Please cite the Published Version

Politicising Motorcycles: racialised capital of technology, techno-Orientalism and Japanese temporality

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Abstract

This article politicises the racialisation of motorcycles and critically examines the representation and material consumption of Japanese raciality and technology through motorcyclic discourses. Firstly, referring to online discourses surrounding Harley-Davidson and Japanese motorcycles, I argue that these essentialise and racialise motorcycles, which in turn, through their material consumption become a technology for classifying, racialising, and organising socio-cultural systems of Western cultural hegemony. I suggest the term, *racialised capital of technology* as a way of examining and politicising the ideological-material intersection of racialised technology. Secondly, through an analysis of Honda's contemporary advertising discourse (UK, US, Japan, World websites), I focus further on the racialisation of technology by exploring the ways in which Japan is temporalised through technology. I re-think techno-Orientalist ideas on the future and technology as being 'Japanised' (Morley and Robins 1995) and instead, explore the Japanisation of the *past* through technology, or the historicisation of Japanese technology. I argue that Honda's dual connectivity to the past and the future mark a destabilisation of techno-Orientalist discourses of Japan and technology, providing a counter-narrative against Western cultural hegemony. However, I am also critical of such discourses and consider some of the historical and ontological tensions surrounding the representation of Japan and technology, relating these to Japanese temporal imperialism and capitalism.

Contributor's Details

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> A: I see you looking at my Harley, isn't it awesome?
>
> B: It looks nice but I'm not into cruisers
>
> A: What?! How can you say that? This is all-American iron. Harley makes the baddest bikes on the planet.
>
> B: If you mean they make the worst bikes, I agree with you.
>
> A: Oh I get it. You ride a Jap bike, right?
>
> B: Yes, I do.
>
> A: Well, you are a communist asshole who hates America and supports terrorism
>
> B: You are an idiot
>
> A: How can you ride one of those rice-burning crotch rockets. That is un-American.

> https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4ZfaDjxDBs.
>
> Accessed 1 October, 2015

A fellow motorcyclist sent me a link to a youtube video involving two animated characters – one, a Harley-Davidson owner, and the other, an owner of a Japanese sports-bike – discussing their respective machines. The video is by no means a unique example, there are countless similar instances where American or European models are pitted against 'Jap

bikes'. We are invited to mock the 'all-American' Harley rider, but language still subjugates the 'Jap bike' within a dominant discourse of Western cultural hegemony: the Harley-Davidson is equated to the hard, solidity of 'all-American iron' and dominance, whilst the un-named and 'un-American' brand of the 'Jap bike' falls into its 'rice-burning', cheap, oppositional and subservient position of the Other. Whilst one could argue that such 'ironic' online discourses provide a counter-narrative to poke fun at the inherent nationalism and racism often found within motorcycle culture,[1] the overall result is the same: offensive words like, 'Jap' and 'rice-burning crotch rockets' are still being re-used. Rather than challenging such 'everyday racism' (Essed 2002), these online discourses subsume and diffuse the problematic racialisation of motorcycles through their very dichotomous mode of articulation.

Furthermore, in being a commodified object as a popular vehicle and as part of popular culture, such ideological constructions of motorcycles have materialist and ontological implications which need to be considered in relation to race and raciality. For example, as a motorised and private mode of transport (which thus sets it apart from bicycles, trams, trains, planes, or other forms of technology for that matter), motorcycles are available almost worldwide – particularly in countries where cars are more expensive for the average consumer (e.g. India) – and are thus an important part of a globalised industry and worth investigating as well as politicising in the context of technology, raciality, and consumption. As part of popular culture, motorcycle imagery is ubiquitous and forms an important part of media consumption: from films such as, *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) and *Kamikaze Girls* (Nakashima, 2004); literary works like, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an enquiry into values* (Pirsig 1974) and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (Guevara 2003); TV shows like *Sons of Anarchy* (Sutter, 2008-2014), anime/manga like *Akira* (Otomo 1982-1990) or Marvel's *Ghost Rider* (Friedrich *et al*. 1972 to present); musical works like *Leader of the*

Pack, sung by the Shangri-las (1964). From a popular culture perspective, again, the motorcycle is a worthy subject for considering questions of technology, raciality and consumption.

