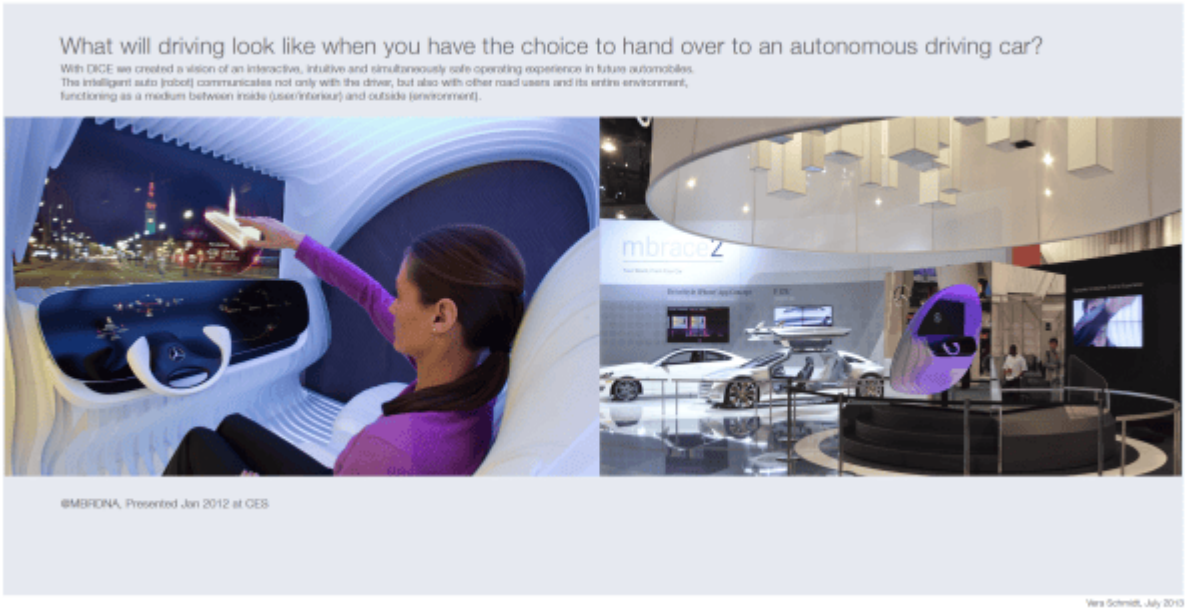
JUST WHAT IS A CAR?



I am in Amsterdam for eDay – one of the regular business conferences organized by the Dutch magazine Emerce.

Ji Lee, Facebook Creative Director, opened with a pep talk about social media: “Ideas are nothing. Doing is everything.”

Then there were talks about advertising, platforms (not products), marketing and branding, selling cheaply to poor people in Africa, storytelling experience, and a whole lot more.

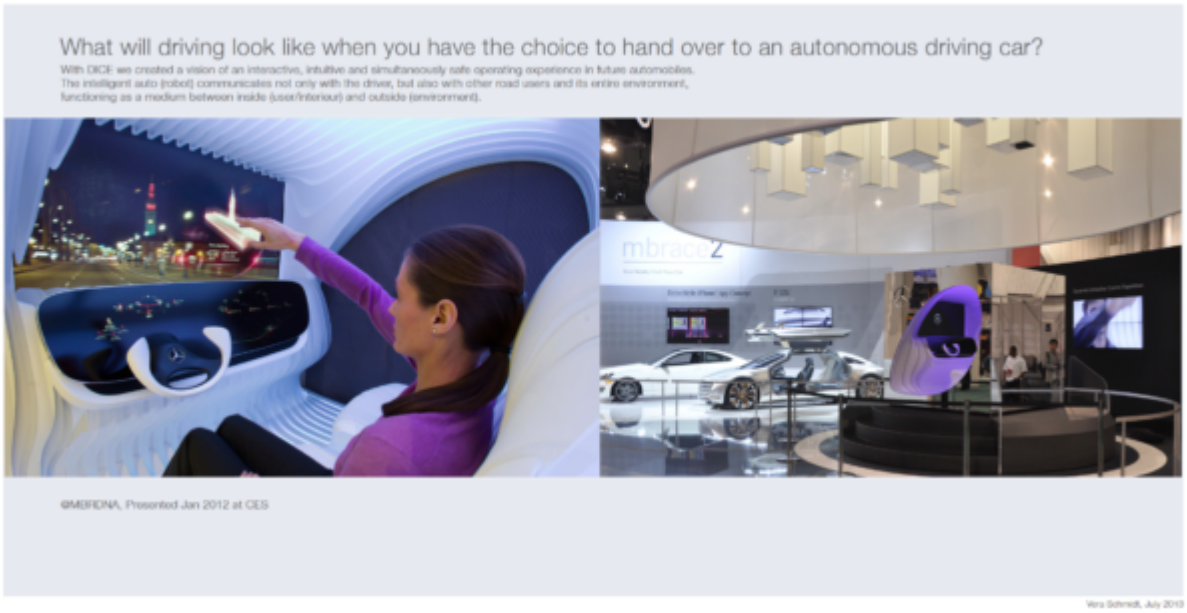
I wind up the day with a keynote talk I call

“The future of personal mobility: the internet of things and the rise of the autonomous car”

or “Why everyone needs to adopt a design mentality”

or “How to succeed in the experience economy”.

