

HONDA

"Each machine has its own, unique personality which probably could be

defined as the intuitive sum total of everything you know and feel about it.

Shop Manual

This personality constantly changes, usually for the worse,

Discovering Phaedrus

but sometimes surprisingly for the better, and it is this personality that is the real object of motorcycle maintenance."

HONDA MOTOR CO., LTD.

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4. Introduction

What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. (Barthes, Roland 1980 p.4)

Throughout my era of academic research and enquiry, my praxis has evolved to comprehend the human condition in all its divergence, similarities, and obsessions, perfecting my visual language via the lens of photographic media.

I believe that the photographic image can inhabit and represent the persona of a person unlocking a depth of subconscious awareness. Studying the theories of Deleuze and Guattari and recently Buddhism has enabled me to extract the individual's underlying values and experiences and bring them to the photographic image.

Nothing surprising, then, if sometimes, despite its clarity, the *punctum* should be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of me, and I think back on it. I may know better a photograph I remember than a photograph I am looking at, as if direct vision-oriented its language wrongly, engaging in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect, the *punctum*. (Barthes, 1980 p.53)

I hope that my photographs convey an inner self that has been released from the limits of human materialism to a larger audience. Each person I have encountered has a unique story to tell, each experience is different but everyone within this story has a collective narrative. Using *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* as a foundation for my narrative, I explored the principles and concepts in this autobiography and applied these concepts to modern-day motorcycling belonging and camaraderie, as well as pragmatism and technical attitude.

Robert Pirsig explained succinctly in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*:

In a car, you're always in a compartment, and because you're used to it you don't realize that through that car window everything you see is just more TV. You're a passive observer and it is all moving by you boringly in a frame. On a cycle, the frame is gone. You're completely in contact with it all. You're in the scene, not just watching it anymore, and the sense of presence is overwhelming. That concrete whizzing by five inches below your foot is the real thing, the same stuff you walk on, it's right there, so blurred you can't focus on it, yet you can put your foot down and touch it anytime, and the whole thing, the whole experience, is never removed from immediate consciousness. (Pirsig, 1974 p.13)

My bond with a motorcycle is that of a rider who has a lengthy history and symbiotic relationship with the machine. However, this relationship might be viewed as eliciting a significant psychological, relational, and emotional reaction. Somatic inquiry analyses and explores the integration of the body and mind in both their unconscious and conscious states. Motorcycling is an example of an embodied experience in which it could be argued that the act of riding induces a state of mindfulness.

Motorcyclists are a subgroup of society defined by mystery and ritual, manifested as a dedication to a genre that expresses tribalism. The motorcyclist is experiencing a primal sense. His motorcycle is an exciting, dangerous, and seductive object. My investigation is based on the paradox of desire, the mystique, and the ambiguity of those who ride motorcycles. I identified several motorcycle collectives in the local community. Contact with these collectives has allowed me to research and explore further the concepts of belonging, camaraderie, and the basic question of why I ride a motorbike. This work has been accompanied by a large collection of site-specific photographs, photobooks, and this report.

5. The embodied experience of motorcycling with Zac and his machine

The following short narrative is an example of experimental writing which was pieced together as it progressed. Describes Zac, the motorcyclist's emotions, apprehensions, and sense of belonging.

With the purr of the engine beneath me
And the warmth of the high sun above,
I'll go over the distant horizon
Along the country lanes that I love
Wildwood flowers and fruit will be growing,
Winding rivers flow down to the sea,
On my revered travelling companion,
I lay claim to my life of the free.

Theresa Wallach (2011, p.174)



Club 59 Archive UK

The motorcycle was standing cold in the shed; anticipatory, fuelled with gasoline, oil, grease, primordial and sensual. Zac approaches from the outside; opening the door with a creaking growl. The light goes on. Ripples of everlasting light reflect from the chrome. The rasp of the zip on his leather jacket zipped tightly down on the forearms. His helmet for a moment obliterates everything as it is pulled down, the strap is buckled. The weight of the helmet on Zac's head, the scent, triggers a

recollection of hours spent within its confines. Soft leather gloves reinforced with armour, insurance against his body falling, are the last to go on.

Zac puts the key in the ignition, then he swings his leg over the seat, keeping the weight of the bike on the balls of his feet. He rocks the bike forward off the centre stand, controlling the momentum as the bike falls forward, with his hand on the right-hand lever in a vice-like grip, the front brake is locked. Brake released the bike rebounds slightly. The 450 lbs. of metal rests between Zac's thighs. Gravity is just willing to reassert itself, in a manic move to reconnect with the shed's concrete. This tenuous balance needs a human to help the bike become its true self.

Balanced, Zac turns the ignition key, lights come to life. Green and two reds, all is fine. Pressing the starter button results in a whirring down below the gas tank. Zac twists the throttle, in an instant, the bike gulps air and then roars. The explosive mixture of gasoline and air is contained in 1000 ccs between Zac's thighs, as the pistons rock the bike from side to side in a melodic rhythm. Flipping the headlight switch illuminates the shed into a theatrical relief, mental checklist, lights, turn signals, pressure on the brakes; Zac is ready.

