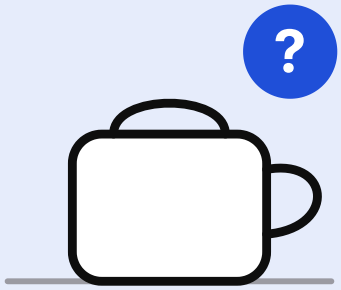
Specialty

Speculative design

Designs objects and scenarios from possible futures to raise questions and open debate, instead of solving problems or selling products.



In Spanish

Diseño especulativo

Origin

Dunne and Raby (2013); earlier, critical design by Dunne (1999)

What problem it addresses

Design usually sticks to solving present problems and rarely asks what future we want.

Principles

Ask, don't solve

Its aim is to open debate about what future we want, not to provide solutions.

The possible, not just the probable

It imagines futures that could happen, even if they aren't the most expected.

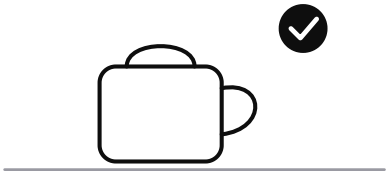
Outside the market

It isn't designed to be sold, but to make people think.

An example

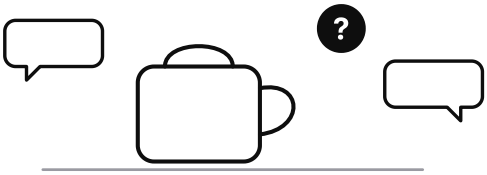
Two ways of designing from the same technology.

Affirmative design



It solves a problem, gives answers and is meant to be manufactured. **For production.**

Speculative design



It finds problems, asks questions and is meant to provoke debate. **For debate.**

Dunne and Raby sum up this contrast in their A/B list: neither approach is better; they do different jobs.

How it works

1

An object from the future makes an abstract idea concrete.

2

Being strange but believable, it makes people ask why it exists.

3

The conversation it sparks matters more than the object.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Design an object from a possible future and use it to ask what seems desirable and what does not.

Avoid

Confusing speculation with decorative science fiction, without a clear question.

Don't fall for it

Always explain that it is a speculation, so it isn't taken for a real product.

Connections

Builds on

- Futures cone
- Image of the future

Uses these methods

- Research through design

Related to

Critical design

Authors and works

1999	**Anthony Dunne**	Proposed critical design in Hertzian Tales.
2013	**Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby**	Developed it as speculative design in Speculative Everything.

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.

Last reviewed: October 25, 2026

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