

Capstone Project

Poetic Involution: Trade-offs and Controversies

FIRST SECTION

WHAT IS INVOLUTION?

FACT 01

Last December, just a few days before the new year, at 1:30 in the morning, a 22-year-old employee of the Chinese e-commerce company Pinduoduo collapsed after **a long day of work**. Her colleagues rushed her to the hospital, but she died six hours later.

Less than two weeks later, another young Pinduoduo employee jumped to his death during a brief visit with his parents. The following day, a third employee said **he had been fired for criticizing Pinduoduo's work culture**.



FACT 02



A photo shows a student studying on his laptop while riding a bike at Tsinghua University, Beijing, China.

FACT 03



Students preparing for the postgraduate entrance exam (unified examination) set tents to facilitate evening study.

“ Once a culture reaches a specific final form, it cannot stabilize itself nor transform into a new form; it can only complicate itself internally. ”

Geertz, Clifford. "Culture and Social Change: The Indonesian Case."

INVOLUTIONI. Negative connotations

One refers to **excessive work that does not lead to productivity or improved innovation**, and the other is that it can lead to **unhealthy competition** among people, especially for the younger generation. Involution mainly occurs in the fields of economy, politics, culture, education, etc. It matches ideas of the rat race and burnout, and it is also used to describe when **putting more into something only results in getting less back**.

II. Dialectical thinking

It has its own reasons for its existence: **People get stronger in constant competition**. It is a **method**, and people can choose to use it or not to use it.

Involution is an inevitable part of the **social development process**, it is a **rule** that can be used well, and its own ambiguity can bring more possibilities for its future development.

These different viewpoints are bound to be issued by people of different statuses, and they have their own issues related to interests and different perspectives on things.

METAPHORThe Screw

There's a feeling of tightening screws in the phenomenon of "involution." Turning the screw inwards only tightens it further and makes it impossible to loosen. But if you turn it outwards, it can be easily undone.

Cinema Effect

While watching a movie in the cinema, an audience member suddenly stood up to obtain a better view. The people he blocked had to stand up as well, and eventually, everyone had to stand up to watch the movie, except those in the front row who remained seated.

The essence of "involution" is the unequal distribution of resources, the imbalance in resource allocation. The decreasing allocation of resources to individuals causes some people to break the rules.

SECOND SECTION

RESEARCH PROCESS

PROCESSUAL

In the process of research, I gradually found the design direction and the information I want to convey.

**SECONDARY
RESEARCH**

I. To gain a deeper understanding of involution

Reports, cases or facts, people's understanding of the term "involution," and definitions of it on China Knowledge Platform and other official websites.

II. To investigate artistic methods that will be used

The research analyzes the direct or indirect impact of design on social phenomena from the perspectives of **ironic art, design activism, speculative design,** and **universal design language,** based on the relevance of involution to irony, enlightenment, and experimentation.

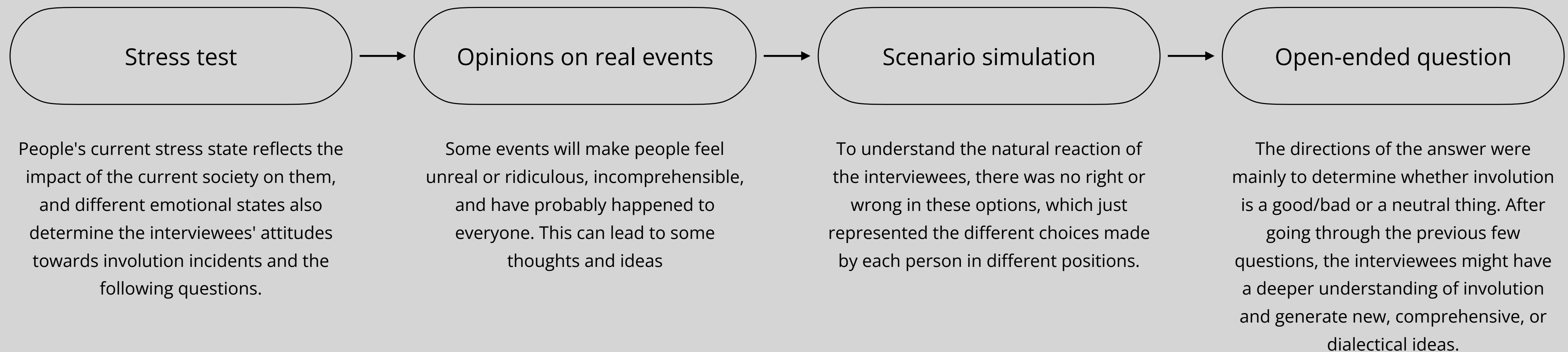
**PRIMARY
RESEARCH**

I. Focus group interview

The survey started by creating some **situations** related to involution or using **facts** of involution to interview focus groups about their **reactions, emotions, and reflections**. Then record and analyze the results of the interview, and create unique stories and background settings in a narrative way.

II. Substantive

Gathering qualitative survey results, analyzing them, and finding **insights, reasons, and problems**. Extracting **pain points** and possibilities from respondents' responses.



THIRD SECTION

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**KEY
OBSERVATIONS**

- I. The **negative** aspects of involution: stagnant and degraded efficiency and slow and subtle development caused by constant internal complexity, pressure, and anxiety coming from unified values and evaluation standards for the entire society, and hard work or dedication that is never enough and hard to be seen.

- II. **Positive** factors include: involution is an inevitable part of the social development process, it is a rule that can be used well, and its ambiguity can bring more possibilities for its future development.

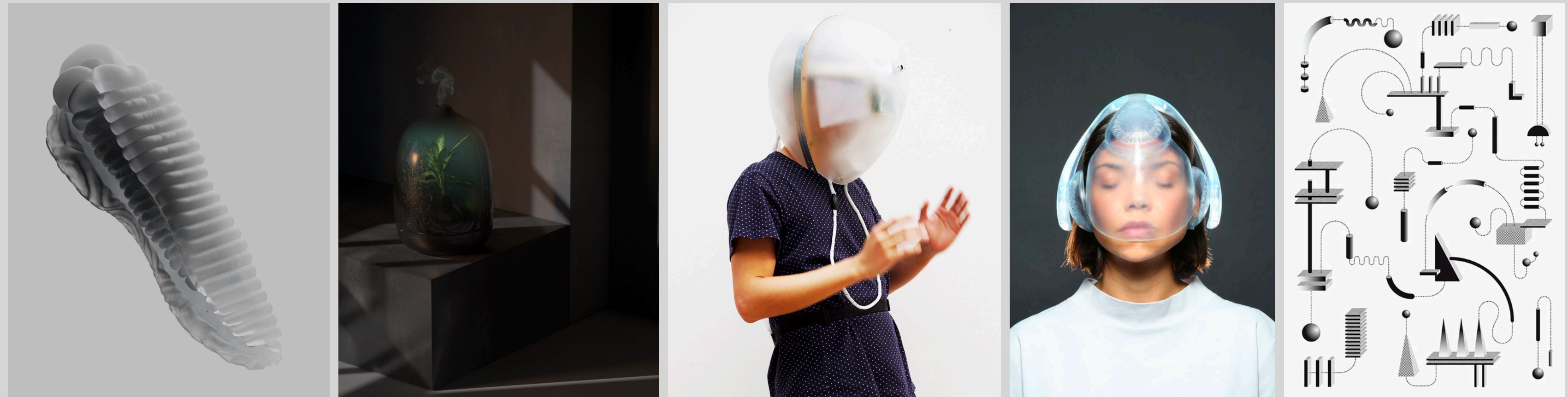
- III. Design intervenes in people's lives through its own **inspiring and driving force**, indirectly or directly guiding people's thoughts, behaviors, and social changes. The design itself does not have a clear standpoint. It is a matter of opinion. But for designers, it can be a medium or tool endowed with value.

**KEY
OBSERVATIONS**

IV. The cutting-edge **speculative design** at the experimental stage, focuses its attention on significant events that affect the development of society. It is often misunderstood as predicting the future, but it is **the dividing line between the future and reality**, containing countless possibilities for the future.

It does not represent a certain position but will have poetic, political, critical, and developmental value after purposeful artistic processing.

V. Some real cases of involution will make people laugh, this is the spectator's perspective. But as a colleague or classmate who is the protagonist in the case, these incidents may cause more negative emotions such as burnout and disgust. However, there are also some brand new angles, one is not caring at all, and the other is sympathy, which is a kind interpretation.



HYPOTHESIS

Research stage

- I. Can design be used as a language carrier so that all groups can understand the core of involution and its dialectical thinking? How to balance the practical value and the experimental value in the design?
 - II. How can works of art reveal a social phenomenon, which refers to involution, most powerfully?
 - III. How to visualize involution through graphical and visual ways?
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DELIVERABLES

Project output

- I. Two-dimensional and graphic visual experiments
- II. Speculative product design
- III. Motion design and infographic design

FOURTH SECTION

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

**VITURAL
COMPANY**

A speculative virtual company with a fixed performance appraisal system to judge employee behavior.

**VISUAL
EXPERIMENTS**

The warm-up of the project, and the abstract but narrative exploration of the word and the meaning behind the 'Involution.'

**PRODUCT
DESIGN**

Two speculative products from different standpoints about involution.

**INFOGRAPHIC
DESIGN**

Using graphic language to convey information. Including the design of the performance appraisal system and motion graphics.

