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Shackled: To A Front-Row Seat of My Own Horror Film

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SHACKLED: TO A FRONT-ROW SEAT OF MY OWN HORROR FILM

Dellil Mohammed

Master of Fine Arts, Spring 2022
Department of Graphic Design, Concentration
in Visual Communications I
Virginia Commonwealth University

Dellil Mohammed

Master of Fine Arts
Graphic Design, Visual Communications
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
2022

Bachelor of Fine arts
Painting & Printmaking
Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, VA
2018

Roy Mckelvey
Primary Advisor
Associate Professor
Virginia Commonwealth University

Wesley Taylor
Secondary Advisor
Assistant Professor
Virginia Commonwealth University

Andrew Walsh-Lister
External Advisor
Senior Lecturer
University of Brighton, UK

Hello? Hello? Is anyone down there? ...silence. I was greeted with silence. I didn't know what was more terrifying, looking at the stairs as they gradually faded away into darkness or the fact my voice just traveled and got lost within the pitch black shroud that led to a familiar place, but had an overlay, a textured dimensionality much like nostalgia. It felt familiar, but something about the time frame was different. I took note of white particles dancing in the air, as my voice and the natural sunlight came from behind me, vanishing to the bottomless abyss that was my downstairs. I never thought about what my voice was supposed to contain, which was weight, but it was as if my ears weren't working, as if the words were intended to achieve something. The black hole sucked it into this world of the unknown, at the time at least.

As I got older, my voice laid dormant—a voice I wanted others to hear, but was too afraid to release into the world. There was a fear of being judged, fear of being viewed as less than “good enough.” Many voices were filtered through this one mouth. These voices dictated my every move, I had no control over them. The world around

me was vibrant enough to radiate its light on me, yet that source of light felt distant. Was this what I wanted?

I come from a background of having one foot in the art world and one foot out. I come from a place of not refining my skills as I grew up, favoring spending time with friends over craft and purpose, allowing judgement from social constructs in high school and family to rule my actions. I was taken out of my theatre class by my parents. I grew up in an African household where I worked as a child in a business that I slowly learned to despise. Coming from a culture where your assistance is needed around the clock, not being able to hone in on skills or pursue personal endeavours. I did learn some foundational skills at my first college—enough for me to be of some value—to other interests, interests that could potentially inspire new forms of thinking and mastering the Adobe Creative Suite. This all transitioned into a “true artist’s approach,” using trial and error to make things that I thought were only of self interest.

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This document serves as internal view point, stemming from my experiences as a black muslim, first generation Ethiopian American, overall identity, and it's disorienting implication on my interpretation of my view-self and the world. This is also informed by my struggling with the realities of type-1 diabetes and the sporadic and often inadequate support of the American health system. All of these intersecting experiences have led to me making work as an agent for advocacy, empathy and social justice. This work is also informed and dressed with the elements of horror, sci-fi, & fantasy. See and hear the voice in this desolate yet continuously changing environment that is nestled within.



INTRO

INTRO

My passion for humanities stems from my experiences as a black muslim, first generation Ethiopian American, overall identity, and it's disorienting implication on my interpretation of my view-self and the world. This is also informed by my struggling with the realities of type-1 diabetes and the sporadic and often inadequate support of the American health system. All of these intersecting experiences have led to me making work as an agent for advocacy, empathy and social justice. I use color theory from my painting background to world-build and evoke emotion. As a consumer of books, music videos, RPGS, anime and fashion, I absorb, synthesize, then re-contextualize these things in order to translate the complex and often disorienting emotions, and sensations associated with being a diabetic. In focusing on the sensations that impact me so severely, I've developed an "emotional lens". This has birthed the utilization of mediums such as language, narration, video projection, image synthesizing, screen printing, abstraction and sound.

INTRO

"...You do it all just to live the life
Even if it means you don't live it right
And even if it means you don't survive the night
But if even if you do you won't survive the hype..."¹⁷

INTRO

INTRO

Living in this world, we call life, we get lost in states of confusion; not knowing which way to go, or if ones recipe for success is applicable or a template to success for others. Finding different groups or activities to partake and embody can have us feeling alienated, as some of these moments of a "picturesque" lifestyle don't necessarily align with our individual core values. We're special, maybe too special to live by everyone else's rules, because of that difference we couldn't survive in the many boxes that are tailored to the masses.

INTRO

That doesn't mean we're wrong or unfit for those standards. Most people survive by trying to live up to others' opinions or court to public favor, to do that is to die while you're still here. We control our own destiny.

INTRO

As I walk, equipped with justification, I push through an invisible threshold. Encased by the wrapping of chains of all facets of my mind and body, I am pulled back. Dropped in an undefined area, the boundaries of this empty space stretch to infinity in all directions. Talking in this vast terrain, the echo in my voice akin to when I think a word, rather than saying it aloud. There are no solid objects for sound waves to bounce off of. The frequency in this voice, is compressed, much like time, as I watch everything around this vessel move, in a standstill.

