**Design Analysis**

Our brains have developed over time to deal with the physical world around us, we are specially adapted to recognise and interact with the environment we live in. When confronted with a purely theoretical construct in the virtual world we often use metaphors to make them resemble the physical world we are more accustomed to. For example, a switch toggle on iOS is not a physical switch; it is simply made to look like one to aid the user to use the system without learning an entirely new interface. The metaphor acts as a visual cue to the user.

Desktop Interface

Perhaps the most commonly used and often experienced metaphorical interface is the desktop. It has been used in a vast array of computer operating systems since the 1970's and most importantly has been implemented in both Windows and Mac OS's. The desktop metaphor treats the computer screen as if it's the top of your desk. Hierarchies of folders and Documents, like a filing cabinet, can be placed upon this virtual desk and can be opened in a window, which is supposed to somewhat represent a paper copy of the document sat open on the desk. Many applications, common on many implementations, attempt to fit into the metaphor, for example, calculators, notepads, and basic card games are designed to feel like they are just sat on the virtual desk.

What the desktop metaphor does so well is provide even the least technologically able with a familiar looking virtual space. Its very existence instructs the user how to use it, so little or no further instruction or tutorials are needed. The trashcan present on the Mac desktop is a perfect example of this. The vast majority of people who own a Mac computer are familiar with the functionality of a bin. The virtual trashcan attempts to mimic this functionality as far as possible. When you no longer need or want a document you drop it into the trashcan. The document then stays in the trash until we explicitly empty the trash or retrieve the document back to the desktop. Much like a real life desktop trashcan, its functionality is self-explanatory. Nearly everybody has been in a situation where they have accidentally deleted files they needed, the use of this metaphor plays on the fact that throwing something in the bin is an act already
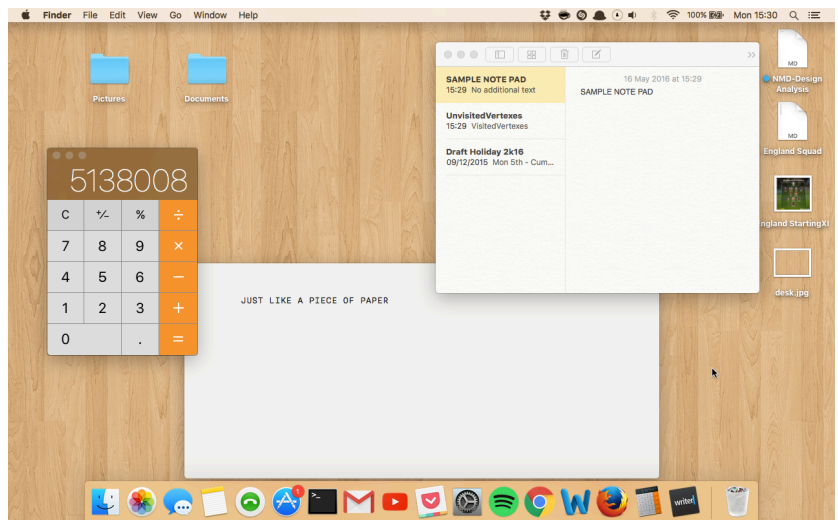
deeply embedded already in the users mind. This an attempt to reassure them that this action will do what they expect and thus increasing their user experience.

However, I think that it has some significant flaws, particularly in 2016 when the vast majority of people are competent performing basic tasks on a computer. People no longer need such basic visual clues and would now perhaps benefit from an increase in functionality not possible whilst still trying to mimic each items real world counterpart. Other metaphors, such as the filing cabinet file structure, also now seem out-dated. In an age where storage is no longer at such a premium and users have tens of thousands of files stored on each device, individually finding somewhere to store each file is clunky and inefficient. In my experience users no longer think of their files as in a virtual filing cabinet and instead use metadata tagging and the search facilities to better organize their data both in their minds and on their computers. This particular metaphor now just gets in the way and detracts from the user experience. Metaphors also need to be consistent else risk causing confusion to the user and detracting from the user experience. I think the trashcan metaphor still has a place in modern day interface; this is due to the fact that the metaphor doesn't interfere with the items functionality and still provides instruction to a potentially dangerous function. However on Mac OSX in order to correctly eject an external disk or disk image, you must drag it into your trashcan. This goes against the whole reason for using the metaphor in the first place. It is supposed to provide a clear and self-explanatory place to safely delete unwanted files. By adding this counterintuitive functionality it confuses users and detracts from the usability.