YUYING LIU/LISA

2023.MAY.09

FIFTH SECTION

DESIGN EXPLORATION

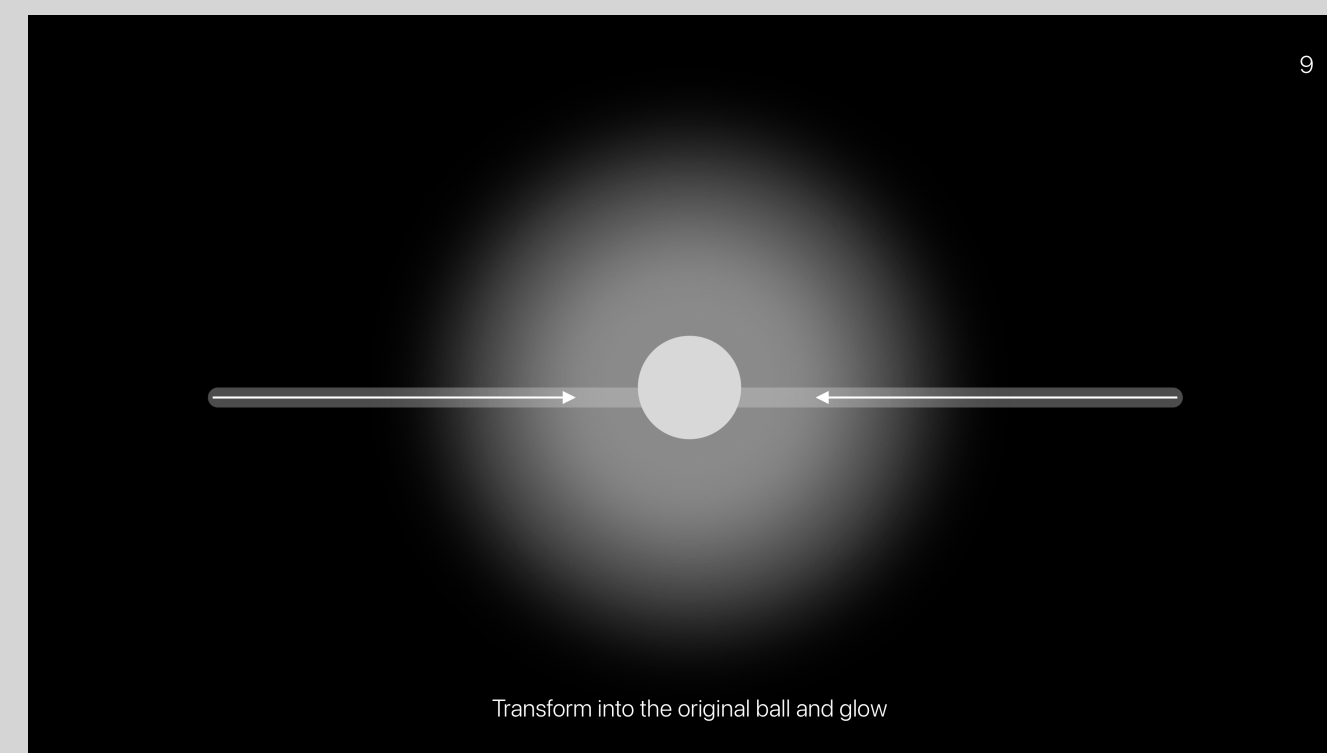
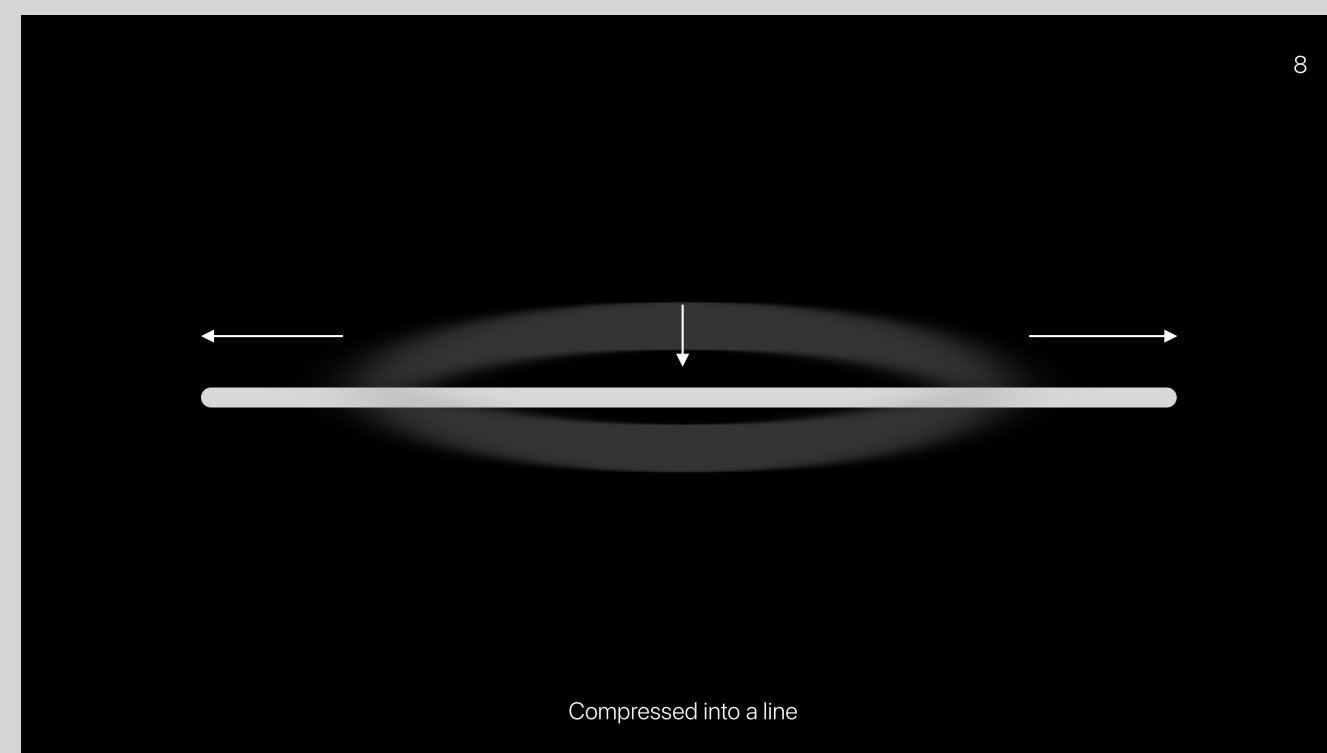
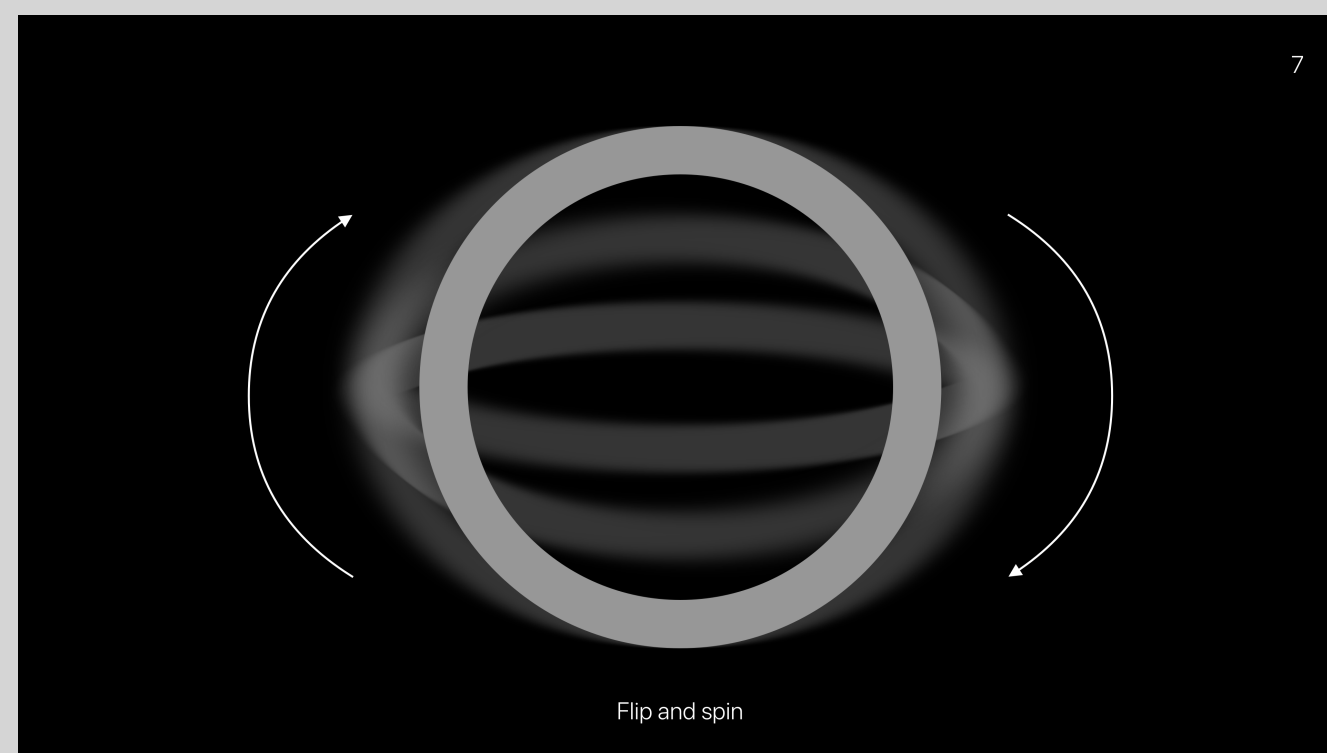
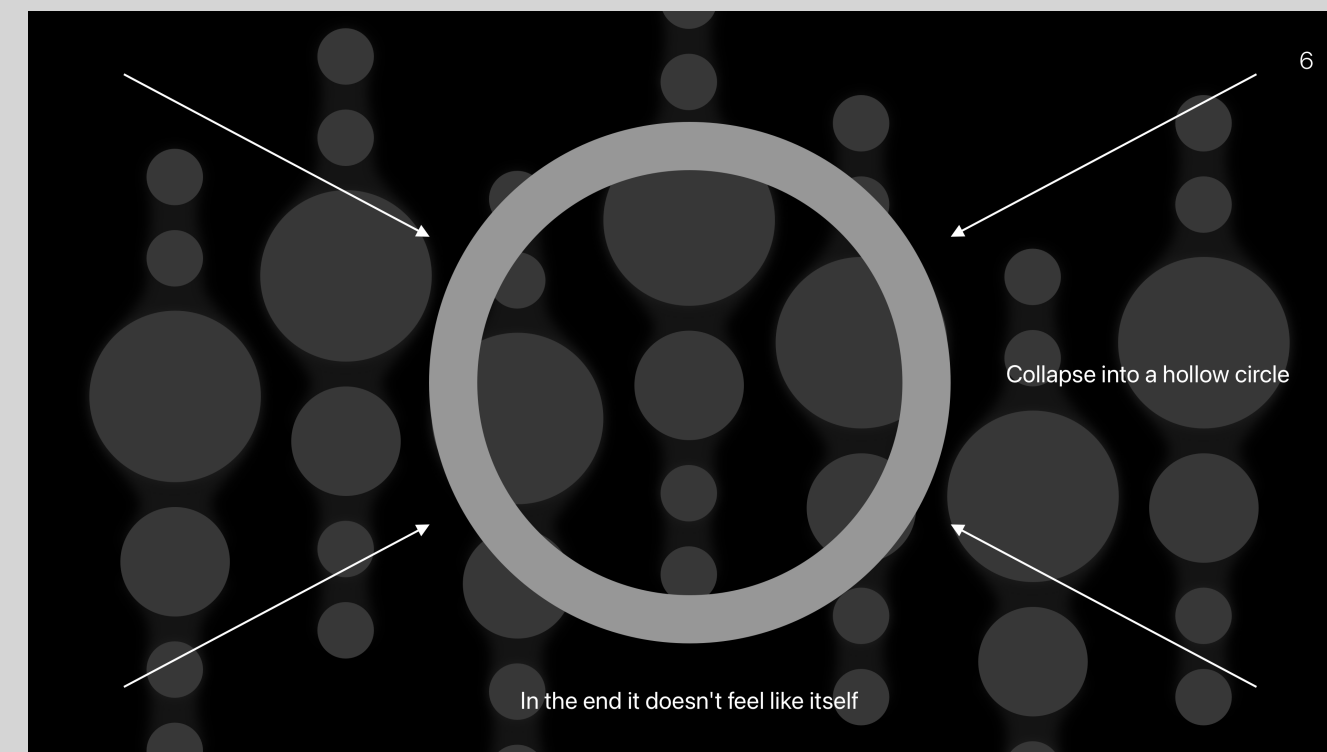
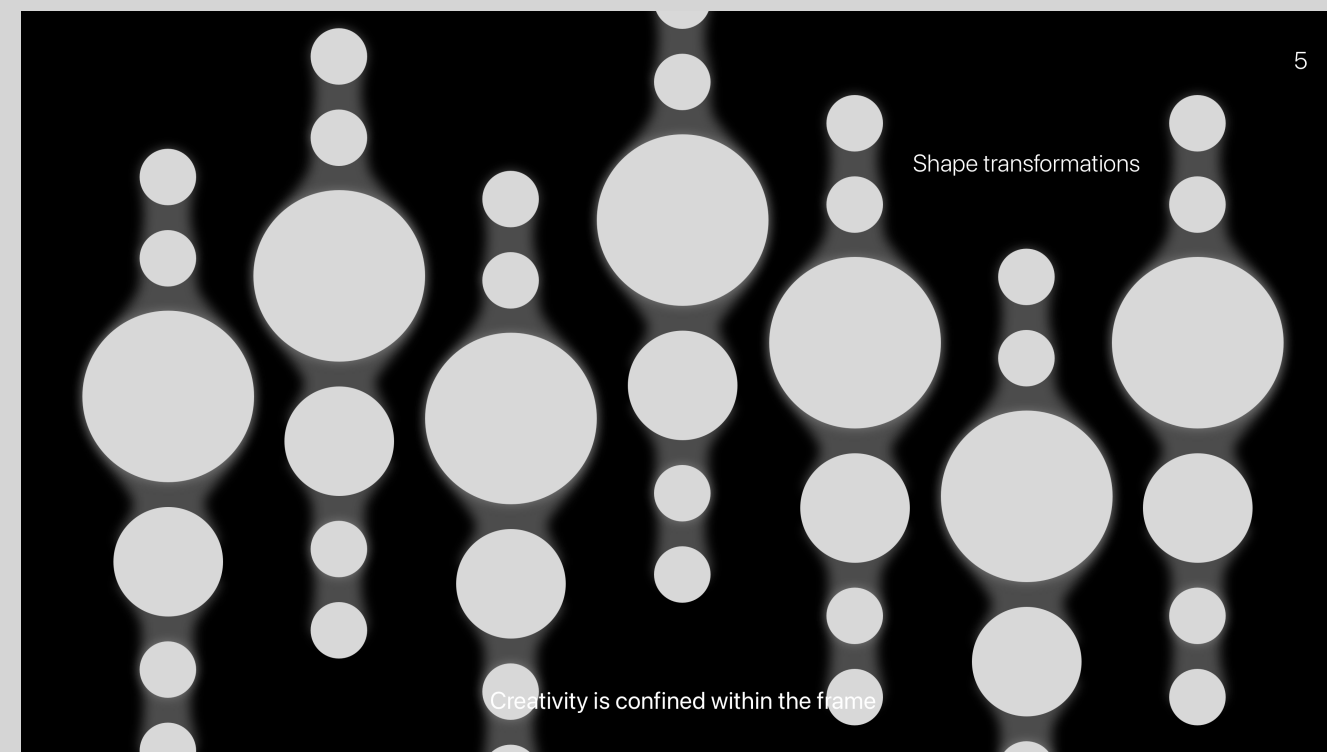
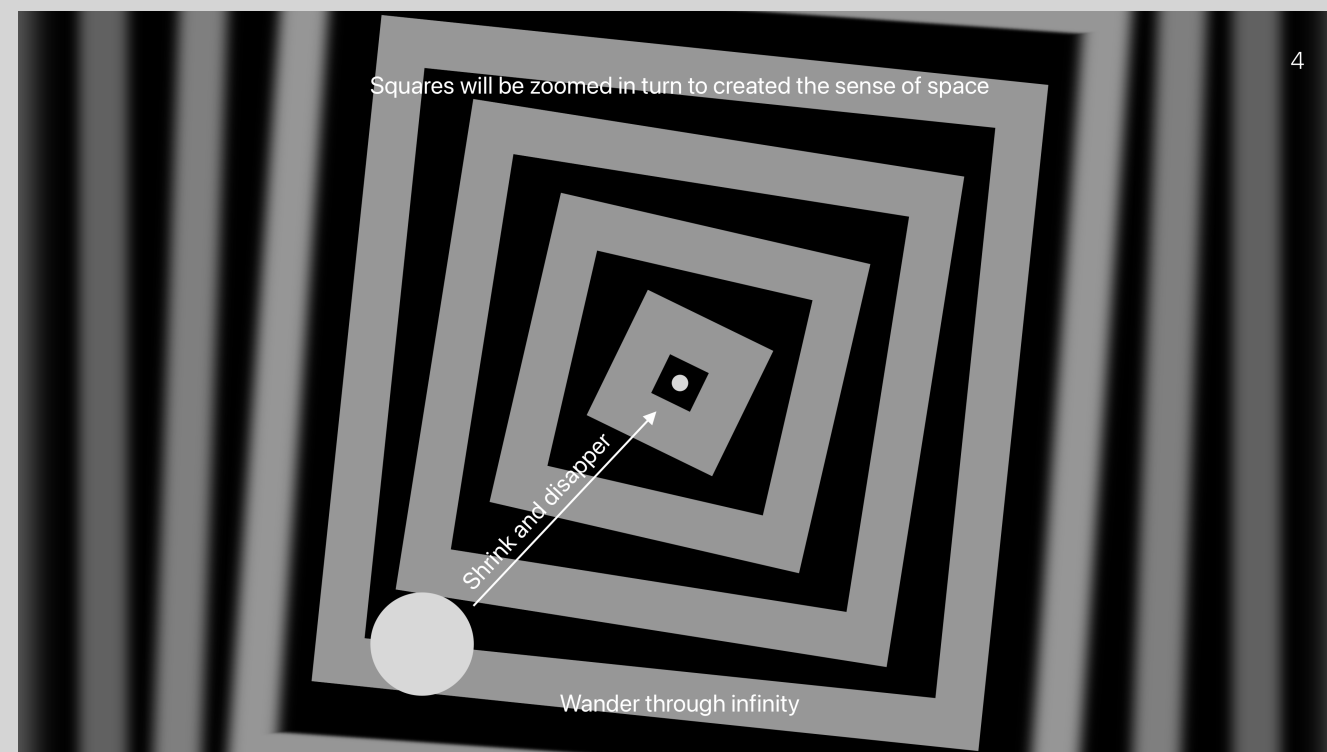
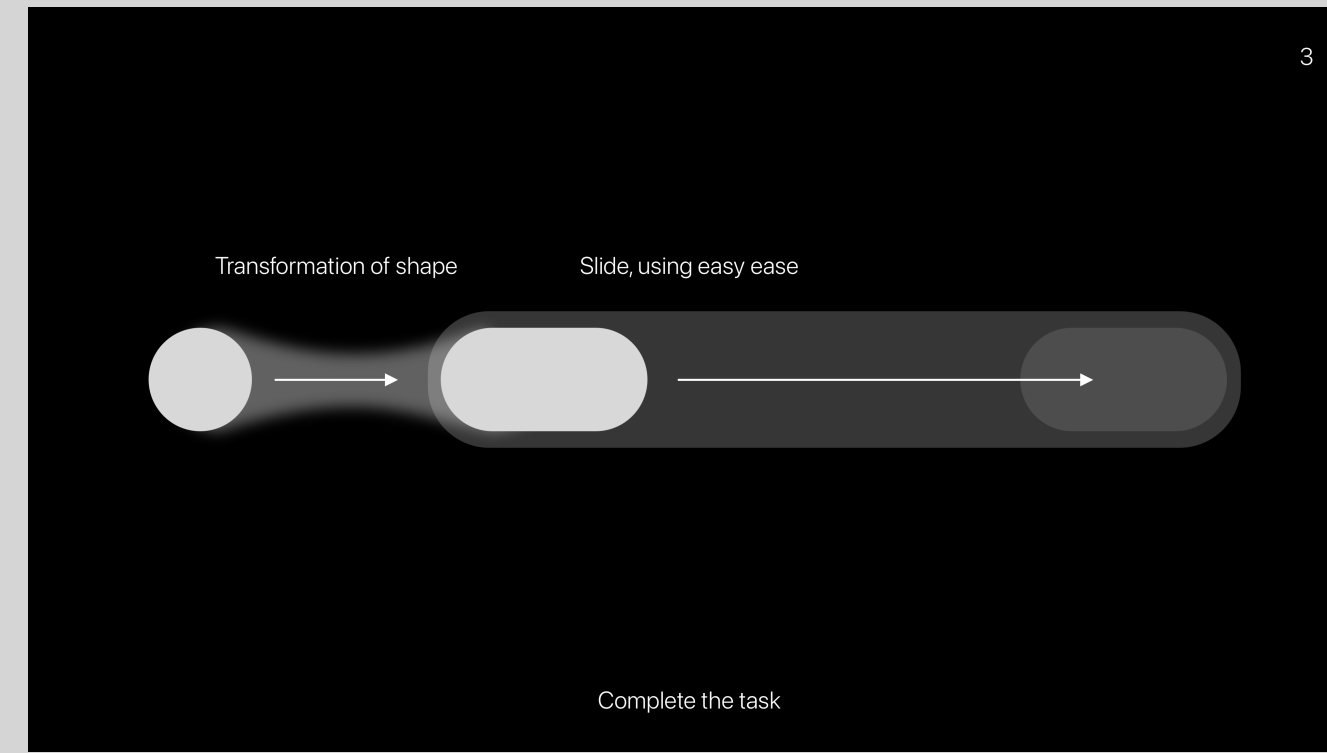
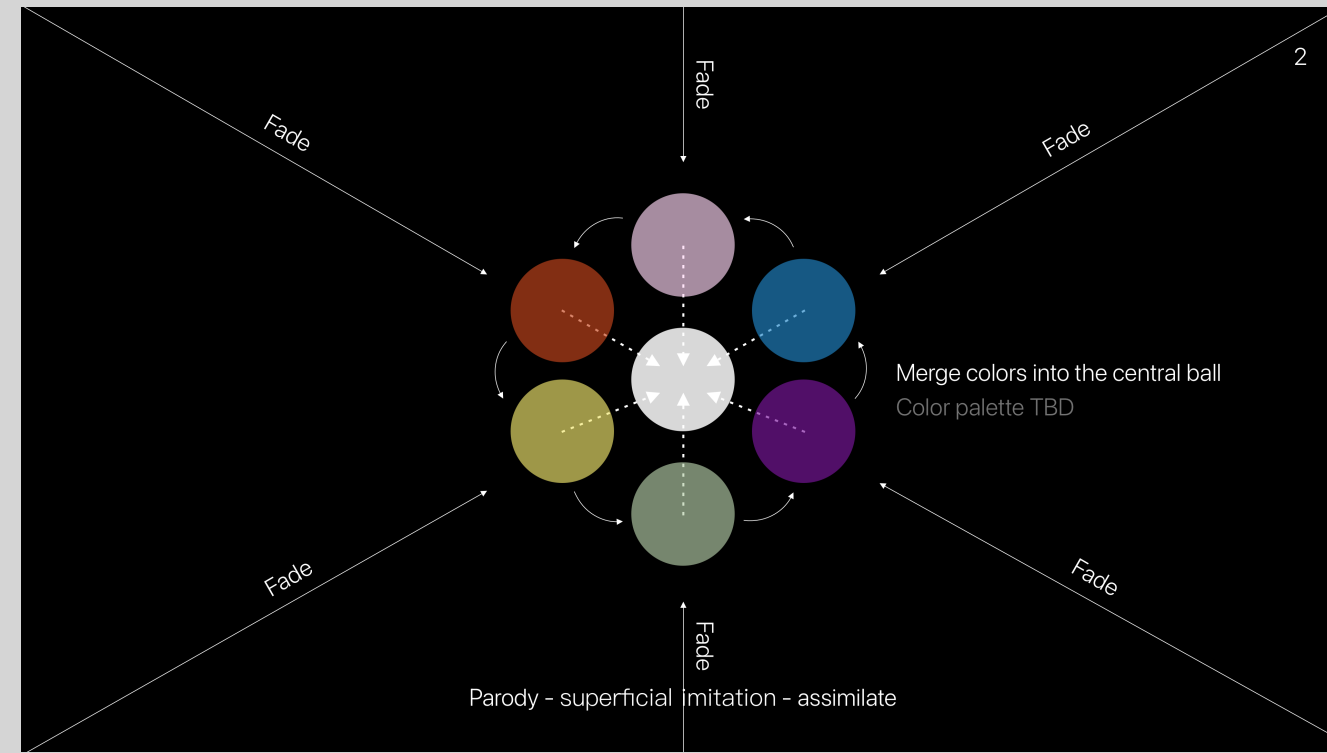
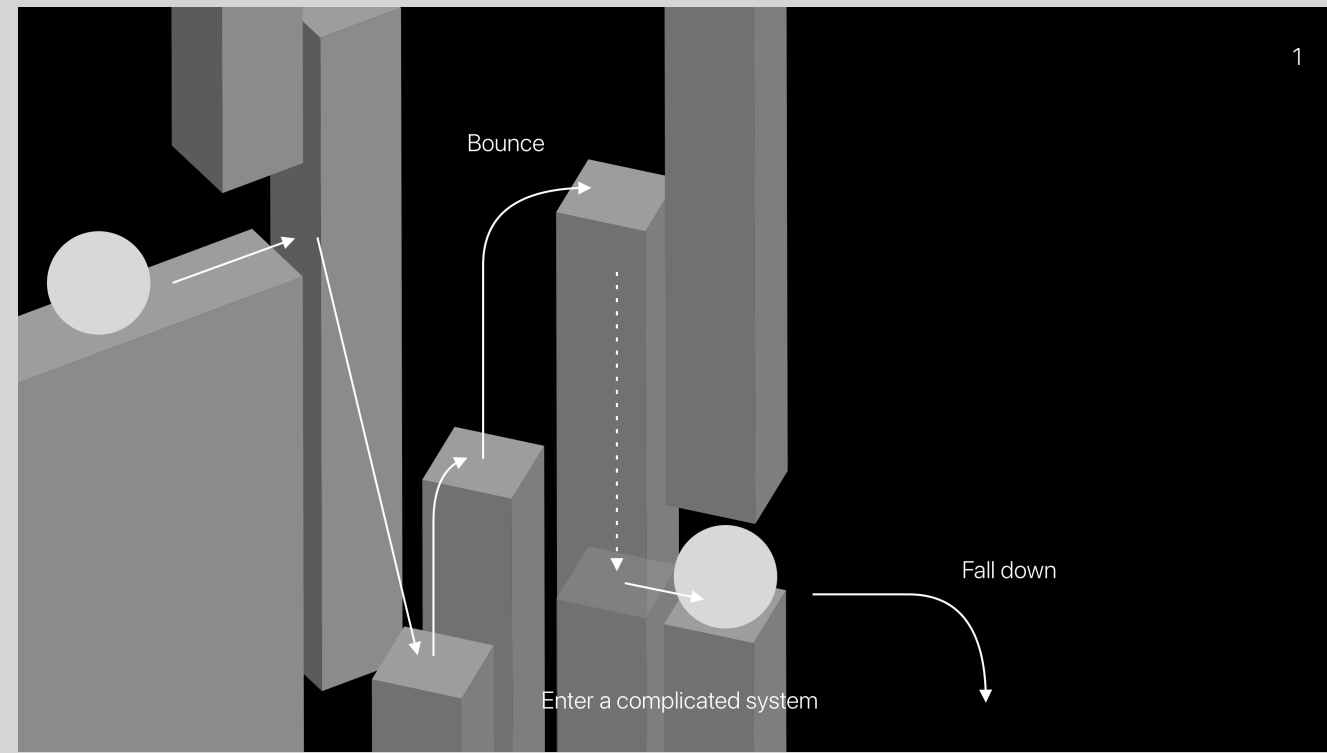
“ Ultimately, speculative design is a catalyst for social dreaming. ”