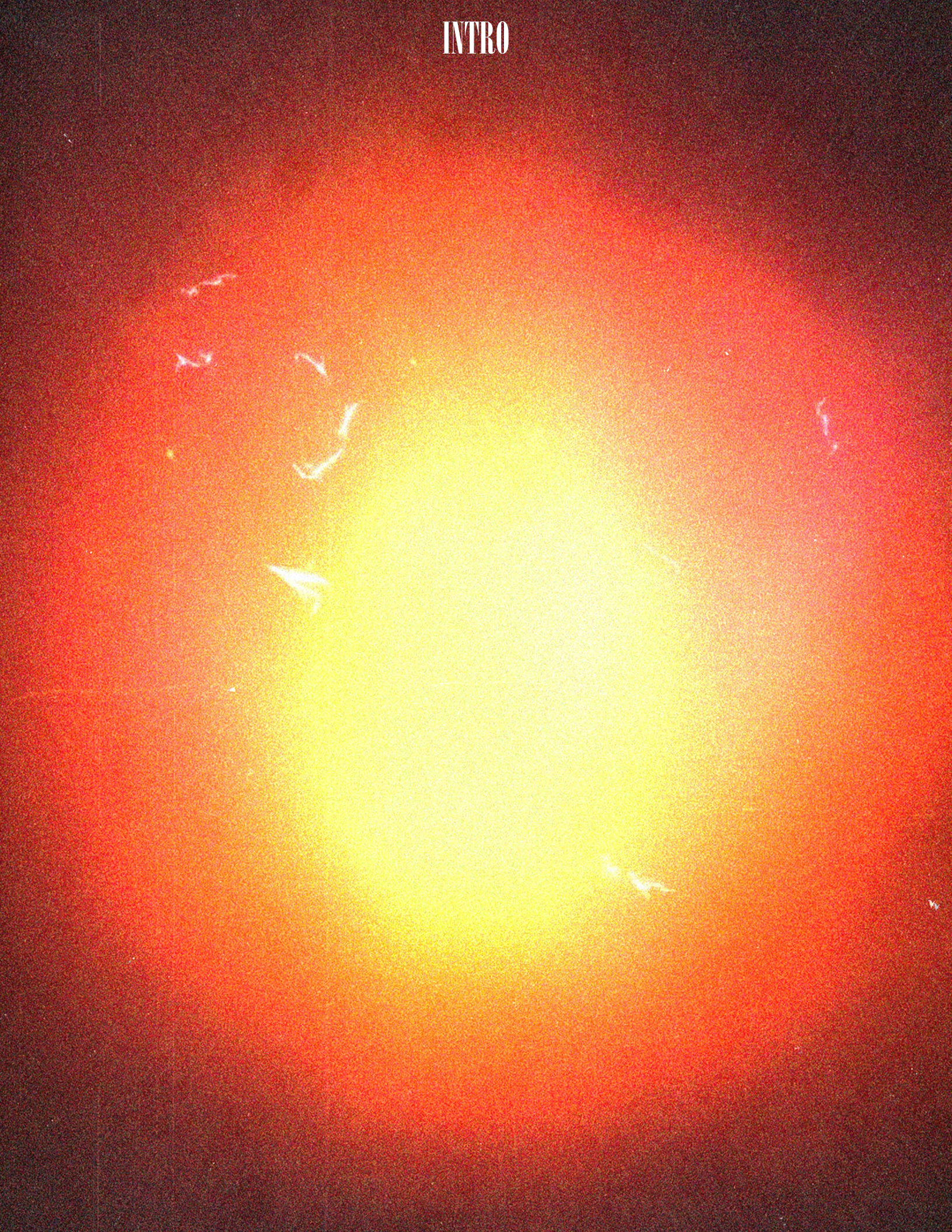
INTRO

INTRO

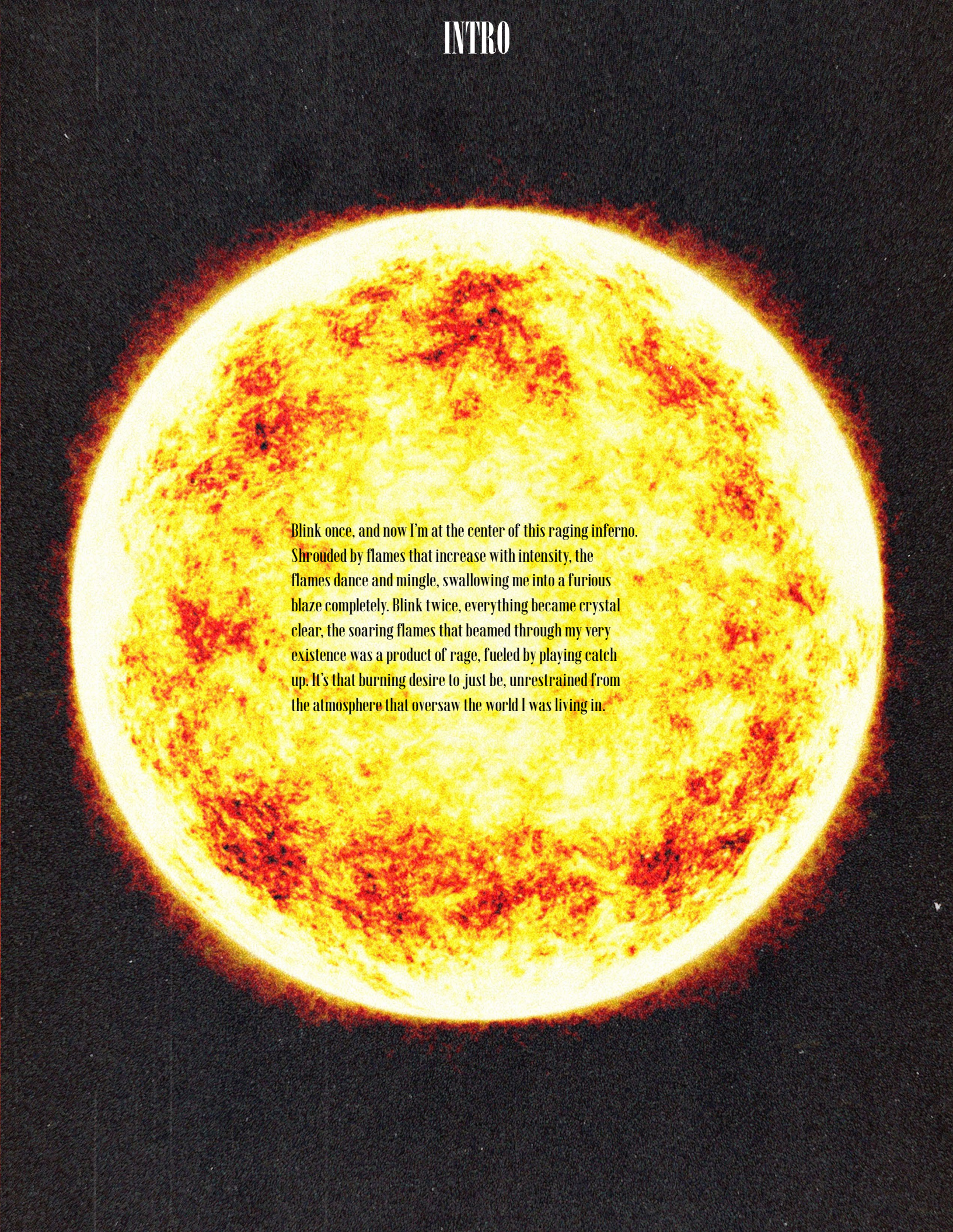
The complexities that make up this infinite space feel foreign. The intensity that came with increased gravity, left me stationed to the floor. Layered by a sheet of fog, there was no end in sight of its never ending, elongation to the abyss of this boundless surface I stand on. Still dark, the temperature of the world begins to fluctuate, corresponding to the everyday hardship and new obstacles to be met and overcome.

INTRO

INTRO



Blink once, and now I'm at the center of this raging inferno. Shrouded by flames that increase with intensity, the flames dance and mingle, swallowing me into a furious blaze completely. Blink twice, everything became crystal clear, the soaring flames that beamed through my very existence was a product of rage, fueled by playing catch up. It's that burning desire to just be, unrestrained from the atmosphere that oversaw the world I was living in.



NIGHTMARE & TERROR

NIGHTMARE & TERROR

Nightmare and Terror was inspired by nightmares induced by nocturnal hypoglycemia. In states of low blood sugar levels, in the context of being unconscious would result in nightmares. Initially, these nightmares went above and beyond fearful as these, especially since I could not make out exactly what they meant.

The beginning of my first semester highlighted and brought forth the power in which I could write down and make connections to understand. If I was able to take control or discuss these ideas that juxtaposed my present and conscious standing, would allow me to cushion and or banish them subconsciously in my dreams.

REALM PRESENTS NOCTURNAL HYPOGLYCEMIA STARRING UNKNOWN

CREATIVE DIRECTION DON KUZU GRS PHOTOGRAPHER KUBICOWROJ COLORIST CRUSTOMBS POST PRODUCTION ANIS FERREJA PRODUCTION ASST JAMES FONDSWORTH

PRODUCED BY DOMICANA, PEDDYMAC, 703KASH MIXED BY PEDDY FROM PEDDYMACSHOOTS MASTERED BY REALMSTUDIOS

REALM

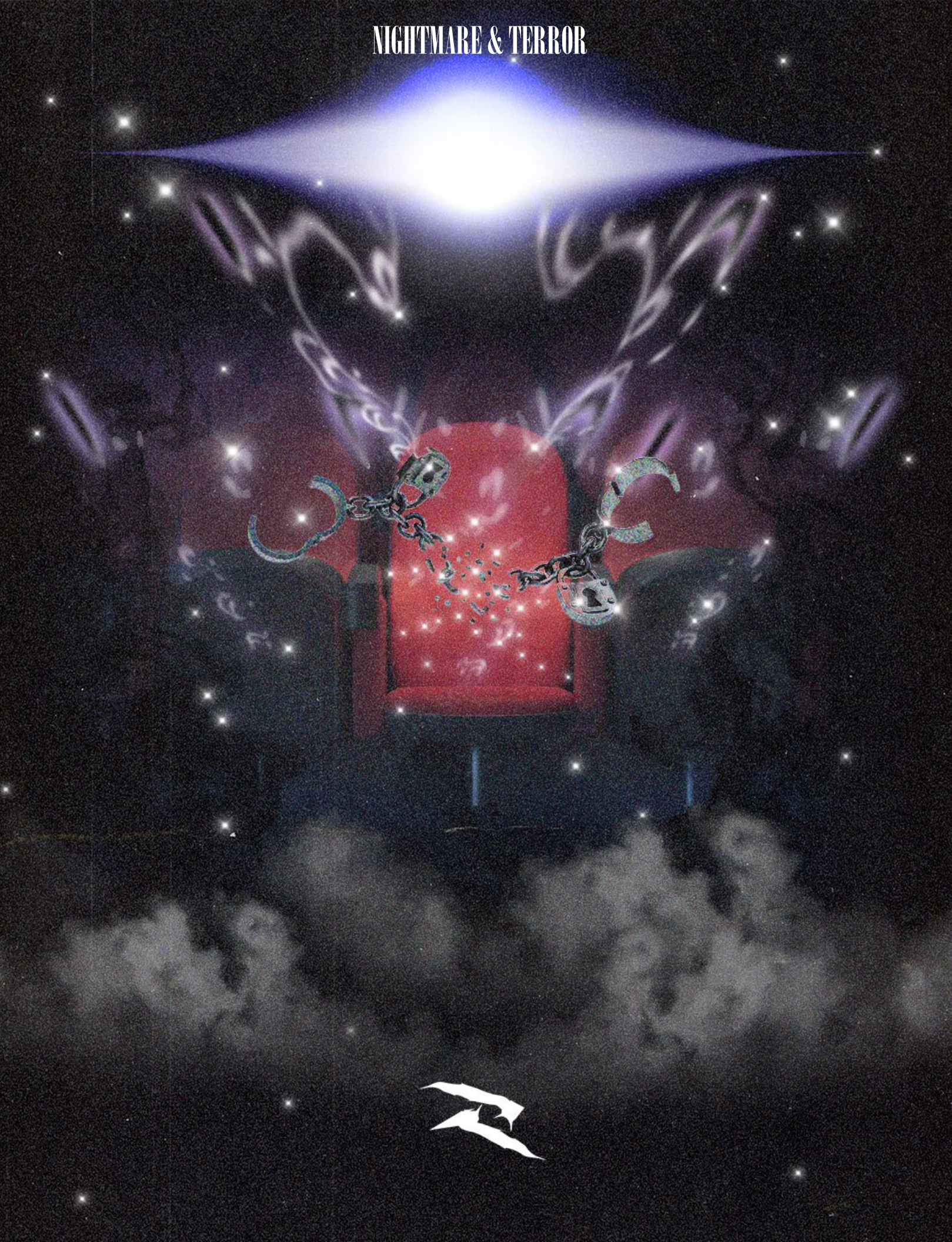
NIGHTMARE & TERROR

I can allow myself to be
Transported to an illusion
But With the change in breathing patterns
I could not notice the parallel in its fusion
Vibrant and rich hues
Warm winds that
Release from my pores
Infect the atmosphere

Captivated

By the temperature's allure,
The interior becomes cold,
The shadowy figure houses itself
luring The exterior in a standstill,
The physicality is all too familiar,
Suddenly it changes,
It feels as if my hands lost sensation,
The texture and temperature of
Everything around me morphed
But this is the mask and gloves
I wear now.