Motorcyclic discourse**s** can therefore reinforce and often reveal the hegemonic mechanisms which classify and organise Japanese subjectivities, and ultimately, ground them in a material and social system of signification. How does this process occur? How can it be challenged? To begin answering these questions, this article addresses two areas relating to the politics of motorcycles and race. Firstly, referring to examples from online media discourses surrounding Harley-Davidson and Japanese motorcycles, I problematise the racialisation of motorcycles and how these are tied to materialist concerns. I argue that motorcyclic discourses essentialise and racialise technology, which in turn, through their material consumption become a technology for classifying, racialising, and organising socio-cultural systems of Western cultural hegemony. Here, I suggest the term *racialised capital of technology* as a way of examining and politicising the ideological-material intersection of racialised technology.

Secondly, I want to focus further on the racialisation of technology through the temporalisation of Japan. Here, I re-think techno-Orientalist pioneers, Morley's and Robins's (1995) idea of the future and technology as being 'Japanised' (1995:165) by exploring the Japanisation of the *past* and technology, or the historicisation of Japanese technology. Through an analysis of Honda's contemporary advertising discourse (UK, USA, Japan, and World websites) which promotes both the heritage and futurism of its motorcycles, I argue that such a dual connectivity to the past and the future marks a temporal destabilisation of techno-Orientalist discourses of Japan and technology, providing a counter-narrative against Western cultural hegemony. However, I am also critical of such a counter-hegemonic discourse in itself, and consider some of the historical and ontological tensions surrounding

the representation of Japan and technology, and relate these to Japanese temporal imperialism and capitalism.

Part I: Racialisation of technology: racialised capital of technology

YOU WISH YOU HAD AS MUCH MONEY AS ME BECAUSE I CAN AFFORD A HARLEY AND DON'T HAVE TO SETTLE FOR A CHEAP LITTLE RICE BURNER.

http://www.goingfaster.com/angst/typical.htm.

Accessed 5 October, 2015.

Like they have a right to rag on us for buying a more reasonal (sic.) priced bike, with more power & better looks be it, that is a rice-burner!

http://www.m109riders.com/forums/showthread.php?t=101920.

Accessed 5 October, 2015

There is no doubt that a big part of the price of a Harley is the name. That's what i choose to ride though […] If i didn't ride a Harley i would probably buy a Triumph (like the Bonneville) but there is no doubt the Honda is a good bike too. I just like the classic designs. (sic).

(https://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20080711202609A AIIqNr)

Accessed 6 October, 2015

The above online comments begin to reveal the ways which Euro-American and Japanese motorcycles are contrasted through ideas of difference. Usually, British and American brands (like Triumph and Harley-Davidson) are described as being 'classics' or 'originals', renowned for their eye-watering price tags (all comments above reference price/economic cost). Japanese brands – note the way no specific brands are mentioned in two of the remarks – like Honda, Yamaha, Kawasaki and Suzuki on the other hand, at best, tend to be discussed in terms of high technology and speed ('more power') but somehow lacking in historical and cultural value ('I just like classic designs'); at worst, Japanese bikes are regarded as cheaper imitations of Euro-American brands: both on-and off-line, there is an abundance of derogatory terms like 'rice-burners' (with variations such as 'rice-rockets' and 'rice-grinders'), 'cheap plastic', 'replica' and the diminutive 'cheap little rice burner'.

Such social discourses point toward what Willis noted back in 1978 through his empirical study of 'motor-bike boys': motorcycles are not simply a means of transport but play a specific cultural role, where its cultural meaning is most related to status within a social system (Willis 1978: 53). To push Willis's point further, seemingly harmless discussions about motorcycles reveal how the motorcycle positions riders ideologically within a social system which ties cultural meaning to economic and cultural capital. Whilst there is a body of work which explores race and cultural capital in relation to education (Pastrana 2010, Carter 2003), surprisingly, little attention has been given to how racialised capital is tied to consumer cultures. Therefore, I suggest the term, *racialised capital of technology* which relates directly to Bourdieu's (1984) concepts on class and taste and links them to technology: Harley-Davidsons have high(er) exchange value, they are distinct and distanciated from the 'cheap little rice-burner' in order to produce a dominant motorcyclic 'class' which Japanese motorcycles can only hope to emulate (Veblen 1998) and imitate (Simmel 1997). What I want to problematise in particular here is the racialisation of

motorcycle classifications, where choosing a certain type of motorcycle – even though this action might be attributed to only 'taste' and preference (hence the use of words like 'classic' and 'better looks') – becomes part of a mechanism of distinction 'in which social positions become "culturalized" and embodied; that is, they become known through the attitudes, practices or symptoms of those who occupy them' (Skeggs 2004: 110). The very act of choosing and classifying a motorcycle becomes part of a social, ideological and embodied process of classifying and materialising race: choosing a motorcycle not only 'classifies the classifier' (Bourdieu 1984: 6), it *racialises* the classifier through its consumption.