DUNNE, ANTHONY, and FIONA RABY. “SPECULATIVE EVERYTHING.”
In *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*.



Click to see the video

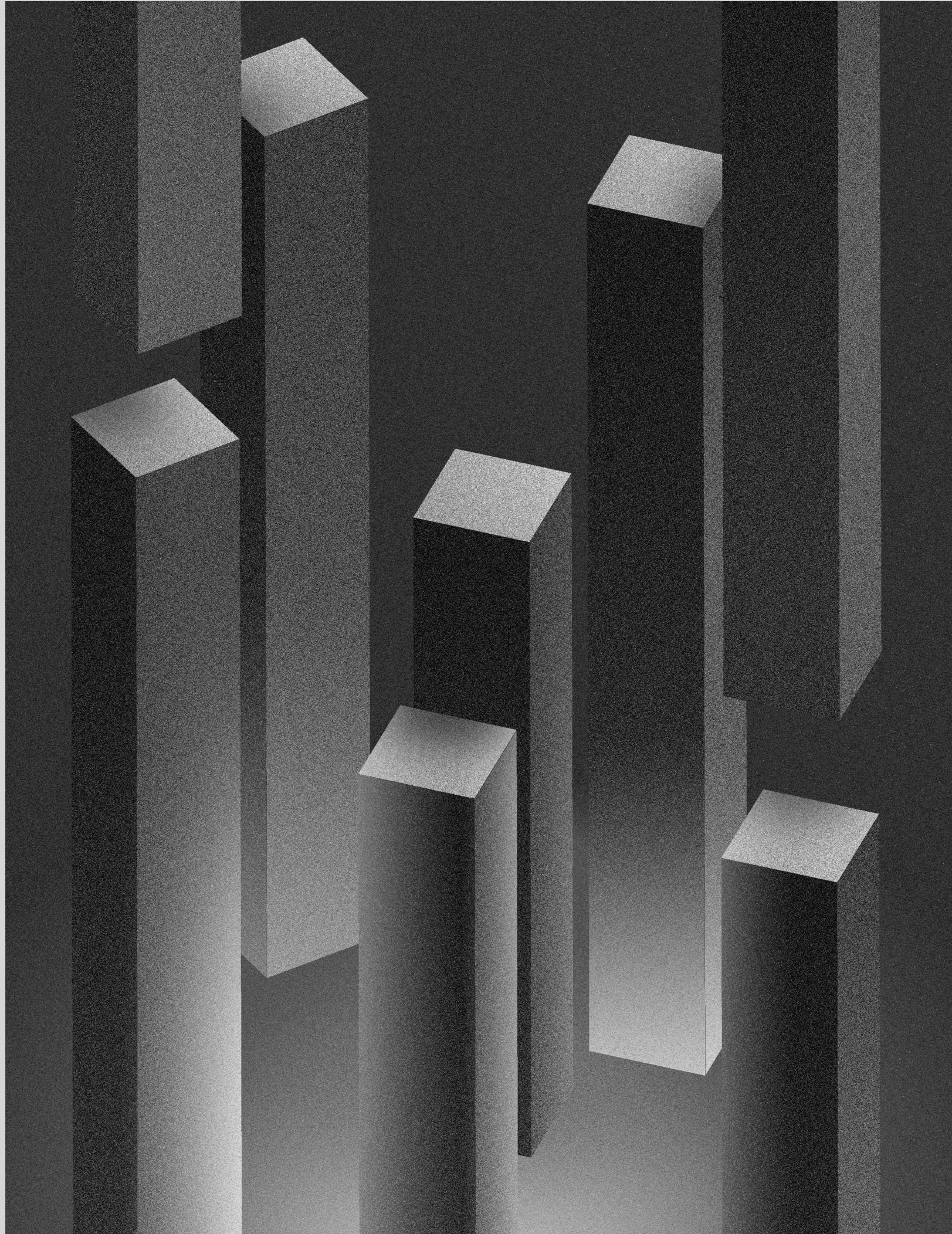
https://www.behance.net/gallery/169811757/Motion-Graphics_Capstone-Project



An experimental motion graphic with narrative nature.

Perspectives included:
 Entering a complex system;
 Being forced to assimilate;
 Complicating simple problems;
 Low-level imitation;
 Limited creativity;
 Limitless competition/effort;
 Get lost.

