Forest and cunnus—the eroticism of Shigeo Toya
Toji Kamata

1 Eros of the forest

The novelist Motojiro Kajii wrote that buried under cherry trees, are dead bodies, and it is an assertion that again comes to mind when viewing works by Shigeo Toya such as *Woods*, *Spirit Regions* and *Swamp*. Kajii had a vision that cherry trees could only bloom in such beautiful profusion and accomplish such a total, vital flowering due to the countless corpses concealed deep below, from which they draw up the nutrients for life. Thus cherry trees in full bloom are dead bodies dissolved, then transfigured. If so, then a cherry copse is a corpse copse, home to hovering guardian spirits of the earth.

I sense the same serried ranks of bodies in the forests of Shigeo Toya, which resemble furiously bubbling eruptions of life, but also the acceptance of countless deaths. In that sense, Shigeo Toya's *Woods* are obelisks of life, and simultaneously, of its demise. The coincidentia oppositorum by which these colonnades of life are at once colonnades of death is what gives Toya's seductive forests their mystery, and their erotic charge. For that reason, Toya's forests are more than simple symbiotic forests of communal living, even, perhaps, harboring a secret of life that suggests they could be called forests of communal death. It is perhaps precisely because they emit an aura of dead bodies, and raise the prospect of transfiguration of vast numbers of dead bodies, that these bewitching, intoxicating woods retain their impenetrability.

A secret woodland chamber, where a fascinating transformation akin to that of base metal into precious in the alchemist's retort, is perpetually occurring. Both magma and water cascade from the mountain of life, to the valley of death. The acme of life turns in an instant to the extremum of death. For this reason the forest, though humming with voices, is shrouded in silent stillness.

The forests of Shigeo Toya exude a sense of overwhelming, cumulative death. And in them I see the shadow of the goddess Izanami, who sacrificed her own life to give birth to islands, and to the gods of wind and stone and mountains and fields and more. Izanami is both god of life, and of death. The first deity in Japanese mythology to make the journey to the realm of death was the great Earth Mother, Izanami. Let us remind ourselves here of her story.

On the order of the gods in Takamagahara, the High Plain of Heaven, Izanami descended with her husband Izanagi to the world below. Standing on Ama-no-ukihashi, the bridge connecting heaven and earth, Izanagi plunged the heavenly spear Ama-no-numahoko into the turbid seas, stirred it around and withdrew it. Drips fell from the spear and solidified to form the island of Onogoroshima. Izanagi and Izanami descended to this island, where they circled a sacred pillar, taking turns to sing each other's praises, before engaging in intercourse, after which Izanami gave birth to what are known as the "Oyashima" islands including Awajishima, Shikoku, Kyushu and Honshu. Izanami then went on to give

birth to a number of small islands, then the nature gods such as those of stone, wind, mountains and plains, before burning her mihoto or private parts giving birth to Kagutsuchi, the fire god, which weakened her irretrievably until she passed over to Yomi-no-kuni, the land of the dead. Despite her debilitated state, Izanami continued to produce gods, from her own waste products: the gods of metal Kanayamahiko and Kanayamahime from her vomit, the water goddess Mizuhanome from her urine, and from her feces the earth gods Hatayasuhiko and Hatayasuhime, after which she followed the path to Yomi.

Up to this point, Izanami is the goddess of sex, and of life, having mated liberally and given birth to islands and deities from her private parts. But after setting off on her journey to Yomi-no-kuni, Izanami turns into a fearsome god of death. She informs the pursuing Izanagi that she cannot return from the underworld because she has eaten the food of the dead, but says she will consult with the god of the underworld, and not under any circumstances to try to find and look at her in the meantime. Trusting her words Izanagi waits patiently, but when there is no sign of her returning, he loses patience, violates his wife's command, and goes to look for her. What he finds is horrific: Izanami riddled with maggots, thunder gods dancing wildly on her eyes, mouth, chest, and genitals. Seeing the terrified Izanagi start to flee, Izanami, angry at her husband for shaming her, dispatches female demons in pursuit. After barely escaping, Izanagi places a large boulder across the path to form a boundary between this world and the underworld, and informs Izanami that their relationship is over. Enraged and distraught by her treatment at Izanagi's hands, Izanami vows to kill a thousand inhabitants of this world (humans) every day. Izanagi responds that if she does, he will build 1500 birthing huts every day, and spawn 1500 people. Thus the population was able to increase by five hundred a day.

