Not Feel Far Away

This dystopia feels believable because it grows out of small, reasonable steps. We already use emotional data to personalise experiences. It is not hard to imagine that same data being used to decide who needs intervention or who is considered stable.

In our world, authorities use the Hollowed, people damaged by failed attempts to escape the system, as warnings. Underground Private Games appear because people are desperate for moments of freedom. None of this happens overnight. The system begins with care, then slowly raises thresholds, tightens rules, and normalises emotional exposure.

What makes it unsettling is that everything still works. People adapt. And that is what makes this future feel uncomfortably close to our own.

11. CONCLUSION

11.1 What This World Ultimately Shows Us

This project presents a world where care still exists, but recognition depends on data. Over time, people stop trusting how they feel and start trusting what the system tells them. Emotional visibility becomes mandatory, and privacy turns into something risky. Tools like Null Patch appear not because people want to rebel, but because they need moments that feel truly theirs.

Systems designed to support well-being slowly become tools for regulation. The most unsettling part is that there is no single moment where everything goes wrong. The dystopia forms through years of small, accepted changes.

11.2 When Being Unseen Is the Most Human Act

What surprised us most while building this world was how powerful hiding becomes. In 2125, doing something as simple as turning off emotional visibility for a moment, crying, laughing, or just feeling nothing starts to feel like an act of resistance. People are not starting revolutions. They are just trying to create small

moments where they can exist without being watched.

This changes how we think about resistance. It does not have to be loud or dramatic. Sometimes it is as simple as someone thinking, I just want to feel this without it being measured.

Through this project, we wanted to reflect on how many small moments of privacy we already give up in our lives today and whether holding on to them might be more important than we realise.

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