Chun (2009) and Coleman (2009) both discuss the idea of race as a technology to explore race, technology and racism. Whilst their ideas are relevant here, I am approaching this issue from the other way: technology as race, or to be more precise, technology as the material means of classifying race, where technology enables the circulation of racialised capital. For what begins to emerge from motorcyclic discourse, as above, is the discursive production of mechanically racialised subjects, exchanged and valued for their *racialised* cultural and economic capital, or lack thereof. Discussing, choosing and buying a motorcycle are all part of a motorcyclic discourse which serve to order and classify race: Japanese bikes and Japanese raciality are thus mechanically positioned, consumed and embodied as the inferior Other through the machine, whilst simultaneously maintaining the dominance of Western socio-cultural hegemony. As Ueno (1999) states in his discussion about techno-Orientalism: 'just as the discourse of Orientalism has functioned to build up the identity of the West, techno-orientalism is set up for the West to preserve its identity' (1999: 95). The Japanese motorcycle becomes a techno-Orientalist object which plays a cultural role in enabling the Western subject to 'preserve its identity' through the process of distinction and distanciation.

Motorcyclic discourses thus essentialise and racialise technology, which in turn, through their material consumption – which include mechanisms of taste, embodied through processes of distinction and distanciation – become a machinic means of ordering socio-cultural systems of Western hegemony. Within this context, the online examples begin to suggest that racialised capital of technology is measured against a set of techno-Orientalist values which sets up brands and machines oppositionally:

Harley-Davidson	'Jap bike'
All-American	Un-American
Metal/chrome	Plastic
Expensive	Cheap
Customised	Mass produced
Heritage	Inherited
Individuality	Collectivity
Original	Copy
Cruiser	Sport
West	East
Self	Other
Past	Future

Such a dichotomisation of motorcycles is of course too simplistic, reductionist and problematic in that there are other kinds of 'raced' motorcycles – BMW (German), Aprilia or Ducati (Italian), and the increasingly popular Lexmoto (Chinese) – not to mention the differences in sales and perceptions of motorcycles in a given country. However, the point I

am making here is that motorcycles, like most branded commodities, are classified and marketed through the idea of difference, where it is an expected part of the culture to make competitive comparisons: after all, this is how brand cultures in general are formed and maintained. Motorcycle brands even rely on selling the idea of difference by promising subcultural capital (Thornton 1995). But critical race and feminist theories have taught us that it is not just about questioning difference *per se*, it is also about 'thinking through differences that matter' (Ahmed 1998: 22). What matters here is – to reiterate – the racialisation of motorcyclic difference: the circulation of racialised capital of technology serves to strengthen and materialise the discursive and normative process of essentialising and racialising technology, where the everyday and embodied practices of consumption become a part of a process of racialising, ordering and classifying subjects through technology. Motorcyclic differences matter because race and racism matter.

As Ahmed states in relation to race and processes of racialisation, race becomes 'what we *receive* from others as an inheritance of history' (2006: 111). One of the challenging issues for Japanese motorcycle companies in representing their history (more on this later) is the way in which the significant growth of its industry is tied to Japanese militarism and Western technologisation of Japan at the start of the 20th Century, a fascinating history which I do not have the time to discuss here but is explored in depth by Jeffrey W. Alexander in, *Japan's Motorcycle Wars: an industry history* (2008). As a piece of historical legacy, Japanese motorcycles in this context represent a technological inheritance from 'the West', funded by the Japanese military: a somewhat difficult narrative which in itself becomes part of a process of both an American and Japanese racialisation. For example, Harley-Davidson technicians 'journeyed to Japan to assist Sankyo' (a Japanese company) in the 1930s to become domestically proficient in manufacturing motorcycles, supported by the Japanese army (Alexander 2008: 57-62). With such an origination narrative involving America

'journeying to Japan' to provide assistance, Harley-Davidson in this context represents an external force, taking on what Power (2006) describes as a 'historical role in the development of expertise', which in turn reinforces classifications of difference (2006: 28-9). Harley-Davidson is thus associated with knowledge, originality and creativity; by contrast, Sankyo is constructed as the recipient of this knowledge from America, capable only of mechanical and menial replication, re-production and repetition. Furthermore, these material and cultural processes in Japan are historically situated within a domestic military discourse which regulated and re-racialised the very technologies it produced: for example, the re-branding of domestically (re)produced Harley-Davidson motorcycles as Rikuo (陸王, to mean 'King of Land' or 'Land King') represents such a process. In this way, histories racialise technologies which then become a means of classifying difference through everyday practices such as consumption.

