
The Desktop Odometer: Situating Speculative Design in the Amazon Marketplace

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Abstract

In this position paper I will describe the Desktop Odometer a futured oriented and quasi fictitious product sold on the one the world's largest consumer markets, Amazon.com.

Author Keywords

Research through design; material speculation; design method; design inquiry; relationship;

CSS Concepts

- Human-centered computing → Interaction design

Introduction

Speculative design often takes the form of an artifact. Dunne and Raby use the gallery space to exhibit speculative design.[1] Yet, within the museum or gallery it is difficult to recontextualize the work; to understand the work outside of the white box gallery space, and in the context of the spectator's own life. (I never look at art in a museum and wonder what the work would look like in my own home).

In [2], Wakkary et al. highlight four examples of *Material Speculation*, "a critical space of inquiry occupying the actual or everyday world as opposed to a gallery space." [2:100] Thus, by situating SD, designers and design researchers may be able to provoke more particular and nuanced speculation among viewers.

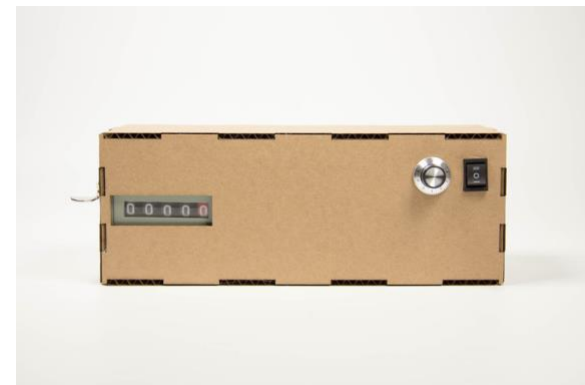


Figure 1: Desktop Odometer

Using Amazon as the vehicle I have positioned a fictitious product onto one of the world's biggest consumer markets, Amazon.com. As opposed to the gallery it is quite easy to imagine a future with a product sold on Amazon. Amazon has a large, diverse audience who use customer reviews to describe their

experience with products. In the case of the Desktop Odometer customer reviews become an opportunity for more situated, speculative storytelling.



Figure 2: Desktop Odometer Scene render

The Desktop Odometer

The develop of the Desktop Odometer came in response to questions regarding the physical transportation involved in surfing the web. To begin selling the Desktop Odometer on Amazon.com I needed to develop a seller account. Amazon offers free accounts for artisans and crafts-people interested in selling their work. My own storefront is called *Handmade Futures*.

The Desktop Odometer is composed of one 12"x24" sheet of cardboard, a 12 V Gear Motor, a 5 Digits Rotary Counter Display, a DC Motor Speed Micro Controller, a dial, and a Potentiometer Scale Dial. (all items were purchased on Amazon.com)

(The following description appears on Amazon.com)

Product Description

Watch in awe as you travel immense distances in the blink of an eye. You have never truly understood just how far you can go until you experience the Desktop Odometer. The Desktop Odometer tracks the distance the user travels online via the computer's internet browser. The device connects wirelessly to your computer for easy use. The Desktop Odometer is handcrafted at the Electronics and Crafts Studio for the Dark Arts (ECSDA) in Seattle Washington. Utilizing a grumpy old laser cutter, Fresh raspberry Pi's and a whole lot of magic you can now see as you travel through the web and into the unknown.

Price

\$70 USD & FREE shipping

Production Method

Products are handcrafted by me, Jeremy, at the Electronics and Craft Studio for the Dark Arts (ECSDA) to allow you (a person) to travel through the browser and into the unknown.

Seller Description: Handmade Futures

The little bits made at *Handmade Futures* are the manifestation of technical know-how, witchcraft, design thinking, and traditional woodworking.

Customer Reviews:

1. Elliott – 5 stars: There are a few things one looks forward to in life. Unboxing my first, Desktop Odometer was one of them. I purchased a refurbished unit from Handmade Futures but it looks brand new. I had just

purchased a new mac book pro but I love when things have a vintage feel so when I saw that the refurbished Desktop Odometer already had 2,000,000 miles on it I had to pull the trigger. You should see my friends' faces when they see how many miles I have logged!

2. Phillip – 5 stars: It's incredible to experience the vast distances you travel at a speed of 3mbps. When surfing the web, all I have to do is glance at the Desktop Odometer, and instantly I can almost feel the wind in my hair. I feel alive again!!! FIVE STARS. Thanks, Desktop Odometer
3. JustJack – 5 stars: Now that I have the Desktop Odometer I don't feel the need to travel via airplanes as much. It feels great to know I am going so far without burning fossil fuels and destroying the environment.
#GoGreen

Material Speculation

In [2:97], Wakkary et al. describe material speculation as, "emphasizing the material or mediating experience of specially designed artifacts in our everyday world." Regarding the Desktop Odometer I emphasize not just

the materiality of the artifact but also the materiality of the store through which it is sold, Amazon.com. In this workshop I would like to discuss the materiality of Amazon.com and the Desktop Odometer, as well as how they affect one another.

If you are interested in learning more, reading past speculative reviews or purchasing your very own Desktop Odometer please use the following address: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07K2HRFR7>

References

1. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby. 2013. *Speculative everything: design, fiction, and social dreaming*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London.
2. Ron Wakkary, William Odom, Sabrina Hauser, Garnet Hertz, and Henry Lin. 2015. Material Speculation: Actual Artifacts for Critical Inquiry. In *Proceedings of The Fifth Decennial Aarhus Conference on Critical Alternatives (CA '15)*, 97–108. <https://doi.org/10.7146/aahcc.v1i1.21299>