



Ten Year Old Spaghetti

A short time ago, I had a chance to drop in at a restaurant run by one of my print collectors, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the opening of the business. I took a small gift for the owner, and spent a few hours there, chatting with her and some of the other guests and visitors.

One of the things that came up in our conversations was the progress made by their kitchen over the course of the ten years. She thought that their skills had increased steadily over time, and that their dishes - they specialize in Italian food - were now of a very high standard. I had lunch there, and can indeed testify that the food was excellent; I wish that they were closer to my home, and that I could eat there more often!

But our discussions on this question of skill improvement led to an interesting comparison between their chef and myself. We can look at certain skilled professionals in terms of two types. Let me list a few professions here; see if you can see a major difference between them.

The first group: chefs, doctors, performing musicians ...

The second group: artists, authors, movie directors ...

Do you see what I am getting at? The chef makes a dish, and serves it to his customer, at which point it is eaten, enjoyed, and ceases to exist. As the years go by, his skill (hopefully) increases and his new dishes are made to a higher standard than the older ones. His customers always receive the benefit of his highest skill level. The same thing happens with the doctor and the musician. They always perform at their current standard of achievement.

But the second group is faced with a different situation. Although they too, may continue to increase their skills as time goes by, *their older work remains on the market*. The book written by the author ten years ago is still available for people to read, even though he may now look on such work as immature and amateurish compared to his recent creations.

So it is with me. I am squarely in the second group. Even though I feel strongly that my recent work is far improved over the prints I made ten (and more!) years ago, those prints are still on the market. Just the other day I received a catalogue from a book shop, in which were a number of my older prints for sale. I will never be able to 'escape' from that work!

As we discussed these points at the restaurant I asked the restaurant owner if she could imagine her chef selling his 'ten year old spaghetti', and she vehemently rejected the idea. He would not want people to taste such a dish, as it would in no way come up to his current standards.

But I, and book authors, and movie directors, and people who make works that take physical permanent shape, have no such option available to us. The works we have produced are out there for everybody to see, and will be forever available for criticism. When I saw my old prints in the book dealer's catalogue, I wanted to say, "No, no, please don't sell those! I can make much better work now," but of course that is impossible.

It is not all negative though, and in fact this permanence of the work does have one major benefit. Because I too, can still clearly see and touch and analyze my 'ten year old spaghetti', it provides clear evidence that I have actually improved over time. Has that chef actually improved too, or is it just his imagination? Nobody can tell ...

So here we are - at the end of Volume Five of 'A Story A Week'. Promise me something ... rather than look back to Volume One, let's look forward to Volume Six! :-)

David Bull
Seseragi Studio
Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City
Tokyo Japan 198-0052
<http://astoryaweek.com>