Savannah College of Art and Design

Postmodernism and Automobiles

A Collision Course

Mohammed Aiman Ahmed

GDVX 701

Professor Eric Scott Shumate

11 November 2022

Postmodern automobiles of the future may end society as we know it and change it forever. We are undergoing an evolution that humanity as we know it may not be ready for. With advancements in technology skyrocketing, along with advancements in artificial intelligence and its ability to learn. We are headed for a collision that will either leave us with a utopia, or a dystopia. These technologies have already fused with our lives becoming integral to our daily functions in the form of our laptops, watches and phones. These have become extensions of our thoughts, an extension of our opinions and the way we interact with society. And soon, the automobile will be no different. These technologies can have vastly different outcomes for out future, where not only our thoughts, but also our decisions may be outsourced or influenced by them.

Humanity's technological progress can also largely be measured by our automobile engineering, how we started off with a purely functional vehicle to our modern vehicles with their central computer, intuitive and sophisticated systems and their integration with our devices. We always dreamed big as we wanted the freedom to go anywhere we wanted in the comfort of our own vehicles. In the 1950's and 60's, we had predicted the future of transport and vehicles to have flying cars or pod systems that we would individually travel in. Ever since the invention of flight, we have not stopped trying to invent the flying car. With years of innovation and design, there were some successes, albeit they were more planes than cars, but they worked. In order to actually use them, of course you needed to get various permissions and permits, not only to actually fly but to also use the actual airspace above you.

While we've come up with many creative and postmodern concepts as the flying car (See Fig. 1.), a couple of companies today like Joby, SkyDrive, Aeromobil and Archer Aviation, have actually achieved this, with over 500 other companies actively working on

similar concepts. Speaking with the context of semiotics and how the car manufacturer Volvo may invoke a sense of safety due to its identity and marketing, or how BMW as a signifier may symbolise high performance, some of these vehicles may similarly have you thinking about them in terms of the best way of mobile flight transport. Some of these concepts look more like drones than actual road going vehicles, but they could very well be the future of transportation. However, in the context of today, we can see that it will either be too expensive and just not sustainable. And to replace the 1.4 billion vehicles we currently have on the road today, in a sustainable, economical way is a task that could take a century or two, at the least. That being said, some of these technologies are being conceptualized and slowly integrated into the current world. And looking at some of the successes and failures and analysing these postmodern vehicles, we can determine the type of future we are headed for.

Fig. 1. Chinese Tesla competitor Xpeng unveils plans for flying car, NPR, https://www.npr.org/2022/11/03/1133736081/xpeng-evtol-flying-car

Some of these postmodern cars may simply not work practically, with single seats or no steering controls, since they are the designers vision of the future. Some look like they are

straight out of *Blade Runner.* Nonetheless, pop culture has played a significant role in inspiring a lot of futuristic designs, such as the DeLorean in *Back to the Future*, or the concept Audi RSQ from *I, Robot.* We may as well be headed on a similar path to the future that sci-fi dystopian movies have shown us.

It is difficult to imagine flying cars or amphibious vehicles letting us further dominate the skies and oceans, however we may not be too far away from achieving such freedom and scope of transportation. Cars of the future may become more of a device than vehicle delivering its own libraries of apps, features and services. While this may not happen overnight, there is a high probability that it could be an eventuality progressing along with the rate of growth of technology and efficiency.

One major technological evolution taking place is that of automation and artificial intelligence. The rate at which artificially intelligent technology is progressing, as well as being integrated with our daily lives is incredibly fast. (See Fig. 2). A.I already exists in our phones, and our homes with programs such as Siri or Alexa listening to our commands. Other types of A.I that are currently progressing at a scary rate is that of image construction through prompts with programs such as Midjourney and Dall-E. In automobiles, voice command and navigation systems, as well as auto drive features are possible using A.I technology. Tesla for one is popularly known for its vehicles ability to self-drive themselves without needing the drivers input.