The problem is that at this point, the realms of the living and dead were clearly separated, reinforcing the perception of the realm of the dead as a terrible, unclean place. To cleanse himself of the defilement of death, Izanagi undertook ritual bathing on "the plain of Awagihara by the river-mouth of Tachibana in Himuka on the island of Tsukushi" at the end of which he created the "Three Precious Children": Amaterasu from his left eye, Tsukuyomi from his right, and Susanoo from his nose. He then ordered Amaterasu to rule over the High Plain of Heaven, gave Tsukuyomi dominion over the night as moon deity, and Susanoo over the seas. However one of these children, Susanoo, did not do as he was told, instead crying with love for Haha-no-kuni/Ne-no-kuni, that is the underworld where his mother resided, and was banished. Japanese mythology subsequently tells of how Susanoo's antics in the heavens drove Amaterasu to hide in the cave known as Ama-no-iwato, her luring from the cave, the story of the Yamata-no-Orochi serpent, and the transfer of rule over Japan from the earth gods to the gods of heaven. In any case, the issue is that a fissure thus opened up between the worlds of the living and dead in the form of a concept and system of purity and impurity, severing the dynamic interface between the two.

This split between life and death surrounding worldviews and traffic between worlds may overlap with the chronological and cultural shift from Jomon to Yayoi period, and a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one of rice cultivation. In this context, Izanami, as goddess of both life/sex and of death, could be described as a deity symbolic of the Jomon world. Within Japanese mythology she remains the face of the primeval god, god of the ambiguous dynamism of life and death, of the two extremes of creation and destruction.

I confess to being utterly fascinated by the genealogy of Izanami. The unruly Susanoo was also connected to the mother goddess Izanami. Gods that invited death and violence, and especially, eros; somehow from these origins of the land forming a wonderfully dynamic current with the power to revive and rouse cell upon cell throughout the body, the hidden networks in living systems. This is the genealogy and gaze of which I speak.

What I scent in the forests of Shigeo Toya is an accumulation and eruption of this kind of mythical eroticism. To reiterate, this is an accumulation and an eruption of life, and at the same time, of death. The forest of life and forest of death form a cycle, like a Möbius strip or ouroboros serpent, manifesting concurrently. In this flourishing yet silent space both male and female, phallus and cunnus appear simultaneously in a single tree, in a single space. Noise and silence, night and day, phallus and pudendum, life and death, clean and unclean: a space and dynamism that are generated instantaneously and solidify instantaneously while swallowing up all kinds of polar opposites. What the woods of Toya emit is this erotic energy of the forest, and impenetrability of the forest.

Tears or fissures that at first look almost chaotic form a maze-like path through the forest, and tracing that path, we arrive at gullies and wetlands that resemble female genitalia, or mountains formed by masses of rocks, large and in strange shapes that could be mistaken for phalli, or iwakura: rock dwelling places of the gods. Woven into the work *Woods and I* (1988), which with its countless protrusions and folds is in itself reminiscent of female genitalia, is a towering, supple phallic dynamism and surging; an indefinable fusion of living bodies and dead. A source, a path that gives birth to all, and simultaneously swallows all. This is the eros of the forest. The moment when savage, surging, boiling, roiling fire and water are stilled. The sun and ocean of Rimbaud:

It is recovered.
What? – Eternity.
In the whirling light
Of the sun in the sea.
“A Season in Hell”

Needless to say, the sea is another forest, and the forest, another sea. Forest and sea become one, surging, then calm. A forest incredibly fascinating, yet at the same time, also repelling warped, prejudiced human sentiments and ideas. Open, and closed. Entrance and exit. We are lured in, yet invariably repulsed, flung aside by the force of that space in all its dreadful impenetrability.