The Harley-Davidson brand clearly capitalises on this very idea of tradition, history, continuity, and ancestry – leading at times to 'Japan bashing' by Harley-Davidson owners (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) – and plays a role in the discursive production of American identity. For example, the Harley-Davidson museum in Milwaukee is described as being 'nearly 105 years in the making' where 'every gallery and exhibit is a testimony to the legendary bikes' and visitors are invited to peruse the 'archives' that hold 'rare documents and other artifacts' which 'tell the stories of the extraordinary people, products, history, and culture of Harley-Davidson' ('Harley-Davidson Museum'). Such promotional language posits the motorcycle as an object resonating with national heritage sensibilities and national pride, and the motorcycle becomes a way of telling a mechanical and historical story of national identity – akin to the role of Hollywood Westerns and cowboys – with the Harley-Davidson museum an institutitionalised 'national heritage site' (Crang and Tolia-Kelly 2010). These ideas are further reinforced by popular cultural representations of Harley-Davidsons

like *Wild Hogs* (Becker, 2007), *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994), *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969), and *The Wild One* (Benedek, 1953). Whilst Japanese brands are increasingly turning to ideas of heritage and longevity (more on this later), these media discourses surrounding Harley-Davidson become in themselves, material means to consume history and heritage – rather than the future – and reproducing the myth of America.

The pre- and post-war relationship between the Japanese and American motorcycle industries are part of a broader and complex set of historical, political, and economic conditions between Japan and America[2] and has perhaps meant that the contemporary and usually name-less, homogenous 'Jap bike' is almost always classified – as we have seen in some of the online discourses cited earlier – as a sports bike ('crotch rocket') as opposed to the American, Harley-Davidson ('cruiser'), positioned comparatively and chronologically upon an American time-line. As Ueno states, 'Japan is not only located geographically, but is also projected chronologically' (1999: 98): Japan is OK to have the speedy and technologically proficient future as innovators of futuristic sports bikes, just so long as it does not touch the romantic(ised), cruising past because if it does, it can only ever be imitative of the original Western 'classics'. By the same token, such a temporal configuration means that the American motorcycle industry can never be innovators of the future – or can only play catch-up with 'the East' – as celebrating heritage becomes also a means of being trapped in the myth of the past: an ironical techno-Occidentalism, perhaps?

In this manner, the material consumption of motorcycles involves the process of distinction and distanciation upon a temporal continuum, which in turn racialises technology through difference: in the case of Japanese motorcycles, it is positioned in the future. Not only does this mean that Japanese motorcycles are othered through their perceived production of the future – ironically, the very reasons the motorcycles are scorned in the first place – it also means that Japanese motorcycles can only be born to a parental West, nurtured at its

point of 'natural' origin, growing up into independence within a (mass-produced) technological future. Such ideas form the basis of techno-Orientalist discourses – in itself open to debate, of course – a configuration which presents the West as both scared and fascinated by technological and futuristic Japan. The question then is, if, as Morley and Robins state, technology is Japanised where the 'syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese' (1995: 165), can history be Japanised? Can Japanese technology be historicised? Can Japan 're-orient' itself through technology?

PART II: Japanising History: the historicisation of Japanese technology

In 2014, Honda launched a 'New Breed' of motorcycles – the NM4 Vultus – advertised as: 'tearing up the rule book and breaking free from the boundaries of traditional motorcycle design' (Honda UK); '"Cool!" – a worldview that people can identify with, with a sense for the arriving future' (Honda World); 'the near future where fantasy is reality, and imagination with inspired engineering makes every moment feel like a cinematic adventure (Honda US). The NM4 was designed by a team inspired by jet fighters and the 'aerodynamic angles inspired by Japanese Manga comics' (Honda UK) and as if to further reinforce the Japanese popular cultural reference, Honda even collaborated with a Japanese manga franchise, *Knights of Sidonia,* to create two limited-edition, promotional motorcycles (2014 and 2015) for the *Knights of Sidonia* film (**see Fig 1**).[3] Such promotional discourses and activities surrounding the NM4 bring all that is Japanese, or the idea of Japanese – what Ueno (2002a) calls, 'Japanoid'[4] – together into a single, globalised machine: technology ('engineering', aerodynamic angles'), future ('arriving future', 'near future') even kawaii Japanimation ('fantasy', 'imagination', 'inspired by Japanese Manga comics').

