

KANEDA'S RED BIKE AND OTHER FUTURISTIC MOTORCYCLES FROM THE CINEMA

Fábio S. Magnani

Full Professor, Doctor in Mechanical Engineering, Federal University of Pernambuco, Brazil
fabio.magnani@ufpe.br
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There is an uncountable feast of motorcycles in films and comics. Those fantastic motorcycles differ from the bikes we see on the streets in relation to form, function and action. For example, Milla Jovovich's motorcycle in *Ultraviolet* (2006) has the function of running on the walls, although it has a conventional form (BMW R1150R). In *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), Carrie-Anne Moss rides a motorcycle with both conventional form and function (Ducati 996), but in a fearless riding rarely seen in the real world. It is important to make the distinction between function (*i.e.*, the mechanical design, the actual dynamic potential of the motorcycle) and action (what the motorcycle performs in the film), since in the real world the action is limited both by the mechanical design (function) and the rider's skill and courage, while in the cinematographic world the action is limited only by the artist's imagination.

In this paper I analyze six bikes from the cinema that, in addition to different function and action, also have distinguished form: **Light Cycle 1st-Gen** (*Tron*; Lisberger, 1982), **Kaneda's Bike** (*Akira* manga; Otomo, 1982; and *Akira* anime; Otomo, 1988), **Bat-Pod** (*The Dark Knight*; Nolan, 2008; and *The Dark Knight Rises*; Nolan, 2012), **Moto-Terminator** (*Terminator Salvation*; McG, 2009), **Light Cycle 5th-Gen** (*Tron: Legacy*; Kosinski, 2010) and **Priest's Bike** (*Priest*; Stewart, 2011).

In the first section I discuss the challenges to study *Akira* (the artistic work in which **Kaneda's Bike** appears), followed by a section where I use analogies to discuss the concept of speed in Futurism and postmodernity. Then I present the bikes properly, starting with **Kaneda's Bike** and then the other five of the group. The last two sections are dedicated to comparing the six cinematographic bikes to each other, and then comparing them with real bikes. Certainly, motorcycles in the cinema have more a symbolic purpose than a functional one, so our objective is not criticizing them on those terms, but only to pinpoint why actual motorcycles are not like those beautiful machines roaring on the screens. In the conclusion, I defend some reasons why I believe Kaneda's bike is the most beloved of all.

1. THE SET: AKIRA MANGA AND AKIRA ANIME

Central to this paper is the most iconic of the fictional motorcycles: **Kaneda's Bike**, which appears in *Akira* (the manga was published between 1982 and 1990, and the anime was released in 1988). It is not my intention to summarize all the films analyzed here, but shortly *Akira* is the story of two teenage bikers: Tetsuo and Kaneda. The story is completely different if one considers the former or the latter as being the protagonist. Following Tetsuo, after a motorcycle accident he develops telekinetic powers that grow exponentially throughout the story until he is completely possessed, transforming himself in a new universe. In the process, he changes physically and psychologically, becoming a threat to the world very existence. In turn, his until then friend Kaneda (and his red motorcycle) navigates among military, politicians, bikers, scientists, and rebels trying to stop Tetsuo from destroying the world. In the manga plot line, Kaneda evolves from a *bosozoku* (Japanese motorcycle gang) biker to become a leader of the newly independent Japan (in the anime, Japan's aftermath is not shown). *Akira*, the title character, is not very relevant as an individual, since he is a child with immense destructive power but almost without conscience. *Akira* is nothing but a bomb that menaces to explode at any time without any reason at all.

Akira is considered a landmark in pop culture for being responsible for the explosion of manga and anime in the West. And *Akira* is a challenge for analysis. First, it is complex due to its size (2200 pages), several interlaced plots, number of characters, serial and long spam publication, and historical/cultural references (*e.g.*, the atomic explosion, *bosozoku*, and the American military control in Japan). Second, *Akira's* analysis is a challenge because it was publicized in various media. Bolton (2014) recounts how 75% of *Akira's* story first appeared in the form of manga (black and white) in Japan, from 1982 to 1987. In 1988, an anime was released based only on the first 30% of the story of the manga, but already with an ending. Between 1989 and 1990, the manga was then finished, incorporating in a certain way the ending of the anime. To make things more complex, when the manga was released in the US and Europe (after the anime's release), it was colored to sweeten western audience. Therefore, someone's impression of *Akira* depends a lot on his first contact: black and white manga (the sensorial sensations of sound and movement depend on the previous experience of the reader), colored manga (the coloring process somehow flattens and freezes the action), or anime (the

music and engine sound amplifies the sensory experience, while the limited time of the film results in the fragmentation and oversimplification of the plot and characters).