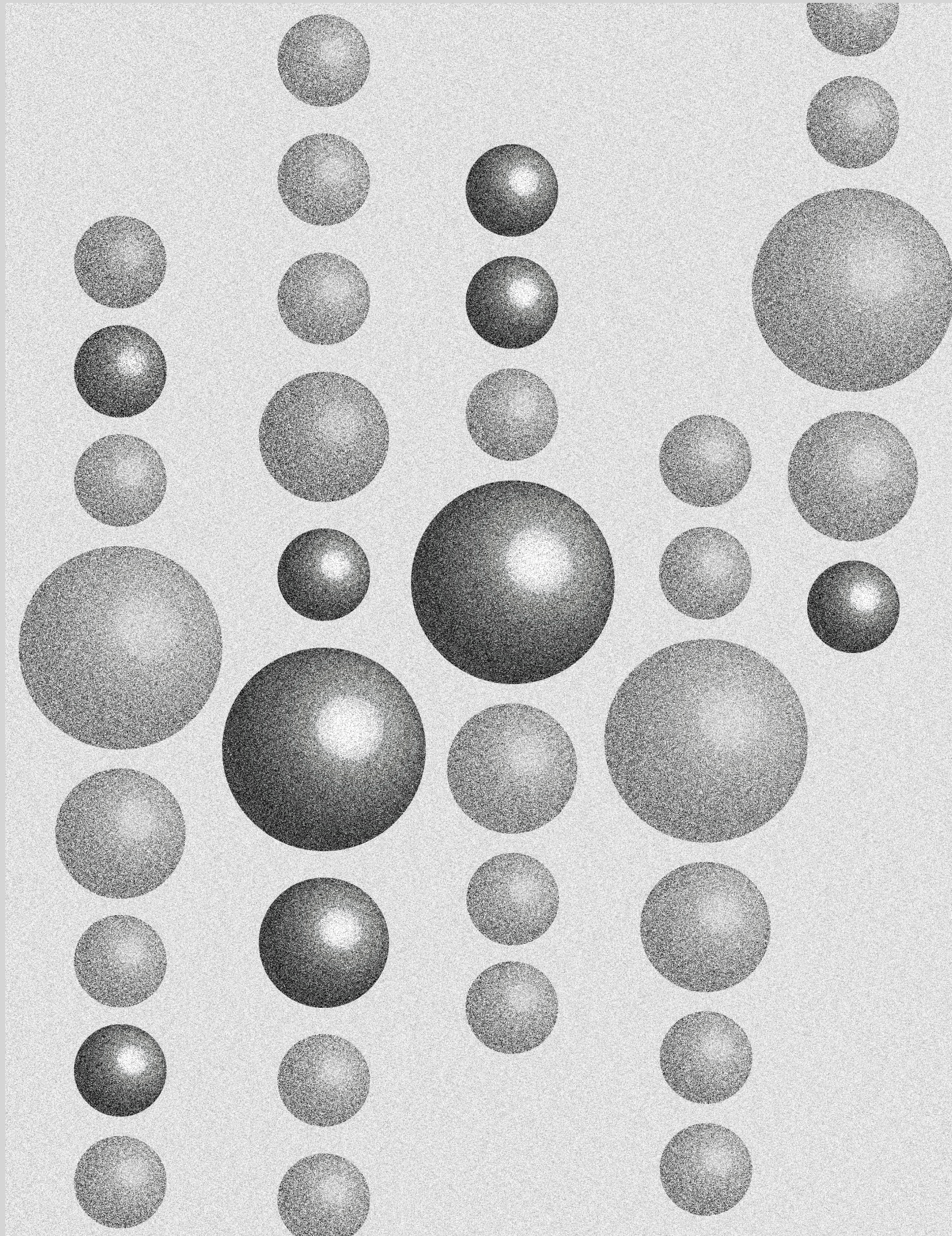
Finally, after experiencing involution, the small ball's back to how it was.



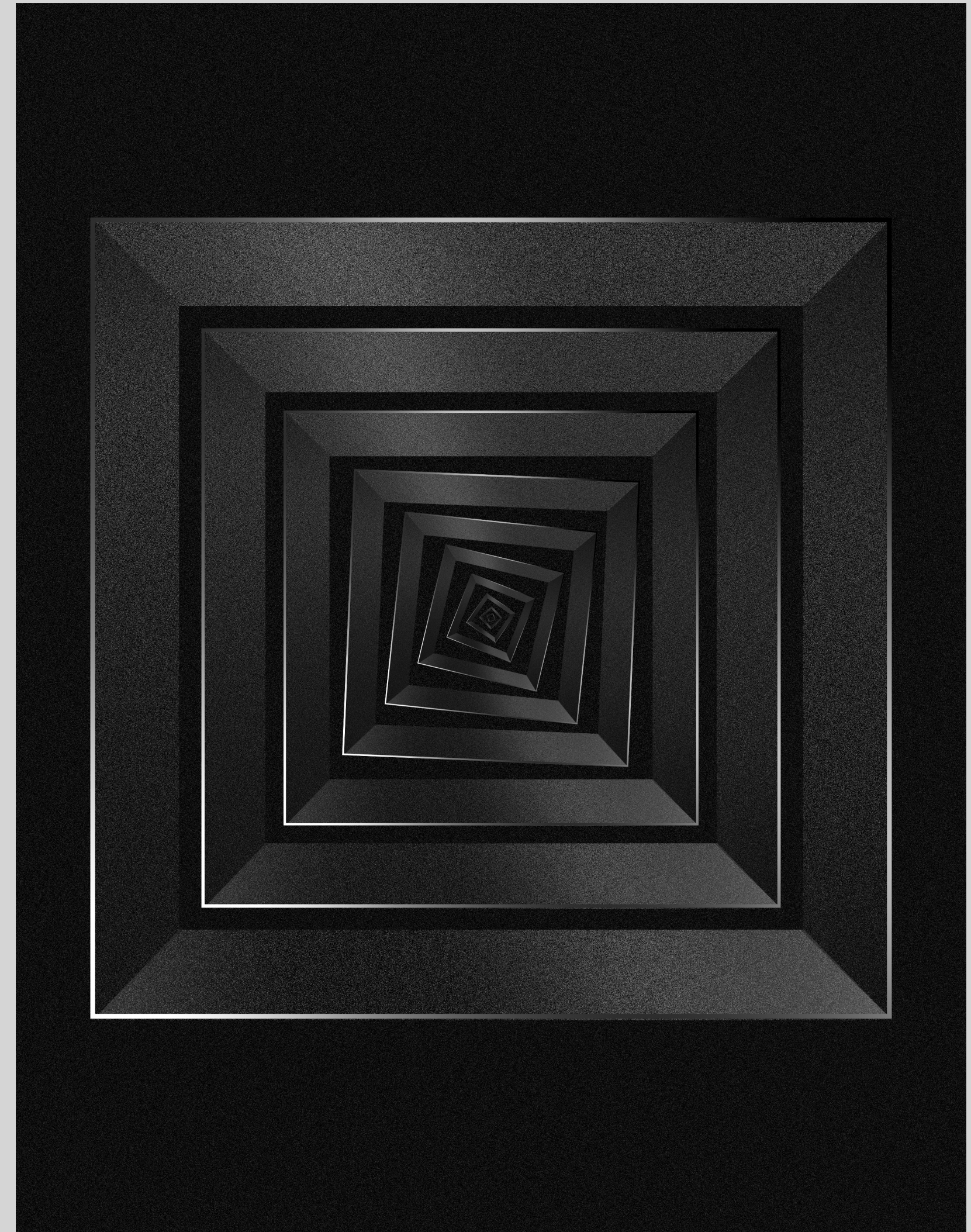
Meaningless, endless optimization and excellence



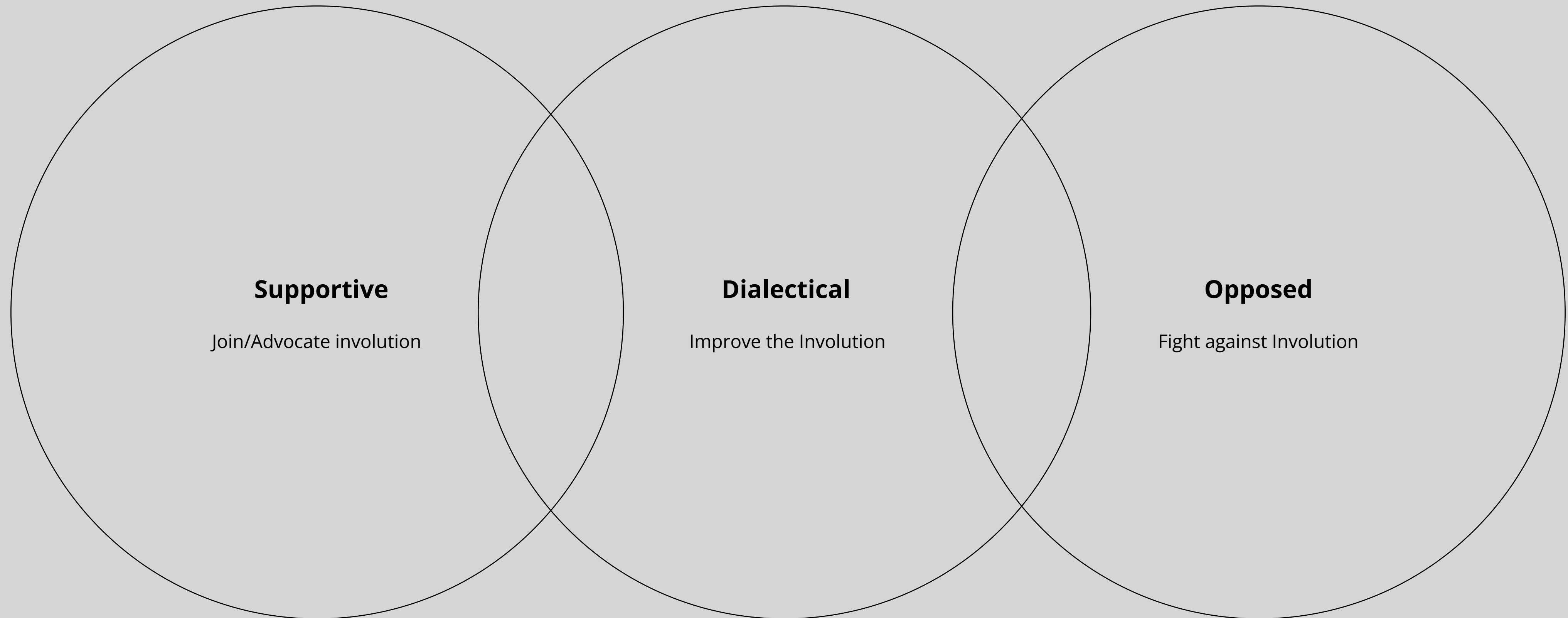
Low-level imitation and replication



The internal competition that limits creativity



Inward evolution



UN PRODUCTION MOON

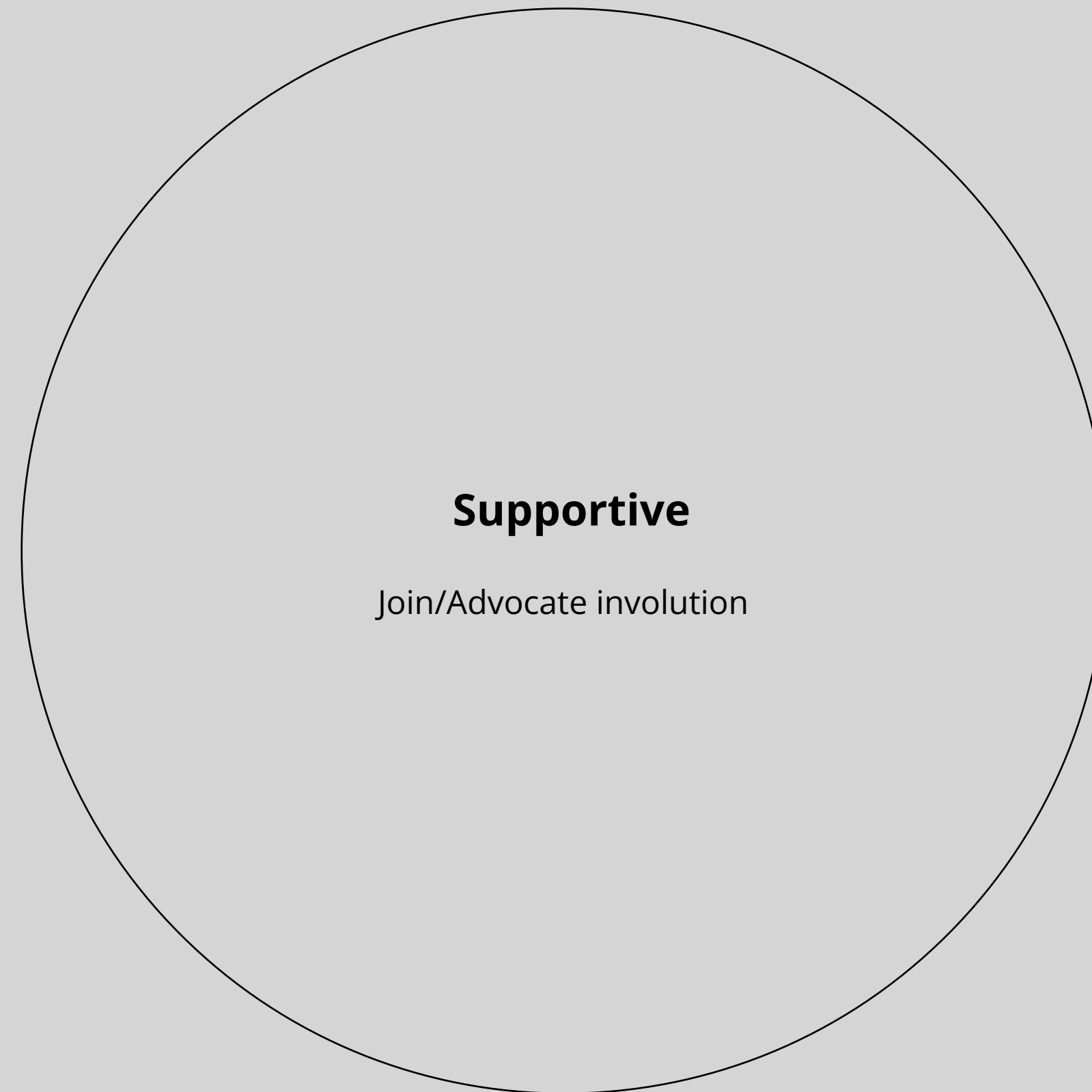
NAMING

This is a factory-like company.

