

PANDER

AN ABSURD CULMINATION OF THE NATURAL

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Thesis Submission for Master of Fine Arts in Design & Technology
at Parsons School of Design

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ABSTRACT

Pander is a series of absurd products derived from an interrogation of the definition of natural in contemporary Western society. The objects are physical manifestations of the absurdity of the human relationship to nature which manifest as the need for separation from nature, the desire for control over nature, the evolving narrative of the “natural”, and discomfort with uncertainty in the relationship to nature within the human experience. The series is presented as part of a satirical business called Hypersolve Technologies which leverages a highly subjective perspective on the natural in order to fit their business needs. The series is presented with a duality of perspective from both the artist and the “business” behind the series.

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Much like the processes of nature, *Pander* did not come to fruition through a linear pathway. *Pander* is a culmination of my investigations into nature, subjectivity, and humanity answered through a nonlinear process of research, inquiry, experimentation, and imperfect iterations of my own creative process across mediums and methodologies. This paper was formatted to reflect the meandering culmination that is *Pander*.

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sponsored by Hypersolve Technologies

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foundations

CONCEPT STATEMENT

Pander is a series of absurd products derived from an interrogation of the definition of natural in contemporary Western society. The objects are physical manifestations of the absurdity of the human relationship to nature which manifest as the need for separation from nature, the desire for control over nature, the evolving narrative of the “natural”, and discomfort with uncertainty in the relationship to nature within the human experience. The series is presented as part of a satirical business called Hypersolve Technologies which leverages a highly subjective perspective on the natural in order to fit their business needs. The series is presented with a duality of perspective from both the artist and the “business” behind the series.

WHY PANDER?

The inspiration for my research is rooted in an ongoing personal experience which I have only been able to describe as not feeling “real.” In my own mental model, I associate technology with a feeling of dissociation and nature as the antidote to the numbness brought on by technology. This observation in conjunction with technological cynicism I developed from my experience working tech created a tendency for me to view technology and nature as innate opposites on a spectrum ranging from technological to natural. Furthermore, this spectrum connotes that technology is bad and nature is good, which led to frequent internal conflict with my contemporary lifestyle as it becomes increasingly separated from nature and integrated into the technological.

In the face of climate disaster, the human relationship to nature is woven with complexity and contradiction as humanity attempts to tame the effects of climate change while grappling with the realities of a bleak climate future which is both their doing and potential demise. Despite the urgency of the scenario, dooming portrayals of nature have spurred apathy in the rising generations. Therefore, another damning portrayal of the natural world is unlikely to provoke any real criticality nor inspire change. Rather than indulging in the climate sorrows of the zeitgeist, my project attempts to shift the mental model by focusing on nature through a lens that humans have always been most interested in – ourselves.

Pander embodies the absurdity of the human relationship to nature that we have attempted to cultivate in response to such unsettling uncertainty. By characterizing our relationship to nature in an absurd, manmade form, *Pander* aims to garner curiosity of the audience while provoking criticality in contemporary perspectives of the natural. The series leverages humor to blur the line between absurdity and utility to invite the audience to act as critical spectators as they engage with the bias, absurdity, and subjectivity which comprises the human relationship to nature. Ultimately, *Pander* aims to provide an experience which is entertaining for the audience while illuminating and challenging existing mental models of nature which hinder the likelihood of a climate-positive future.

MAY 2023

A HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES PUBLICATION

HYPERAWARE



INNOVATION

The cause of inconvenience
and the product that
answered

INSPIRATION

Van life reimagined from the
top of the wealth gap

LIFESTYLE

Productivity as a meditative
practice

PANDER

The latest innovation from Hypersolve Technologies

Pander is the latest series in lifestyle optimization inspired by the forces of nature. *Pander* provides an additional layer of productification to solve problems caused by physical realities which lead to inconvenience in contemporary lifestyles. In the age of innovation, humans are the top of the hierarchy, yet continue to pander to the inconveniences of contemporary life. The series reinstates the natural order of humans above all else. Quit pandering to nature, **let nature pander to you.**

HYPERSOLVED GUARANTEE
FROM HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES



inquiry

WHAT IS “NATURAL”?

My project inquiry began with an interrogation of the definition of natural as it relates to the human experience. The most commonly used definition of natural tends to encapsulate anything that is not manmade, such as plants or animals, so I began my inquiry with a foundational definition of “natural.”

natural (adj): experiences or objects which are not exclusive to the human experience in the natural environment.

Following from this definition, I began to examine the human experience in relation to nature. Nature often takes on a positive connotation when used in contemporary society, but the human definition of “natural” is difficult to capture. The positive connection between humans and nature is discussed frequently in design with theories such as E.O. Wilson’s biophilia, which is the innate human attraction to that which is natural (Wilson). These principles are applied most commonly in architecture, where spaces are designed with organic shapes in order to make them more enticing for people than traditional rectangular spaces which are not found in nature (Wilson). Smalley et al. discuss the idea of “natural quiet,” which is quiet that exists with the accompaniment of natural sounds such as flowing water or birds chirping. (Smalley et al.) Natural quiet has been found to be an evolutionary adaptation that facilitates restorative mental health benefits (Smalley et al.), in contrast to city sounds which have been found to keep people in a constant state of alert and correlate to increased instance of anxiety and depression. (Janssen et al.) Thus, the psychological benefits and human affinity toward nature depend on a distinction between nature and manmade technology while suggesting that nature connotes goodness.

natural (adj): experiences or objects which are not exclusive to the human experience in the natural environment and do not include manmade technology.