Even more difficult is that, depending on who is performing the analysis, depending also on the media analyzed and on the part/character studied, *Akira* can be seen as pre-modern (Kaneda as an adventurous chivalric Ronin; Napier, 2001), modern (**Kaneda's Bike** could be itself a very appropriate illustration of the 1909's *Manifesto of Futurism*; Greene, 2014) or postmodern (Tetsuo's transformation from a boy to a deformed monster, then dissolving his individuality to become a new universe).

Finally, another difficulty is that *Akira* (manga), *Tron*, and *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982) were all released in the same year, 1982 - practically preventing the distinction between cause-and-effect and simple co-occurrence. To us, *Tron* is important because of the influence on **Kaneda's Bike** (as attested by his own creator Katsuhiro Otomo; Barber, 2017); and *Blade Runner* (itself based on Moebius' drawings in *The Long Tomorrow*; O'Bannon and Moebius, 1976) is important because of the city ambience in the anime. But *Blade Runner* is important mainly because it is, in all fairness, the ruler by which all SF films are measured, which complicates our analysis since the anime was influenced by it, but not the manga.

To show the diversity of points of view in *Akira's* academic analysis, I will briefly mention some academic works dedicated exclusively to it, while I try to group them into major themes. The most rich theme of these papers is the interpretation of *Akira's* instances of modernity and postmodernity (Napier, 1993; Standish, 1998; Napier, 2001; Bolton, 2014; Klausner, 2015; Gottesman, 2016; de la Iglesia, 2018). Some important reference themes in *Akira* are the atomic bomb (Napier, 1993; Lamarre, 2008; Klausner, 2015), *bosozoku* (Standish, 1998; Klausner, 2015), and *Blade Runner* (Standish, 1998; Gottesman, 2016). In relation to the media, the majority of those papers analyze the anime (Napier, 1993; Standish, 1998; Napier, 2001; Bolton, 2014; Gottesman, 2016; Miyake, 2018), while others analyze also the manga (Lamarre, 2008; Bolton, 2014; Aparicio, 2016).

2. SPEED IN FUTURISM AND POSTMODERNITY: AN ANALOGY

Speed has several dimensions, and it is always interesting to be aware of which one is being considered in each argument. First, there is the riders' transcendence in an almost superhuman being when in high speed. Second, speed is also about mobility, be it geographic, social or cultural. Finally, speed is associated with various dysfunctions such as accidents, pollution, noise, exploitation, and crime. An elegant fictional interpretation of some of those dimensions is made by Rachel Kushner (2013), and an academic one is made by John Urry (2007). In the case of the bikes analyzed in this article, transcendence is the main dimension.

The comparison between Futurism and postmodernity is always difficult, as the two have similar elements, such as speed and fragmentation. At risk of creating a mini new *Sokal Affair* (Sokal and Bricmont, 1998), let me try a very simplistic physical analogy using something from 19th century Thermodynamics: entropy. Imagine an elevated lake with still water. Because it has great potential energy, it has

low entropy. At the edge of this lake there is a border, through which the water flows in a beautiful waterfall. The gravitational potential energy is then transformed into turbulent kinetic energy, slightly increasing the entropy, until the water falls on the rocks below in a thunderous noise. In a certain distance from the rocks the noise dissipates and the water spreads in a gentle river delta covering the entire plain - water has followed its natural path, entropy has reached its maximum.

In this analogy, pre-modernity would be the upper lake. The water as a whole was restful in the beginning, although with a very high potential for movement; its molecules presented the microscopic movement of thermal vibration, but a movement that could not be seen with naked eyes. Futurism (*i.e.*, modernity in general) would be the great movement of the waterfall, a movement with purpose - even if only a false belief in a purpose, even if in a movement destined to doom. Postmodernity would be the huge delta standing at the bottom: certainly its individual molecules have more vibrational movement than when the molecules were in the upper lake before the fall, but each vibrates almost in an individual way, unable to give the same integrated direction (purpose) to the water as compared when it was the mighty waterfall.