While this type of technology can be convenient and help creating a better flow of traffic, along with proximity awareness technology keeping the driver safe from “predicted” collisions, we must stop to consider what is actually happening here and its possible effect on

the future of transportation.

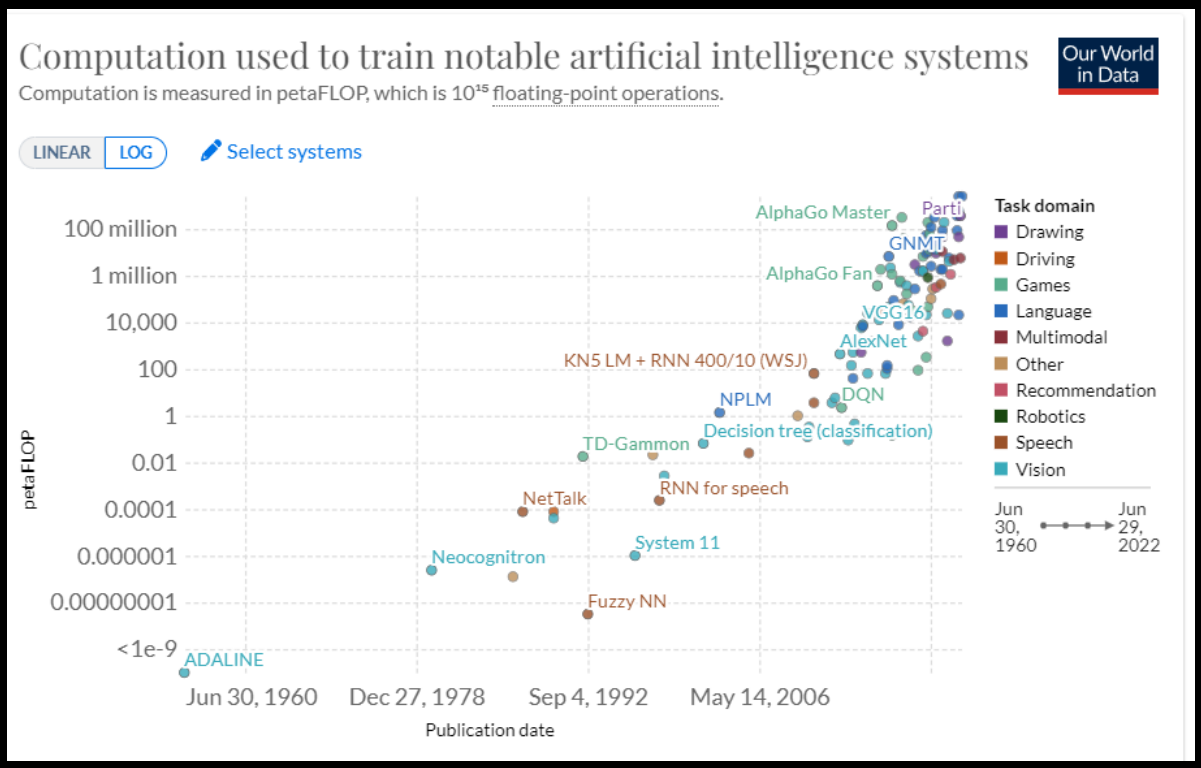

Fig. 2. Computation used to train notable artificial intelligence systems, Our World In Data, https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/ai-training-computation

On one hand, A.I is a convenient tool that makes our lives easier and performs actions for us that may otherwise take time or effort to do manually. On the other hand, we may be beginning to outsource even our thoughts to A.I. Companies like Google and Facebook allegedly collect our data and information, put a price tag on it and sell them. Algorithms predict our shopping patterns and begin showing us advertisements that we more likely to engage with. If we take this information on a much larger scale and apply them to automobiles, we may be on the backseat in terms of controlling the direction our lives take. There are many possibilities that the future holds for us living and integrating with such technology.