A survey of the natural relationship across technological eras in humanity is thus required to define “natural” accurately for the human experience beyond contemporary classifications. Noah Harari’s book about the history of humanity, *Sapiens*, brought definition to a concept which I had been abstractly pondering called “the luxury trap.” (Harari) The luxury trap refers to the idea that as technology advances, people become accustomed to luxuries until they are so commonplace that the luxuries are eventually considered necessities. (Harari) This phenomenon spurs a cycle of innovation which ultimately changes the very nature of human existence as new luxuries become the way of life.

Tacit collective understanding of the power of the luxury trap drives contemporary discourse on the implications of artificial intelligence and new subjectivity regarding the nature of sentience in the human experience. As Nick Sousanis states in *Unflattening*, “the medium we think in defines what we can see,”

thus the definition of natural has always been subject to the collection of manmade and natural elements which coexist in the system of the human experience. (Sousanis) Basic shelter from the elements was once a manmade innovation (i.e. unnatural), yet in contemporary times camping in a tent is widely considered to be a way to connect with nature. Combining this notion with Harari's luxury trap, the concept of natural is relative to the technology which is commonplace rather than what exists without human intervention. Therefore, technology can be considered both natural and unnatural depending on how long it has been integrated into the human experience.



Modern Gladiator by Emily Gary

But why is technology so often considered unnatural despite its consistent role in the human experience? Harari cites the first instance of the luxury trap as the invention of agriculture which gave humans the ability to store food, thereby creating an expectation of food abundance which ultimately spurred safer but less stimulating lives relegated to farming-related tasks. (Harari) Agriculture was the first sweeping instance where technology changed the nature of the human experience through decreased geographic and physical mobility, and technology continues to spur reduction of physical movement in the human experience with new technological frontiers like remote workplaces. Both agriculture and remote work resulted in sweeping lifestyle change, but in contemporary times agriculture would be considered a more “natural” occupation than a remote job, proving the importance of time in the subjective and evolving qualifications of the naturalness over time.

natural (adj): experiences or objects which are ~~not exclusive to the human experience of~~ or relating to the natural environment that do not include recent innovations in manmade technology.

Yet despite technology serving as the classification boundary for naturalness, humans have consistently framed manmade works through nature-based concepts. In language, planes “fly” and businesses “grow” (Sokolowski). Sokolowski discusses the way that machines have been mimicking human behavior since their very

inception. (Sokolowski) Thus despite the desire to separate nature and technology, it is human tendency to characterize technology through the lens of the natural. The need to use nature to describe technology and vice versa suggests that technology is an innate facet of humanity. In addition, there are clear dangers to the way that the term natural has been used throughout history, particularly when the “unnatural” is used as a tool to assert power. (Harari) Harari even goes as far as to say “if it exists, it is natural,” suggesting that nature and technology are parallel forces. (Harari)

natural (adj): experiences or objects of or relating to the natural environment **directly or through the application of manmade technology in a manner that parallels natural occurrences.**

The interrogation of the natural throughout humanity lends itself to the conclusion that the definition of natural is not constant; it evolves to serve the needs of the human experience. The evolving definition highlights the subjective perspective which characterizes the human relationship with nature. It reveals the paradoxical desire to distinguish nature from technology despite the shifting definitions as new innovations become ingrained in the human experience. The fixation on the natural is fixation with ourselves. The definition of “natural” demonstrates the human need to center our experiences in the narrative of the natural environment and more importantly, the need to situate humans at the top of a contrived hierarchy of natural existence. Thus, the most accurate definition of nature as it exists from the human perspective can be summarized succinctly:

natural (adj): any other that is whatever we declare it to be.

The absurdity of this definition is the foundation for the Pander series.

WHAT FEELS “NATURAL”?

My thesis project began with an inquiry into the definition of “natural” inspired by my habit of spending time in nature as an antidote to the unpleasantness caused by technology in contemporary Western society. The nature I most commonly experience as a New York resident comes in the form of walks through a park, however the naturalness of parks is a subjective characterization. Parks were a man-made solution to an excess of constructed environments, yet ironically I view them as sprinklings of nature within my contemporary urban life. The paradox of the naturalness of parks made me realize that the concept of “natural” is also man-made. I began a series of embodied experiments attempting to find the boundary between natural and manmade in contemporary Western society.

My first experiment started broadly by testing the basic boundaries of the definition of natural by juxtaposing rudimentary samples of nature and technology: a plant and a phone. In my first prototype of the plant-phone, I cut ivy vines from a tree in my neighborhood and taped them to the edges of my phone case so that the leaves partially obstructed the screen while still allowing me to use my phone normally. I brought the plant-phone everywhere I went for three days to test whether this object could fit the contemporary definition of “natural” despite being physically attached to the unnatural.

The plant-phone garnered subtle attention as I rode the subway to class and I could sense curiosity from bystanders who noticed me using the plant-phone. Initial reactions from peers often referenced the calming presence that the plant created and I noticed that the plant aspect of the object garnered far more commentary than the phone. Most reactions seemed to convey that the presence of the plant made the phone more natural, rather than viewing the object as a technologized plant. Several peers wanted to test out the device by



First plant-phone prototype

typing a message on my phone and a few even suggested that the plant-phone is a product they would be interested in buying. The naturalness was associated with peace, which matched my embodied experience of peace when using the plant-phone which I liken to the calm of sitting in a park. The need to physically engage “nature” while using my phone created a gentleness in my interactions which felt almost nurturing, despite also receiving feedback regarding concerns for the plant’s bleak likelihood of survival on my phone.