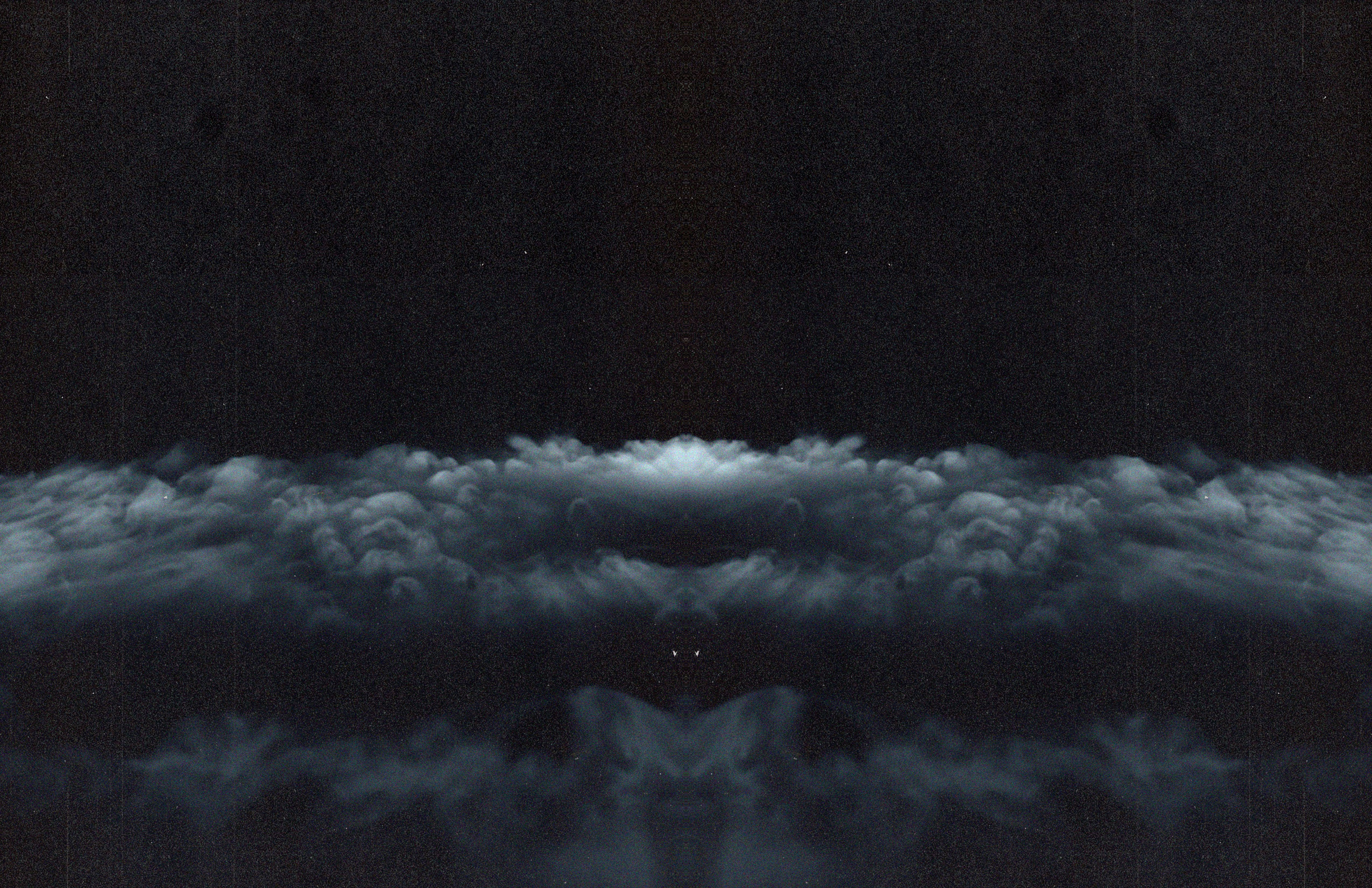
NIGHTMARE & TERROR



NIGHTMARE & TERROR



Shackled to a front-row seat of my own horror film.



NIGHTMARE & TERROR

Running off false boldness/confidence,
The light was so bright but I should have
seen the thin layer in between
I should have known it was fictitious
I see you were burning
I smell your residual stench
I want to heal I want to feel I what I
thought was never real
Somewhere I belong

NIGHTMARE & TERROR

They should have seen what it was doing to me,
Even I was close and felt victim to this spiraling world of nothingness,
This idea, this picturesque infatuation was nothing but fiction,
For it made me colder //
I sent a probe down there,
nothing...
No glimmer of sunshine arose

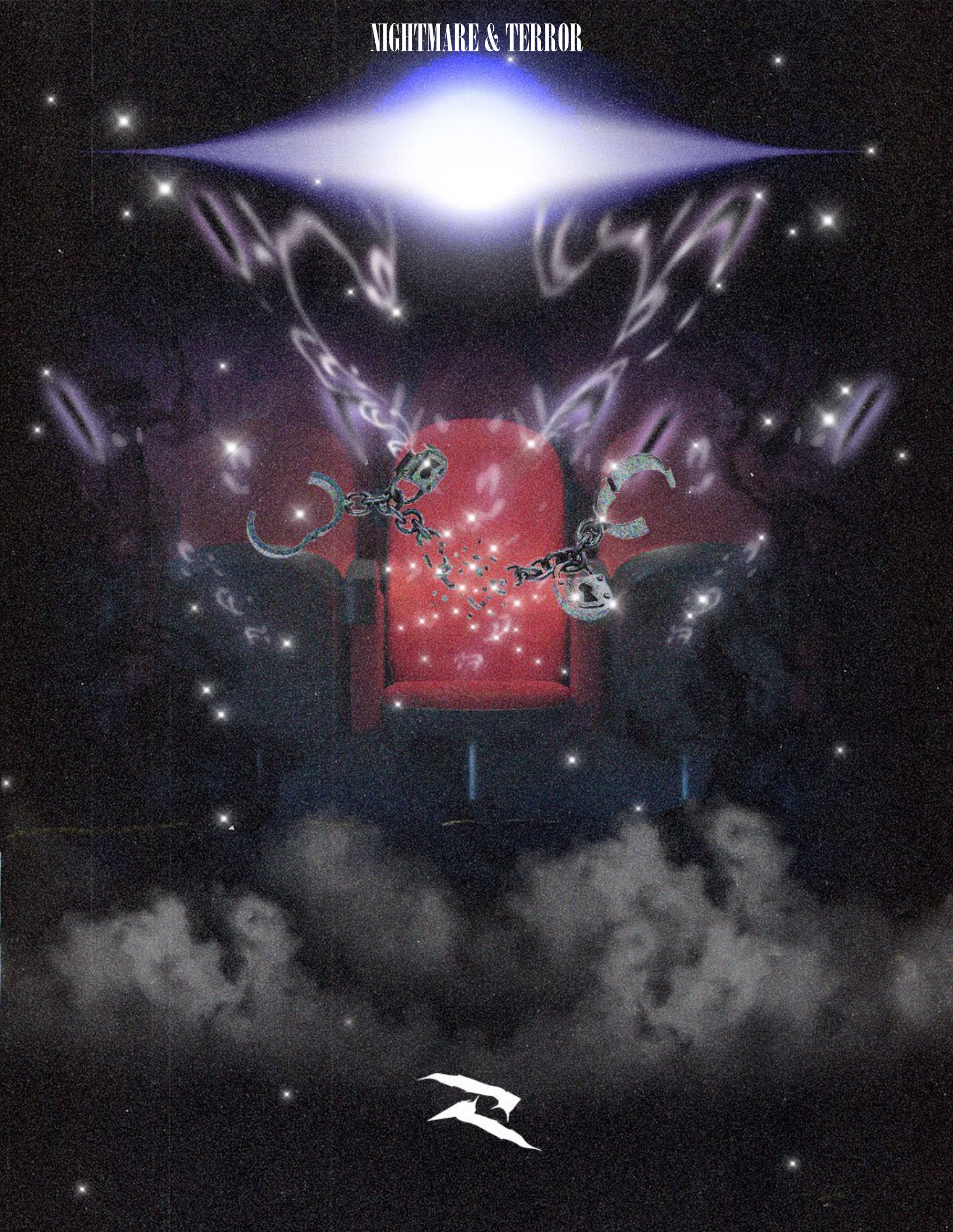
I'm thinking finish line
Cheers
Drinks
Surrounded
Love
It's all false
I wanted that, I got it.
What I needed was to get to know myself more.

