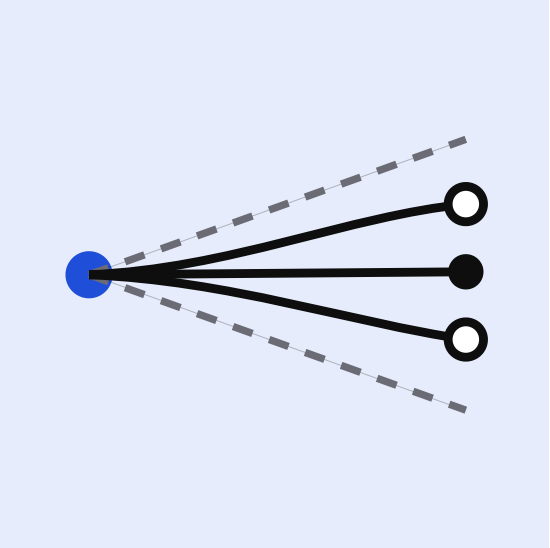
Discipline

Design futures

Uses the means of design, such as objects, images and experiences, to make possible futures tangible and open the debate about which one we want.



In Spanish

Diseño de futuros

Origin

Critical design by Dunne (1999); design fiction by Sterling (2005) and Bleecker (2009); experiential futures by Candy (2010)

What it deals with

Futures described in a report are hard to imagine and discuss. Design turns them into something you can see, touch or live, making them easier to talk about and decide on.

Principles

Make the abstract tangible

An object from the future is grasped faster than a report about it.

Open questions

It does not aim to sell a product, but to spark a conversation.

Draw on foresight

It starts from signals, trends and scenarios so that what is imagined is plausible.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this

Bring a future into a concrete object so the team can discuss it before deciding.

✗ Avoid

Using a futuristic aesthetic just to impress, with no question behind it.

👁 Don't fall for it

Separate the speculative from what you will actually build, and say so clearly.

Especialidades



Specialty

Speculative design

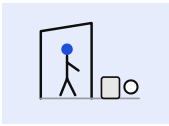
Designs objects from possible futures to ask questions, not to sell them.



Specialty

Design fiction

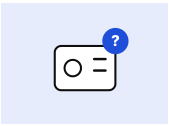
Shows objects from a fictional world as if they were ordinary, to make a change believable.



Specialty

Experiential futures

Turns a future into something you can see, touch and walk through.

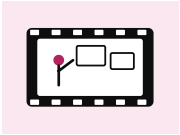


Specialty

Critical design

Objects that question how we live with technology, instead of selling it.

Concepts



Concept

Diegetic prototype

A technology that doesn't exist yet, shown working inside a fiction.

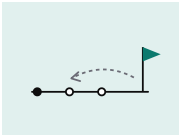
Methods and tools



Method

Causal layered analysis (CLA)

Looking at a problem in four layers, from what the news says to the myths that sustain it.



Method

Backcasting

Imagining the future you want and walking back to today to see which steps lead there.



Method

Ethnography

Spending time in people's world to understand their daily life and culture from the inside.



Method

Scenario planning

Imagining several plausible futures to make decisions that hold up in all of them.

Connections

Builds on

- Futures studies
- Futures cone
- Image of the future

Related to

- Product design
- Transition design

Authors and works

	Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby	Developed critical design and speculative design.
	Julian Bleecker and Bruce Sterling	Shaped design fiction.
	Stuart Candy	Proposed experiential futures.

Sources

Original sources

- Dunne, A. (1999). Hertzian tales: Electronic products, aesthetic experience and critical design. RCA CRD Research Publications.
- Dunne, A., & Raby, F. (2013). Speculative everything: Design, fiction, and social dreaming. MIT Press.
- Sterling, B. (2005). Shaping things. MIT Press.
- Bleecker, J. (2009). Design fiction: A short essay on design, science, fact and fiction. Near Future Laboratory. View source (https://nearfuturelaboratory.com/2009/03/17/design-fiction-a-short-essay-on-design-science-fact-and-fiction/)
- Candy, S. (2010). The futures of everyday life: Politics and the design of experiential scenarios [Doctoral dissertation, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa].
- Candy, S. (2018). Gaming futures literacy: The Thing From The Future. In R. Miller (Ed.), Transforming the future (pp. 233–246). Routledge. View source (https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351048002-7)
- Candy, S., & Kornet, K. (2019). Turning foresight inside out: An introduction to ethnographic experiential futures. Journal of Futures Studies, 23(3), 3–22. View source (https://doi.org/10.6531/JFS.201903_23(3).0002)

Last reviewed: October 29, 2026

Atlas público de diseño, de Adriana Ojeda. Texto e ilustraciones bajo licencia CC BY 4.0.