Viewing Toya’s works, I am reminded also of the jungles of Bali, and the sacred utaki of Okinawa, and of the forest of leeches and snakes depicted in Kyoka Izumi’s Koya Hijiri (The Holy Man of Mt. Koya).

Once when venturing into the jungle on Bali, I was reminded of the forests of gajumaru (banyan) trees in Okinawa, with their vast suspended root systems. It struck me that the jungles of Bali and forests of

Okinawa are joined at some deep level, their paths connected to each other through the land known as Haha-no-kuni, Ne-no-kuni, Soko-no-kuni for which Susanoo wept: the land of his mother, the root of the land, the underworld. The jungles of Bali and forests of Okinawa are linked across the Pacific, beyond the vast ocean given to Susanoo to rule, via that other world known by all these names. The ocean, another kind of forest, connects these two forests.

The forest on Bali was part of a small village to the southeast of Mt. Agung, Bali's most sacred peak. This village, called Tenganan, has a population of around 300, all native Balinese. When we arrived, cock-fighting was in progress with all its attendant uproar, and leaving behind the clamor and excitement, we walked about 200 meters up the path to the mountain, where we found the skeleton of a giant gajumaru tree. Perhaps struck by lightning, or simply withered from age, this huge tree had fallen, leaving only its roots, forming a hollow. The area around the tree was fenced off, and we found to our delight that a young tree was sprouting from the roots. It would likely take hundreds of years for this sapling with its vivid green foliage to attain the height of the previous tree. Contemplating the single gajumaru planted in the open space in the village center, I couldn't help wishing I had seen that other, giant tree when it was in the prime of life.

After visiting a nearby temple, we had just begun to retrace our steps when we spotted a tree on the right that was unusually dark in color, a tree I had noticed during our ascent. Feeling my heartbeat quicken, I hastened toward the tree, covered in leaves, growing from the base of a gully. Taking the path down, I discovered a vast expanse of gajumaru roots. These formed two "legs" straddling a stream, while two giant hands stretched upward, as if raised to the heavens. The various trees there were joined vertically and horizontally by innumerable roots resembling snakes of different dimensions, connected every which way like the neural network of a brain. This was a gajumaru forest: a single gajumaru tree, but comprising a labyrinthine space befitting the description of forest. In the womb of that gajumaru, we experienced a profound calmness. The tumult of the initial bubbling of cells and molecules had disappeared, replaced by a deep and tranquil sense of ease. The Balinese youth accompanying us spoke of sensing a "sacred silence."

Beneath that gajumaru forest lay a stream and a path. Every morning and evening the people of the village doubtless take water from this stream, wash clothes, and set out along this path for the mountain. Their lives and lifestyle are intimately connected to the roots of this gajumaru. It truly is the tree of life; a gajumaru Womb Realm Mandala, forming a space of so many different forms and expanses and depths and densities that really does invite the description of mandala. I could only feel admiration and gratitude for the vital powers of a tree that had just kept on breathing, and spread its roots this far.

From here it is only a short leap to the utaki of Okinawa. Bali and Okinawa may be separated by the Equator and Pacific Ocean; located thousands of kilometers apart, but it feels as if you could move between them in a single step, or a breath. Warped by ocean and other world, the two forests form a single forest, far away, yet close by. My body tells me this. The forest of life extending within me links these two forests firmly, in turn connecting directly to Koya Hijiri's forest of leeches and snakes deep in

the hills of Hida. These spaces do not extend in linear fashion, or materially, but twist and warp and connect across space, like a rhizome.