You're everything I love.
Even I couldn't recognize myself.

Real life, what does it feel like?

Everything was normal. One moment I'm on zoom, discussing work, taking a step back, witnessing the mouths move on the screen. Birds chirping. The sun is shining. Seamlessly, there was a shift in thinking. My mouth trembled. The weight of my jaw became stone. Soon enough, the rest of my body followed. My fellow classmates couldn't see. The opacity in reflection to myself heightened, while my reflection was faint.

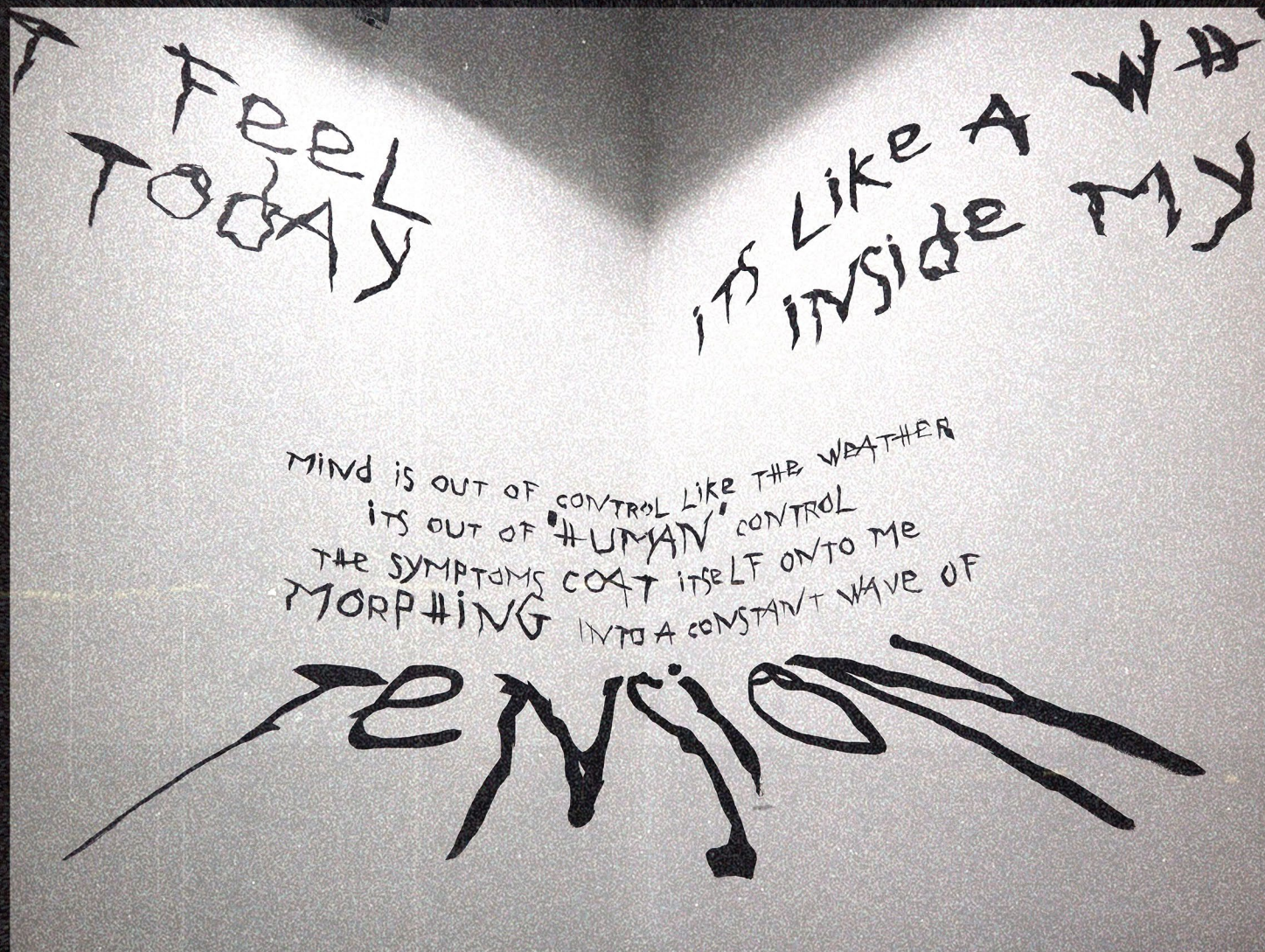
I could see. It turned night. The depths of the incinerator that was my body, brewed like a storm. The tides moved side to side. This vessel, I call my body, just stood there, immobilized. Staying in place was too much to handle. The storm subsided. The molten lava coursed its way throughout the depths of my inner silence...swallowing me into the depths of pitch black darkness.