Reflecting on the experiment, I was surprised by how noticeable the plant became once it crossed into the “unnatural” world of subways and indoor classrooms. I was particularly surprised by the attention the object received given that the species of plant I used is an invasive species commonly seen throughout New York City. I noticed a desire for human control of the natural relationship based on the positive response and concern toward ivy intentionally brought into the man-made environment compared to the same ivy being hacked away when it expands across an apartment facade. When I presented the prototype to peers, the plant-phone sparked discussion about the utility versus absurdity of the object. The borderline absurdity of the juxtaposition was a successful mechanism for provoking criticality so I decided to continue experimenting with various combinations of natural and man-made objects across expanded settings to identify the boundary what we might consider “natural.”

The first experiment tested the definition of natural by bringing

nature into predominantly man-made environments. The next experiment, *Analog Wednesday*, was a subversion of the plant-phone dynamic where I brought manmade objects into a natural setting. *Analog Wednesday* was an embodied experiment where I juxtaposed camping with contemporary working lifestyles. On *Analog Wednesday*, I spent an entire day completing all work and leisure activities outdoors or in a tent I had set up in my garden, however I still had access to wifi and all of the technology I typically use on a weekday in graduate school. I only went inside to attend class, cook food, or use the bathroom and also slept outside for the night. I filmed the experience and journaled between classes and completion of assignments about my perception of nature when a contemporary work day and night occurred almost entirely outside.

Analog Wednesday yielded similar feelings to the plant-phone experiment from my own embodied perspective, particularly with respect to the perceived gentleness with technology that usually feels harsh in my daily life, however the magnitude of the



Setting up for Analog Wednesday

effect felt more expansive due to the increased immersion of the experience compared to the plant-phone. I felt less need to entertain myself or mindlessly scroll my phone when I had leisure time despite having the same access to my phone. The most surprising observation from the experiment occurred when I went inside to use the bathroom and my partner was watching TV when I entered the room. The sound and bright lights of the TV felt jarring after spending the entire day outdoors and I actually looked forward to returning to my tent outside. When I was outside, I also found natural sounds to be soothing and city sounds to be a bit more unsettling. The most

difficult part of the experience was related to my concerns about safety given that my tent doesn't have a lock, but aside from caution I felt fairly comfortable spending the day outside with my technology, though it is fair to note that I have a fair amount of experience camping in the wilderness so I am accustomed to camping accommodations.

I presented the video documentation and journal excerpts of Analog Wednesday to my peers, and was surprised to have significantly less success with this second prototype. The audience gave positive feedback on the novelty of the experiment and video documentation, but many



Using a laptop outside during Analog Wednesday

expressed confusion about its relevance to nature despite the parallel use of juxtaposition as with the plant-phone prototype. Many reviewers noted that access to my computer and wifi negated the natural elements of the experiment which I also found surprising despite the fact that a few leaves of ivy attached to a phone created strong association to nature in the plant-phone experiment while an entire 24-hour period outdoors did not.

The varied audience response between plant-phone and Analog Wednesday helped me identify the importance of physicality in the final form. When I began the experiments I was unsure

whether the final project would be a film, performance piece, documentary, or physical object. The smaller impact of Analog Wednesday on the audience was surprising for me as the embodied participant because the effects were significantly more pronounced, but the video alone was not able to convey that to the audience in the same way as the plant-phone which they could physically experience themselves. In addition, the audience had an easier time critically discussing a “product” than another person’s experience, so I decided that physical objects would better lend themselves to a provocation of criticality. This was also the moment when I began to consider a store or business as the



Waking up outside on Analog Wednesday (Thursday)

context for the series rather than an exhibition-like presentation.

Suggestions for the next iteration included eliminating the use of any form of technology for Analog Wednesday, or conducting the experiment in a more remote location. The most interesting part of the feedback was the discomfort with the lack of separation between nature and technology. Most people expressed some desire for further distinction between the natural and unnatural rather than evaluating Analog Wednesday as an intertwined natural-manmade experience. I found that the audience was able to anchor natural elements to man-made elements, like

with plant-phone, more easily than they could anchor man-made elements to natural elements. The absurdity of this discomfort with blurred lines and a lack of control over natural elements became a central theme for the project and ultimately led me to shift the goals of my experiment from attempting to define “natural” to understanding the absurdity of the human relationship to nature.

PLAYFUL CRITICALITY

At its core, *Pander* is a social critique. It intends to provoke criticality of the human relationship to nature in hopes that it may shift the mental model of that relationship as a step towards change. However, few people are inspired to engage with content detailing their wrongdoings toward nature and the impending doom of the climate crisis given its rightful but all-consuming prominence in the public eye. Rather than inspiring further anxiety, I wanted to create an experience that was lighthearted in its provocation and felt authentic to my own propensity toward playfulness and humor. More plainly, how can I achieve playful criticality?

Given that I did not start the project with a defined medium, I looked to other artists to explore methods of critique as well as potential mediums. Anni Liu and Natalie Jeremijenko



Eyeris by Anni Liu, 2018.

overcome the difficulty of communicating social critique in an approachable form by leveraging novelty to draw attention to social issues. In her 2021 project, *Eyeris*, Ani Liu developed a helmet where the user cannot see anything unless someone else is in physical contact with them. The obstruction of sight serves as a forced mechanism to create physical connection. (Liu) The novelty of the hindering wearable technology creates an intriguing experience while successfully highlighting the lack of physical connection in contemporary society. The strangeness of the object inspires the audience to question why *Eyeris* might need to exist rather than stating providing a prescriptive critique.