Surveying Shigeo Toya's *Woods* and *Spirit Regions* and *Swamp*, this is what I recalled. This is the esoteric faith of the forest. A sort of sylvan animism; the arcane animism of the forest. Disseminating the profoundest of joy and fear and wisdom involving the eros and thanatos of life and death, with a kind of concentrated impenetrability one could describe as forest esotericism.

2 Eros of the cunnus

In Shingon esoteric Buddhism there are two Genzu mandala known as the Kongokai (Vajradhātu) or Diamond World (Garbhakoṣadhātu) Mandala, and Taizokai or Womb World Mandala.

The kongoseki or diamond is the hardest and brightest of gems, and due to its form and properties, the Kongokai Mandala is deemed to represent the realm of the male principle. In contrast the Taizokai Mandala represents the female principle, this being reinforced by its meaning of a womb. In Indian cosmology, the Kongokai Mandala could be said to represent the dynamism of the linga (lingam/phallus), and the Taizokai Mandala the fecundity and inclusiveness of the yoni (pudendum).

Incidentally, I have maintained for many years that "sacred ground is sex ground" so to speak, and indeed the description of sexual pleasure or climax as ecstasy has its origins in the Greek ekstasis, which means a trance or state of rapture in which the spirit leaving the body returns to the one who is the source of its existence, its home, there achieving a profound fusion, and the more demotic usage of the word indicates that sex is not far behind the sacred. Which makes sex a channel to the sacred.

Most ancient sacred sites have a cunnus-like cave or hole. The likes of springs and valleys also form spaces reminiscent of pudenda. Herein lie the spatial density and the forms created by Shigeo Toya's works such as *Woods and I*, *Spirit Regions* and *Swamp*. Forming sacred spaces, these sites are revered and consecrated as places of the utmost importance.

Take for example the places still found around Japan referred to as Ama-no-iwato (ie the cave where Amaterasu hid away). There are sacred sites in Takachiho, Ise, and Awa Tokushima known as Ama-no-iwato, or Ama-no-iwato Shrine. Then there is the shrine known as Funatsu Tainai at the base of Mt. Fuji, which has just a prayer hall, with the go-shintai repository of the deity being a cavern formed by lava flow and deemed to be the female parts of the goddess of Mt. Fuji. In the back of the prayer hall is a torii gate, and beyond that a twisting cave only accessible by crouching down and crawling, and when you arrive at its furthest reaches, suddenly, a stone representing the genitals of Princess Konohanasakuya-hime, more real and seductive in form that the genuine article, and powerful with it. One can only admire nature's ability to craft such a perfect design. Though come to think of it, this perhaps makes sense—after all the most private places of human beings are also of natural design.

For some reason I find caves and grottoes like this utterly fascinating.

I remember when traveling around Amakusa and Unzen encountering two places with a certain, definite frisson. One was in front of the memorial stone erected by the Mizunashigawa River. This piece of ground, razed and burned in the pyroclastic flow triggered by the eruption of Mt. Unzen, is a scene of unrelenting desolation, covered in jagged rocks of various sizes, the earth scorched black and lifeless. Bowing my head before the memorial, I joined my palms in prayer, then sounded a stone flute and conch shell I had brought with me. Ignoring the warning sign prohibiting entry, and the rope, I then stepped into the site of the disaster.

Some time after entering, gazing up at Mt. Unzen I suddenly spied a valley near the active volcanic area slowly starting to lift. Peering closer to see what it was, I saw this rising of the ground slowly spread, becoming more violent. The moment I realized it was an eruption, I felt all the blood in my veins react, rising up and heading toward the top of my head. Of course, in physiological terms my pulse and blood pressure were doubtlessly heightened, and my blood not actually flowing in reverse. But we commonly speak of the blood draining from our face with shock, or rushing to our head when in a rage, for instance. Blood in the human body can respond sensitively and be attuned to the fire and water and wind that constitute the corporeal blood of the land, or the planet. At the risk of being misunderstood, it was a movement of the heart that could only be described as well, extremely moving. To those who would criticize me for being moved by the eruption of a volcano that had previously killed a large number of people and swallowed up homes with its flows of hot ash and debris, I can only say, guilty as charged.