Thermodynamicists would say the potential gravitational energy of the upper lake was transformed in kinetic energy in the waterfall and then in internal energy (microscopic movement) in the river delta. We cannot see energy, pressure, temperature, chemical bonds, or microscopic movement. We can see only macroscopic movement, what we call speed, only one of the several possible expressions of energy. For our eyes, the water was quiet in the beginning, then very fast in the fall, and then slow in the delta. For the thermodynamicist the energy was conserved (First Law of Thermodynamics) and the entropy has increased (Second Law of Thermodynamics).

We could think of several other metaphors for the | pre-modernity | Futurism | postmodernity | triad: in artistic presentation, | symphony | performance art | YouTube |; in mobility (in the terms of Urry, 2007), | pedestrians | motorcycles | cell phones |; in knowledge, | monasteries | universities | internet |; in *Blade Runner*, | the slow and orderly flying cars | the violent androids | the alive lower city |; in society, | well defined classes | war | the complex present world |. Maybe the main difference between Futurism and postmodernity is the purpose - even being a silly, wrong, simplistic or murderous one. For the Futurism, speed would bring big changes to the world, while in postmodernity speed is all about mobility and consumption, performance and anesthesia (Kundera, 1995).

3. THE PROTAGONIST: KANEDA'S BIKE

But the main theme of this paper is **Kaneda's Bike**. Suzan Napier (2001) presents the motorcycle as an agent of change, kinetically contrasting with the structure of power. Writing about the manga, Christopher Bolton (2014) explains how all the motorcycles (not **Kaneda's Bike** in particular) are important to the second half of the story as part of the challenge to navigate through the city ruins. Sebastian Klausner (2015) notices how *Akira's* characters, even being victims of class

structure, are riding their motorcycles instead of chanting socialist slogans. For Zach Gottesman (2016), *Akira* portrays bike gangs as something authentic in a corrupt, decaying city. Martin de la Iglesia (2018) describes how Kaneda uses a futuristic motorcycle to confront Tetsuo, and then, in the end, against the United Nations troops. Esperanza Miyake (2018), analyzing the anime, highlights how Tetsuo desires **Kaneda's Bike** in order to search back his own identity. Important for our present paper is Miyake putting in prominence the **Kaneda's Bike** in *Akira*, emphasizing elements as its nostalgia, color, and riding position.

Katsuhiro Otomo (b. 1954) is the writer, illustrator and director of *Akira* (both the manga and the anime). In an interview from Otomo for Ollie Barder (2017), several themes were revealed, and were used as the initial spark for this present investigation. Some elements of *Akira* can be seen in previous works of Otomo, as paranormality in *Dōmu* (Otomo, 1980) and the exquisitely designed machines in *Farewell to Weapons* (Otomo, 1981). This last manga was then adapted to anime as a segment of *Short Peace* (Katoki, 2013). Another relation to previous works was revealed by Sebastian Klausner (2015) tracing an evolution in Otomo's symbolism of exploding cities/buildings from *Dōmu* to *Akira*. When speaking about **Kaneda's Bike**, Otomo says the initial inspiration was the **Light Cycle 1st-Gen** of *Tron* (1982), designed by Syd Mead (Mead and Hodgetts, 2017; Mead, 2020), the visual artist also responsible (besides the director Ridley Scott) for the visual of *Blade Runner*, the canonical cinematographic reference of almost all SF film after that. Other very important element of the *Akira* anime is the soundtrack by Shoji Yamashiro (from the musical collective Geinoh Yamashirogumi, 1982). Some other books explore **Kaneda's Bike** in its constructive details, as Takenaka (1988) and Otomo (1995). Brugeas (2017) present a tribute to Otomo, in a book where dozens of artists revisit his work to show how they were influenced by it.

Besides the atomic bomb, one of the most important references of *Akira* is *boso-zoku*, the extensively studied Japanese motorcycle gangs (Sato, 1991; Greenfeld, 1995; Yoshinaga, 2002). **Kaneda's Bike** has several elements from *boso-zoku*, as the large windshield and the laid back riding position. One difference is **Kaneda's Bike** is very powerful and fast, while *boso-zoku* motorcycle in general are usual motorcycles customized for spectacle, not for dynamic performance.