Natalie Jeremijenko's 2009 collaborative work with David Benjamin titled *Amphibious Architecture* was a project designed to remind the people of New York City of the nature that surrounds them despite living in a city. Jeremijenko & Benjamin installed sensors in the Hudson River that lit up every time a fish swam by and people could text with the fish and give them snacks in order to create a sense of engagement between people and nature. (Jeremijenko and Benjamin) Driessen comments that "...the playful design approach makes this moralizing and politicizing into an evocative and appealing experience, as opposed to an ethics of (more direct) prescriptions, accusations and guilt." (Driessen) The absurdity of texting a fish critiques the lack of connection to nature without being scolding or hyper-critical. Allan Wexler also uses absurdity in *Coffee Seeks its Own Level*, which was a setting for a coffee break where every person must drink at exactly the same time or someone's cup would overflow. This absurd mechanism forces cooperation and prompts a sense of community and criticality of the concept of hyper-productivity in modern society. (Wexler) These works leverage absurdity to create an experience that is joyful to interact with, in turn providing deeper engagement with the central critique.

The enjoyable critique created by the preceding works led me to use absurdity in conjunction with physical objects for my project, however I still lacked clarity on the appropriate context for these interactions. Peter McIndoe's *Birds Aren't Real* uses public spaces as the forum for his work which



Coffee Seeks Its Own Level by Allan Wexler, 1990.

involves large-scale performative protests stating that all birds are actually surveillance drones created by the government. (McIndoe) The publicity of the movement is a satire on the tactics used by conservative extremist groups in the United States, where conspiracy theories are a key facet in gaining support and discrediting opposing political views. Tran and Mihail's 2003 work, *Gene Genies*, also used public spaces by installing a mock store in a shopping mall which claimed to offer gene editing services. (Tran and Mihail) The tension between the absurdity and plausibility of the store led the audience to consider the ethical dilemma associated with gene editing, which was a prominent issue at that time. The use of public forums increases the uncertainty between satire and reality, garnering significant attention and sparking public discourse in both cases.



Birds Aren't Real by Peter McIndoe

Following from these precedents, I decided to use absurdity, physicality, and blurred lines as guiding principles in Pander. An alternate summary of these principles of successful critique are outlined in a featured in *Hyperaware*, which is the media outlet for Hypersolve Technologies.



Emily Gary
CEO OF HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES
Founding philosopher of hypercriticality

PRODUCTIVITY SPOTLIGHT
CRITIQUE AS A MANAGEMENT STYLE
SPONSORED BY HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES

(HYPERCRITICALITY)

Critique is a core value of the company culture at Hypersolve Technologies, where founder and CEO, Emily Gary, believes direct communication, and even confrontational critique, is essential to a continuous cycle of improvement for employees at Hypersolve Technologies. According to employees, Gary is famous around the office for her finely tuned ability to provide critique for any misstep, no matter how small or inconsequential. “I used to think I was a solid employee and overall good person, but [Gary] has really brought awareness to all of my flaws,” remarked one newly motivated employee.

In our exclusive interview, Gary announced her upcoming book release which she believes will become the foundation for a new school of critique-based management, called *Hypercriticality*.

Given her recent success and impressive personal share of overall US GDP, there’s no doubt that we’ll be seeing *hypermanagement* as a Q4 trend. Here’s a look at how you can employ hypercriticality in your own workflows.

PRINCIPLES OF HYPERCRITICALITY

1. Use novelty when providing critique to ensure you have their attention. *Don’t use commonplace aphorisms, make it personal to show that you understand their weakness at its core.*
2. Physicality is key in ensuring the critique lands. *Provide physical evidence of the critique by handing them a note or gifting them a self-help book.*
3. Avoid scolding tones or prescriptive communication styles. *Make the critique in jest so they can spend hours questioning the boundary between playful banter and genuine feedback.*
4. Use public spaces to provide critique. Critique that is shared privately ends with the recipient, but *public critique allows for the whole team to get involved.*

manifestation

PURE ABSURDITY

In attempting to define “natural” through research, embodied experimentation, and rapid prototyping, my exploration of nature ultimately led me to the notion of the absurd. The human relationship to nature is characterized by four pillars of absurdity.

ABSURDITY #1: THE NEED TO SEPARATE

The first absurdity is the need to separate or mediate the human experience with nature. Nature is viewed positively as long as there is appropriate separation, such as camping from within the confines of a tent. Yet this desire to separate also leads to another critical dynamic of the relationship to nature – the need to control.

ABSURDITY #2: THE NEED TO CONTROL

Nature is deemed acceptable as long as humans are placed at the top of the hierarchy of the natural order. Imagery of nature often involves flowers or beautiful mountains, yet invasive weeds on a manmade lawn are rarely classified as nature. Climate change is the result of human actions, yet much of climate-related media focuses on its effect on the “natural world,” portraying it as something to save rather than acknowledging our powerlessness in our relationship with nature.

ABSURDITY #3: AN EVOLVING NARRATIVE

Yet despite our best efforts, humans will never have full control over nature. The end of the world which is so often referenced is only the end of the human world. In order to maintain this facade of control, humans must also control the narrative of what is natural. The definition of natural must evolve to fit human needs, thus farmed foods are defined as “natural” or “organic” despite being planted by the human hand. Brooklyn apartments are filled with monsteras native to central America or snake plants from Western Africa in order to create an environment that is “natural.” Controlling the narrative of what is natural is essential to our relationship because it enables people to do what they want within the evolving confines of selective definitioning. The narrative is an artificially beautiful scene to distract from the destruction that humans have caused.

Thus, my exploration of the definition of nature culminated in the conclusion that our relationship to nature is defined by the need to separate, the need to control, the evolving narrative, and discomfort with uncertainty. These four absurdities are each brought into physical form through the *Pander* series.

ABSURDITY #4: DISCOMFORT WITH UNCERTAINTY

All of these dynamics work together in order to pacify human discomfort with uncertainty. The future of the natural world is uncertain. Separation enables a façade of control, the façade of control is maintained by the narrative, and the narrative prevents the need for humans to face the uncertainty of their relationship with nature in the near future. Though these dynamics pacify fears, they do not change the reality. The truth is that people are at the mercy of the natural environment and a world which cannot sustain people leads to a world without them. People are just one part of the complex system, yet these absurd relationships serve as justification for the increasingly unsustainable environment which people have created.

