



Double or Nothing!

In recent weeks, we have accelerated the pace of progress at my Mokuhankan print publishing venture. The early experiments over the past months - seeing whether or not 'raw beginners' can learn to make acceptable prints in a reasonable period of training - turned out far better than I had expected; our catalogue now features any number of prints made by the ladies here who had never touched a printer's baren before they came here. But the only way to build a 'stable' of printers is to get more people started on the first rung of the ladder, so I have accepted more trainees, and we now have four young women working at the benches here, each person coming a couple of times a week.

Now this place isn't a 'printmaking school'. I have no established curriculum for the training, and so far have simply been bringing various block sets out of storage for them to practice on. As I myself have gained experience over the course of the year, I have been learning which training procedures are more effective than others, and am constantly adapting my methods to incorporate this knowledge.

Because the whole thing is running on a fairly informal basis though, I am having a bit of trouble keeping track of who has learned what, who has trained on which particular technique, and who has printed which design. Just this morning, I was working with one of the younger women, and said something like, "Don't you remember - we covered that last week?" But she looked at me blankly, and it was clear that it hadn't been *her* to whom I had made the earlier explanation.

Now going over the same material more than once is just a part of life when you are a 'teacher'. School teachers of course have to begin again at the beginning of their textbooks every single year, as each fresh crop of faces comes before them. So I am not complaining about this repetition. As the years go by, it won't be necessary for me to be the single source of all the information here, because these people will more and more be helping each other.

But over and above the printmaking training, I am having a bit of trouble with *déjà vu*. You all know the feeling - the sensation we sometimes get that we have 'been here' or done something before. Well this is happening to me 'in real life' all the time now! For example, I was talking about our staff blog with the young woman here today, and we looked at one of the blog photos - a picture of one of the other staff members that I took one day last week while the two of us had been 'exploring' in the river near the workshop.

"Where was that taken," she asked, and when I told her, she made it clear that she too would like to see that place. This was just after lunch, and we had some time, so off we went down the ladder into the river, and began wading along through the shallows.

Now this was *exactly* what I had done earlier in the week - waded along the river on a sunny afternoon with a young lady. It was like replaying a scene in a movie - we walked the same route, stopped and looked at the same beautiful tree, saw the same deep pools with fish trying to hide from us, and so on and so forth. *Déjà vu* in real life! She even stopped and posed for a photograph in the same place!

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I had to make specific efforts to stop myself from falling into the same conversations! "That building just above the trees there; that's the studio of piano teacher K-san. We can sometimes hear her students playing ..." ("No Dave; stop! You said that exact same thing to the other young lady just a few days ago!")

Perhaps I shouldn't worry about this. Anybody who is around my age almost certainly has the experience of talking to somebody, and realizing at some point that we have probably 'told this story' to that person before. They are usually too polite to remind us of this, trying to save us from embarrassment.

Well in my case, I don't have to worry! I can tell the same stories over and over again, as many times as I like! As long as our little venture is successful, there will always be a constant stream of new recruits to walk with me in our river ...

Now if only I could keep from getting their names mixed up ...

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