For the employees, what the company is doing is opaque and unknown.

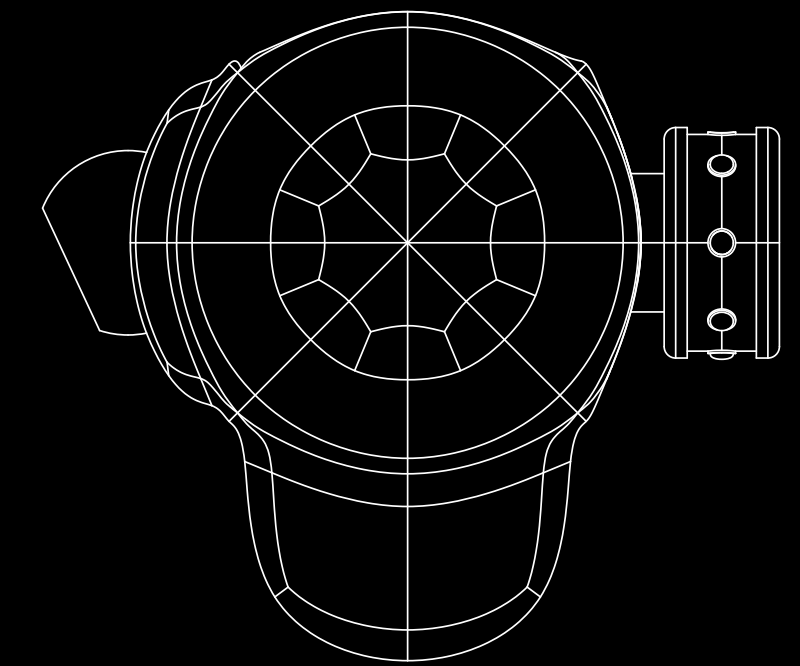
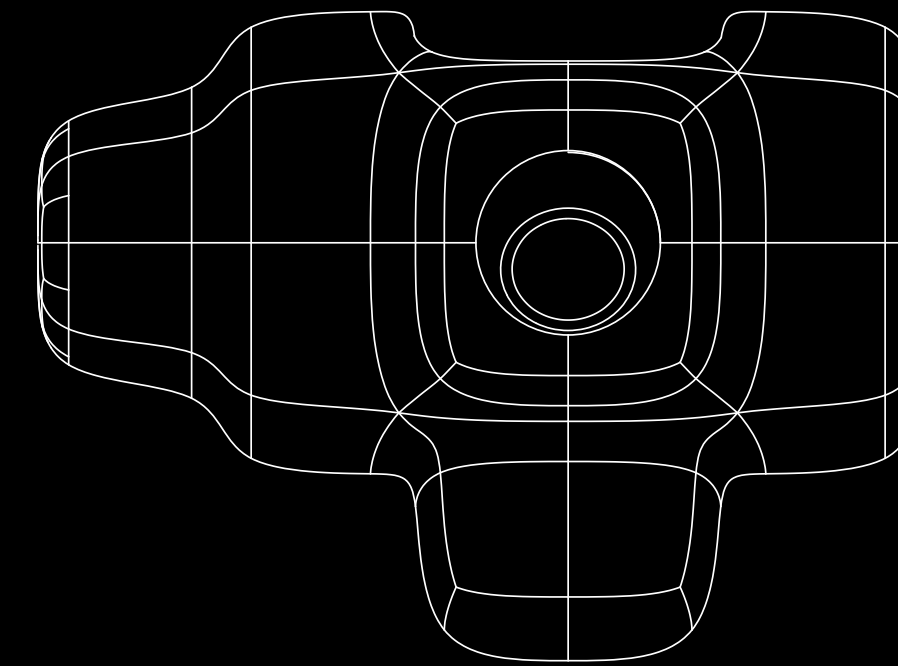
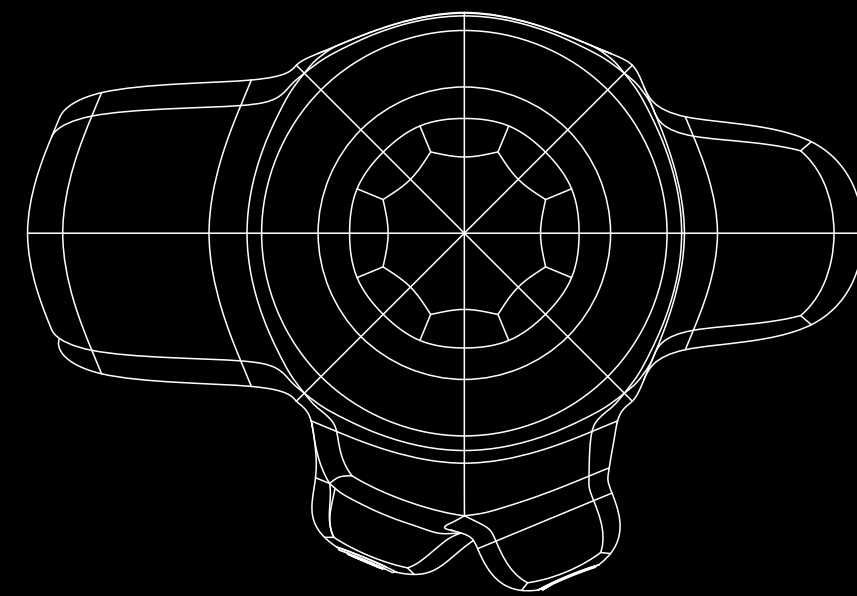
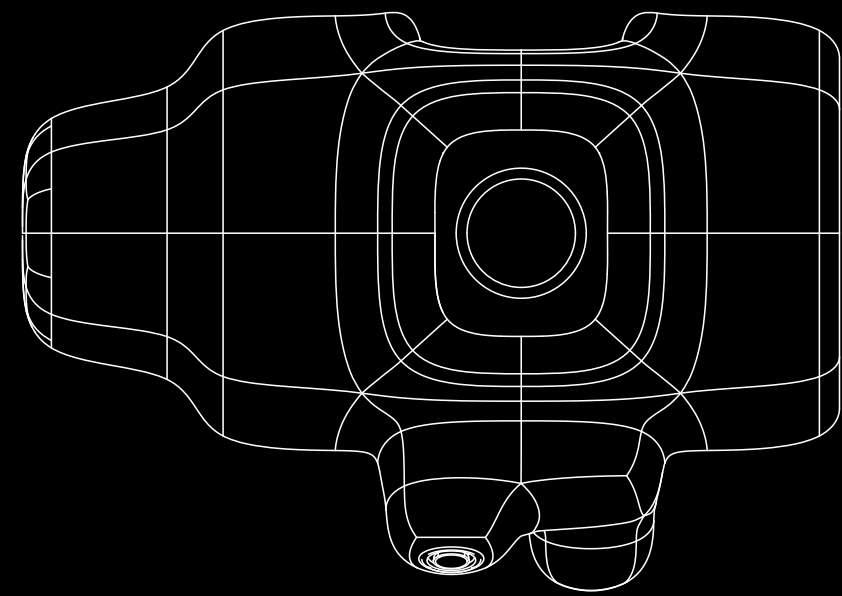
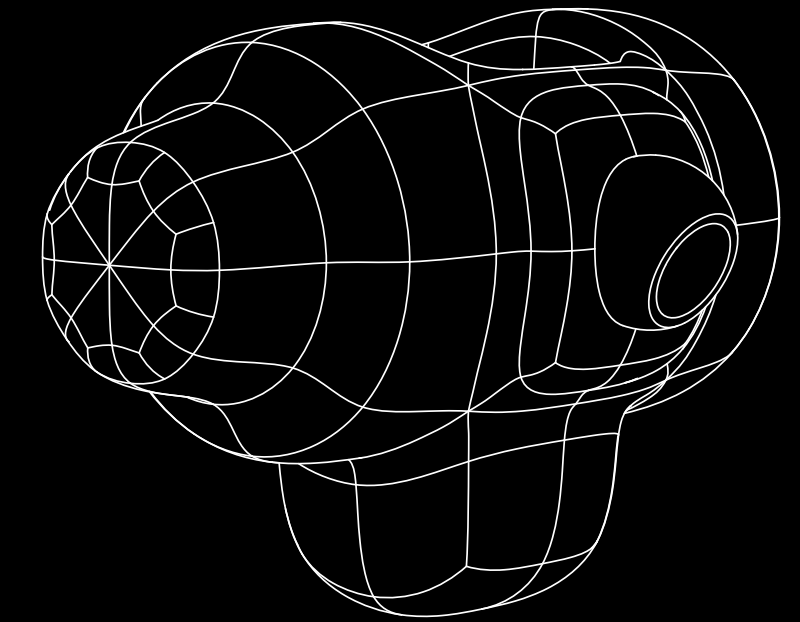
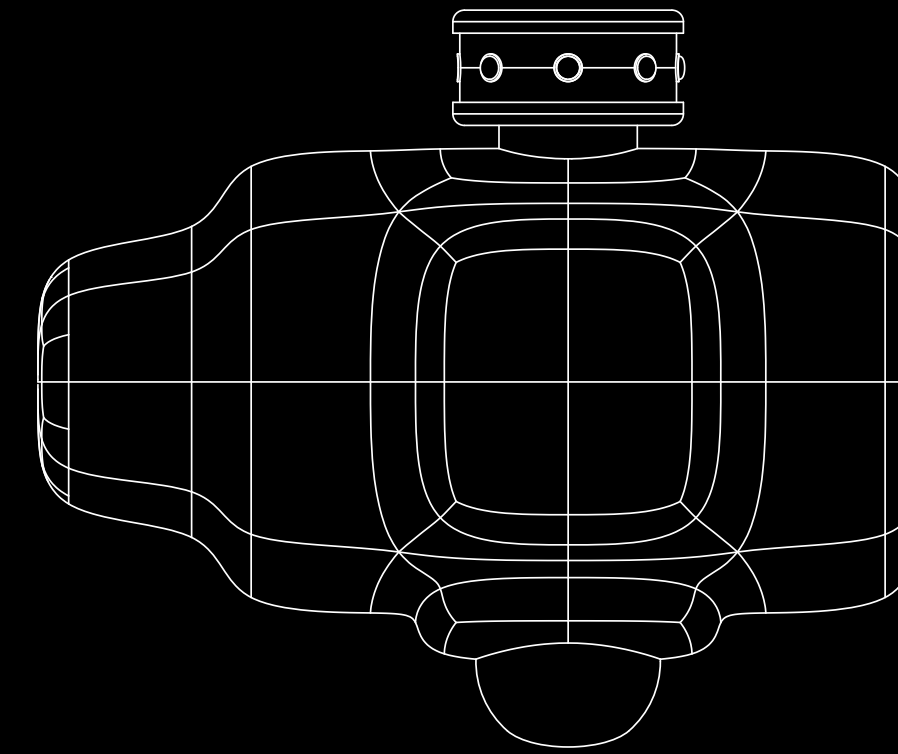
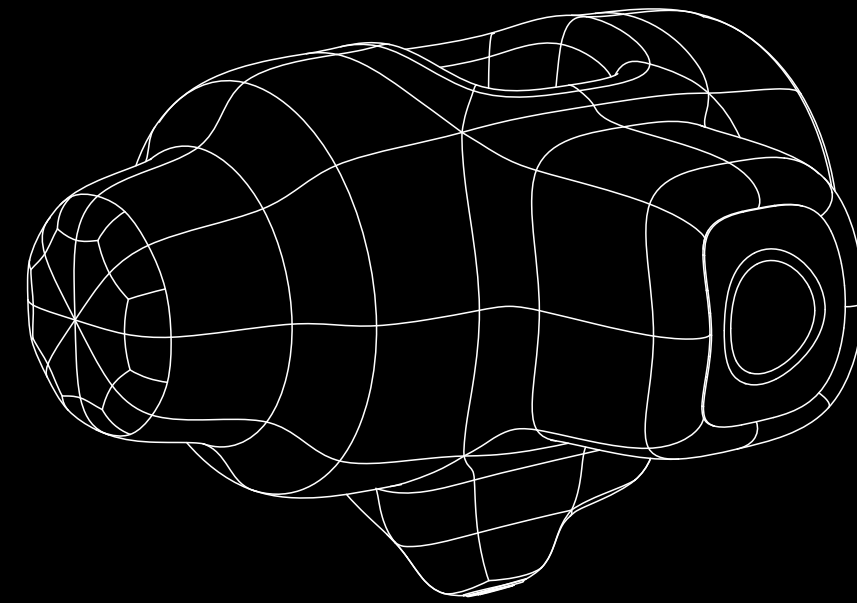
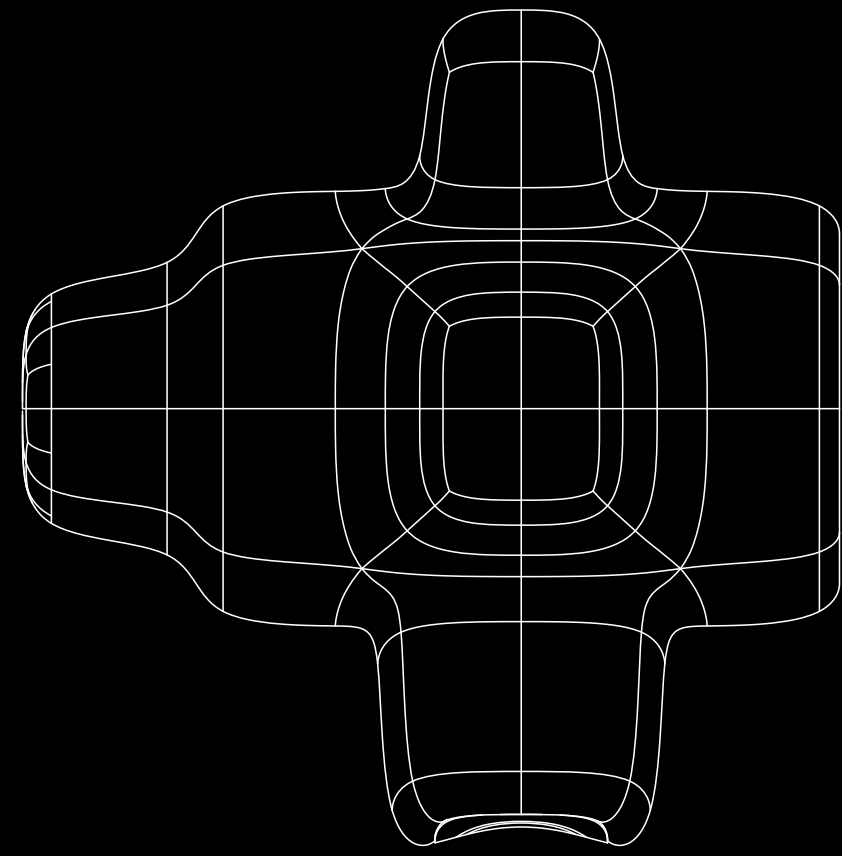
It is responsible for the manufacture of high-tech and speculative products, and the primary market direction for these products is in workplace settings.