Honda's NM4 seems like yet another chronological self-consignment to the future, a future which is Japanised not only through its multiple technologically innovative features, but also through its self-conscious references to contemporary Japanese popular culture. In this sense, the NM4 can be read as reinforcing the position of Japanese motorcycles as the Other within techno-Orientalist constructions of difference, where Japan offers an exotic technological playground for consumption. But the NM4 can also be read as a counter-hegemonic machine 'tearing up the rule book and breaking free from the boundaries' of Western cultural hegemony by producing its own cultural space and modes of self-representation. In this sense, the NM4 points to the very tension of techno-Orientalism: on the one hand, techno-Orientalism is part of an Orientalist project of 'creating a collusive, futurized Asia to further affirm the West's centrality', but on the other hand, techno-Orientalism is about 'reappropriations in texts that self-referentially engage with Asian images' to produce a counter-dialogue (Roh *et al.* 2015: 7). Either way, such a techno-Orientalist configuration relies on the necessary relationship between Japan representing the fascinating but scary technological future staged within the realms of the fantastical and technicoloured spectacular, whilst the 'West' represents the safety and continuity of a comforting and 'natural' past.

But what seems to challenge this temporal techno-Orientalism is Honda's simultaneous promotion of its past: 'Honda, as a company, looks to the future; yet always with one eye on, and great respect, for the past' ('Honda CB1100'). Running concurrently against and along its orientation facing towards the future through technology – the NM4 being an example – there is an equally strong and persistent chronological contra-flow which simultaneously re-orients Japan, facing it towards the past. Yoshioka (2008) discusses anime director Hayao Miyazaki's use of Japanese history and nostalgia in *Spirited Away* (2001)*, where the fantastical connection between contemporary and traditional Japanese culture

marks the 'essence of Japan', a pastiche which 'transcends temporal and territorial boundaries' (2008: 272). What is interesting is that unlike the imagery signalling traditional Japanese culture in *Spirited Away*, the past that Honda presents is not a pre-technologised, mythic past populated by Geishas, Samurai and Zen Buddhism (Kawasaki's motorcycle models like 'Samurai' or 'Ninja' clearly point toward this past) – which would inevitably re-feed the techno-Orientalist circuit of Japanoid imagery – instead, Honda presents a past that involves technology: Honda historicises technology, or places its technology in the past as well as the future. It is a form of retrospective futurism,[5] or what I describe as technological nostalgia. Here, rather than technology representing a gateway to the future, technology *also* represents a gateway to the secure past that anchors Japanese identity to romanticised notions of longevity and history, just like the previously mentioned Harley-Davidson. Such a multi-directional orientation destabilises ideological constructions and the position of not just Japan, but also technology.

One of the ways in which Honda constantly reinforces its dual-directional, simultaneous connections to the past and the future is through the word 'Dream'. 'Dream' refers to its first production motorcycle called the 'D-type' or ' "D" Dream' and is an ubiquitous Honda word: from its slogan ('The Power of Dreams'),[6] its monthly *Dream Magazine* (UK)*,* frequent references to 'making dreams come true', and the celebration of the D-type itself ('It was named the Dream, a name that seemed to symbolize Honda itself, and this machine was the embodiment of the company's dream of becoming a motorcycle manufacturer' ['Dream D-Type']). Not only referring to the name of its pioneering and historically situated model, 'Dream' is also conceptual in that it evokes images of inspiration, aspiration, hope, and the future: hence it encapsulates a double-time of both looking back and ahead into and from the past and future. A visual representation of this chronological multi-directionality and technology can be found on Honda's UK homepage, which offers a black

and white image (see **Fig. 2**)[7] of a small male child, wearing what appears to be adult-size motorcycle boots, gloves and helmet. Behind the child is a tricycle, and next to it is a full-grown 'D' Dream. The words 'Honda Dream' appear in both English and Japanese in the background, alongside a rendering of the scene in the style of pre-war manga.

