

A sticky situation: Part 1: Cinema, anime and nukes

 By [Edward Herridge](#)

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We have all seen those movies where machines destroy human civilisation. Stories of omnicide and universal subjugation tend to stick in the mind, even in the form of entertainment, so I am sure the name of at least one will be rattling around in your cranium already.



It can be argued that this particular genre of apocalyptic entertainment is so popular because it accesses an atavistic fear of technology that mushroomed into the human subconscious after the A-bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Echoes of the effect that this destructive event had on the Japanese Psyche is still evident in their popular culture, especially so in anime.

Do yourself a favour and watch the classic anime *Akira*. It should be an easy viewing since it was one of the first anime crafted to be accessible to Western culture.

This seminal work perfectly captures the sublimated post-apocalyptic dread that this event engendered in the Japanese psyche. It reveals a barely suppressed post cataclysmic fear that had not remained localised to the island nation. Had it done so our favourite sci-fi movies would not lean so strongly toward distorted and negative paranoid visions of dystopian futures. It is as if we know deep down inside that we are powerless to stop the steady goose-stepping juggernaut of progress impelled by the technological feudal climate exiting between the superpowers of this world.

Never before has technology given man such agency to destroy or create. Oppenheimer himself declared “Now I have become Death”. That’s Death with a capital D. He was not talking about the natural cycle of organic life on this planet. He was crowning himself as the archetype itself. When he witnessed the scope of his creations destructive potential it irrevocably altered his vision of the future.

Sticks, levers and catapults

As prominent as this moment was in history it is not where our relationship with technology began. It starts with the first weapon that a human has ever wielded to assert dominance over another. It starts with a stick. Every tool we create has a binary potential and so did the humble stick.

When primitive man paused swinging it at his neighbour’s skull for long enough to consider a further use for the thing, something wonderful happened. The stick became a lever and levers are demonstrably superior to sticks. Had we stuck with the stick humanity, would still be living in caves?

The history of the lever is a far more illustrious one since levers helped us to lift heavy things with which we could begin to construct the beginnings of modern civilisation. In turn the lever would later go on to become a far more effective weapon in the guise of the Catapult. Ironically it would prove to be most effective in destroying the fortified constructions that levers had helped to build in the first place.

Looking at human ingenuity from this angle one can conclude that all technologies are just the creation of sticks of increasing complexity.

Oppenheimer, vinge and the internet

When Oppenheimer saw his dark vision of the future flash in front of him in 1945, he saw in himself the bringer of the end of an era, perhaps even humanity. At that moment, his mind became overwhelmed by the evidence that the moment presented. Little did he know that his invention of mass destruction would ultimately enforce an unprecedented period of global peace on this world for years to follow. This goes to show that we really cannot predict how our tools will affect us.

Any projections we make regarding technology’s impact on our future must be considered speculative for this reason, regardless of how convincing the evidence might be.

Luminaries of futurism, such as Ray Kurzweil, have proven track records of high prophetic accuracy regarding the developmental curve of technology but cannot claim to fully comprehend or predict the full effect any technology will have on our specie's psyche nor its impact on global civilisation.

Just 50 years ago nobody would have believed that we would all be carrying a computer around in our pockets nor would they have been able to fathom the far-reaching effects that this along with the internet would have on our society today. The next 50 years of our future is arguably even more uncertain if one considers the rapidity and exponentially increasing pace by which technology is booming today.

To be continued... Part 2 will look at Post humans, Elon Musk & Pong

ABOUT EDWARD HERRIDGE

Edward matriculated in 1992 after which he performed military service and began his working career in printing by studying electronic origination at the South African Printing College. Edward eventually became an account executive for Oakes and Associates at Investec Bank. He then migrated into advertising and became brand manager for Ronin Grain Management Solutions. Edward departed Ronin GMS to pursue his own interest before finding employment at Grey advertising as a finishing artist, re-toucher, motion graphic and digital designer.

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