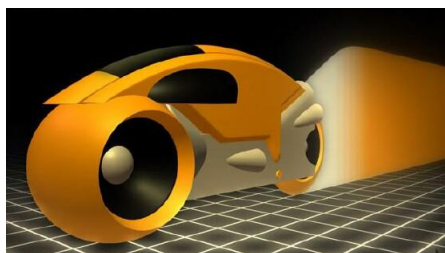


Figure 1 – Light Cycle 1st Gen

4. ENTER THE OTHER MOTORCYCLES

The **Light Cycle 1st-Gen** appears in *Tron* (1982). It is a digital motorcycle that exists only inside the computer, used

solely for deadly gladiator combat. As the hero Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) and his companions and adversaries ride, the bikes leave a solid wall of light. Your goal is to force the opponent's bike to explode by hitting that wall. An important feature of these bikes is the ability to make instantaneous sharp 90-degree turns at high speed, while its trajectory is locked in a Cartesian grid (they got to escape the grid with the motorcycles in the end of the battle). The **Light Cycle 1st-Gen** was designed by Syd Mead. In the original drawings (Mead, 2020), it appeared without a hood, but in the film it looks more like a two-wheeled car. Probably in the film they placed a hood due to the limitations of computer graphics at the time, as it would be difficult to render the pilot's body. The motorcycle is important in the film because the battles condense almost all the action.



Figure 2 – Moto do Kaneda

Kaneda's Bike from *Akira* (manga 1982-90; anime 1988) has already been discussed in the previous section. From a dynamic point of view it is a relatively usual bike, although powerful. Its design remembers a big cruiser/scooter and it sounds (in the anime) like owning a hybrid powertrain. In the manga, **Kaneda's Bike** is used only for *boso-zoku* rides, and in the anime it is additionally used in the final battle against Tetsuo. Its greatest importance is symbolic, as being large, unusual and difficult to ride, it certainly shows that its pilot (Kaneda) is the leader of the pack. In the anime, **Kaneda's Bike** has reverse gear and great ease in sliding the tires (apparently this is selective, because in accelerations and curves the motorcycle conveniently does not slide), giving it great agility to change direction despite the large size. In the manga, the motorcycle can jump great heights, although it does not have long travel suspension. In the *Akira* anime, Tetsuo can't control **Kaneda's Bike** very well, bringing him frustration. On the other hand, Kei, the heroine of *Akira*, controls **Kaneda's Bike** with mastery at the end of the manga.

In the first film of the *Dark Knight Trilogy* (*Batman Begins*, 2005) Batman drove the Tumbler, an armored car. In the following film (*The Dark Knight*, 2008) the Tumbler is destroyed, revealing the **Bat-Pod**, an escape-pod used to evacuation. This motorcycle is used mainly by Batman (Christian Bale) in *The Dark Knight* (2008) and by Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway), Catwoman, in *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012). Its conceptual design was made by Christopher Nolan and Nathan Crowley, then built by Chris Corbould (Jesser and Pourroy, 2012). Like the others, it is a long bike, which makes maneuvering difficult. To increase the bike's agility, it has a (unrealistic!) mechanism that rotates the front and rear forks around their axles, allowing the bike to move sideways. Steen Christiansen (2013) explains how the **Bat-Pod** shots were made in order to portrait Batman/Catwoman always in complete control of the motorcycle. In general, the

motorcycle brings a certain vulnerability to Batman (if we compare he riding the **Bat-Pod** after have driven the Tumbler), and strength to the Catwoman (previously she did not possess weapons or vehicles like Batman). Bane (Tom Hardy), the bad guy, also uses a motorcycle in the film to escape the traffic jam. Batman and Selina show the same skills when riding the **Bat-Pod**, although Selina Kyle has the courage to use the **Bat-Pod** weapons to kill the villain Bane (saving Batman), while Batman fails to use the bike to defeat the Joker (Heath Ledger).



Figure 3 – Bat-Pod

The most realistic motorcycle (albeit its robot pilot) in our bunch is the **Moto-Terminator**, from the film *Terminator Salvation* (2009). It was conceptualized by Victor Laing and designed by Victor Jay Martinez (Martinez, 2020). During the filming (Warner Bros. Entertainment, 2013) Ducati motorcycles were filmed to catch the real dynamic of the chase, then the robotic surface was graphically superimposed to look like a two-wheeled terminator. The motorcycle brings a new kind of terminator: faster but also weaker than the previous. Unlike the other bikes in our study, the **Moto-terminator** is no frills, just speed, agility and lethality. One curiosity is Christian Bale, whose characters rode two of those motorcycles: **Bat-Pod** (Batman) and **Moto-Terminator** (in the final part of *Terminator Salvation*, John Connor deactivates the robot-pilot to ride the motorcycle himself).