In the context of an increasingly cybernetic and digital world where machines and mechanical hardware are no longer hi-tech and futuristic, the use of such a black and white image places the 'D' Dream – and Honda itself – immediately in the past, with the helmet and manga-style drawings similarly dating the scene whilst framing it through a lens of sentimentalised nostalgia. In marketing terms, one can read this image as part of a strategy used by corporate heritage brands who sell their products through consumable nostalgia and references to historical events, and in this context, Honda indeed plays an 'anchoring role' by providing a 'sense of continuity and belonging for consumers in a rapidly changing world' (Spittle 2009: 128). In ideological and political terms relating to techno-Orientalist configurations of Japan and technology, one can read this image as part of a process of historicising technology – Japanising history – which in turn, decentres and destabilises the temporal continuum of race and technology. In this way, the black-and-white technology – the 'D' Dream – situates Japaneseness and Japanese motorcycles upon a specific Japanese temporal location in the past: it (re)sets a 'national time' which 'becomes concrete and visible on the chronotype of the local, particular, graphic' (Bhabha 1994: 143). Also, it challenges the very connections between Japan, technology, and the future, whilst paradoxically, bringing a past into dialogue with the future through technology.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) state that the reason why 'Japanese bikes (dubbed "rice grinders" or "rice rockets") are scorned' by Harley-Davidson owners is due to the 'perceived disdain of Japanese manufacturers for tradition' as opposed to Harley-Davidson which 'emphasizes a continuity that connects its newest motorcycle in a direct line of

ancestry to its earliest prototype' (1995:53). Thus, Honda's historicisation of its technology also produces a competing counter-narrative, which like the Harley-Davidson, provides a 'sense of continuity and belonging for consumers' in terms of a motorcycle's 'lineage' (it is no coincidence that motorcycle models are often referred to as 'breeds') and evolution: the tricycle is there to suggest potential mechanical evolution, as is the child wearing adult clothes who will presumably grow into a man. But the difference is, whilst the Harley-Davidson values the connection between the past and present, Honda values the connection between the past and future: a globalised, temporal imperialism (more on this later).

But the one element which complicates issues is the boy. The child represents a number of possible meanings. Firstly and ironically, it is the organic presence of the child which represents the future, and not technology (the motorcycle) as is usually the case within most popular discourses: yet another way in which technology is divorced from the future and the Japanese body, whilst simultaneously being connected to it through the idea of the 'dream' (the child 'dreams' of riding in the future). Secondly, the child represents the idea of genesis, further reinforced by the repetition of the word, 'first' in text, as well as the phrasing 'it starts with a dream'. In this way, the 'D' Dream is Honda's child, he represents the beginning of a time-line and the agency to pronounce when and where that time-line begins: which in this case is 1949. As a post-War year, this in itself already begins to point toward discourses surrounding 'New Japan', presented as 'a prosperous industrial country whose people had begun to enjoy the "bright life" – a consumerist lifestyle unimaginable before the war' (Duus 2011: 13). As a representative of the future, the child embodies the 'New Japan', which Duus (2011) refers to as 'Japan Inc.', the start of a new life, the start of peace, and the start of a corporate world-facing democratic Japan. This is where Honda wants to start its history.

Related, lastly and perhaps the most problematically, the child is 'cute', 'comical' and 'innocent'. Whilst these attributes act as sentimental agents which package nostalgia for ready consumption, perhaps the sweetness is also sugar-coating a darker pre- and post-war history of Japan: both the darkness of the post-war devastation in Japan, and Japan's own imperialist, colonialist and militarist role in the war. Soichiro Honda wanted to improve the lives of people living in the immediate aftermath of war which saw the destruction of Japan's transport system and so used army surplus engines to build the 'D' Dream (Alford and Ferriss 2007, Brown 1991) work on Honda. Whilst Honda's desire to improve people's lives is highlighted in its own historical accounts, the 'D' Dream's mechanical connection to the army and war are carefully avoided or at least carefully worded. Whilst Harley-Davidson seems to be proud of its military connection – a whole section on their museum website is dedicated to 'Harley-Davidson & the Military' – in the case of Honda, it only refers to founder Soichiro Honda borrowing from his friend's garage, a 'generator engine designed for a No. 6 wireless radio from the former Imperial Army' ('The "Dream" starts here'). Somehow, a 'wireless radio' seems tamer than other types of army surplus technology.