The vibration of the earth had been delivered directly to my heart and mind, in fact, to my very soul. Moreover, that vibration had pushed up earth from a crack reminiscent of the female organs, erupting in leisurely fashion. I was moved by the grand workings of nature, so above the impertinence of human knowledge or endeavor, and—obviously—unaware of the human gaze, and felt a mixture of awe and love.

I clearly remember the day of the first eruption of the Jigokuato crater on Mt. Unzen, back on June 5, 1991. That said, my memory is so vivid because when color photos of the crater's eruption appeared in the paper that evening, I was shocked by the sheer shamelessness of the sight, then dumbfounded, before finally exclaiming with delight. That photo could hardly have been more pudendal in appearance. At a time of noisy debate around the display of pubic hair in print, some argued that nature should be censored, although what they really meant of course is that such a thing would never be possible, nor should nature be censored, nature having such terrific power.

That photo adorned the front cover of the Mainichi Shimbun and Yomiuri Shimbun newspapers. Readers were confronted by a huge, stunning picture of a pudendum in nature. In the depths of my soul I sensed something about to explode. A switch flicked, and I began to achieve a deeper access to the natural world. Whether we like it or not, we will all come to know the trembling of the land; come to know both the creative and destructive powers of nature in practical, callous ways.

One theory has it that the word hoto for female genitalia originally meant “where fire sits.” In simple terms a “place were fire sits” is a volcano, and the crater of that volcano. Watching fire and rocks and lava spewing forth from a volcanic crater, the ancients must have felt that the female parts of the land were convulsing in labor. Volcanic activity is the act by which fire, in all its wild and mystical ferocity, gives birth to the land, which makes a volcanic crater the earth’s womb, and its pudendum. From the viewpoint of our ancestors, the fact that the remains of the active volcanic area known as Jigokuato that also became the crater of Mt. Unzen, took a hoto form, was doubtless obvious in view of the etymology of the term hoto.

As we saw earlier, the goddess Izanami gave birth to the fire god Kagutsuchi last and was burned in the process, being fatally injured and eventually passing over to Yomi-no-Kuni, the land of the dead. This being the case, volcanic activity could be superimposed on the act of the goddess Izanami giving birth to the fire god Kagutsuchi. This god of fire is in one aspect the god of death, whose body was cut to pieces by his father Izanagi, and spawned various gods from his blood. Thus Kagutsuchi summoned up the extremes of life and death, sacrificing his own body, allowing it to metamorphose it into other gods. Which gave him a savagery befitting the last god to be born from Izanami’s hoto.

Photographs of the eruption of Mt. Unzen’s “hell valley” thermal area reinforced the reality of this myth for me. It was the moment when myth ate away reality and gushed forth. The presence of myth smack bang in the middle of history exposed in a single stroke a timeless, warped sort of time, within a certain temporal order. I was transported to a truly mythical time and space where myth and history merged seamlessly. And there, felt a trembling sense of trepidation at the desperate clash about to occur between life/sex and death.

The reappearance of something Izanami-like: these were the words that escaped my lips. Perhaps this was another opening of Amaterasu’s cave?

To put it frankly, the opening of the sun goddess’s cave is a story of the opening and closing of the hoto, of female parts. What was this about?

Unable to endure her brother Susanoo’s rampaging antics any longer, the sun goddess Amaterasu hid away in a cave. Directly, this was due to Susanoo throwing the flayed, ie skinned and bloody, remains of the ama-no-fuchikoma (heavenly piebald horse) into the sacred weaving hall used to weave the garments of the gods, startling a weaving maiden and causing her to pierce her private parts with the shuttle (needle) and die. In the Nihon Shoki it is a goddess who appears to be Amaterasu herself who suffers this rather nasty injury. In any case a female deity startled by a blood-soaked dead horse stabs her genitals with a sharp-pointed implement, and bleeds to death. Thus perhaps due to the double defilement of sacred space and clothing of the gods by the impurity of death (black impurity) and blood (red impurity), Amaterasu finally shut herself away in the sacred cave, Ama-no-iwato.

