Anime as a window on the impact of technology on Japanese society

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Schoolgirls and Mobilesuits

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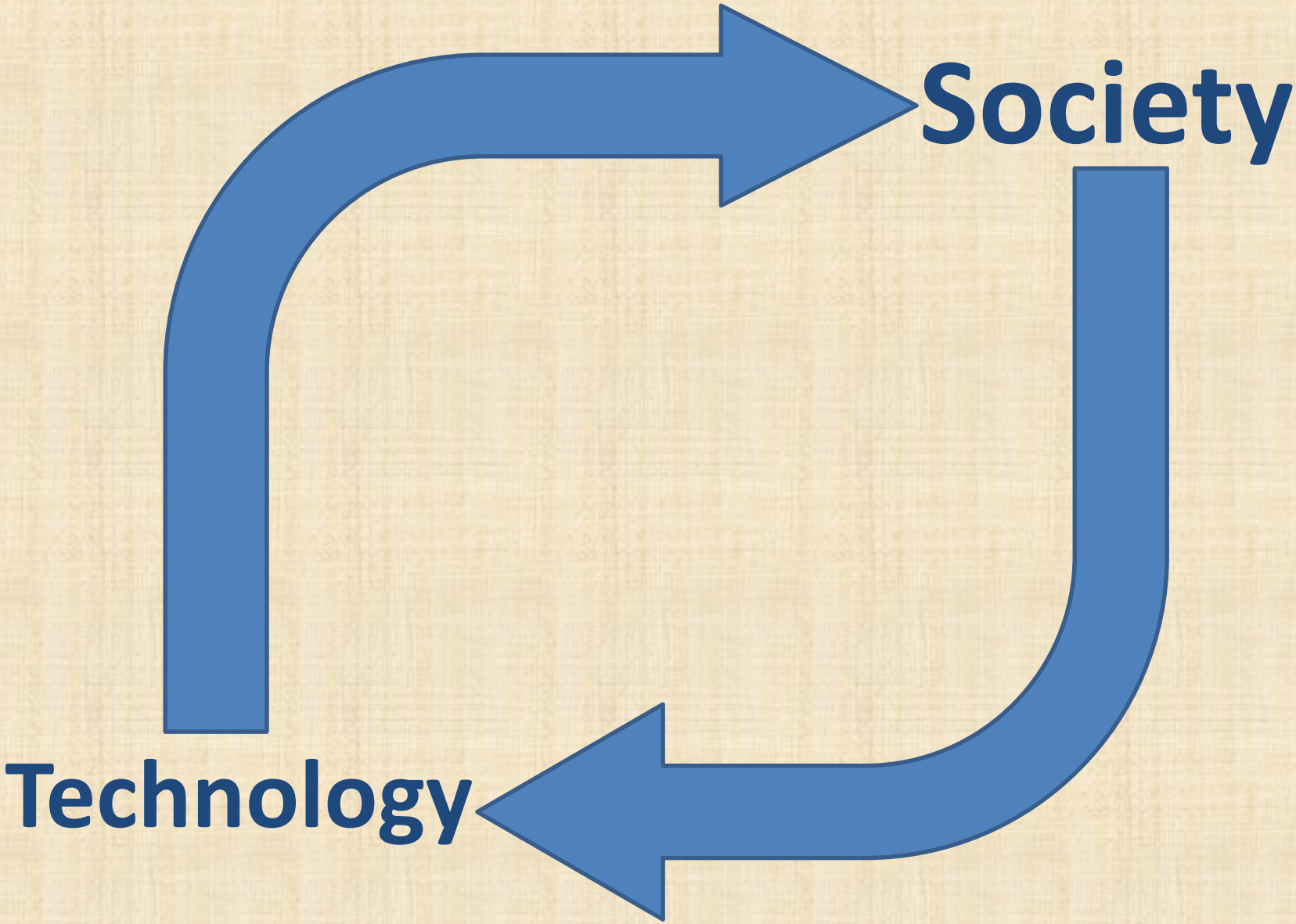

Society
Technology

The interaction of technology and society is culture specific

- Different cultures have different needs and select which technologies to use and how to use the them
- Technology comes into a society in different ways
  - Home grown
  - Imported

This session

- Share some examples of the many ways that anime provides insights into the study of the interaction of technology and Japanese culture
- Encourage the audience to look at anime through this perspective
  - Paul Price – Telling stories that help us make sense of the new world
  - Kukhee Choo - A review of Denno Coil
  - Marc Hairston – An analysis of the role of games in Summer Wars