I’m not sure how qualified I am to speak about any of them. Though I have been thinking about cars and design for some time now.



My point – cars have always been more than cars – and being mobile involves a whole lot more than being able to get around by car. Cars have never been just powered boxes on four wheels. Now there's a fast growing convergence of devices and experiences that are about mobility.

New kinds of car that can drive themselves are going to mix this all up even more.

How to deal with the complexity?

– become a designer

We're in a world where a car is fast becoming as much a mobile media device as my iPhone, where experiences such as mobility, reach, extension, the urge for co-presence, to be and share with others, are being connected through an internet of things – IT disappearing from view into everyday artifacts. Frictionless surveillance, sensing, monitoring means that my car can know about my life and health, and share that knowledge with me and my healthcare provider, as well as link with other providers and users of everyday information so as to anticipate my actions and desires, for good or evil.

The world is entangled, my experiences folded together in a complex manifold where it does't make sense to think of products so much as experiences and desires. When major attention is being given to the means of smoothing the interconnections and

interoperabilities, so that I just don’t notice the difference when my home IT system hands over to a mobile carrier, to a cloud service, to my personal mobility system embodied in the automobile. Disintermediation. Nomadic experience.

When my lab worked a few years back on mobile media with Daimler Chrysler we used short stories as a means of capturing in a few words such complex interfoldings that are more and more our everyday, our quotidian experience. Meg Butler was superb at this.

I presented such a scenario of the near future. And something of a horror story.

I’m not often traveling to the studio on this project. The fiber optic link at home lets me run a wall-sized wormhole at high resolution so I can see everyone as if I were just there, chatting, passing materials around as if I was with them.

I am planning the day with a member of the team out in rural France when the House tells me that Ben is off to school. It has remembered to charge his electric bicycle overnight.

My conversation follows me room to room across the screens and sound system running through the house and out to the car which has pulled round to the front from the garage.

It’s a Gordon Murray Special. The super lightweight composite frame allows complete customization and I’ve

got the latest self-driving system installed, developed by a small specialist company in Zurich.

My conversation carries seamlessly into the car and I’m gently interrupted by its greeting. I tell Jimmy I’ll talk later.

“I see that you’re a little stressed this morning Michael.” The sensors in my jacket pass on all my vital signs to the House and Car. The House had suggested I had more for breakfast to help with my blood sugar. Now the Car suggests that I relax and let it do the driving.

“Your driving is upsetting the insurance company Michael. They’ll raise your premium.”

I refuse. I really like exploring the performance simulation modes. Having the Car behave as if it were a tourer in the 1960s, or whatever, gets my head out of things.

“Perhaps Eddie Hall’s Bentley this morning?”

Great! I’ve been wanting to try this all week, and the

morning weather today is perfect. The Car lowers the roof and loads the specs for the 1936 4.25 liter motor that Eddie had fitted for the Tourist Trophy race of that year (he came second). The simulation of the Borg and Beck clutch felt spot on as I nudged the stick shift, admittedly from a late 60s Lotus Elan. I slip into first and pull away. The engine note comes through beautifully on the Car's environmental sound system. The dashboard displays adjust to show the worn dials of the old Bentley.

But the commuter traffic on 101 is bad.

The Car suggests it take over. Perhaps I'd like to edit the video of the weekend family road trip. The Car has compiled all sorts of clips, interior shots of us all joking along, looking out of the windows, clips shared from roadside cameras, and from the kid's cameras in the other Car. The dashboard displays adjust again.

"There's a problem ahead Michael, and I can't quite reconcile the data coming from the road sensors and other cars."

"Let me know if you need any help."

“I will Michael.”

The lanes reserved for self-driving cars allow high speeds, and it’s only a few miles and moments before the Car interrupts.

“There’s really something not quite right Michael. The distances are not computing. Road and vehicle-to-vehicle sensors are incompatible. I think it might be something to do with the roadworks.”

“OK, let me see.”

I look up and don’t recognize the road at all. The car has taken us a different route this morning.

Everything then speeds up. I see there’s something coming up fast. It looks like an overturned bus, a school bus, and cars are swerving too fast around it.

“Michael, there are 14 school children in the road ahead and I can’t see a way through. What should I do?”

I hesitate.

The car applies emergency braking and deliberately

veers to the left to avoid the children.

“I’m sorry Michael, and I’m sure you would understand.”

Surveillance cameras and in-road monitors record the speed of impact with the concrete overpass as 62.3 mph.

How might we deal with the opportunities and challenges, the threats too?

I suggest, of course, **active appraisal and intervention** – design thinking.

The slides – eDay-2013-Shanks-720p



Here I am trying to tell my science fiction story