This was a cavern with enough room inside for a person to live in seclusion, but at the same time, a hoto in itself. Pooling their knowledge, the gods plotted to carry out rituals and perform sacred kagura music and dance at the mouth of this cave symbolizing the pudendum, to summon Amaterasu back. Ame-no-koyane, ancestral god of the Nakatomi clan, performed a Shinto prayer, while the goddess Ame-no-uzume performed a lewd dance while brandishing bamboo leaves. Possessed, she began to leap about in frenzied fashion, exposing her breasts and genitals. A ripple of laughter ran through the gods witnessing this divine striptease, and mystified by the hubbub outside, Amaterasu peeked out of the cave, returning light to the world.

This is said to be the festival of the winter solstice, showing the death and rebirth of the spirit/sun, held when light from the sun is at its weakest. It is also the origin myth of kagura, and popularly, of the strip show, with its revealing of private parts.

To my mind, this entire story is enveloped in hoto. It starts with the death of the weaver when her hoto is pierced, then the chief goddess Amaterasu hides in a cave that is itself a hoto, then Ame-no-uzume exposes her hoto in front of this hoto (cave), going into a trance and succeeding in summoning the sun goddess from inside. This is why the tale has been called a story of opening and closing of the hoto. All of which demonstrates how important the female genitalia were deemed as a mythic space.

Still buzzing from the eruption I'd experienced on Mt. Unzen, I drove to the town of Kazusa on the Unzen Peninsula, because I had heard there was a temple there known as the Iwato Kannon, dedicated to the goddess Kannon. This temple, which goes by the name of Gankuji, has the honorific mountain prefix (sango) of Iwatoyama. Apparently the whole of this Iwatoyama was until a few centuries ago a small island floating in the sea off the tip of a point. The Iwato Kannon in question was not enshrined in the main hall of the temple, but on a cliff near the summit of Iwatoyama. Climbing up the steep cliff with the aid of handrail and chain, I found a rock indeed the shape of a woman's parts, with a hole in it. Without thinking I clapped my hands in prayer, and it was in that moment I understood why that place was known as the Iwato Kannon, and a major Kannon pilgrimage site.

Entering, I found a cavern large enough for about thirty people. Small stone Buddhas were enshrined in a semicircle inside the cavern, and at the back, occupying a central position, stood a small shrine dedicated to the Kannon Bosatsu (Bodhisattva). Reciting a Shinto prayer and the Heart Sutra, I had a visceral sense that this space truly was a hoto. Like Sefa-Utaki in Okinawa, from the end of this cave, one could gaze across the ocean and worship the sight of the morning sun shining in. Beyond that sea where the sun rises is the other world known variously as the Heavenly Fields, Tokoyo, Haha-no-Kuni, Ne-no kuni-soko-no-kuni and Nirai-kanai. The union of light from the sun and female parts of the land, the joining of heavenly shaft of light and hole in the ground: the Kannon Bosatsu was enshrined in a location where such topographical congress is achieved.

Why are the private parts of a woman, that is, the pudendum, known as "Kannon-sama"? Female genitalia feature prominently in the forms of the clay figures and vessels of the Jomon period, indicating

that over tens of thousand of years, cumulative human knowledge and experience had concluded that this was the entry and exit for the opposites of life and death.