BUILDING A HYPER-NARRATIVE

Pander is framed within the narrative of a satirical company called Hypersolve Technologies. While the company itself is a fabrication of contemporary society, it builds its own narrative of the human relationship to nature with the goal of serving its own interests, akin to what society has done with the concept of “natural.” The company is a metaphor for the overarching societal perception of nature and the human experience, and showcases the role of consumerism and in turn, solutionism (Lawson et al.), which is alluded to in the namesake. I chose this consumerist presentation context rather than a fine arts presentation format because it creates a familiarity for the audience who may feel more equipped to critique a product than a piece of art. In our consumer-centric society, people are conditioned to ask critical questions when deciding whether a product is worth purchasing. Hypersolve Technologies capitalizes on this societal norm to unknowingly set the audience on a path to criticality of their own conceptualization of their relationship to nature.

The satirical narrative of Hypersolve Technologies also opens the door to critique by creating an “other” by which the audience can pass judgment. I was inspired by Kristina Ten’s short story, *Beginnings*, which uses fantastical elements of a kingdom to transport the audience only to reveal a critique of guns, white privilege, and anti-queer belief systems in the rural United States. (Ten) After immersing the audience in a fantastical kingdom, the story concludes with the entitled, gun-toting “king” murdering the two queer protagonists due to their non-heteronormative sexuality. The true setting is not revealed until the very end of the story and the framing of narrative as a fantastical land and entitled king change the meaning of the story drastically depending on whether or not the audience views him as a king or an ignorant, violent man. In this example, the narrative provides the audience with the

agency to come to a realization on their own, while making the heavy topic more approachable given that it is concealed within the plot of a fantasy story. Hypersolve Technologies intends to provide a similar effect to the audience by portraying the company in an absurd light and thus provoking the audience to critique *Pander* on the path to social critique.

Hypersolve Technologies attempts to commodify the role of nature in society by creating a narrative that the benefits of nature are a resource which can be harnessed through technology and ultimately purchased. This same concept is echoed in *Sapiens*, where Harari comments that throughout history “myths are the only way to control large groups of humans.” (Harari) This resonated with me in that nearly all systems of belief, whether they are cultural, societal, or familial, are based in narrative of what the human experience is and should strive to be. This same principal is what creates problematic perceptions within the overarching human view of nature and I chose to make Hypersolve Technologies leverage false narratives in its own attempt at manipulation.

On a personal note, Hypersolve Technologies is a satire on my experience in graduate school as a whole. Graduate school is one of the few times in life where my work was not required to focus on profit or monetizable skillsets, but rather granted the opportunity to explore my passions. Throughout graduate school I found that many friends would ask to see my work with an unstated undertone of curiosity about the specific employable skills I was cultivating in the program. In my opinion, the value of graduate school expands far beyond the boundaries of a list of acquired skills and to complete my degree without taking the opportunity to explore the jarringly unmonetizable world would be a severely missed opportunity. As a nod to this nagging question of employability, I created a thesis project that showcases (unmonetizable) absurdity while placing it in the context of the ultimate moneymaker, a tech company. Hypersolve Technologies encapsulates the duality of my graduate experience as I embraced my creative process and let my passions guide me while ultimately satisfying the (looming) need for marketable skills in a creative profession.

THE PANDER SERIES

The four objects that make up the Pander series are Periscope, Mirage, Youthanize, and Crystallize. Each of these objects is a physical manifestation of the absurdity of the human relationship to nature. Translating the four absurdities into physical objects yielded the final project. The images shown are prototypes which differ from the objects in the final showcase See “Exhibition Design” for a link to the final product showcase.

PERISCOPE



Periscope represents the need to separate from nature as a way to moderate what parts we see. It centers the manmade while mediating interaction with nature through a selective lens. We interact with nature only under our own terms and create physical and metaphorical barriers to separate what is human from what is natural.



MIRAGE

Mirage is a manifestation of the absurdity of a hierarchy where humans preside over the natural in an authoritative role. It represents the need to control nature rather than accepting our non-dominant role in its ecosystem. Mirage reveals the reality of the relationship with nature where humans believe that they are the ones caring for nature, but in reality it is the thing that takes care for humanity despite our self-destruction.

YOUTHANIZE

Youthanize represents the evolving narrative of what is considered "natural" in our society. The definition of natural is ever-changing to serve the human gaze. Youthanize can be worn while engaging in screen-based activities, enabling people to believe they are engaging with nature without making any compromises. Youthanize represents the fetishization of nature and the evolving definition of the natural which becomes increasingly manmade over time.



CRYSTALLIZE

Crystallize is a manifestation of the desire to control nature and make it conform to our preferences and ideal definition of the natural. It represents the natural narrative which only accepts nature as it suits our needs rather than accepting our non-dominant role in its ecosystem. "The end of the world" is only the end of the human world - nature will continue to evolve with or without us.





periscope

See what's
already in front
of you

See what's in front of
you without ever looking
up from your screen

Reduces need for visual or
social interaction with
others in public spaces

Reduces need for visual
interaction with physical
objects

Resolution as clear as the
human eye

HYPERSOLVED GUARANTEE
FROM HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES

mirage

Appear in sunlight.



Daily sunlight requirements cause user to appear outdoors for product preservation

100% compostable posterior display

Appears eco-friendly

Believed to improve mood

HYPERSOLVED GUARANTEE
FROM HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES

youthanize

Take a dip in the fountain of youth.