Pulling the left-hand lever, the clutch, simultaneously whilst pressing down with his right foot, first gear is engaged with a resounding clunk. Following this symphony of movements and equilibrium of give and take, Zac slowly releases the clutch lever whilst gripping the throttle. The bike moves into the sunlight, Zac is momentarily startled, everything is whitewashed.

The early afternoon traffic is light, with few irksome slow-moving cars. Moving out into the road Zac shifts into second gear, a small jolt of speed is experienced

in the seat of the bike. Like a colt springing from a canter to a trot. Warming the tires to improve grip, Zac shifts ever so slightly from left to right. Leaning left then right then left again, tracing a sinuous path down the highway. The bike is partnered with Zac, each anticipating each step, it's not clear who is in control.

Out into the country now, trees line the highway, infrequent houses set back from the road. Accelerating up the highway hills, de-accelerating, and gingerly braking from speed downhill. Overtaking a truck making its way to the next delivery; feeling a deep sensation from the stomach to the chest as the bike straightens up from a long curve.

This ride today, on the way to the longed-for destination, excitement is received from the revolutions of the wheel which merge with a desire to arrive in one piece. The journey is defined by the combination of the anticipation of its end and the pleasure of its duration.

The highway constantly turning, rising, and falling repeatedly, has the hazard of something unexpected around the next bend. A car on your side of the highway, gravel across the road, a dog running to attack the bike. The rider is constantly processing all this information and translating it into a physical response. Zac has no room for idle thoughts. The faster he rides the more closed the circuit is, there are no interruptions in a closed circuit, to stop the flow of information and response. Zac has no past to regret and no future to await, he is free.

Zac is always stressed when not riding. Once riding the flames of depression and stress are anaesthetised; riding his bike always puts the flames out. He is happy when he rides for longer and longer. The motorbike is an extension of himself, a better Zac, eminently fixable, perfectible, and ominously powerful.

Every motorcyclist is in denial of insanity, Zac is no different. It's the price of admission to riding on a day like this. If he wants, he can ride at insane speeds, the inadequate creature on the back of the motorcycle, now reduced to hanging on. The roar of the exhaust is left ringing in the trees as the red taillight lasers into the distance. A ghostly residue of the bike and its rider and their struggle against gravity. Zac is lost in the concentration it takes to outwit an impressive opponent. The fact that he makes the right judgement leaves a sweet taste in his mouth.

Meeting with another rider just in front of him, Zac is connected as if there is an invisible wire stretched between them, they are in tandem connecting them both through a moving world into the distance. It is apparent to Zac how easy it would be for an accident to happen, but that dangerous gap does the trick, the gap is unbridgeable. It is apparent to Zac how vulnerable he truly is, but isn't that what love is? The traffic changes, it becomes heavy, the sun is going down, rain has slicked the highway surface. He understands what remains hidden, both a happy passenger on an amusement ride and the controlled operator. Riding the motorcycle makes Zac feel joyous, powerful, peaceful, frightened, vulnerable, and back to happy again in perhaps ten miles.

Now a hundred miles from home, Zac has forgotten what it is like to sit anywhere but on his motorcycle seat. On his motorcycle seat, Zac is a fine-tuned machine rhythmic like radar, brake, speed, slow, corner, lean. Again, and again like a rocking chair. The vanishing point of the white line, eaten up by his wheels, is like a video game in which the landscape moves while the motorcycle stays put. The wind is Zac's reassurance.

Zac is now susceptible to highway hypnosis; all options have been removed and he needs to continue. Wanting nothing more, he holds the power to stop, and the power to go, which are held in his grip. In this perverse pleasure, he wants nothing more.

Zac is a member of a community, linked foremost by anyone who rides a motorcycle in a world that divides into neat divisions. Mention that you ride a motorcycle, and some will be impressed, and others will say that is so dangerous. But how can someone who has never done it have any appreciation? Zac may go for long periods without feeling the wind on either side of his helmet; weeks of routine happy riding until one minute it chooses to remind him.

The close calls, calling close to his ear are carried as a mental registry. Wet leaves, gravel, sand, oil deposits, manhole covers, or even greater hazards await in primal innocence for a rear tire. Some motorcyclists deny it as if they have an assigned guardian angel with an impenetrable shield around them. They claim to have never felt danger, only joy, but somewhere they know it. In part, that is why they ride a motorcycle, it's the mastery of danger or the feeling of it.

6. Motorcycles and their relationship with humans

The encounter between the motorcyclist and the motorcycle can be explored in the theories of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (machines and becoming other). Karl Marx referred to the distinction between a machine and a tool in which a separation between the mechanical and organic was now irrelevant. For Guattari the twin distinction between a machine and a human was unsatisfactory.