Imagine you are in an automated car that is controlled by your brainwaves. And yes, this technology is in development today, just look at the Mercedes AVTR Concept car that uses brainwaves to input directions and commands to the vehicle. (See Fig. 3) Other car makers are also using neuromorphic technologies such as keyword spotting, driver attention and passenger behaviour monitoring. Similarly, SynSense is working with BMW to use neuromorphic chips and integrate them into smart cockpits. Along with these, hands-free technology is largely being developed and integrated into our world with cars turning into moving lounges. Imagine you are simply feeling thirsty or hungry, and as the programs identify your thought patterns, automatically order food or water delivered directly to your car by a drone, using your history and predictive technology based on the data that's been collected from you. Imagine not needing to even say anything, but simply thinking it.

On one hand, it may seem like the ultimate convenience since we know who we are and what we want. However, the line between what *we* want, and what the A.I algorithm *thinks* we wants may begin to blur. The movie *Wall*-E showcases a future where humans simply sit and are connected to all services. being fed, clothed and transported by way of automation. In the movie, the humans begin to lose parts of their intelligence that earlier ancestors have needed and honed. Similar to this. we may begin to outsource our thoughts and actions to machines. A world where you aren't using technology anymore, but it starts using you.

Fig. 3. Mercedes VISION AVTR Concept, Mercedes-Benz, https://www.mercedes-benz.com/en/innovation/concept-cars/vision-avtr/

We can already begin to see such change in our world today. For example, Amazon and FedEx are testing automated delivery technology using drones or delivery robots. (See Fig. 4.). One voice command to Alexa can soon bring all your groceries right to you, while it stores the information of your preferred products to recommend to you in the future, or automatically order periodically. Self-driving technology as well does not stop at cars, but also trucks for transporting goods, cargo and services, such as the Tesla Semi. These services may be performed completely by automated vehicles in the future. However, as Marshall McLuhan puts it in his book *The Medium is the Message*, introduction of these new ways of transport by themselves may not be the source of evolution, but rather their impact on society, infrastructure and jobs. While the future may introduce such automation, the world will be forced to change along with it. One question that is often pondered is what would A.I do in a self-driving or automated vehicle when faced with a direct collision with an elderly

person crossing the street, or a mother with a baby. What data or information would A.I utilize in order to make the decision to swerve into one of them, or into a wall and possibly injuring or killing the driver. Elon Musk is largely vocal about his fear of A.I. His opinion is that artificial intelligence could one day outsmart us or endanger us. While we are a long way away from such a future, it is one that we may inevitably face.

Fig. 4. Amazon Prime Air prepares for drone deliveries, About Amazon, https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/transportation/amazon-prime-air-prepares-for-drone-deliveries

What is clear is that we are headed for a future that we may not be ready for, but one that may be a necessary step in the evolution of mankind as a species. What that may be, depends on how aware we are of new technologies and their effect on us. Automobiles and future concepts for different types of transportation may play a larger effect on the future than we may know, just as the car had done when it was first introduced to us. Since then, our cities and infrastructure, our jobs and education, advancements in technology, our entertainment, our experiences and level of freedom have significantly evolved in direct correlation.

We will continue to evolve our technologies in ways that we couldn't imagine before, whether it be postmodern or ultra-modern and integrate them further into our lives in our computers, phones, transport and maybe even our minds and bodies themselves. It is important to stop and observe our current world, and guide ourselves to a better future in which we do not have to sacrifice who we are, but rather use the same technology to work for us, instead of the other way around.

Works Cited

Ward-Foxton, Sally. Eetimes.

Cars That Think Like You, 07 Jul 2022.

https://www.eetimes.com/cars-that-think-like-you/

Maria, Victoria Nadal Sánchez. BBVA.