Fred Perry Online Store Interface

The Fred Perry online store goes in the opposite direction to the desktop metaphor, rather than using a metaphor to increase functionality and usability it is used to provide an interesting, cool and elegant look that is supposed to embody their brand. Fred Perry is a brand very much associated with British subcultures and music and there is an attempt to continue this link with the website design. It is trying to portray a contemporary, underground feeling that they hope that their target audience will connect with and ultimately be more likely to make a purchase. Each canvas hung on the wall presents a different style for the user to click on and navigate to another part of the website. When

hovering over each image it expands slightly in size making it obvious to the user that it is a link to elsewhere. The metaphor here provides no extra instruction or functionality over a standard e-commerce shop but instead is implemented for aesthetical reasons and thus improving the user experience in that way. It is assumed that the user has a certain level of knowledge as a complete novice would have no way of knowing how to use this page.

The main criticism of using this metaphor is that it doesn't manage to portray very much information to the user. It's fairly obvious that each of the canvas's provide a link to a page with more information about each one but it is not completely clear exactly what each might be linking to. For example, if I came to the website wanting a specific t-shirt, it is not at all obvious which link I would be best in choosing in order to find it. If someone with little or no experience came across this website they simply wouldn't be able to navigate it. There are no usability hints provided by the metaphor or in general. Images on a wall would not instruct a user that they a links to other areas of the website in the same way that a trashcan suggests a place to get rid of stuff. The fact that usability is quite so poor could actually reduce the number of people using and purchasing items on the site.

Despite this there is an awful lot to like about the website, it looks smart and fans of the Fred Perry brand will enjoy the atmosphere it is portraying. The target demographic of Fred Perry is also likely to consist of relatively young technologically able people so the relative lack of usability is not so much of a problem as they have grown up using the web and know how to navigate with ease. In this design, they have certainly sacrificed both functionality and usability in favor of aesthetics, which will benefit the user experience in other ways to that of the desktop metaphor.

Designing my metaphorical interface

I learned a significant amount about the use of metaphorical interfaces whilst studying the above two examples as well a further research of other interfaces online. There are aspects I like and dislike from both designs so I have thought carefully about which aspects to implement myself. The main thing I have learned from the desktop metaphor is that mimicking real life items in the interface is not necessarily a good way of instructing the user how to use the virtual item. I feel that people are far more skilled at navigating the web than they were a few years ago and do no need quite such obvious clues at the expense of functionality. After doing some research I have found that there has been a significant shift away from skeuomorphism in recent years, most noticeably in Apple's iOS, this is due in part to people becoming better at navigating technology and do not need as much assistance as they used to. Despite this, I feel that Fred Perry has captured this perfectly and instead used real-world objects to make it engaging and familiar to the target

user. I am going to take this approach with my own design and use real life object analogies to add to both the aesthetics and usability of my interface but not necessarily try and recreate their exact real world functionality, as I feel it could actually detract from the usability. Despite this I do not want to go as far as the Fred Perry website, I am creating for the Gutenberg Project which is primarily going to be used as a source of information and to download specific books, so ease of use and navigation are still of paramount importance. So I will need to make sure there is still enough space to display relevant author information and still include visual pointers so that the majority of users can navigate the site with ease. I am aiming to strike a balance between the usability of the desktop and the look and feel of the Fred Perry website.

My chosen author was Albert Einstein, so I wanted to get the science and maths kind of atmosphere into my design much in the same way the Fred Perry website subtly projects the feeling of cool British subculture. Some of the most famous photographs of Einstein take place in a classroom or lecture theater so decided to try and incorporate this into my design. The chalkboard would be a perfect place to display information and perhaps a bookshelf could display each of his books. Although I was conscious of the fact that I didn't want it to look like the old iBook's iPad app, which looks dated and tacky in 2016. To avoid this I did not include the bookshelves on my low fidelity prototype. The idea was that it would look like Einstein was writing on the board. Other than informing the user what Einstein looked like this would not provide any extra functionality but would hopefully make the design more aesthetically pleasing to anyone interested in reading any of Einstein's books.

Beyond this, I wanted to keep the design clean and easy to navigate. The remaining information would be drawn onto the chalkboard in a white, but easy to read handwritten font. This will continue the metaphor that gives a mathematical science like feel but hopefully will not detract from its usability as information, links and books can be made as clear as necessary on the black background. Book covers could be posters stuck onto the chalkboard much like on the Fred Perry website. As we are not pretending that out virtual chalkboard is and behaves precisely like a real chalkboard. Information can change as books or links are clicked and expanded, hopefully creating and an interactive chalkboard that changes to what the user wants to see and adapts intuitively to the areas that they click.