NIGHTMARE & TERROR

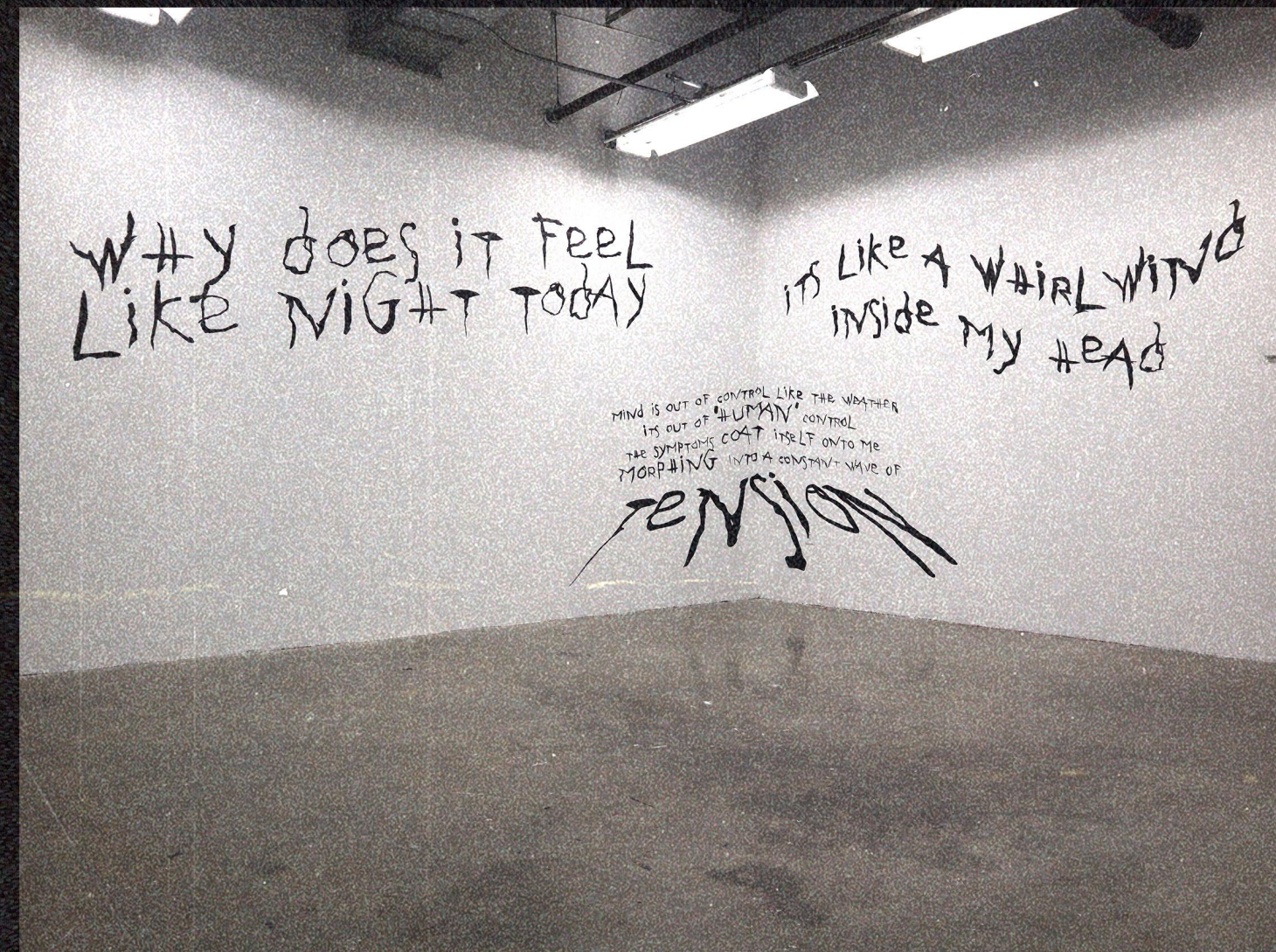
Closed Room: I Am

Type installation, Material(s) used: Black acrylic paint



Within my own practice, epistemology is something I ride off of. Writing prose became a way of investigating the meanings of juxtaposing nightmares I endure to the buried experiences in my subconscious. With that, brought forth in my type installation from the end of the first semester. The foundation began off the basis of my coming to grips with living as a diabetic.

NIGHTMARE & TERROR



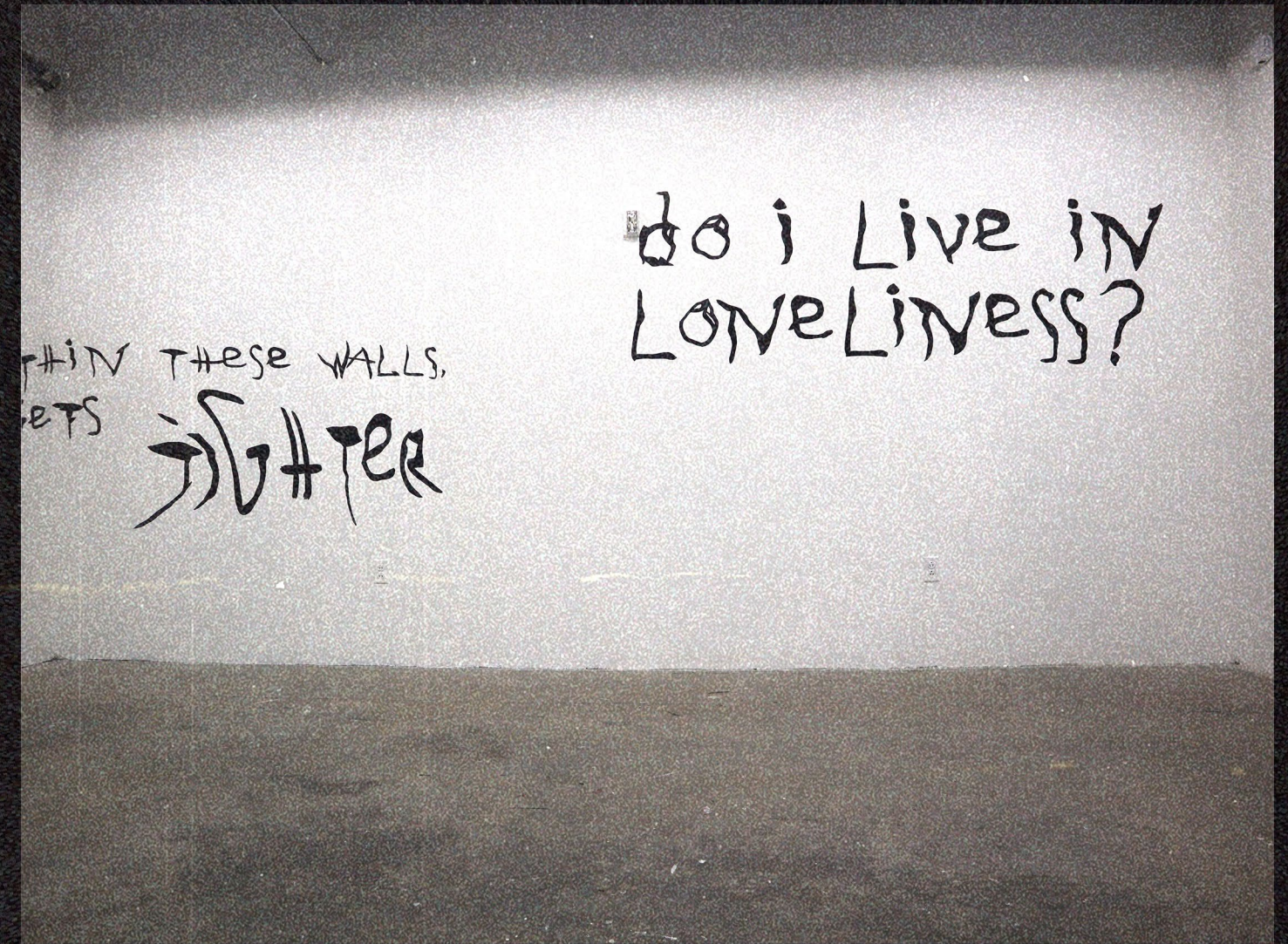
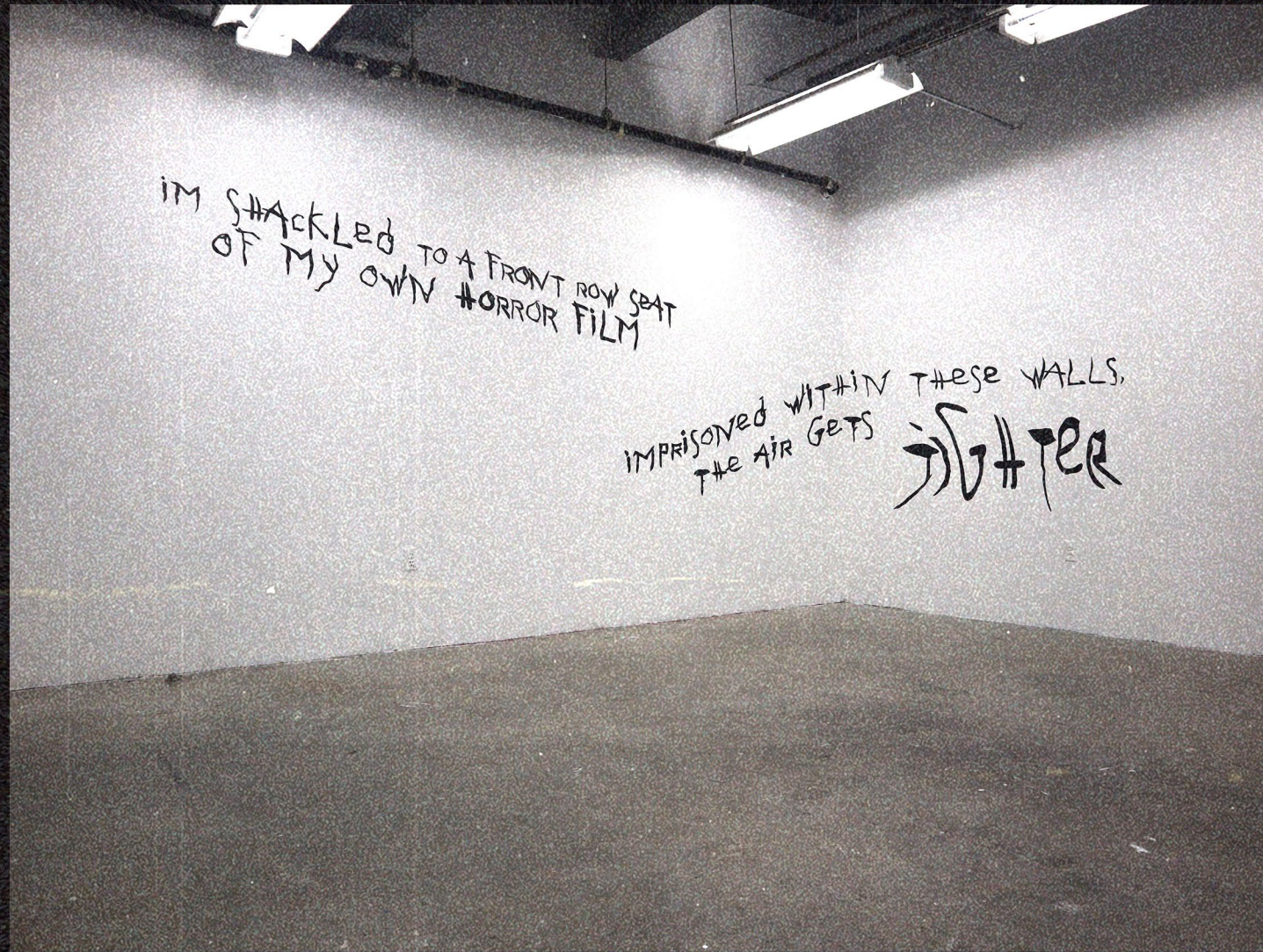
Focusing on that made me lose sight in the other avenues this also played a role in, as far as identities in the categories of disability, color and race, and gender. The take away from this study was that vulnerability within the space displayed had, encouraged, and eased hard conversations not only for me but for those who had never had a space to naturally feel compelled to engage in.