Technology has shaped society

Technology and age-specific roles

Advanced societies requires 12+ years of training to become a fully functional member

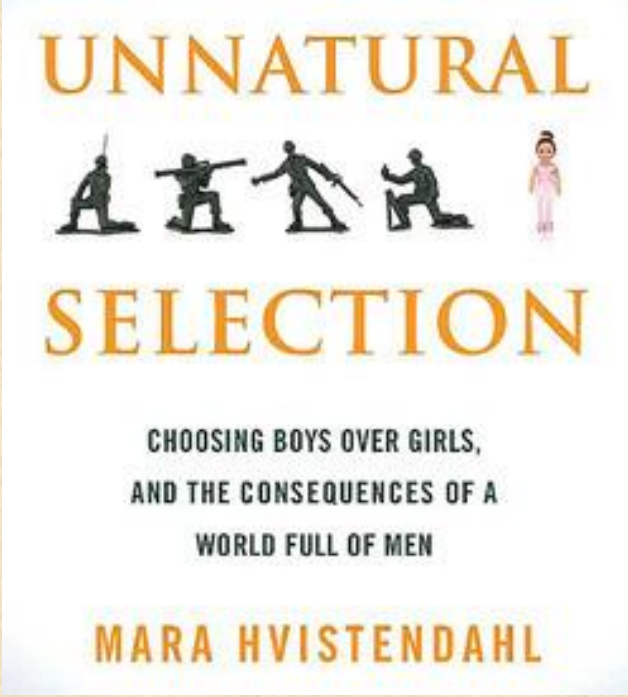
- The has created the concept of adolescence (a space between child and adult)
- Without adolescents here would be no market for shoujo and shonen anime
- And of course no Schoolgirls….

Technology and age-specific roles

Increase in human lifespan

- Individuals who reached 50+ were so rare that they were granted special status as "*the elders of the community*"
- Now Japan is full of the elderly and the concern for their care is a major societal issue (Roujin Z)

Technology and biology



- In China, India, and Eastern Europe (but not in Japan, Korea, or US) the male-female ratios have changed from:
  - the natural 1.05 males: 1.0 females
  - to as much as 1.2 males: 1.0 females
- In the next 20 years there will be 200 million missing brides
- How will this be reflected in Anime?

200 Million missing brides

- Will gynoids become acceptable?
- Will these unmarried males be turned into drones like the kill-dolls (*Kirudore)* in the Sky Crawlers?

Loss of control

- Up to 1600 in Europe most of life was “understandable” on a personal level
  - I know what I need to live or I know the person who knows
  - Esoteric knowledge is rare and suspect
- Today I know nothing about who makes my food, clothes, vehicles, electronics

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic

Loss of control and magic

- Is the popularity of magic and fantasy due to a desire to regain a sense of control in our life?
  - Is there a spell/story/object/demon/place that answers my needs
  - Can magic allow me to regain control?
- Magic promises to cut through the Gordian knot beyond the confusion there is a single problem that must be solved
  - Find the shards and recreate the jewel
  - Destroy the ring
  - Master the spell
  - Reach the “promised land”
- This magic’s promise is of course reductionist……

Telling stories to help understand the human in a world of technology

- According to Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell the most powerful stories serve as modern "myths"
- These "myths" provide maps of "meaning for the new technological world that
  - explain the world; and
  - orient the individual.
- Three examples of anime that tell stories about Japan's choices in the use of technology

Pom Poko

- When you make suburbia you destroy as well as build
- The spirits of the old world, while diminished, survive in the new world
- We have chosen the new technologies but we are still haunted by what we have lost

Yokohama Kaidashi Kikou

- A kind future and gentle future
  - A declining population
  - A return to a human sized world
  - A gentle unwinding of technology
  - Humanity to being a participant in, but not the ruler of the world
- A return of the sacred
- Humanity replaced by a non-humanity that replaces, but echoes, humanity

Mōsō Dairinin (Paranoia Agent)

A warning parable of the dangers of:

- Allowing technology to fragment society;
- Denial of our responsibilities to one another;
- The choice of fantasy over reality;
- Embracing powerlessness as an escape from accountability

Summary

- Technology and society are in a dance
- Anime is one window to watch the dance
- Science impact on society
- Society's choices on adopting technology
- Stories to make sense of both….

Thank you!