In this way, the 'D' Dream, as a mechanical child of War is a 'technological object [which] evokes *and* elides a problematic "origin," at once *past* and *future'* (Liu 2015: 74, italics author's). The 'origin' of the 'D' Dream is thus one that is at once celebrated as a connective mechanism between past and future, but it is also one that is problematic as it can evoke the trauma of post-war Japan, as well as ideas of Japanese imperialism, colonialism and militarism: detrimental to a global company that promotes the NM4 with a 'worldview that people can identify with'. This is where the boy – both as a presence of cute, childhood innocence and as an organic, counteractive form to the 'war machine' – enables Honda to negotiate the Japanisation of history and its narrative of origins. We are invited to identify with a past filled not with war and destruction, but with a child's dreams of a future. In his

analysis of use of the 10-year old 'lad' in the 2008 television and cinema campaign for British bread brand, Hovis, Spittle (2009) argues that presenting the world through the eyes of a child in advertising can be a 'powerful technique for de-politicising the representation of social change' which ultimately 'avoids over-identification with potentially controversial politics of historical moments' (Spittle 2009: 130). Similarly, Honda's use of a boy de-politicises war, technology, Japanese imperialism, colonialism and militarism through his organic, innocent 'cuteness', but mostly because he represents the future: his gaze moves ahead and forwards, beyond and past our own historical gaze backwards in time.

This double-crossing of gazes is precisely what makes the 'D' Dream a paradoxical, technological object which 'evokes and elides a problematic "origin," at once *past* and *future'* (Liu 2015: 74)*,* and destabilises a techno-Orientalist temporality through a multi-orientational representation of technology, Japan and history. By placing the 'D' Dream – a piece of *technology*, rather than a Geisha, for example – at the centre of a fixed, *historical* stage rather than a futuristic and fantastical landscape, Honda's image Japanises history through technology rather than through 'tradition', where technology becomes part of a Japanese history of origination, not of imitation. Instead of 'the newness of the West re-contextualized into Japanese tradition' (Sato 2004: 353), the motorcycle enables the newness of the West to be re-contextualised into the newness of Japan: this complicates techno-Orientalist configurations of past and future, technology and the very location of Japan (or 'the West', for that matter). It is also important to remember that Honda's historicisation of technology is only a part of its overall corporate brand, and an even newer newness of Japan is being pushed to the forefront: the historicisation of technology, or the Japanisation of history must thus be read against an equally strong dominance in discourses of the future: the Honda's NM4, or ASIMO ('The world's most advanced Humanoid Robot' ['ASIMO']) being two such examples. If nostalgia is about 'preferring conservation to development' (Cannadine 1989:

258), then Honda's use of technological nostalgia is about the conservation of, and for development: Honda is not contained in the past, but instead, it contains a past into its future as part of a wider capitalist strategy.

In other words, we must not get lost in a hazy mist of technological nostalgia: let us not forget the dominance of Japanese motorcycle companies – particularly Honda[8] – in the global motorcycle market. The process of historicising technology, or Japanising history, can be read as part of a broader capitalist process of Japanisation, and the Japanising of the future through technology. As we have seen with Harley-Davidson, inasmuch as history and heritage inform ideological questions of national identity and raciality, they also sell motorcycles because they offer racialised cultural capital. Honda's World website has a section named 'Heritage', an online archival dedication filled with photographs and accounts of the company's history, key figures, workers' diaries and its motorcycle evolution. In the company's own words, their Heritage website is 'Honda-ism revealed from a historical perspective' ('Honda History'). Furthermore, as if to rival Harley-Davidson's museum in Milwaukee, Honda continues its story off-line with a huge complex in Tochigi, complete with a race track, a 'Collection Hall' with displays of restored Honda vehicles alongside its cutting-edge robot, ASIMO, a reading room for research and gift shop. If Harley-Davidson is a dominant American cultural institution, then Honda is its consumerist counter-part: a dominant Japanese cultural institution circulating Japanised cultural capital through the ideological and material production of 'Honda-ism'.

