



Big Brother

One of the major frustrations in my life these days is the fact that because I am such a poor manager of my personal time - spending every day morning 'till night on my printmaking activities - I no longer have a chance to indulge in personal hobbies. That's not such a tragedy actually, as printmaking itself is basically a hobby for me, in the sense that I do it for fun and not profit. But there are so many other things that I would like to 'play' with!

Sometimes I just can't resist, and even though I know that I won't be able to devote much time to it, I have a 'nibble' at a particular activity. So it was late last year when I saw information on a small specialized type of digital camera with the name Recolo. This is a simple little camera that makes timed recordings of a scene - taking one shot every XX seconds (or minutes), and stitching them all together into movie form. It's time-lapse photography, done very simply.

The camera was very inexpensive, so I ordered one, and have played with it now and then since then. The first movies I made with it were scenes of the sky outside my window. That doesn't sound particularly interesting of itself, but I have learned something interesting about the place where I live. I am right on the edge of the geographical feature known as the Kanto Plain, which as the name suggests is a basically flat area. The plain stretches away to the east towards downtown Tokyo, while on the other three sides are ranges of hills backed by terrain that becomes somewhat mountainous. As a result, this is a place where weather 'happens'. Air does not move smoothly from one zone to the other; as it reaches this place, the flow is disrupted and various clouds are formed (or disappear).

When I put the camera in an upstairs window, set it for shooting a scene once every three seconds, and then come back in the evening to collect the finished movie, I thus see a compressed version of what has taken place in the sky during the day. Sometimes it is not so interesting; just a straight-forward parade of clouds passing by. But on other occasions, I can watch a real drama play out, with clouds forming right there in the sky before me, advancing towards the camera, and then dissipating as I watch.

This is the first time that I have actually *seen* clouds forming. Up to now, they have simply been things that have floated into view from somewhere else. But I have learned that the sky is *alive*. And that's no exaggeration - it seems to behave like a living creature, with air moving in different directions at different levels, and then suddenly reversing course as conditions change. It's wonderfully complex, never seems to repeat the same scene twice, and there is always something fascinating to watch. If I had had this little camera when I was a little boy, I would probably now be a meteorologist, not a printmaker!

I of course eagerly shared these movies with people around me, including the ladies who are coming here to train as woodblock printmakers. And I even experimented with putting the camera down in the workshop to catch views of the activity there. The resulting movies are funny to watch, with the time-lapse effect putting everybody into high-gear, producing a print every few seconds, instead of every few minutes.

But one day as we were sitting there working with this little camera in one corner catching the scene, one of them commented "You sure like all these special little cameras, don't you ... Got any more of them hidden around here anywhere?" She was referring to recent news stories we have heard about people who hide

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cameras in places where there should be none (hotel rooms, public toilets, etc.), and who then sell the resulting videos to the (reprehensible) makers of such DVDs.

I assured her that I was incapable of doing such a thing, and that I was just having fun with a simple hobby activity. But - the world being what it is these days - I know that she must have at least some seed of doubt in her mind, and that next time she used our toilet, I suppose she looked around the room carefully to see if there was anything that looked like a hidden lens.

I know *I* did!

Sigh ...

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