Nature has proven health benefits, but few people have the time or interest in going outside. Youthanize allows for hands-free natural engagement any time, anywhere.

Customers report feeling 30% healthier after only 7 days of daily youthanization.

Visual obstruction has been shown to enhance creativity as you fill in the blanks.





crystallize

Eliminate uncertainty.

Increase productivity through reduction of aesthetic decision-making

Alphabetical sorting enables instantaneous search optimization

Adds green space to indoor settings

Reduce visual variability

HYPERSOLVED GUARANTEE
FROM HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES

Maximize space



THE BIG THREE

INNOVATION UPDATE
NEW BREAKTHROUGHS IN LIFESTYLE SCIENCE
SPONSORED BY HYPERSOLVE TECHNOLOGIES

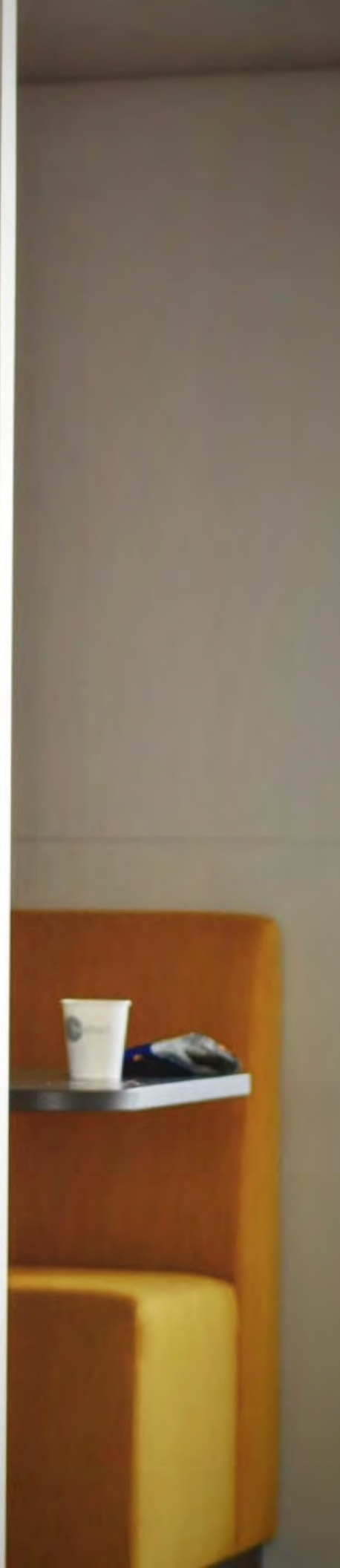
(WHAT ' S WRONG WITH YOU)

The average person experiences between four and six inconveniences every day. That's more than just a few slow walkers getting in your way on the sidewalk, that's about one inconvenience every three hours. Mobile devices can provide entertainment regardless of setting and Chat GPT reduces the mental burden of idea formulation, yet somehow these innovations haven't been able to solve the problem of inconvenience. A life coach may advise a person struggling with inconvenience to alter their perspective or focus on the positive, however these strategies fail to address the root of the problem.

The latest discovery coming from the Innovation Lab at Hypersolve Technologies provides a compelling response. Research has shown that 87% of inconvenience is driven by just three factors that the Innovation Lab has coined "the big three":

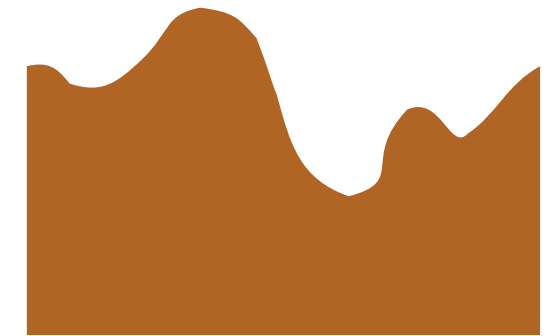
1. INEFFICIENCY
2. UNCERTAINTY
3. UNNATURALNESS

The reason that these factors are so significant is that they directly contradict contemporary values that are widely believed to constitute a meaningful life.



A NAGGING ISSUE

Inefficiency leads to loss of productivity which is the primary pursuit of the human experience. Uncertainty leads to feelings of discomfort. Lastly, unnaturalness leads to a deficiency of organic benefits which have been part of the human experience for millennia.