The question of historicising technology and Japanising history must thus be approached critically and with care. On the one hand, the reclamation of a 'new' past (as opposed to the usual 'traditional' past) through the historicisation of technology – the Japanisation of history – marks an ideological and political move towards the subversion or multi-orientation of techno-Orientalist configurations of time, technology and Japan. That is,

Honda's dual-directional, simultaneous connectivity to the past and the future mark a destabilisation of the techno-Orientalist temporal continuum and provides a counter-hegemonic cultural narrative. But on the other hand, the Japanisation of history (and future) through technology can also be read as a form of cultural imperialism – realised through a temporal continuum – and part of a wider capitalist project, a 'new order' of '(sub)imperialism or (post) colonialism' where hegemony is achieved not only through military and diplomatic politics but also through economic and cultural politics (1999:97). The collaboration between Honda's NM4 and *Knights of Sidonia* suddenly starts to make even more sense: both are part of Japanisation as a global process which involves past and future, a temporal imperialism.

Conclusion: the Racing the Motorcycle

All too often, one can get dazzled – myself included – by the sheer beauty and speed of motorcycles, forgetting how they are historically and socio-culturally racialised pieces of machinery and thus part of a system which circulates racialised capital of technology. Motorycyclic discourses thus produce essentialised and racialised technology, which through their material consumption become a technology of classifying, racialising, and organising socio-cultural systems of – 'Western' and 'Eastern' – cultural hegemony. Ironically, despite being a mobile piece of technology, the motorcycle is locative: it can situate a person, a nation, a brand, knowledges, cultural and national identities upon specific points on a temporal, as well as a spatial, continuum of techno-Orientalist discourse. In the context of contemporary cyber digitalisms where machines are now becoming obsolete, questioning the temporality of technology becomes a pertinent issue, especially when considering issues relating to race, globalisation and consumption. At what point is technology 'outdated' – thus

connoting 'backwardness' – and at what point is it technological nostalgia, retro-futuristic and thus 'cool'? Can spatio-temporal locativeness become a mechanism of distinction and distanciation, of Othering in themselves?

In the case of Japan, being able to locate a point in time in the past which is at once removed from, but still connected to, the future through *technology* – rather than traditionalism – is a significant ideological moment: re-contextualising the newness of the West into the newness of Japan complicates techno-Orientalist configurations of technology, time and the very location of Japan and 'the West'. However, as I have discussed in relation to 'Honda-ism', connecting the past and future together through technology can also become a means of articulating a specific 'double narrative', a 'complex rhetorical strategy of social reference' (Bhabha 1994:145) to serve a broader capitalist project which can erase uncomfortable moments in history: a temporal imperialism. These tensions point to broader questions relating back to the relationship between technology and Japan: does Japanisation ultimately serve to reinstate and reinforce existing techno-Orientalist configurations of Western cultural hegemony and/or does such a process construct a 'new' Japanese imperialist discourse? Is such a temporal double-gazing part of 'a double-consciousness' of the 'colonizer and colonized' (Ueno 2002b: 235)? Or are these temporalised dualisms between past and future, Westernisation and Japanisation, mechanical machines and cyber digitalisms, imitations and originations a necessary part of Japanese identity and articulation?

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[1] The problems of irony and 'knowing' discourses are similar to Gill's (2007) discussion on post-feminist media sensibilities, where she critiques the use of irony, which she argues simply serves to protect and propagate misogynist media discourse.

[2] I do not have the space to discuss the evolution of Japanese-American relationships but this area has been explored by scholars such as Bestor *et al.* (2011), Hein (2011), Nornes and Fukushima (1994).

[3] **(Fig 1)** The collaboration between NM4 Vultus and the Manga franchise *Knights of Sidonia* is advertised on the Japanese Honda website only. Image used with permission. http://www.honda.co.jp/NM4/project/index/. Accessed 2 October, 2015.

[4] Ueno (2002) suggests the term 'Japanoid' to describe the 'stereotype of the Japanese' because 'it does not designate actual Japanese, exists neither inside nor outside Japan' and an 'interface controlling the relation between Japan and the Other' (2002: 228).

[5] This term appears in relation to steam-punk genre but here, I mean it quite literally: looking back on what was futuristic back in the past.

[6] As if to counteract Honda's slogan, one of Harley-Davidson's many advertising slogans is: 'Stop dreaming, start riding'. Ironical, considering the importance of the word and concept for America in relation to 'the American Dream'.

[7] **(Fig 2)** D Dream, from Honda UK's homepage. Image used with permission. http://www.honda.co.uk/motorcycles.html. Accessed 2 October, 2015.

[8] For example, according to Mintel, 'Honda is by far the most important manufacturer in the market with an increase in its share to 17.5% recorded in 2012' (Mason, 2013).