NIGHTMARE & TERROR

NIGHTMARE & TERROR

Closed Room: I Am

Type installation, Material(s) used: Black acrylic paint



This experience and the community that I began to embrace embodied the multi complexities and layerings that make up an individual.



This in turn prompted me to go back to my practice of screen printing and designing apparel. Finding ways to depict these notions of bodily temperatures fluctuating, coinciding with the nature that the world brings for us to experience. Stripping some of the language on the wall and placing it on a t-shirt, felt just as compelling, as a way to also bring thought provoking conversations outside of this room. In thinking about the way some brands have their own ideologies and principles that are wearable, to identify and stand in solidarity with the views the brand embodies.



This allowed me to me to move forward with abstraction with the next t-shirt design abstraction of a whirlwind of not only temperatures but the erratic and manic tendencies that fumigate out of my pores, so to speak.



This allowed me to move forward with abstraction with the next t-shirt design - abstraction of a whirlwind of not only temperatures but the erratic and manic tendencies that fumigate out of my pores.

VOID

The image features a dark, almost black, background with a subtle, grainy texture. A horizontal band of lighter, textured material, resembling a dense layer of clouds or a nebula, stretches across the middle. This band is perfectly symmetrical about a vertical axis. The word "VOID" is printed in a white, bold, serif font on the left side of the image, overlapping the lighter band. The overall effect is one of a vast, dark, and mysterious space.

My type installation brought forth a new form of thinking and how I now shifted my focus to the medium of video and its power to invoke additional senses. I also wanted to explore the use of nonrepresentational forms to convey mood and meaning. Evoking specific notions that I felt as if couldn't only be translated by visuals.

My approach to creating a language of abstraction—avoiding specific cultural references and artifacts—comes from not being able to fully explain personal experience. Words felt too stagnant, designs felt too literal, but abstract visuals felt ambiguously compelling as shapes and sounds opened many conversations that weren't limited to the artist statement or even the ideas I was trying to convey. The work brought to light topics, genres, readings, and references I wasn't privy to.

I had a dream, talking with my professor, Nicole and a fellow student. We were working in a room. We talked for a bit, then I went blind. My eyesight was disabled. Nicole or anyone else in the office couldn't hear or see me. It was as if I was invisible. I was witnessing the entire situation from a third person view, almost like an out of body experience. My vision was constantly changing from yellow to warm reds much like viewing the sun with your eyelids shut.

In my video, *In Between*, I wanted to represent this abstraction, almost mirroring the same effect you'd get from looking at the sun, but in a more fluid manner. The birds chirping and voices going in an out reflect the state of the world continuously moving. The focus on waves of anxiety and loneliness represent my perception of elongated time, divorced from that of the real world.

VOID



VOID

It was warm. While a layer of sweat was on my face, I was sun kissed into a dream. I was cycling, on top of the sea floor right next to the shore. I was on some island that was mustered by the depths of my mind. The cycles that made up this class were stationed to the bottom of the sea floor. Everything was fine, birds chirping, the sun shining, the warm winds enveloping the atmosphere, everyone, including myself, was thrilled to released the pent up energy stored in us. Not long after, my cycle had malfunctioned and began to bring me down to the water as I gripped the handle bars. Immobilized by my grip to feel grounded, I sunk down to the depths of the sea. The metal pole that was bolted to the cycling seat went up and down. Holding on, I began to lose consciousness. Ultimately, fading into the dark depths of the sea. Waking up, I was struggling to breathe, sweating profusely, the weight of my limbs felt heavy as I begin to go numb, induced by the hypoglycemic episode.

VOID

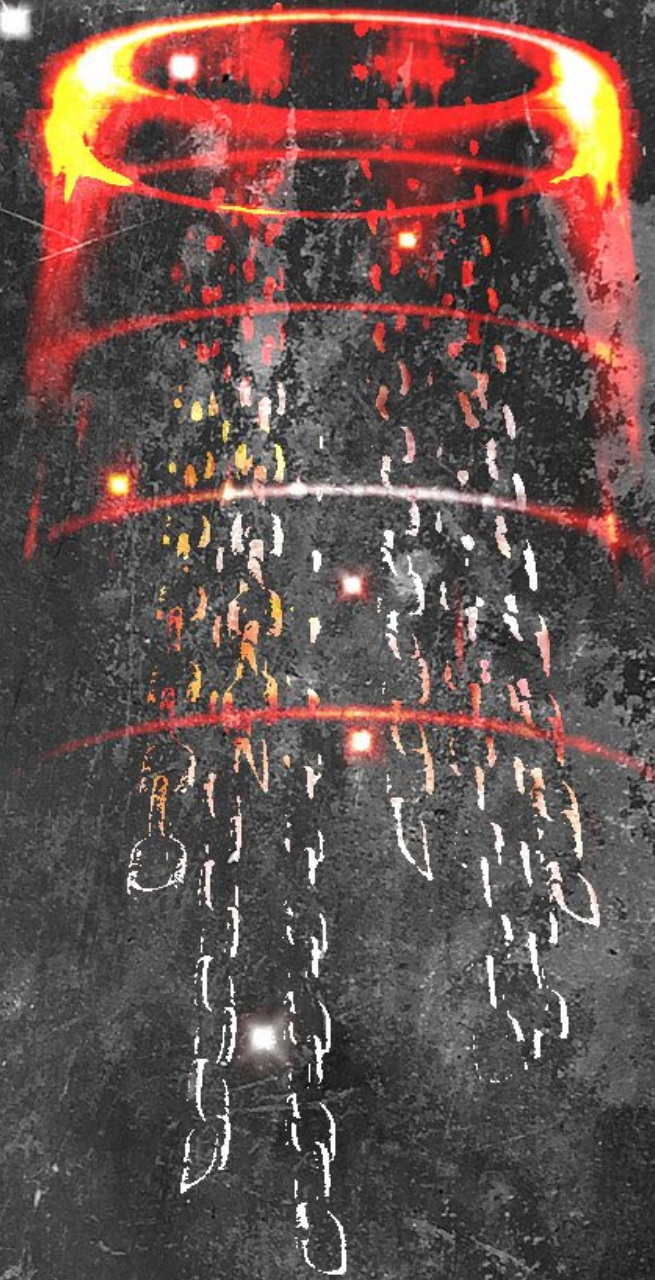
VOID

Every breath,
Induced by social programming,
The repeated cycle of over working
What makes sense?
Does it make sense?
The constant swapping of lenses
Leaves us in a state of confusion,
The notion of duality being eye opening, within this fusion,
Only adds another layer of impairment
Every movement,
Every decision,
Every breath,
The energy released,
Where does it go?
What're the remains?
As we "dictate" our trajectory,
Is there a way to change the sequence
Within the imposed keyframes?

VOID

I invite you,
I invite my surroundings,
I invite the radial energy that runs through me,
That flows with
The air that I breathe
I've allowed the crack to get bigger
I've given myself permission to access
Without the forebears of my psyche
Their once visual depiction of them have turned,
It's psychical form to turn to
fragmented light particles
The chains have broke
The haze like character creeps in
Sticking close to the vest
I've fallen captive to my carelessness
Carelessness or misjudgment of time or prioritization

VOID





PERSUASIVE

INTENT

PERSUASIVE INTENT

The Daily Nightmare
Why is the Food And Drug Administration one?

YOU'RE ONLY A DOLLAR SIGN TO PHARMA



Do you really believe they want to see you feel better?

I mentioned to my roommate how much I would love to swim in a bathtub full of Skittles. Its reminiscent of how I enjoyed them in my youth. A time full of innocence and purity prior to being diagnosed with Diabetes.

It made me think about the advertisements skittles and other companies promote. The patterns, colors, and refrence to pop-culture etc influences us subconsciously to purchase the promoted product.

It then dawned on me, how much pharmaceutical companies make from this indirect correlation between sugary, and high fructosed corn syrup companies.

They promote a picturesque time in their ads,when infact you're there sending us to a living nightmare of constant maintance, especially to children.