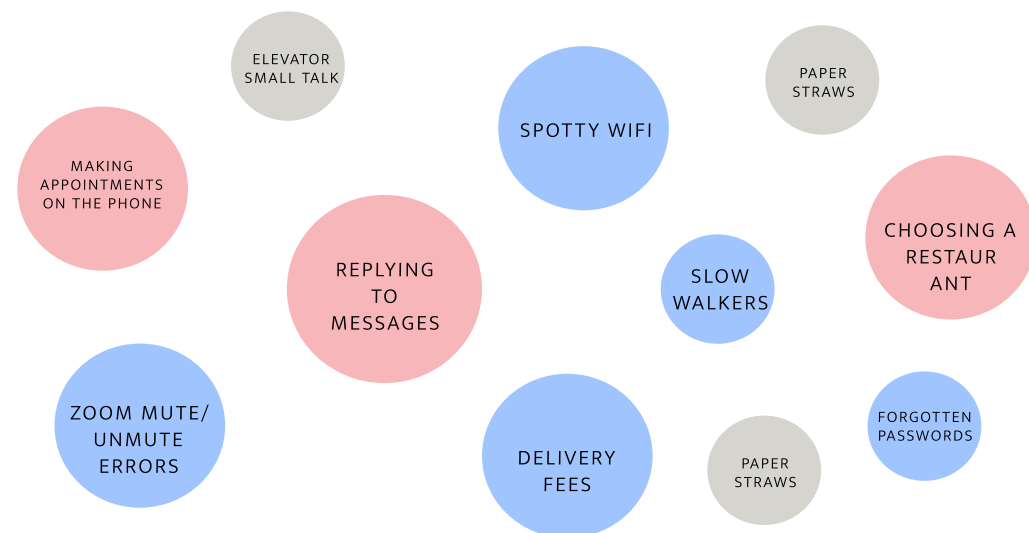
Hourly BUM accumulation

For most, the big three are not a constant factor throughout the day. They appear in short bursts called *briefly unsatisfactory manifestations*, or BUMs, which accumulate to create overall dissatisfaction. Common examples of BUMs include searching for a misplaced item, contemplating a decision, or neglecting to see the sun. For most, inconveniences peak around noon and wane in the evenings. Despite typically lower BUM levels in the evening, negative experiences such as boredom or critical thinking are most commonly encountered at night due to excess accumulation throughout the day.

WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

The big three have been concealed beneath constantly shape-shifting forms by which they manifest. This has created a misguided popular belief that inconveniences are inherent to the human experience. Though the big three are difficult to avoid completely, research has shown that mitigating the frequency and impact of big three manifestations yields promising results in overall inconvenience reduction.

Like with most problems, products can provide the solution. Research suggests that BUM-reductive products can be an effective way to mitigate the impacts of the big three when incorporated into daily routines. These types of products can support the human experience in scenarios where the big three can't be avoided.



Common Manifestations of the Big Three





Preliminary trials demonstrated that impacts of unnaturalness can be reduced significantly simply by counterbalancing technology with natural elements. This is supported by long-standing theories such as E.O. Wilson's biophilia, which is the innate human attraction to nature. Emphasis on the benefits of natural elements are also seen in trends such as the bohemian interior design which prominently feature indoor plants, but outside of the home these tactics are more difficult to apply.

When people find themselves in a location that is unpleasant and unnatural, such as a subway station or office cubicle, BUM-reductive products are a helpful solution. Rather than waiting for opportunities to engage with green spaces, cutting-edge products from the new *Pander* product-line have enabled people to untap the power of portable green spaces. The portable green spaces come in the form of plant housing for mobile devices or masks which enable the consumer to add plants to their visual field.



LOOKING AHEAD

Though there is still much to be tested on the long-term benefits of reducing big three encounters, short term trials have shown a 46% reduction in overall emotional variability after using the Pander product suite for just two weeks. A spokesperson from Hypersolve Technology postulated:

“[people] brush their teeth twice a day and loyally carry their phones with them to stay connected. We believe Pander is the next frontier of product-based habits which will change the world.”



The big three are an exciting discovery in contemporary understanding of the human experience that have quickly inspired the next frontier of health-conscious lifestyle methodology. The discovery is not only an opportunity to improve overall satisfaction, it has already spurred noteworthy innovation from major industry players like Hypersolve Technologies. Though the full impact of this discovery is yet to be fully understood, it is sure to provide a promising suite of perceived consumer benefits which corporations are sure to capitalize on.

iteration

FABRICATION PROCESS

The fabrication process for each object in Pander began with conceptual sketches which I then translated into 3D collages using found objects. After testing the 3D collages with a set of peers, I began 3D modeling to create 3D PLA prints of the final components. For the final exhibition I used resin for all 3D prints in order to present higher fidelity prototypes which yield a smoother, more organic aesthetic and a higher fidelity “productified” presentation.

Each of the objects were designed at independent times based on the conceptual discoveries throughout my creative process, so the aesthetic was not initially cohesive for the series. Once I finalized the four objects, I chose the following design values for each of the objects which spurred the final evolution into the series. The design aesthetic for Pander is defined by organic lines, natural elements, monochromatic color schemes, and high-tech appearances. The iterations for each object are detailed in the following.

Final versions of each object can be found at designs can be found at emilygarycreative.com/Pander.

PERISCOPE



First prototypes made from PVC pipe and craft mirrors



Larger second prototype with improved visibility



First PLA printed periscope



Smaller PLA printed periscope



Lower half of resin printed periscope

MIRAGE



First mirage prototype, titled "plant-phone"



Second mirage prototype testing airplants and durable casing

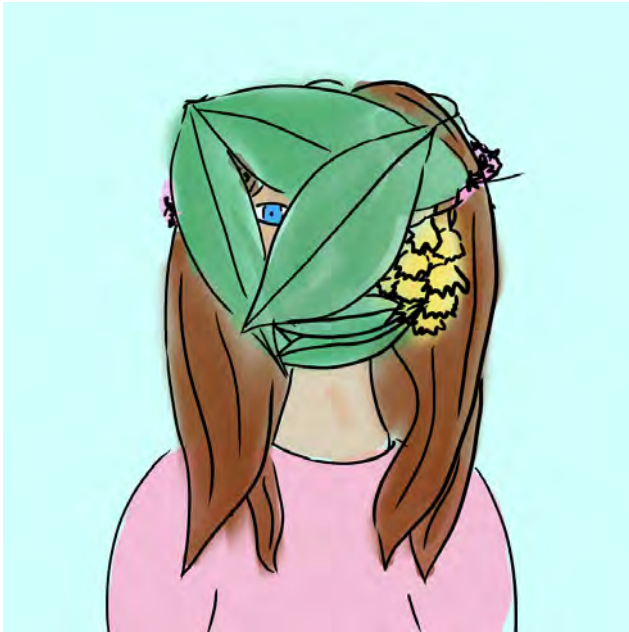


Mirage prototype with large airplant, attached with artist wire



Mirage prototype attached with 3D printed phone case attachment and fishing wire

YOUTHANIZE



First Youthanize sketch



First Youthanize prototype, acrylic face shield, ivy, attached with tape



Third prototype with acrylic mask, hole punches for leaf attachment with tape supports