At the same time, UNNOON represents the eternal night, implying that employees need to work overtime every day until late at night.



Module 01

Module 02

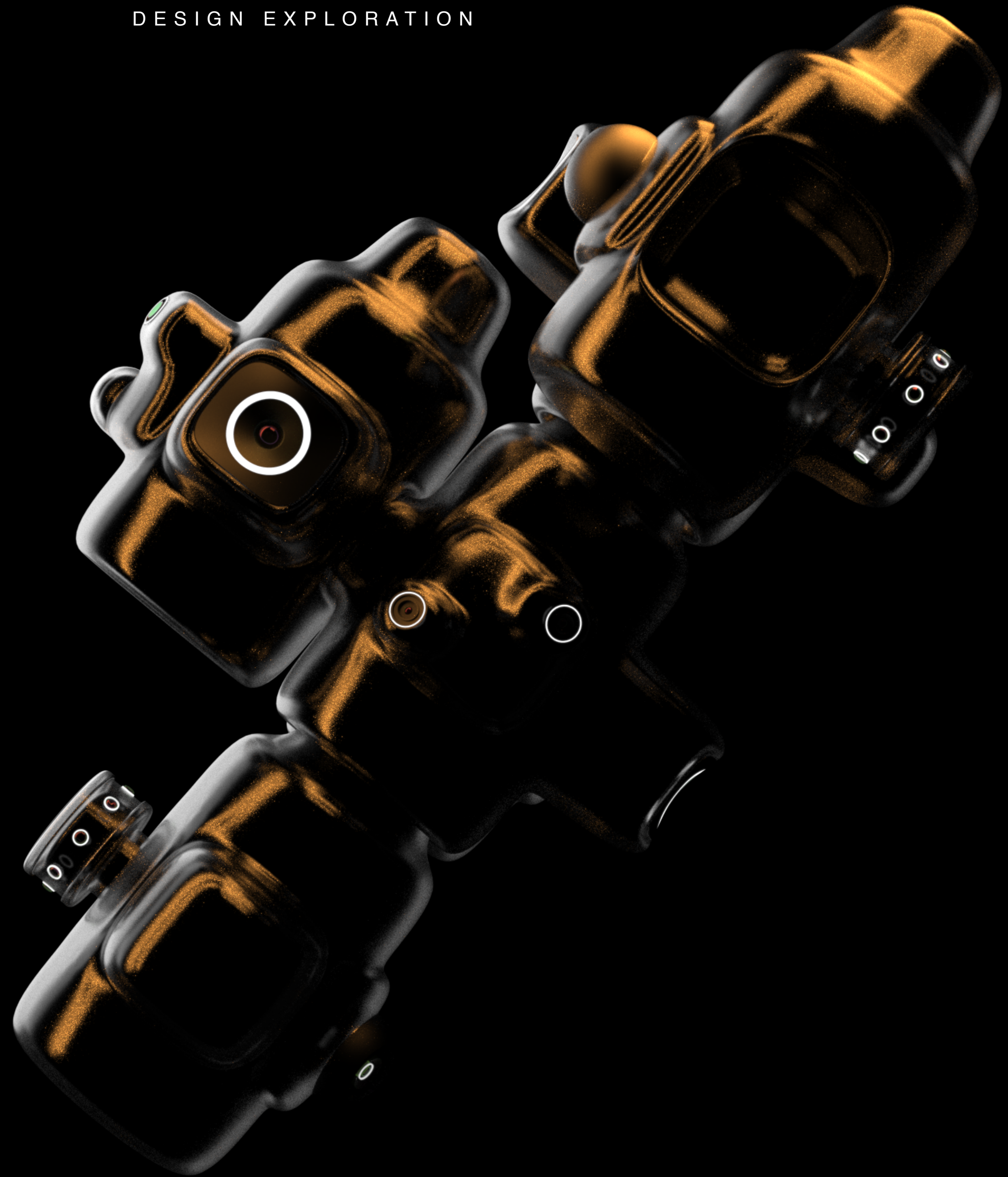


Modular Surveillance Camera System

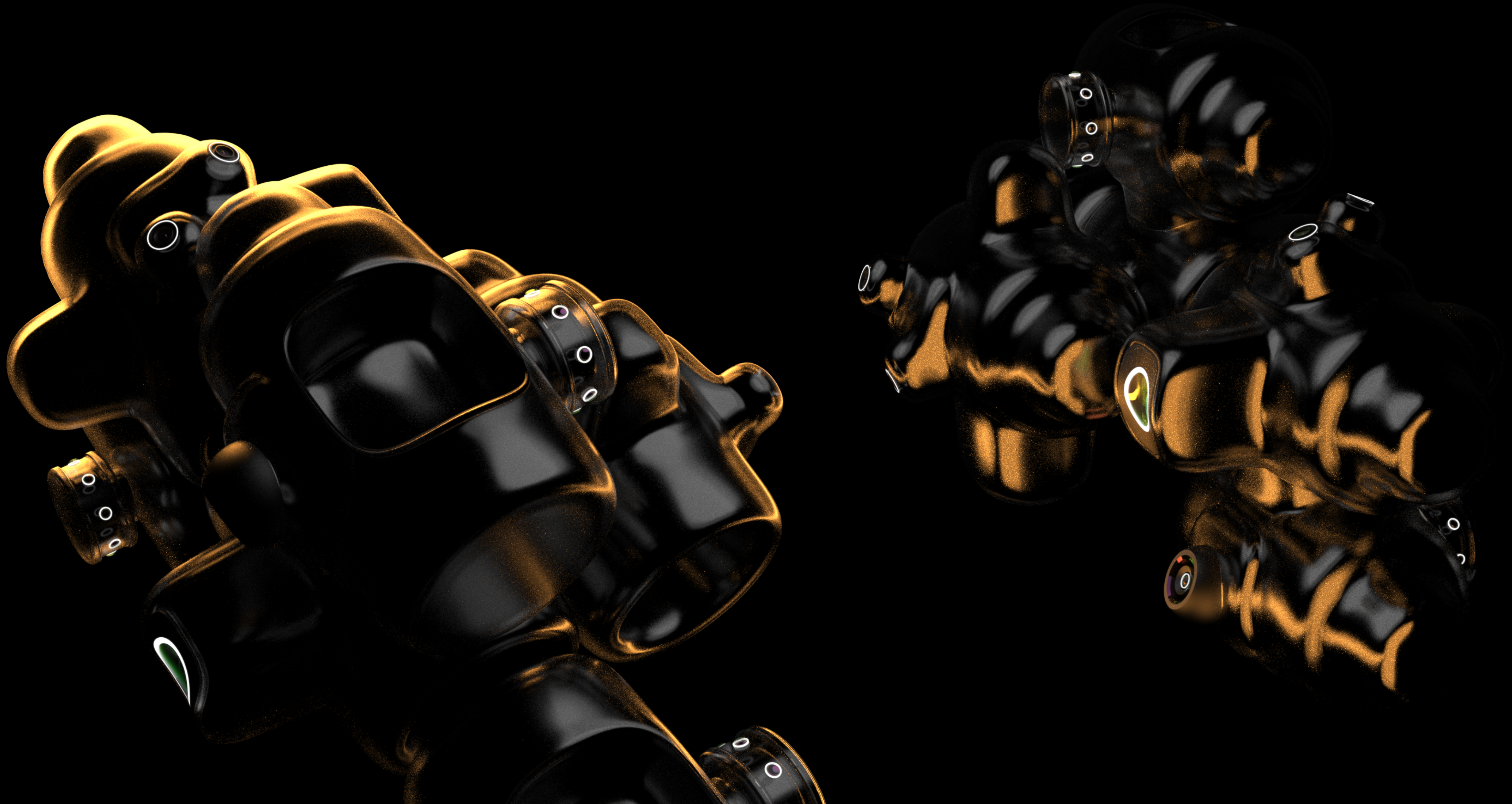
One of the products produced by UNNOON Production.

To monitor employees' behaviors from all angles.
It brings a burnout feeling, but is practical and efficient.

A modular system helps workers take it apart or assemble it.
It can be found anywhere in the company, even on employees' desks.







