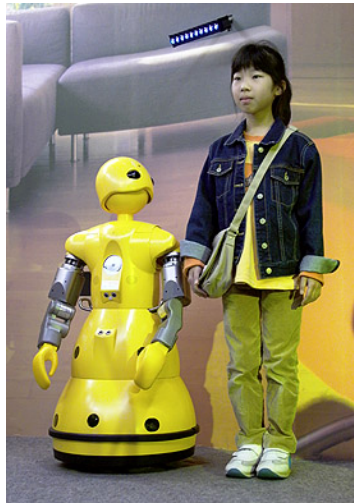


Robo sapiens japonicus: Human-robot interaction and the future of “society” in Japan

Jennifer Robertson
Professor of Anthropology, University of Michigan



The field of robotics is nowhere more enthusiastically pursued than in Japan. Japan is home to about 70% of the global share of the one million industrial robots in use, followed by Singapore, South Korea, Germany and Italy. There are hundreds of robot companies in Japan and domestic market alone for robots is estimated to grow to ¥6.2 trillion by 2025. The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) forecasts that Japan's robot industry and spin-offs will eventually dominate this century's global marketplace.

Japanese roboticists, and their sponsoring companies (including Mitsubishi, Toyota, Honda, and NEC), are far ahead of their international counterparts in designing, manufacturing and marketing intelligent, autonomous robots to care for children and especially for the growing numbers of senior citizens, provide entertainment and companionship, and perform clerical and domestic tasks. Government officials estimate that within five years, each of the nearly 19 million Japanese households is likely to own at least one such robot.

This series of multi-media seminars explores the functions of and roles for robots in Japanese society and popular culture. Lecture and discussion topics are provided in the schedule below. The assigned readings are available as pdf downloads.

Seminar Schedule

29 June: Robot histories: From mechanical dolls to humanoids

Reading: Čapek, *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)*

30 June: Robot gender

Readings: Robertson, "Gendering humanoid robots: Robosexism in Japan"

1 July: Living with robots

Readings: Mori, "The uncanny valley"; Robertson, "*Robo sapiens japonicus: Humanoid robots and the posthuman family*"

2 July: Robot rights, human rights

Readings: Tezuka Osamu, *Astro Boy*