



Somebody is Watching!

A few years after setting up my first website - that had been back in 1997 - I thought about how I could make it a bit more interesting for visitors, and decided to put up a webcam. My internet connection in the early years had been dial-up, which made the idea of a webcam impossible, due to both bandwidth limitations and the expensive connection charges. In early 2001 though, the phone company made their ISDN service available in my area, along with reasonable pricing for an 'always on' connection. This was the chance I had been waiting for, and I purchased an inexpensive video camera, found some software, and set up the Woodblock Webcam.

Now the bandwidth available was still quite limited, so this webcam wasn't full motion video. The camera took a snapshot every ten seconds or so, and uploaded it to my website. Viewers accessed a special page where they could see the photos, which updated automatically, giving them a kind of extreme slow motion view of my workbench.

Even at this rudimentary level though, the webcam proved popular with site visitors, and I can understand why. Back when I was living in Canada, if I had had a chance to see such a thing - a camera focussed on a craftsman's bench in far-away Japan - I would have been thrilled indeed.

The webcam became a part of my daily routine: sweep the workshop floor, get the day's tools arranged, turn on the camera, start up the software, and get to work.

I never had the sense that I was being 'watched'. After all, it wasn't 'real' video, and there was no audio being broadcast either, so it was really no more awkward than having somebody snap some photos now and again, something I am very used to because of the numerous media visits to my workroom over the years.

The years went by. The telecommunications company made a fibre optic service available in my area, and I immediately signed up, giving me astonishingly fast internet service. I was able to watch internet video very smoothly, and even use video telephone service. But I wasn't able to upgrade my webcam, because the very old computer down in the workshop (a 'hand-me-down' from my office upstairs) simply wasn't capable of handling a live video stream.

This past week though, I finally broke down and upgraded the old machine, and one of the first things I did was explore the idea of bringing the webcam into the 21st century (literally!) I found an internet service that provides free video streaming, set up an account, and made some trials. It all set-up very easily, and a couple of days ago I went 'live' - the Woodblock Webcam, just a few months shy of its 10th anniversary, is now a real video stream. Anybody on the planet can watch me as I work on the prints (either carving or printing, depending on my schedule.)

But what a difference it has made in the 'feeling' for me! This is no longer just a 'random' photographer taking snapshots; this is a very real, very open, window right into my personal workspace. I received an email earlier today from a viewer, she had been curious about a certain noise she was hearing, but that had been solved ... when I sneezed. She had been listening to me breathe as I worked!

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

Well, I'm not quite sure what to think about this. My guess is that after a couple of weeks or so, I will probably fall into the same sort of routine I have had for the past ten years - basically forgetting that anybody is 'out there'. And of course, this is woodblock printmaking; watching this work is kind of like watching paint dry. It's not really going to attract much of a crowd, that's for sure!

I think it will simply provide a way for collectors and friends to 'keep in touch', and - I hope - will be of great use for those 'future Daves' out there, the young guys eager to learn all they can about this rare work. Guys, this is really for you!

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