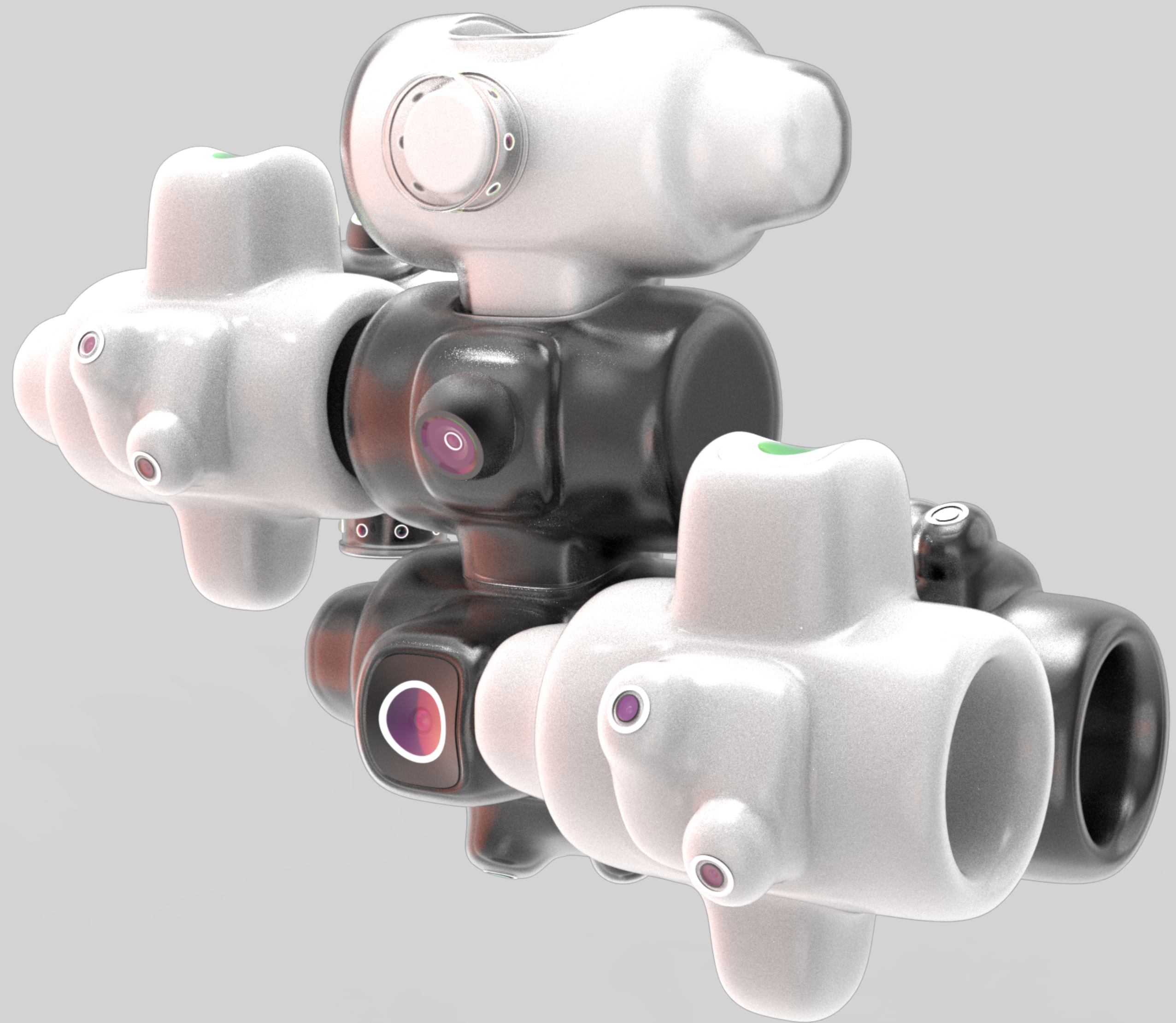
Modular camera system

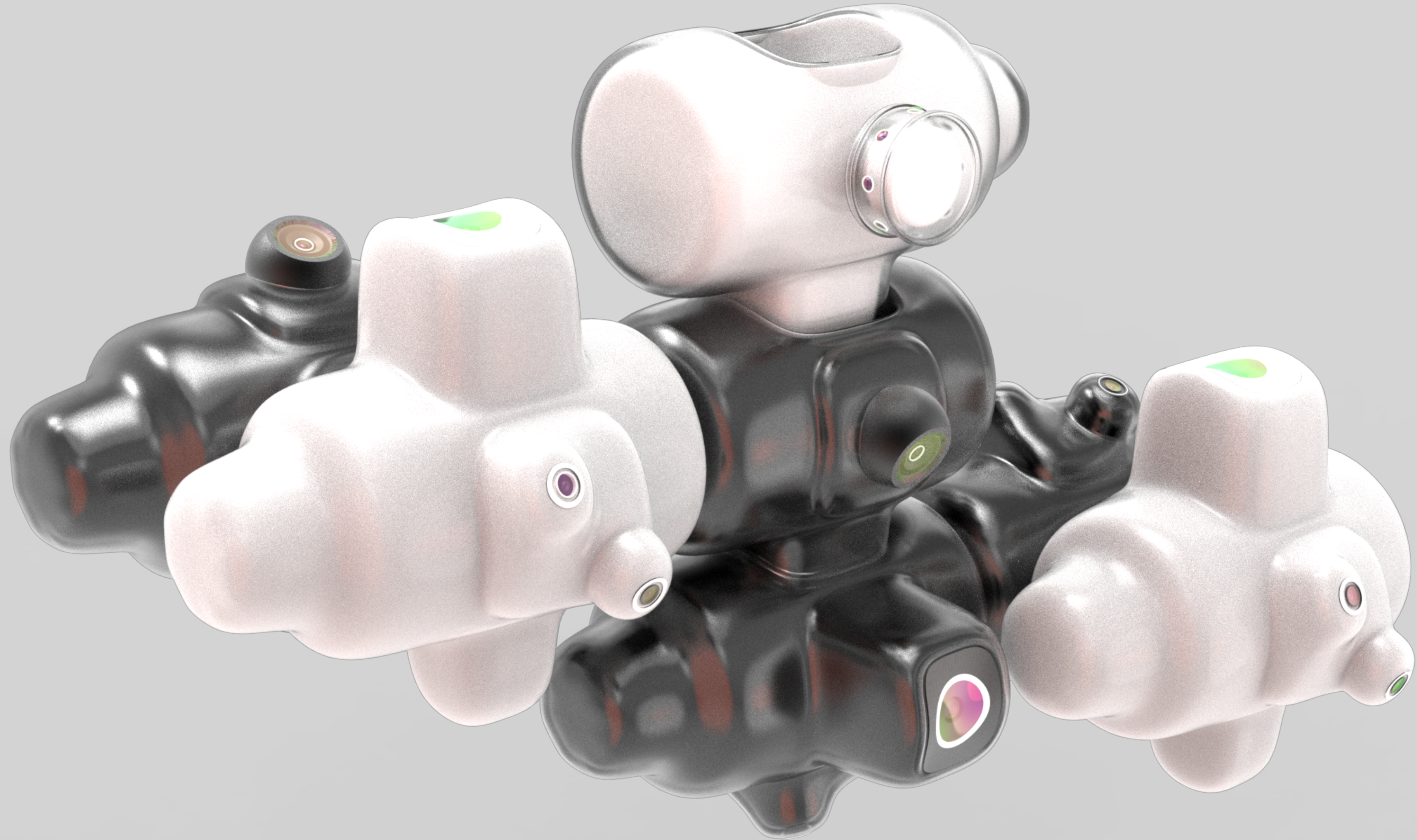
Supportive: Join/Advocate involution

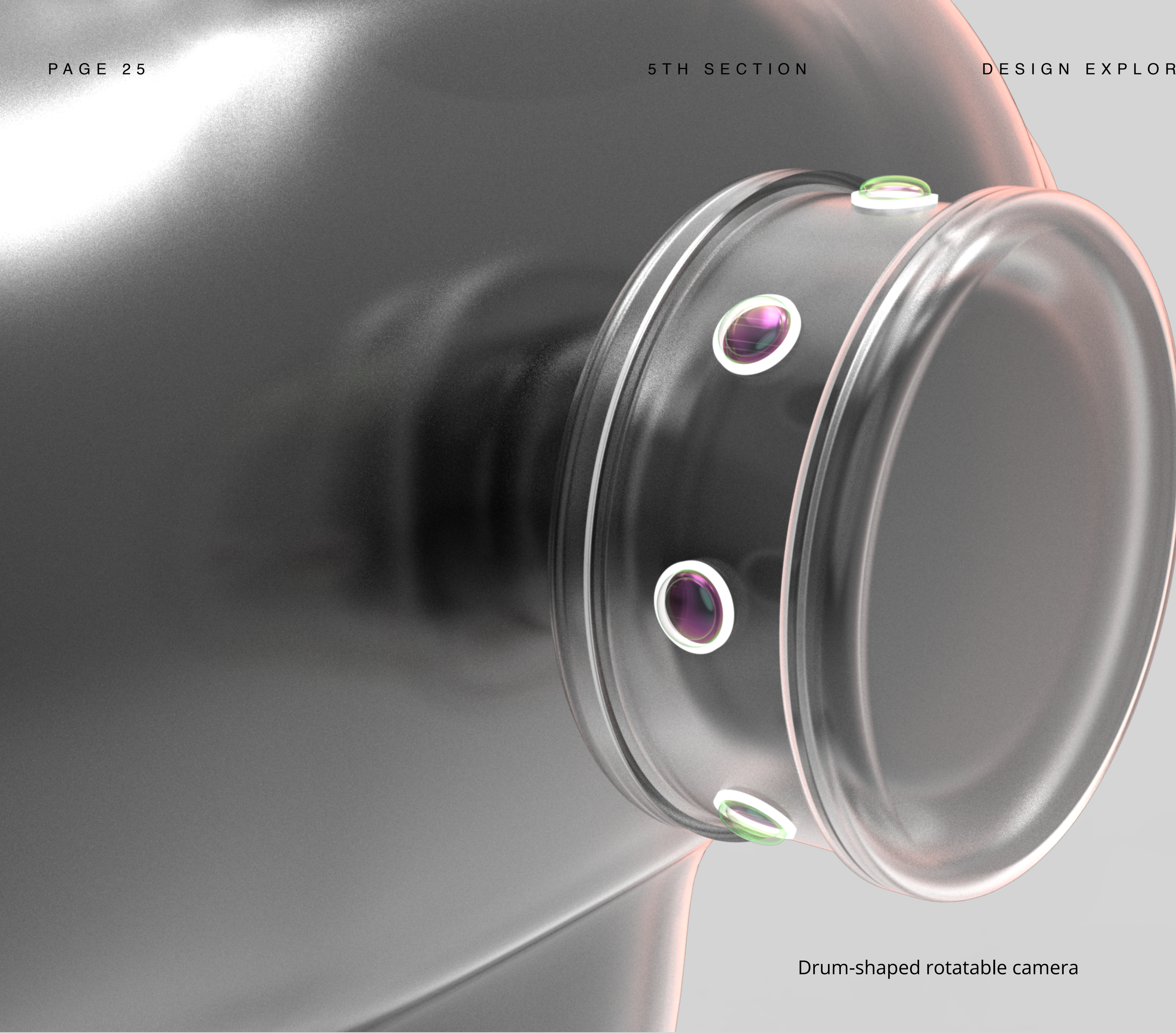
Encouraging competition.

It is more helpful in restraining employee behavior.

This system is similar to the orange organizational model, except that it has become a **substantive** and **only** criterion for judging, with clear rewards and punishments, compared to the intangible one (companies' appraisal system at this stage).







Drum-shaped rotatable camera



"Gaze" Focusable camera

Eye-shaped camera



Multi-angle camera



UN PRODUCTION
MOON

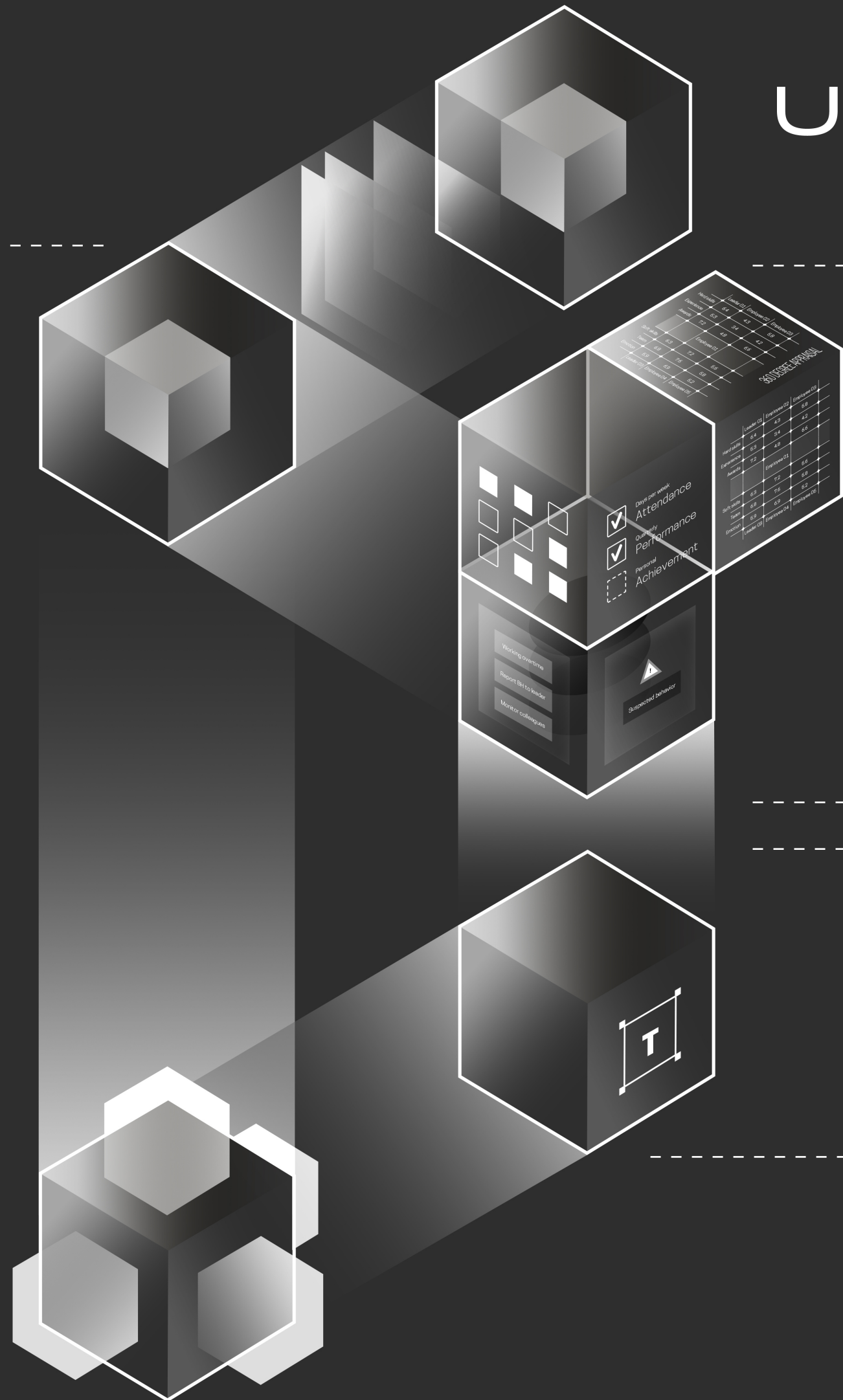
Supervisors are responsible for monitoring employees' performances and viewing related records in the system.

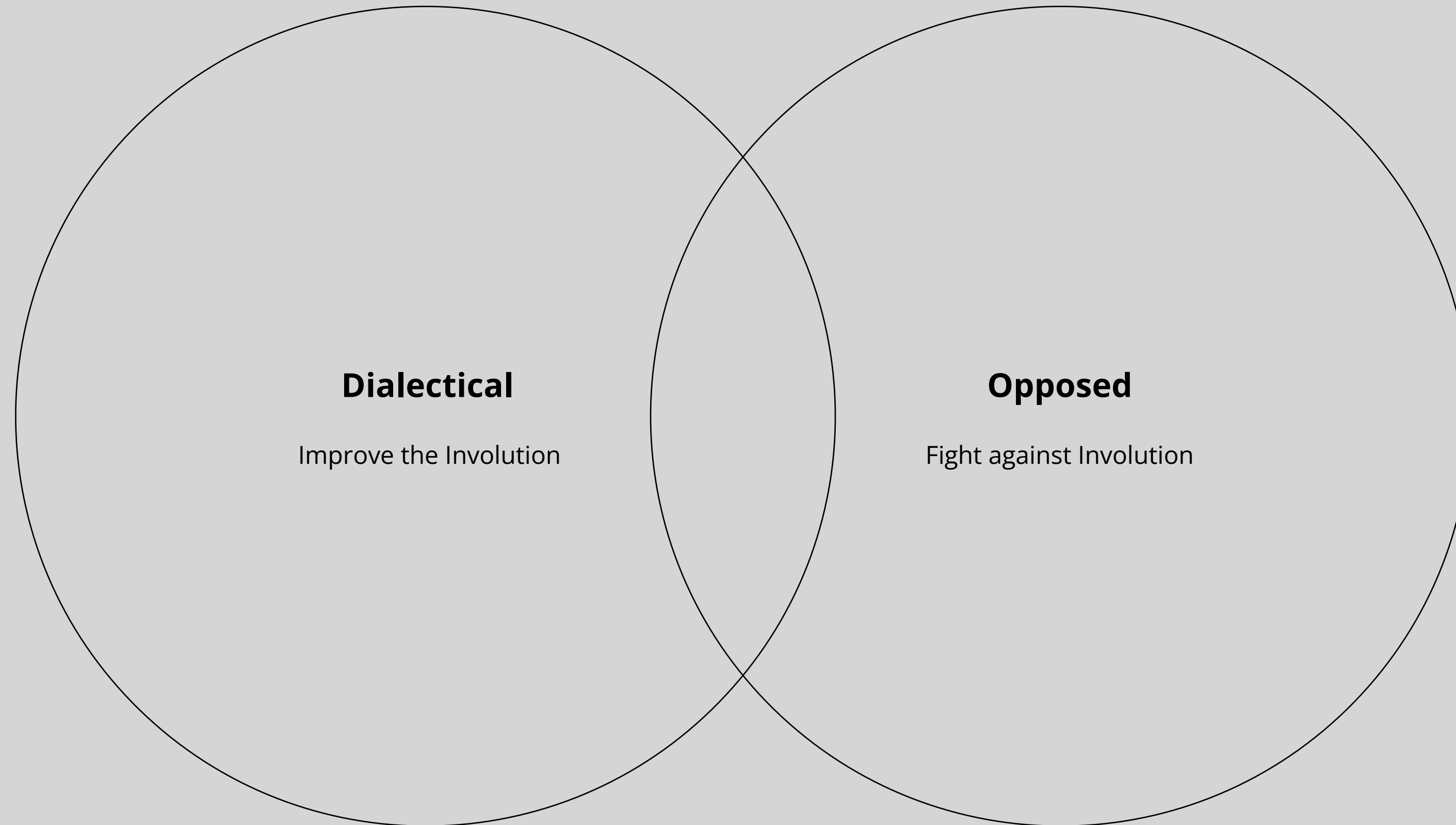
Online employee performance evaluation system.