PLA-printed open concept mask with side stem holders

CRYSTALLIZE



First crystallize sketch, titled "rectangularize"



First "rectangularize" prototype, beeswax and notecards



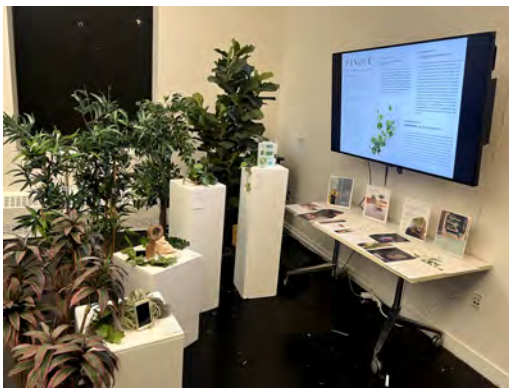
First silicon-casted crystallize prototypes



Silicon-casted prototype with PLA-printed exterior with labels

EXHIBITION DESIGN

Pander was showcased in the MFA Design & Technology Thesis pop-up exhibition and symposium.



POP-UP EXHIBITION

The installation for the final exhibition involved a pathway guided by artificial trees which leads the audience to Periscope, Mirage, Youthanize, and Crystallize. The audience is given dual perspectives on the series in the final exhibition. The objects are staged on

pedestals and the exhibition has demo videos made by Hypersolve Technologies projected behind the pedestals. Each pedestal contains a placard which provides the artist description of each object and how it manifests the absurd relationship to nature. The audience is given the opportunity to engage with the objects in the series alongside the *HyperAware* catalog for increased interactivity.

SYMPOSIUM

The symposium talk is also given from dual perspectives. At the beginning I give the presentation as Emily Gary, CEO of Hypersolve Technologies. The CEO conducts live demos with the products as part of a self-promoting “innovation update” for an R&D showcase. Halfway through the presentation, the CEO transforms into “the real Emily” who then provides the conceptual background and sources of inspiration for the series.

Full documentation for the end of year events is available at <https://emilygarycreative.com/Pander>.

ON THE “NATURAL”

The investigation of the counterbalance between nature and technology led me to realize that “nature” is an ever-changing definition and that it often shifts to fit the needs of its context. Furthermore, separation always felt so central to my definition of nature, yet the boundary between natural and manmade is not one that could ever be drawn with certainty. The definition of nature is riddled with uncertainty and contradiction, undoubtedly connected to climate concerns and ubiquitous technology in contemporary times, and our relationship to it is one that multiple paths of research led me to classify as absurd. Upon reflection, my desire to classify the natural was an absurd undertaking from its inception.

However, the need to classify has become part of society’s collective unconscious in the contemporary era of technology-driven classification which has bled into the narrative of the human experience. I believe this classification serves as a source of comfort in times of increasing tensions where flattening the complexity of the human experience reduces our need to engage in critical thought. However, the dimensionality of the world is lost in the conceptualization in terms of the binary, which simplifies multi-faceted issues such as climate change into something that people can distance themselves from despite its already notable impacts. In summary, the human relationship is absurd, but it mirrors the many narratives we create for ourselves in order to grapple with the innate subjectivity and uncertainty of the human experience.

ON CREATIVE GROWTH

When I came to the DT program, I was incredibly intimidated. I came from a background in mathematics and cutthroat business where any sort of editorial was discouraged. The goal of all my prior work was to remain objective. I don't believe that there is a such thing as objectivity, however there was absolutely a formulaic approach to creating successful work. Though I believed that I had creative potential and hoped to work on projects involving a higher degree of subjectivity, it was difficult to allow myself to explore my creative concepts and push my ideas into new territory early in the program. In math, if you're wrong then you made a miscalculation. In art, if you're wrong it feels much more personal. I struggled to allow myself to pursue absurd ideas and projects for which I didn't know of other precedents. The genesis of this project is when I finally began to feel comfortable pursuing less conventional ideas.

Creativity requires vulnerability and a willingness to be misunderstood as part of your process. I am proud of Pander because it shows my willingness to commit to a style that feels authentic. Though I want to be taken seriously as a creative, I learned that it doesn't have to mean that my presentation has to have a dark and dooming tone. Humor is an important part of who I am and I am proud that I was able to embrace the discomfort of creating a project centered on absurdity as my thesis. I came to DT because I wanted to share my ideas while enjoying the work I am doing and this project was able to achieve that.

Part of my difficulty with Pander was narrowing the scope because it touches on so many of my disparate interests I have learned to consistently check in on the central message that my project conveys to ensure that I am not expanding the scope beyond what the project aims to be. As I'm sure most would say, I would have loved to have more time to work on this project. My goal was to create a physical Hypersolve Technologies store for the Pander suite and stage it in a public space to create an unknowing satirical encounter for the audience. Due to time constraints, this wasn't ultimately possible but I learned a lot about the importance of planning in a fabrication project. Time is a key ingredient to

successful fabrication, and I do hope to create the Hypersolve Technologies store in the future.

Pander is a project which I feel is unique to my experience and interests. I tend to view the world through a critical lens, however I feel that I have found a way to communicate this criticality while keeping it fun. Pander provokes criticality in a format that is amusing, yet makes clear observations about humanity that people can relate to. While the project is amusing, I feel that it has allowed me to develop a unique expertise on the concept of the natural in the human experience through my research and experimentation. I feel that this project encapsulates my growth as an artist and designer over the last two years in the program.

Thank you to all who have engaged with my work. It has been an honor for me and the entire team at Hypersolve Technologies to create this project.

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