Figure 4 – Moto-Terminator

The **Light Cycle 5th-Gen** appears in *Tron: Legacy* (2010), now with Sam Flynn (Garrett Hedlund) as the hero. It is very similar to the first generation, but now it cannot make the 90-degree turns. In compensation, it has the advantage when compared to the 1-st generation for not being locked to the Cartesian grid. Its concept was created by Harald Belker (2020) based on Syd Mead's **Light Cycle 1st-gen**, and then finalized by Daniel Simon (2020). In both versions of *Tron*, everyone rides the **Light Cycles** very similarly, the battle being won more by strategy and luck than by skill. Quorra (Olivia Wilde), although not riding a motorcycle in the film, is the main pilot of cars and jets in *Tron: Legacy* (she rides the light cycles only in the videogame).



Figure 5 – Light Cycle 5th Gen

The sixth motorcycle appears in *Priest* (2011), the **Priest's Bike**. It is basically an immense turbine with two wheels and a saddle. Although it has a long wheelbase, as the others, its function in the film is to overcome large distances in the desert, thus the design is correct (large motorcycles are more stable in straight stretches, thus decreasing the fatigue). However, there is no practical reason to the Priest to ride a naked motorcycle; the protagonist would be better driving a car or at least a faired motorcycle. But there is a strong symbolic reason, as the unprotected motorcycle that rides at 400 kph is used to represent the Priest's stoicism and sacrifice. The motorcycle designed by Patrick Faulwetter (2020) was built around a Suzuki Gladius with elongated wheelbase (Russell, 2011). Its role in the film is to distance the Priest (Paul Bettany) from the oppressive city, leading him to a calm and lit desert where he will save his daughter from the vampires. Everyone rides the **Priest's Bike** (there are several of them in the movie) with the same proficiency, the hero standing out more for his hand-to-hand combat skills, not as a biker. The only battle scene with the motorcycle is when The Priestess (Maggie Q) destroys a whole train launching her bike over it.

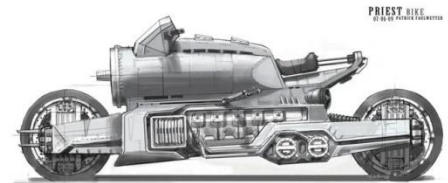


Figure 6 – Priest's Bike

5. THE BATTLE BETWEEN THE MOTORCYCLES

As the bikes analyzed in this paper are all from action films, their main characteristics are speed, acceleration, and maneuverability. So, based on engineering knowledge (Irving, 1961; Cossalter, 2006; Foale, 2006; Cocco, 2013) they should be light and short. But this is a big problem for our cinematographic bikes, since almost all of them are long and bulky. Secondly, some of those bikes need to run over bumpy ground, go over obstacles, and make big jumps, which would require long travel springs and shock absorbers; and also it would require a riding position that allows you to quickly stand up on the pegs as necessary - certainly a difficult maneuver both in the sporty prone position and in the cruising laid back position.

Harald Belker (2020), the conceptual designer of several motorcycles of the movies (e.g., *Batman & Robin*, 1996; *Oblivion*, 2013; *Singularity*, 2017), including in this list the conceptual phase of the **Light Cycle 5th-Gen** of

Table 1 - Main physical characteristics of the motorcycles

	Light Cycle 1st-gen	Kaneda's Bike	Bat-Pod	Moto-Terminator	Light Cycle 5th-gen	Priest's Bike
Symbol	LC1	KB	BP	MT	LC5	PB
Riding Position	Prone	Laid Back	Prone	Prone	Prone	Seated
Length	Long	Long	Long	Short	Long	Long
Hood	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Weapons	Light wall	No	Fire Weapons	Fire Weapons	Light Wall	No
Maneuverability	High	High	High	High	Medium	Low
Venue	Battle Arena	City	City	Road	Battle Arena	Road
Color	Orange/Blue	Red	Silver	Black	Blue/Orange	Silver
Special Abilities	90 degrees turns	Sharp sliding turns in low speed	Lateral movement	No	No	High speed and fuel autonomy

Tron: Legacy (2010), wrote an interesting book (Belker, 2013) about the design of a futurist motorcycle. In the first pages, for example, he asks what would be the coolest way of riding a motorcycle. In his words, would it be in chopper style or sitting on a crotch rocket? He chooses the intermediate typical riding position of a good street bike to good motorcycle control. One element he stresses in the design is the low pilot body and the long wheelbase, although now both design decisions are taken to visually emphasize the tires, not to provide a good riding experience. This kind of choice can be seen in our long motorcycles, as in cinema style comes long before practicality.