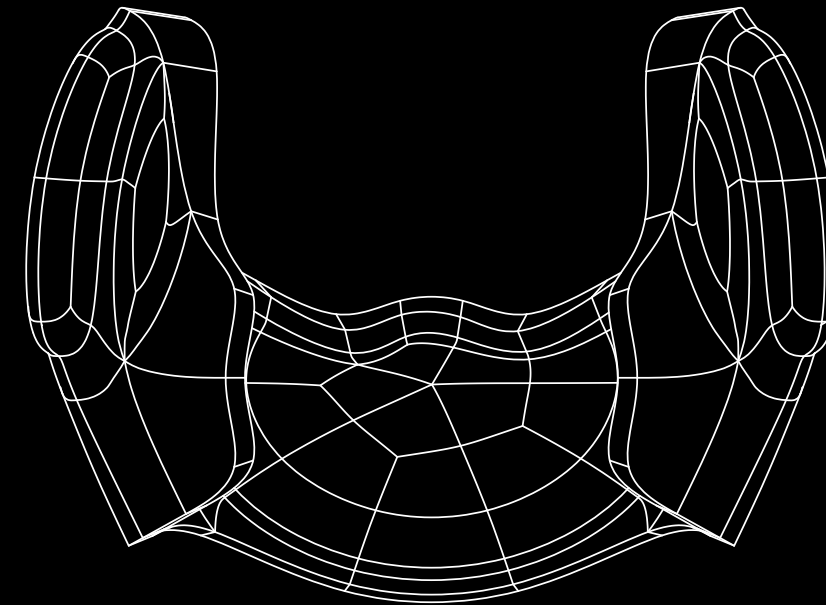
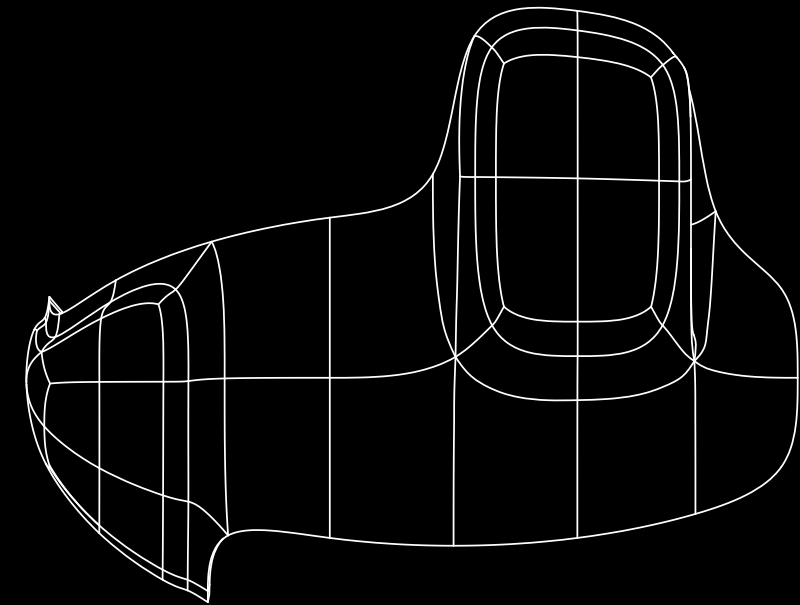
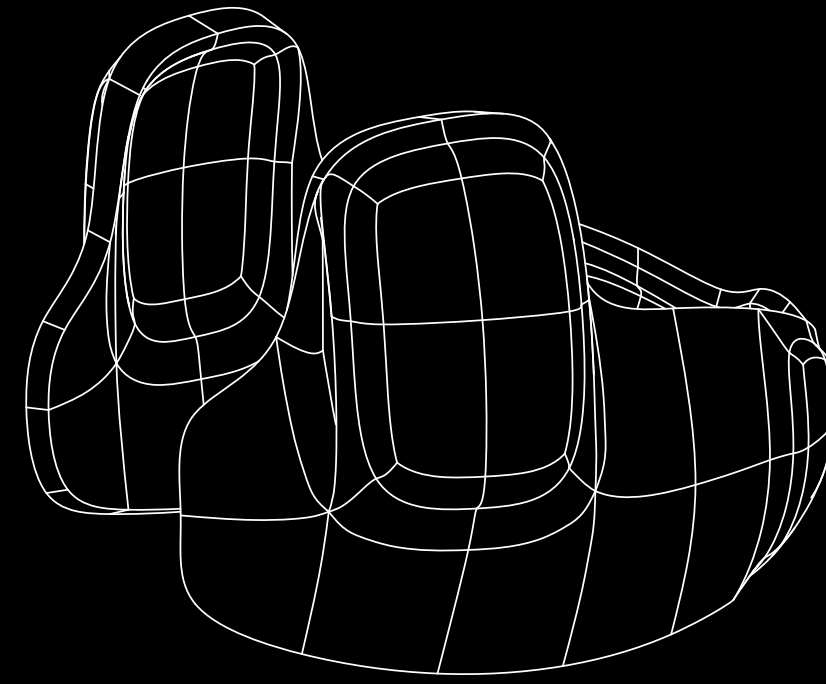
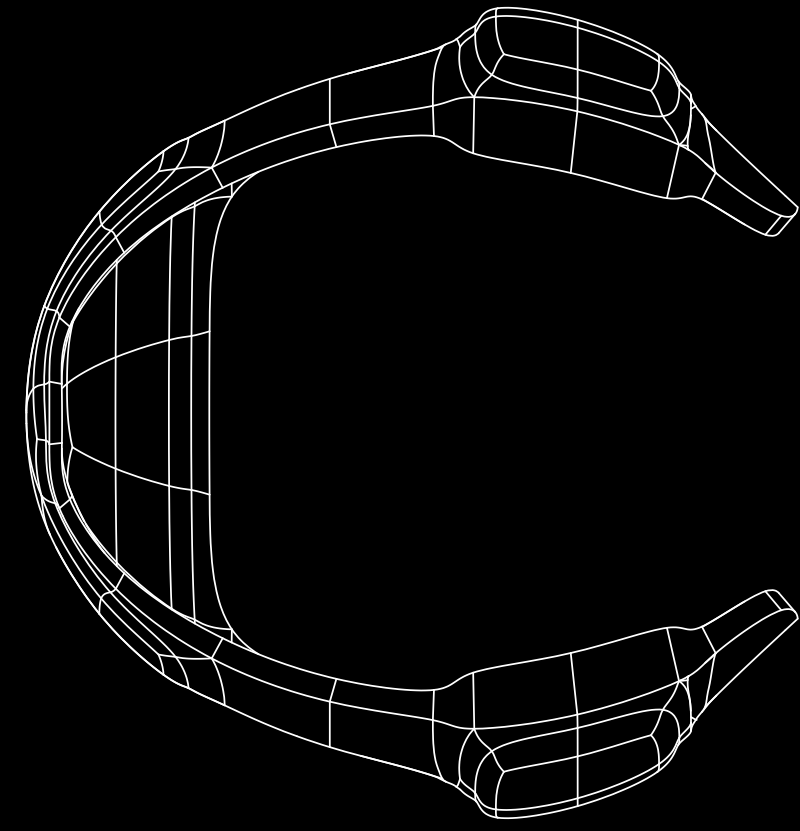
Employees' behavior will be monitored and converted into text information.

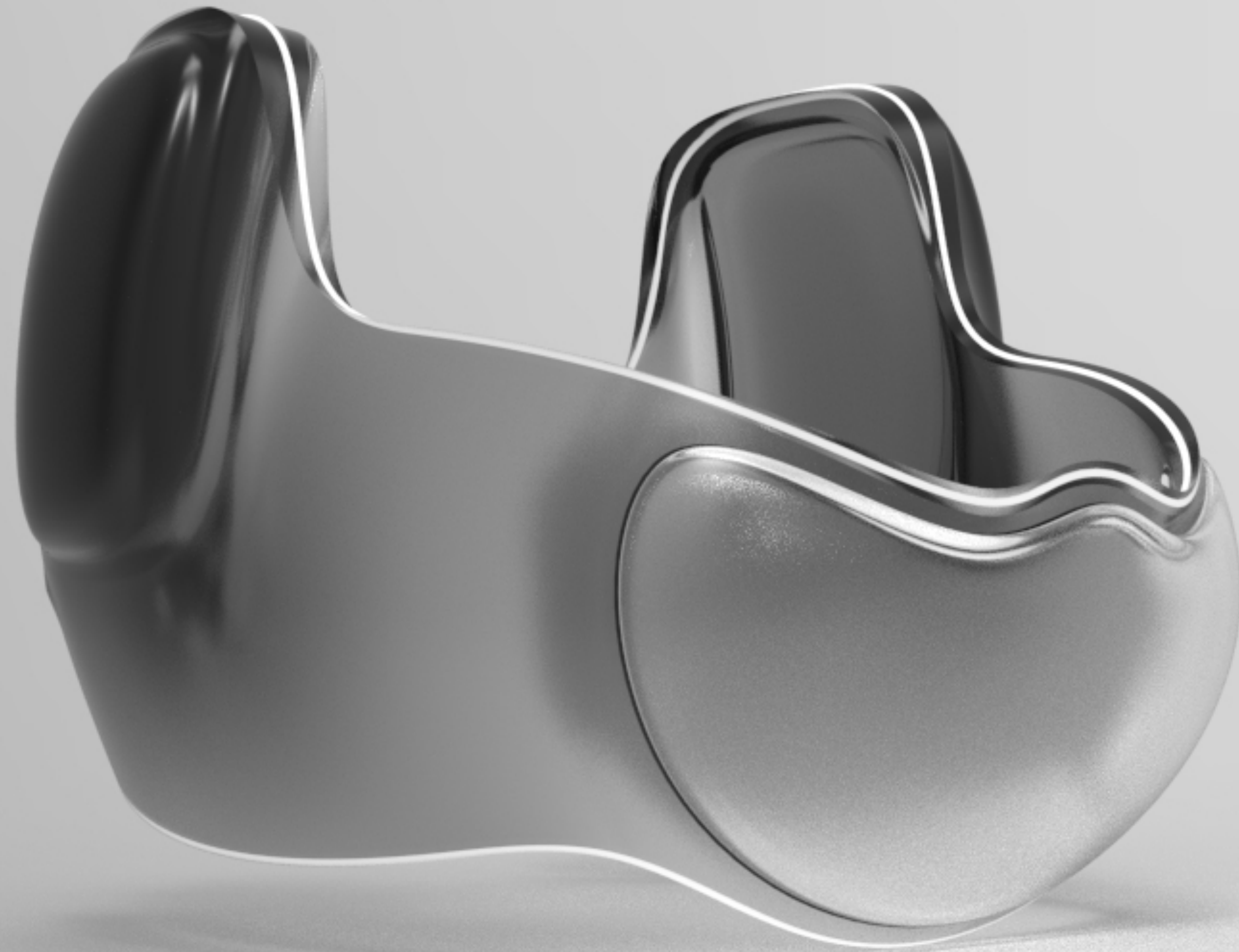
The modular cameras system includes four types of cameras with 360-degree surveillance capabilities.

Performance Appraisal System









Focus Mode

Dialectical: Improve the Involution

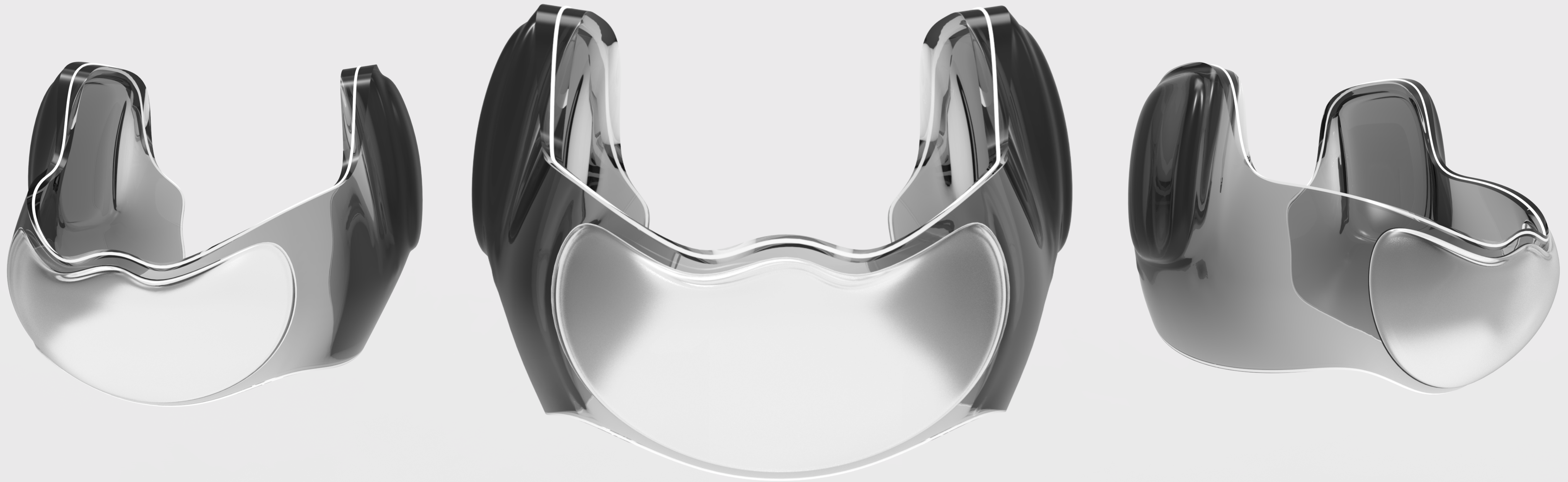
Opposed: Fight against Involution

A combination of a headphone and mask, face worn.
Two-in-one product.

The headphones are located on the left and right sides of the product.

The mask part on the front of the product is made of translucent material, the opacity of the material can be changed.





Focus Mode

A wearable device that can separate the distance between people, and divide work and life.
It is a device that allows people to temporarily isolate themselves from the outside world at any time and enjoy their own time.

THANK YOU!