The same cannot be said for Christian missionary and author of Historia de Japam, Luís Fróis. Having climbed up to this Iwato Kannon, he and his followers smashed the stone Buddhas and Kannon figure in the cave, viewing it as a magnet for idolatry. Doubtless when he discovered that the Japanese worshiped female genitalia as the goddess Kannon, Fróis was startled to learn of such a barbarian and unenlightened custom, and seized with a powerful sense of destiny, concluded that there could be no better argument for spreading the word about an almighty, omniscient and omnipotent God, and His all-pervasive love. This idea though was very much misplaced. Fróis and his ilk failed entirely to comprehend the mythical knowledge of the Japanese around the hoto. And eventually, the Japanese also lost their own grasp of such fundamental knowledge.

What the works of Shigeo Toya thrust before us are the dismantling and rebirth of such knowledge and imagination. His work *Trunk* (1989) is at once elephant's trunk, and pudendum. The work's superficial form of an elephant's trunk, is deeply enmeshed with another shape at a deeper level: that of female private parts. Other works from the same year such as *Death of Kiln of the Elephant of the Woods* and *Twenty-Eight Death*, also *Something There* (1986), *Magic Symbol* (1985), *Magic Symbol* again from 1988, as well as *Spring* and *Gate of Wind*, resonate at a primeval level with what I have described as the eros of the cunnus, or the mythical wisdom surrounding it.

The forest is not a uniform hue, but home to a kaleidoscope of colors. It is a complex system that encompasses multiple dimensions of information, and great diversity of life.

Toya's writings stimulate our imagination every bit as much as his sculptures. They show us the impenetrability of forests. Allow me finally to quote three of my favorites.

> After making the work entitled *Magic Symbol*, I was in the forest. A dazzling ray of light shone through the leaves. I dubbed that tiny opening on the boundary of heavens and woods "a rectum of light." Just as a rectum in the land is known as a spring.
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> In those days, the hills were our playground. In a hollow about 100 meters below the ridge stood a massive cedar—that seemed particularly special. The roots of that tree were always damp, with little pools of water, and green moss growing. I would secretly urinate in those pools.
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> One stormy night, I stood on a road running along a narrow valley, and faced the forest. The forest was a giant black mass, writhing and raging. That rage was no superficial thing, but emanating from deep within. A huge creature was already swallowing the storm. I got back in the car, slowly, so as not to be noticed by this raging, mad thing.

All the things described here are secret inner rituals exchanged between Shigeo Toya himself, and the

forest. In the manner that artists, having communed with nature and society and other, invisible, things, turn a form into a work as their own necessity dictates, here Toya left the form of his communing with the forest in single acts. One of those acts was naming, one urinating, one driving his car. Thus he was not swallowed up by the forest, did not simply fuse with the forest, but engaged with, confronted the forest using words as a channel, or the act of urinating as a medium, or the machine/car as tool, dominating it as a single individual. While living symbiotically in the forest, he radiates an independent will.

In this he resembles his works such as *Wavering Pillar* and *Vertical Column*. Influenced by the force of nature but not buried in it, standing straight, albeit swaying. This straight swaying makes twisting, swirling curves that send cracks through the forest and swamp, sewing it up, covering it, appearing at once to be both an external rhythm of nature, and the movement of inner human ideas and emotions.

The ancients compared pillars (hashira) to edges, to chopsticks, to bridges. They also counted gods as one pillar, two pillars.... This was the tip of a place, and at the same time a medium or channel connecting here and there, and a way of enumerating the gods themselves. Just as the likes of Izanami and Susanoo traversed the forests of the netherworld and the mother world, in the beyond, the other world, or the forests and swamps, Shigeo Toya offers life and death in motion, as swaying pillars that race ahead, come to a halt, copulate, swirl. Receiving those oscillating pillars, perhaps foreign bodies, perhaps fetuses, forest and swamp in turn begin to hum and sway, a sight not unlike the Onbashira Festival at Suwa Shrine in Toya's native Shinshu. In a sense his very creative act could be described as an Onbashira Festival.

The forest/pudendum/wetland is a space of living/dying with those oscillating pillars, and a place of life and death constantly, quietly, humming in endless transformation.

(Associate Professor, Musashigaoka Junior College)

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Translated by Pamela Miki