Mike Burrows is a famous, important and irreverent bicycle designer. In his books (Burrows and Hadland, 2008; Hadland and Burrows, 2016) he champions the importance of convincing people that the most famous brands are not always the best bicycles for use in the real world, where the competition rules do not apply (*i.e.*, UCI rules do not permit ultralight bicycles, the use of fairings, or more efficient riding positions). In *Unusual Motorcycles* (2012), François-Marie Dumas explains how some unconventional motorcycles were not successful in their time not because they have not good designs, but because the companies were not healthy economically, because the manufacturing processes were not yet good enough, or just because the market was not yet prepared.

In a sense, the materiality, speed, sound and individuality of the cinematographic motorcycles analyzed in this paper should guaranty them as specimens of Futurism. But the necessity to cheat the physics in order to make bulky motorcycles to seem agile may be seen as a toast to post-modernity: the visual spectacle for the audience before the real sense of speed of the rider.

To start the comparison between the motorcycles, Table 1 shows the main differences in design between them. In general, they have long wheelbase and are projected for speed. One important characteristic is agility, which the artists imbue them by fooling physics.

The major design differences in **Kaneda's Bike** are its riding position (laid back) and its (bright red) color. Fire weapons are present in the **Bat-Pod** and in the **Moto-Terminator**. **Light Cycle 5th-Gen** does not need to be agile because it is a competition with other equal motorcycles, so a deficiency in one is also present in the other. **Priest's Bike** main function is to ride long distances, so it does not need to be agile either. **Light Cycle 1st-Gen** must be delicious to ride with its 90 degree turns.

In relation to the environment, the motorcycles are ridden in several kinds of terrain: cities (**Kaneda's Bike**, **Bat-Pod**), roads (**Moto-Terminator**, **Priest's Bike**), and

battle arenas (**Light Cycle 1st-Gen**, **Light Cycle 5th-Gen**). Those venues can be ordered (**Light Cycle 1st-Gen**, **Light Cycle 5th-Gen**, **Priest's Bike**), organic (**Kaneda's Bike** in the anime, in a city remembering the lower city of *Blade Runner*) or destructed (**Kaneda's Bike** in the second part of the manga, **Bat-Pod**, **Moto-Terminator**).

The speed, maneuverability, special abilities, and the use of weapons make the strong point of the motorcycle dramatics. All the dance of the motorcycle is provided by their surprisingly movements. Even in the cases where they have no special abilities, *e.g.*, **Light Cycle 5th-Gen**, the collisions build the surprise and the beautiful neon lights create the mesmerizing experience. One exception is the **Priest's Bike**, with long straight stretches that brings more peace than mayhem.

In relation to the sound (music?), three motorcycles sound alike with their electric motor buzz: **Light Cycle 1st-Gen**, **Bat-Pod** and **Light Cycle 5th-Gen**. The **Priest's Bike** has the sound of a turbine, as would be expected by its form, and **Moto-Terminator** sounds like a conventional motorcycle (the coolest sound of them all?). But a special sound is found in the *Akira* anime. First, the powertrain sound is a mix of a conventional reciprocating engine, a jet turbine and a motor with sudden electrical discharges. But the real effect is this engine sound blended with the special soundtrack by Geinoh Yamashirogumi (1982), which merges *gamelan* and *noh* music. In the beginning of the anime, Kaneda appears choosing a music in the jukebox, but it remains silent for a while. Sometime after, exactly when he starts his bike, the music suddenly begins, blending with the motorcycle's sound to amplify the sensory experience of his ride around the city.