This is How Artificial Intelligence Will Influence the Human Mind, 28 Mar 2017.

https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/technology/artificial-intelligence/this-is-how-artificial-intelligence-will-influence-the-human-mind/

Bajarin, Tim. Forbes.

Future Cars Will Become Devices, Not Just Electronic Vehicles, 30 Nov 2021.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/timbajarin/2021/11/30/future-cars-will-become-devices-not-just-electronic-vehicles/?sh=15b95f1c2473

Manuj, Aggarwal. Medium.

Technological advances and its effects on human evolution, 29 Dec 2017.

https://medium.com/@manuj.aggarwal/technological-advances-and-its-effects-on-human-evolution-5329718639e7

Biryukov, Vladislav. Kaspersky.

What is the Car Coming to? The Evolution of Human-Car Interactions, 09 Dec 2014.

https://usa.kaspersky.com/blog/evolution-of-human-car-interaction/4905/

McLuhan, Marshall.

The Medium Is The Massage, 1967.

Bibliography

Heffner, Reid R. Turrentine, Tom. Kurani, Kenneth S.

A Primer on Automobile Semiotics, 02 Feb 2006.

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3577d04p

Hayward, Giulia. NPR.

Chinese Tesla competitor unveils plans for flying car, 03 Nov 2022.

https://www.npr.org/2022/11/03/1133736081/xpeng-evtol-flying-car

Ward-Foxton, Sally. Eetimes.

Cars That Think Like You, 07 Jul 2022.

https://www.eetimes.com/cars-that-think-like-you/

DaSilva, Steve. Jalopnik.

Modern Concept Cars Are Bad Concepts And Bad Cars, 02 Dec 2021.

https://jalopnik.com/hear-me-out-modern-concept-cars-are-bad-concepts-and-b-1848150569

Burt, Matt. Crosse, Jesse. Holloway, Hilton. Moss, Darren. Autocar.

The future of motoring, 20 Feb 2016.

https://www.autocar.co.uk/car-news/new-cars/future-motoring-what-will-cars-be-25-years

Beiker, Sven. BBC.

The cars we'll be driving in the world of 2050, 07 Nov 2013.

https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20131108-what-will-we-be-driving-in-2050

Woodhouse, Andrew. Autotrader.

Cars of the future, 13 Feb 2020.

https://www.autotrader.co.uk/content/features/cars-of-the-future

Roberts, David. Vox.

The way we get around is about to change.

https://www.vox.com/a/new-economy-future/transportation

Maria, Victoria Nadal Sánchez. BBVA.

This is How Artificial Intelligence Will Influence the Human Mind, 28 Mar 2017.

https://www.bbvaopenmind.com/en/technology/artificial-intelligence/this-is-how-artificial-intelligence-will-influence-the-human-mind/

Bajarin, Tim. Forbes.

Future Cars Will Become Devices, Not Just Electronic Vehicles, 30 Nov 2021.

https://www.forbes.com/sites/timbajarin/2021/11/30/future-cars-will-become-devices-not-just-electronic-vehicles/?sh=15b95f1c2473

Manuj, Aggarwal. Medium.

Technological advances and its effects on human evolution, 29 Dec 2017.

https://medium.com/@manuj.aggarwal/technological-advances-and-its-effects-on-human-evolution-5329718639e7

Amazon.

Amazon Prime Air prepares for drone deliveries, 13 Jun 2022.

https://www.aboutamazon.com/news/transportation/amazon-prime-air-prepares-for-drone-deliveries

Biryukov, Vladislav. Kaspersky.

What is the Car Coming to? The Evolution of Human-Car Interactions, 09 Dec 2014.

https://usa.kaspersky.com/blog/evolution-of-human-car-interaction/4905/

Heffner, Reid R. Turrentine, Tom. Kurani, Kenneth S.

A Primer on Automobile Semiotics, 02 Feb 2006.

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3577d04p

McLuhan, Marshall.

The Medium Is The Massage, 1967.