Not to mention, not knowing when insulin prices will increase out of nowhere considering there's only three major companies who produce insulin; Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Sanofi.

They pretty much can hold a monopoly and set prices to their hearts content..Which resulted in me having look elsewhere for survival; Thailand. They only gave a damn about a dollar as well; they recommended Novomix, a type of insulin that is for long lasting, not quick acting. Because of greed, that triggered daily episodes in my senior year of college.

As part of my practice in my first semester graduate workshop, I would write journal entries on nightmares and just thoughts that sparked an interesting conversation with myself, roommate, or anyone. This one specifically, addresses my infatuation with skittles and the pictuersque notion that candy brings happiness to ones life. In addition to that, it's an indirect correlation to abusement of power that pharmaceutical companies have on medication prices. I also wanted to showcase different modes of thinking—on a t-shirt and billboard.

PERSUASIVE INTENT

The Daily Nightmare
Why is the Food And Drug Administration one?

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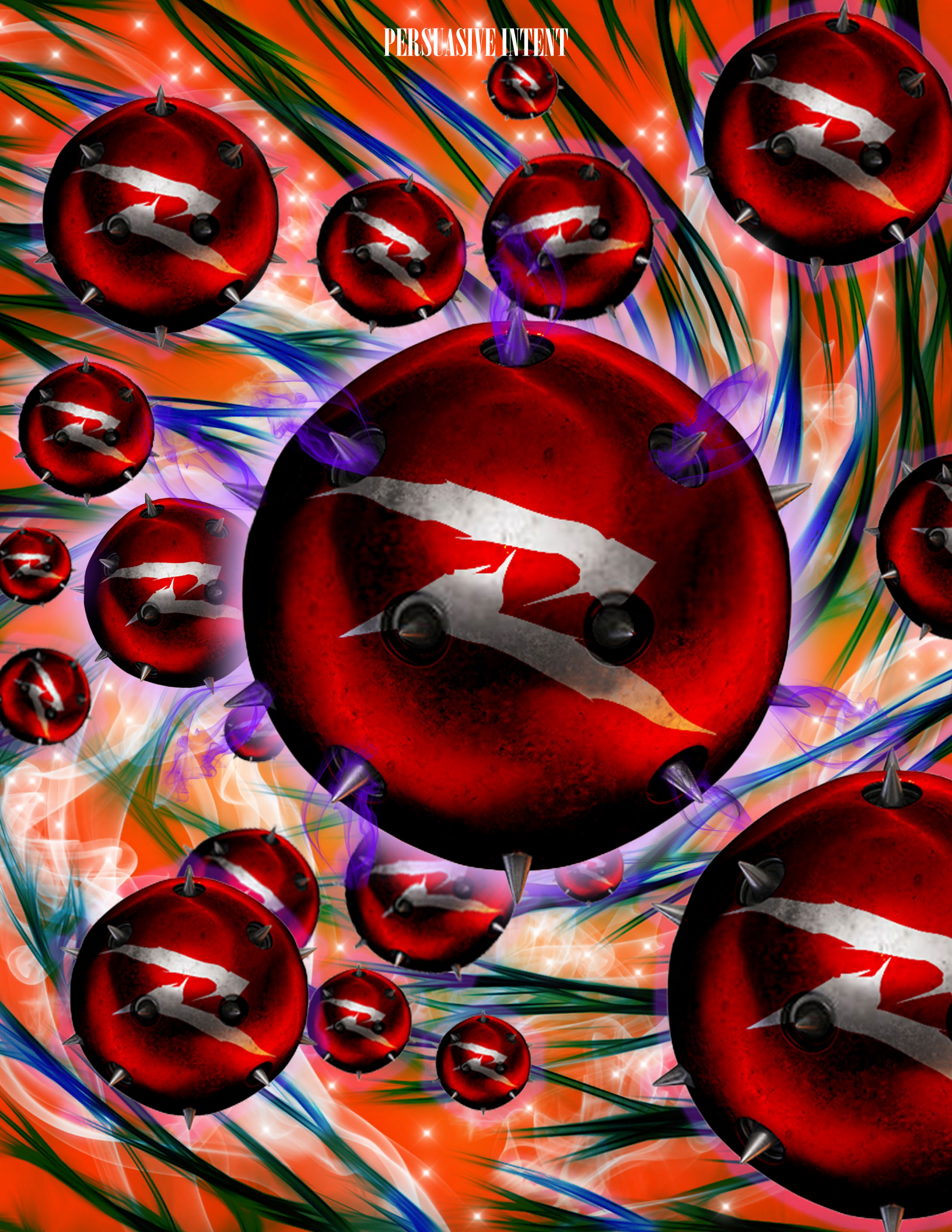
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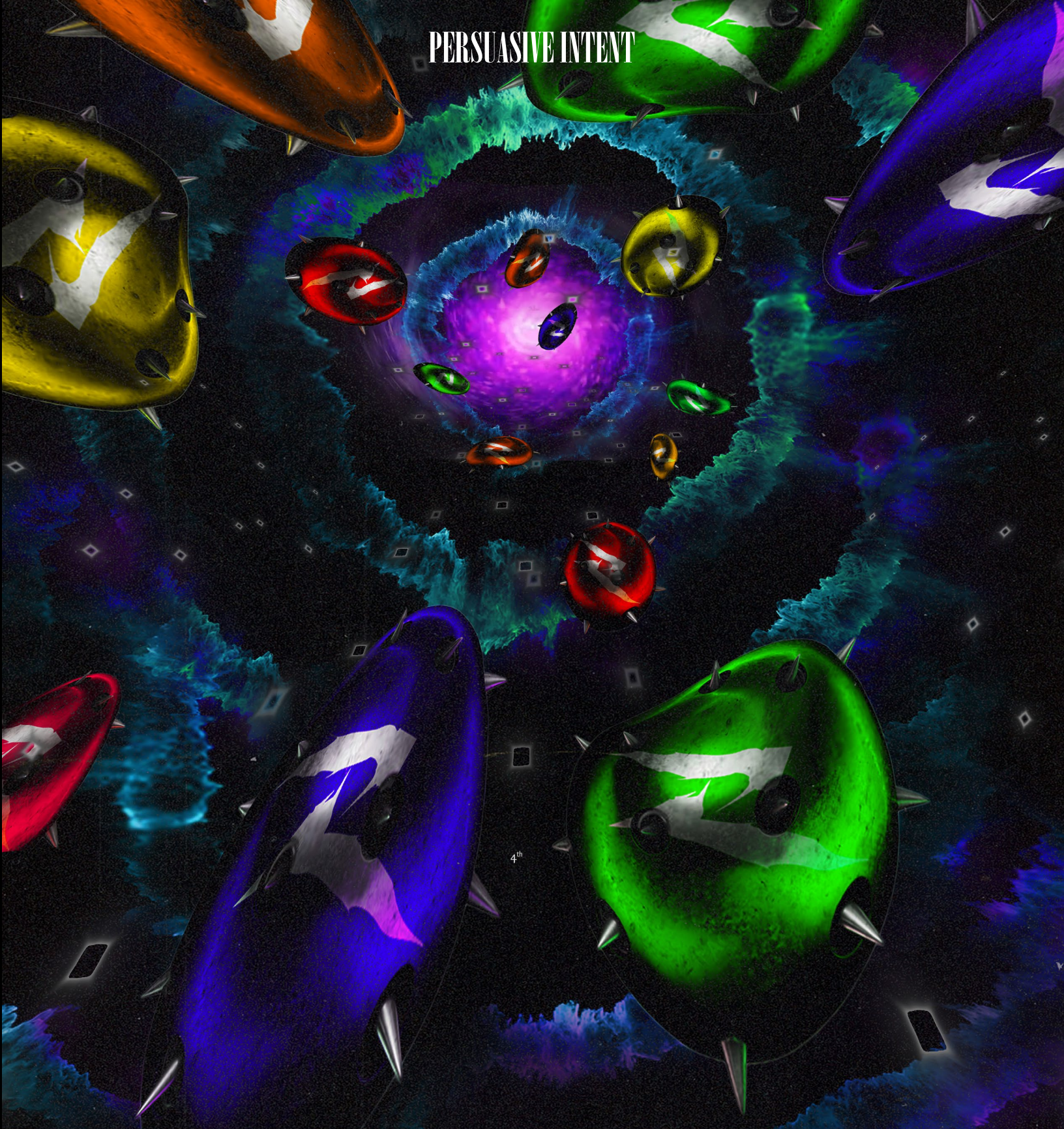
PERSUASIVE INTENT



PERSUASIVE INTENT

These symptoms mingle
With thoughts,
The mental state
Of a young man,
Falling captive to the depths of his
Own walls, formed by the biased
Television screen
At the bottomless pit, he lands
In your hand

Thinking about television networks such as Cartoon Network and Nickelodeon, and the absence of parents in the home due to long hours on the job, especially in the communities that are predominantly minority, is a combination that can leave room for manipulation and misguidance. Not necessarily knocking down the aforementioned children networks but the unhealthy foods and beverages that are advertised to them after the television programming are on a break or ending. Those in between slots allow companies, for example Skittles, to prey on and implement persuasive intent.