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari postulated that 'There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the

other and couples the machines together.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972 p.8). The distinction between a machine and a tool is treated as a concept in *Anti-Oedipus*; the machine is a communication element, but the tool is unable to communicate. Deleuze and Guattari do not accept the traditional concept of a machine's dominance over man by distinguishing between a machine and an item or tool that just substitutes a human being. Deleuze and Guattari also regarded the unconscious as a machine, with the will of the machine to link and spread the flow that passes through it, which may be tied to sexual desire but extends into our unconscious.

Examples include Heath Robinson's cartoons and machines. They were created as desiring-machines, machines that connected to others in an endless cycle of connectivity and synthesis. The spectator perceives beauty in the sense of connectedness in the motions of the assemblage's numerous pieces.



The Gadget Family - Dining Room WILLIAM HEATH ROBINSON TRUST
<https://www.wired.co.uk/article/heath-robinson-deserves-a-museum>

Connections are central to Guattari's psychiatry and psychoanalysis. Adding consistency and fluidity to his work and allowing him to unite the usually disparate fields of Freud and Marx, the political and psychological. Machinery, according to Guattari, cannot be isolated from the desire machines of the human consciousness.

During my research, I came across the work of author Flan O'Brian which succinctly illustrates the bond between machine and man.

The comic story by Flan O'Brian in the *Third Policeman* posits that,

The gross and net result of it is that people who spent most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadstead's of this parish get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of their bicycle as a result of the interchanging of the atoms of each of them and you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who nearly are half people and half bicycles.'...' And you would be flabbergasted at the number of bicycles that are half-human almost half-man, half-partaking of humanity.' (O'Brien, 2019 p 85).

The motorcycle is one component of a human-machine assembly from which the motorcycle derives a form of movement reminiscent of a horse. The motorcycle, with its wheels, gears, and cogs, is likewise founded on the development of the wheel. Powered by a liquified essence of a much older world's decaying rain forests. A motorcyclist's survival and the culture of motorcycling are dependent on emotive relationships. Within multiple human-machine connectivity, a motorcycle is a complex machine that has been manufactured and continues to be adjusted and maintained by individuals who participate throughout its existence. The motorcycle creates its mythology and meaning, which adds to its impact and significance.

7. The Motorcyclist as an existentialist

Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. It is the view that humans define their own meaning in life and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It focuses on the question of human existence, and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. It holds that, as there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness (and hence to find meaning in life) is by embracing existence. (The Basics of Philosophy, 2008-2022)

The existential motorcycle rider is enjoying the life he was destined to live. The great majority of individuals live a consumerist lifestyle, purchasing products that they expect would bring them enjoyment and perceived fulfilment. But invariably, all

that is accomplished is a mirage. The existentialist motorcyclist accepts change and transforms into a warrior and adventurer. Accepting the existentialist view that society should not interfere with an individual's life or deeds, whereas society and its normalised conventions can interfere with free will and potential. Riding a motorcycle is a leap of faith to improve one's mentality. It also helps people to express their actual values and investigate the philosophical, resulting in friendships, experience, and freedom.



Danny Lyon

If the motorcyclist has forebodings about riding his motorcycle, it all comes down to how much he is devoted to a genuine experience in the here and now. Existentialists such as Heidegger and Kafka will claim that existence is all there is, that there is no spiritual metaphysical knowing experience. However, motorcycling has a more genuine feel than normal life. Many motorcycle riders have dislocated experience, a disconnection from time and place, and an imperceptible slowing of reality. This is a synergy, a hyper-experience of the mind, is a similar state to a dream or hypnotic trance.

There is an opinion that the motorcyclist has an intrinsic urge for suicide, and each journey may be a life and death event. Why else would a motorcyclist ride a machine with such a razor-thin margin between life and death? Perhaps the

sensation could be described as orgasmic, as in the pleasure of satisfying hunger or the desire to become violent. Contentment, on the other hand, is nonsensical and insignificant to a biker. His insanity may be sufficient to justify his existence; his goal is not to welcome death but to experience life.

Motorcycles are a demonstrative and distinctive feature of self-identity, the motorcyclist develops a deep emotional bond with his machine, through the act of purchase, control, and imaginary affinity. The advantages of motorcycle riding are appealing because they represent a value higher than that of a vehicle driver, which the motorcyclist may out-accelerate and leave behind. With a joyous and high-risk mentality, the motorcyclist personifies escape. A motorcycle is an object of veneration, an object that is expected to perform and provide a symbolic meaning. The motorcycle is an exacting representation of indeterminable freedom, autonomy, and individual power. The motorcyclist's lifestyle is a major inducement for people. The sensation of belonging to a particular alliance inside a like-minded fraternity and being able to identify while surrounded by revered and skilled individuals adds to the motorcyclist's satisfaction and esteem. Although there is a paradox, a motorcycle is signified by society as a pleasure machine. But by his very use of the road, the motorcyclist is vulnerable to unforeseeable incidents, unpredictable events, disturbance, and constraints. (2721 without quotes)