

Random Thoughts 45

The Box Man¹

This is the story about a man who decides to live in a cardboard box. It is an existential² novel about a man who decides to withdraw from society, to become invisible to it, yet to observe it as though he were invisible. The story is told in the first person, as though by the man, and he explains in detail how to select the box and create it. Basically he ends up wearing the box all the time, even in his own home.

When I see people today wearing earphones and “glued” to their smartphones I am reminded of *The Box Man* because it seems to me these people are in their own world, in an invisible box or bubble that separates them from the world around them, even when they are at home. The difference between these people and the Box Man is that the Box Man watched and observed people around him. Those people I see today wearing headphones and staring at their smartphones, whether sitting, standing, or walking on the street, all seem oblivious³ to the world around them.

But perhaps that is just my perception⁴. Perhaps, like the Box Man, these people *are* observing the world around them, but in a surreptitious⁵ and unobtrusive⁶ way. As mentioned above, the Box Man observed people through the slit in his box, though it appeared that those around him were unaware of him observing them. Perhaps these people around me whom I see apparently hiding in their own little worlds are also secretly watching the world around them. In a sense I suppose they are. By that I mean, they are not observing the actual people around them, those in the trains or in cafes or on the street, but instead, they are secretly observing the people on Facebook, Line, and other digital media. Still, they are not entirely modern Box Men because unlike Abe’s Box Man, these modern-day versions do interact with others through their digital media.

Technological innovations continue to create virtual worlds that make it easier to interact with real people in ways we could not imagine a few generations ago. Now the popular medium is personal computers and smartphones, but as virtual reality continues to become more sophisticated and developed, it may not be that far in the future when it will be possible for people to gather using holographic images of each other.

¹ 箱男 安部公房 1973

² 実存的

³ 無関心

⁴ 知覚

⁵ ひそかに

⁶ 目立たない