4th

“Children’s food preferences, choices, and short-term consumption are negatively affected by unhealthy food advertising, including the use of familiar cartoon media characters. In one study, adolescents’ body fat percentage increases with exposure to fast food restaurant advertising on television⁵. For preschool-aged children, exposure to advertising for high-sugar breakfast cereals is associated with increased consumption¹⁴. Another study suggests reduced advertising of unhealthy foods decreases average body mass index (BMI) for 6- to 12-year-olds. ^{2”}

This, I feel as if, for some, in leading up to or what’s on the other side of what the misconceptions and notions conveyed from candy, and food advertised especially to children. The gimmicks of utilizing notable figures (such as celebrities), the language used in songs and color schemes to promote a picturesque outlook on life when consuming such products.



A black t-shirt is centered in the frame, with the word "SHACKLED" printed in white, bold, serif capital letters across the chest. The t-shirt is set against a background of a chain-link fence, which is rendered in a dark, almost black color, creating a high-contrast, moody atmosphere. The fence's diamond pattern is clearly visible, and the overall image has a grainy, textured quality.

SHACKLED

SHACKLED

As someone who also identifies as a black man, this further fuels my desire to feel placed and heard. I am not entirely saying this has anything to do with my race but also aids in further understanding the complexities and external parameters and hoops I have to jump through to get information to feel secured, grounded, and heard. As a diabetic, Pharmacies and doctors are the only place we can feel heard and validated, but when they give no explanation and or loop holes to a new problem to contend with, it makes us distrust and feel less "cared for." I find the linking of the two experiences as categorized "disabled individual" and the African American treatment to our surroundings is linked to the stigma placed on us as subhuman/subpar stemming from the days of slavery. Being shackled to a sustaining drug in prolonging our livelihood further links the parallel to slave masters and the mobility and free agency we have with the bodies categorized and labeled based on cultural biases.

SHACKLED

"WHY DO WE CLING TO THE VILLAIN, KNOWING THEY CAN KILL US AT ANYTIME?"

* BICKRIT

SHACKLED

This void and or "sunken place" is a metaphysical place that holds our consciousness while hierarchy in those who dictate the limitations and accessibility to proper coverage, relaying information and overall wellbeing in neighborhoods, is inherently cemented in those who have power and how they are indirectly allowing us to feel puppeteer in this game of life. This further exemplifies the new lens I have in understanding that I have no control over my body and having to feel dependent on Pharmacists, The marketplace and insurance companies "verbal contracts" having to ask and wait as this should be our right to immediate accessibility and expected responsibilities of these companies.

SHACKLED

Much like the ending of Childish Gambino's "This is America" music video, it shows him running into a void. With the melodic and soft undertone of Young Thug's language over the fading beat, sings "You just a black man in this world / you just a barcode, ayy." This further emphasize the ongoing cycle of black americans having to run to save their lives, dating back to slavery in the 19th century called "Run N---Run. Historically, African Americans have fled from plantation owners, trying to find a place they can call their own and dictate their own ideologies through cultural and social norms, however there is no place to accept them to allow and feel liberated. As long as Pharma decides to prolong and or never bring to light the cure for diabetes, will always have people with disabilities feel enslaved and punished not only by the condition we contract, develop or born with, but how we get the proper information and accessibility that these corporations have to uphold. As this all feels too transactional.

SHACKLED

SHACKLED

The year was 2017, when my father and i noticed the rise in insulin prices. It reached a new height with the cap at \$666. This was alarming, forcing us to find a solution that ultimatley led us to Thailand. To our tragic surprise, the alternative given to us was not suitable in keeping up with everyday obligations.

The result of using this alternative insulin, led me to having a "fluid" work frame; studio time became all-nighters. Words were inaccessible when writing essays and during critique sessions. The fluctuation resulted in a worldwind of emotions. I thought the world of health care were the only ones to have compassion and understanding to humanity. This warped my perception and waking me up to revelation of what this platform was entirely about--business.

Putting aside our daily obligations of meeting deadlines, being prompt, being politically correct/holding ones own composure, dealing with racial tension/profiling, contending with disability and the necessary requirements to feel stable, in the context of a working class citizen, often results in mental, physical, and emotional fatigue. If we claim disability when applying for insurance, or for potential jobs it becomes this thing of an equitable working environment. Employers have continually praised themselves on creating an inclusive environment however lack the level of awareness of disability and accommodation issues, concern over costs and fear of legal liability. This brought forth the situation I was confronted with during my undergraduate experience. VCU highlights its atmosphere in being an inclusive and diverse institution. This situation with a professor brought to my attention another identity I embody, as a black American. The professor, stated that I wouldn't be successful unless I depict the on going, trickling, generational trauma that is the result of its people today. The combination of negligent responsibilities from health care providers and someone I initially looked up to in my undergraduate department left me shattered. I began to question how I identified with myself and in the context of categorical placement with a group of people. Not only being diagnosed at a young age and coming out the womb labeled, and placed in a specific box made me question my place in society and how I should operate.

A seemingly endless succession of grueling days and sleepless nights, never had I known such effort and never had both my mind and body been closer to the breaking point but through it all I persisted, the enormous shadow that loomed over me a constant reminder to feel one with the two embodiments of identification, ascending into competition.

KEYWORDS

BOUNDLESS · ABYSS

ASCENDING · COMPLETION · OTHER

DESOLATE · GROUNDED · PROFUSE

PSYCHE · TREMORS · IMPRISONMENT · REAL

ILLUSION · OUTKAST · PAUSE · TIMING

RECOLLECTION · SOUL · SHROUDED

MEMORIES · PLEASURES · BREATH · LIFE

ACED · PLAIN · TENDRIL · EDGE

WARPED · SEAMLESS · IDENTITY · VIEWPOINT · PERCEPTION
ENERGY · CHARACTER · ACCESS · IMPENDING · ROOM
REALITY · HUMAN · IMMEDIACY · INTERNALLY · BELIEVED
COGNITIVE · FUNCTION · SPACE · ORDER · SYMPTOMS
ROOM · INTERNAL · INTERTWINED · THINKING · MENTAL
VISION · PANIC · CONFUSED · TRANSITION · AHEAD
HALT · REFLECTION · TRANSPARENCY · CONSUME

RELEASE
TERROR
UNDER · NIGHTMARES · TERROR
CONDITION · COURSE · NIGHTMARES · TERROR
DEAL · COURSE · NIGHTMARES · TERROR
ILLUSION · OUTKAST · PAUSE · TIMING
SOUL · SHROUDED · INVISIBLE

INDUCED · LEVEL · VESSEL · OUTSIDE

HAUNTING · EFFECT

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An American Lyric, Book, Claudia Rankine Citizen
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On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous, Book, Ocean Vuong

Films/TV shows

Law & Order: SVU, Television series,
Executive Producer, Dick Wolf
Maniac, Film, Dir. Shia Labeouf
Black Mirror, Television series,
Creator, Charlie Brooker
Power, Television series, Creators/Directors
Courtney Kemp & Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson
Power Book II: Ghost, Television series, Creators/Directors
Courtney Kemp & Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson
Enter The Void, Film, Dir. Gaspar Noe
The Lovely Bones, Film, Dir. Peter Jackson
Get Out, Film, Dir. Jordan Peele

Artists/Designers

Joe Coleman
Akira Toriyama, Creator of Dragon Ball Z
Rhuigi, Creative dir. of RHUDE
Heron Preston, Creative dir. of HERON PRESTON

Musical Artists & Projects

Yeezus, The Life of Pablo, Kanye West
Cilvia Demo, The Suns Tirade, Isaiah Rashad
Maurading In Paradise, Jazz Cartier
777, Key!
Days Before Rodeo, Travis Scott
Drowning Pool, Sinner
Three Days Grace
Hybrid Theory, Meteora, Linkin Park
Passion, Pain, & Demon Slayin', Kid Cudi
SOHN
Slipknot
From Under The Cork Tree, Fall Out Boy

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NOTES:

1. *American Rapstar* By Big KRIT
2. Quoted from the article *Child-focused advertising restrictions for unhealthy foods & beverages*, www.countyhealthrankings.org
3. *American Rapstar* By Big KRIT