Perhaps the perfect action motorcycle (small, light, and agile) would incorporate those qualities into the biker's own body, *i.e.*, the perfect motorcycle/rider assembly would be an android. Although the *Replicants* (Dick, 1968; Scott, 1982; Villeneuve, 2017) are not exactly humans, they demonstrate empathy (among them at least) and the desire to have memories and emotions. In a sense, mainly because of their materiality and individuality, they are very much closer of humans than, for example, Samantha of *Her* (Jonze, 2013) - a virtual conscience without a body. Speaking of Samantha, she is played by Scarlett Johansson, who also plays the motorcycle rider Black Widow in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015), and the motorcycle rider and also android Major Mira Killian in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). Unfortunately her bikes are not being considered here because they are not futuristic.

The social contexts in the films analyzed in this paper are different, and therefore the political roles of the

motorcycles are also different. In (both) *Tron*, the computational environment is militaristic and the **Light Cycles** are nothing more than entertainment for the regime's subjects (*Panem et Circenses*). The **Bat-Pod** is used by Batman to try to bring order to the chaos created by the Joker. **Moto-Terminators** are tools of the government of the machines for rapid police attacks against rebellious humans. The **Priest's Bikes** are motorcycles used by religious soldiers to quickly reach distant villages, such as the ancient roads of the Roman Empire. **Kaneda's Bike** has several political functions. In the beginning it is an anarchic tool (*bosozoku*) rebelling against the militarized society. In the second part of the anime it serves as a war horse. In the final part of the manga, **Kaneda's Bike** becomes almost a symbol of the new biker elite that now controls the city after the expulsion of the UN troops.

6. EPILOGUE

The bikes studied in this paper are all made to be used in combat, several even having weapons. As they can use "non-conventional" physics, they have the freedom to be large and bulky to impress enemies and audience, even though in the real world their size would hinder their agility.

Of course, they have practicalities. The **Light Cycles** are accessories of gladiators in the combat arena, the **Bat-pod** is an escape vehicle, the **Moto-terminator** is a weapon that can chase enemies, and the **Priest's Bike** can take us over great distances.

In a first thought, they all could be automobiles with the same or better characteristics, probably with even the same size, given the sheer length of those motorcycles (I am excluding in this analysis the rational **Moto-Terminators**). But here comes the symbolism of the motorcycles. A hero in a motorcycle can fall, can be rammed, can be shot, can feel the debris on the face, can be run over, can feel the heat of the explosion on the skin. It is true to say that the motorcycle makes the hero faster, but it also makes him more fragile. And the more fragile a hero is, the more courageous he must be to win the battle. After all, what makes someone a hero is not his power, it is his courage. But then why do the motorcycles have to be so big and chunky in the films? One hypothesis is because they need to be noticed on the battlefield, they need to be seen as the waving flags need to be seen.

So now we are finally prepared to understand the fascination of the **Kaneda's Bike**. It has no special powers and no weapons, so its rider needs to be more courageous yet. In fact, it is very difficult to ride, so the rider must be skilled. He rides laid back, in a totally inappropriate way for fast maneuvers, but anyway he rides like a boss. When **Kaneda's Bike** is on the scene we know that everything will be fine. It reassures us like an old archetypal sage (Jung, 1980; Campbell, 1946) in an adventure legend, remembering us of a bygone time when we naively believed machines and speed would bring us purification of spirit and renewal in politics.

From a deeper point of view, we conceivably like **Kaneda's Bike** because (in the manga) it is inside a much more complex and fascinating story than the others, or then we like it because (in the anime) it dances in a much more complex and fascinating blending of music, engine sound

and *bosozoku* style riding always in a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and danger (Apter, 1992).

Of course, the other films also have very interesting elements, such as the psychological relationship between Batman and the Joker, the existentialism of *Blade Runner's* Replicants, the fear of computers in *Terminator*, and the fascinating solitude in which we'd cross the deserts riding the **Priest's Bike** with the true spirit of the great biker T. E. Lawrence (1926, 1955) in one of his (long and fast and naked) Brough Superiors.

Back to *Akira*, as stated in the previous section, an important symbolic difference of **Kaneda's Bike**, a difference that is perchance the source for our preference to this motorcycle, is its anarchic role (at least initially during the *bosozoku* rides and fights), while the other motorcycles have an almost purely military stance. After all, one expects motorcycles symbolizing individuality and freedom, not militarism and destruction.

But then maybe we love **Kaneda's Bike** only because it is red. Would we need any other reason?

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