

Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue
Interview Shiratama Hitsujiya and Kanayo Ueda

“To Hesitate, To Wander, To Mourn”

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A Rehearsal for the Sake of Mourning

Tokyo is the eastern most capital. I believe you can say it is so geographically. And when you look at the successive capitals of all ages and places; as the ancient city of Babylon which was destroyed by floods, or the Mesopotamia plain once a land full of green turned into desert, have become ruins not keeping the feature of the capital city as it once was and the repeated turmoil of war in the capital city of the ancient Kyoto, fire destroying the majority of the city area, the center of the politics shifted to the east, without being once destroyed, it may not be called a capital.

"Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue" has seen within Tokyo the ruins and the signs with its own eyes. In the town of Ekoda, the market place which continued since the black market closed in 2014.

Aogashima the southernmost island of the Izu archipelago, the history of the islanders who needed to evacuate their island due to the great volcanic eruption in 1785 and finally able to KANJYU/*return* after 50 years. And still the volcanic activity continues.

The former village Ogochi of Okutama town now buried under water, a dam constructed in 1957 for water to service the citizens of Tokyo, lies at the bottom of Lake Okutama.

The turning point within the gap of loss and regeneration taking place every day, that time, we call this as "*mourning*"; which we were active in 2015. I have summarized this in this booklet "*To Hesitate, To Wander, To Mourn*". A rehearsal for the sake of "*mourning*" shall continue.

Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue: Shiratama Hitsujiya, Director

Kanayo Ueda and Shiratama Hitsujiya 2016 Interview Second Lunar Month

Ueda of Kamagasaki and Hitsujiya of Ekoda first met on February of 2016,
"Interview Travelogue 2016 Spring Edition"

The interview was based on their thought on each of their activities, a talk that only they would be able to discuss, along with photos taken of Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue's research on "Ekoda Soup".

Shiratama Hitsujiya

Shiratama was born in 1967 in Hokkaido and dropped out from Meiji University. She is the Artistic Director for Yubiwa Hotel, Director of Tokyo, Soup, Blanket and Travelogue, Playwright, Director and Actress. Her representative works include: "Long Distance Love" a simultaneous performances project between New York and Tokyo via Internet during the terrorist attack 911 in 2001, the play "Candies" toured in North America and Europe in 2006, and "Kozui" toured four cities in Brazil in 2012. "Annani Aishiattanoni" was performed on the beach at the Setouchi International Art Festival (The Setouchi Triennale) in 2013, and on the railroad at the Nakaboso International Art Festival (Ichihara Art x Mix) in 2014. In 2006, she was selected one of "The 100 Most influential Japanese Women in the World" by Newsweek Japan and made the cover of the magazine. www.yubiwahotel.com

Kanayo Ueda

Kanayo Ueda is a Poet and Poetic Activist. Kanayo was born in 1969. Started writing poetry at the age of 3 and recited poetry at the age of 17. In 1992 established a poetry workshop. In 2001 traveling across the country held workshops "Declaration of Poetic Activities" on how to develop various methods of poetry.

In 2003 established Cocoroom on a theme of "Expression, Self-Reliance, Work and Society", an investigation on the relation of society and self-expression.

In 2008 in Nishinari district (popular name: Kamagasaki) opens a make believe coffee shop. Participated in the "Yokohama Triennale 2014" as a representative of Kamagasaki University of Arts. A Representative of Cocoroom a NPO corporation "A room for KOE voice, KOTOBA words, and KOKORO mind/heart. Researcher at Osaka City University on Urban Research Study. 2014 Recommended as the New Face Award, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.
<http://www.cocoroom.org/>

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Hitsujiya: **“Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue” is almost 3 years** and at last we finally reached a phase where we have embarked on an interview with Ms. Kanayo Ueda, I do not know what this will set out, but I feel that this will be a special day.

I would like to introduce the project “Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue” as a start of our interview. The project started with my personal incident.

In 2012 my cat that I was together with forever passed at the age of 22. Well, he had a full life and my friends, also friends with my cat, all came together when he passed.

The last 5 days while I was nursing him, a dozen of my friends one after another stopped by, some of them brought me a large pan of soup and while others brought their work material with them to stay with me.

The last 5 days before my cat passed, while surrounding the cat, we talked about how we should hold a funeral, maybe have it stuffed or even eat its ear.

At the same time our discussion developed into how we would like our after death to be like, nowadays cremation is our only choice but points made were that they do not want to be baked and preferred to be buried in soil or the sea is a better.

After one's death we entrust others with ourselves. My cat gave us the time to discuss this with my friends. While giving thanks to the cat for giving us this opportunity, we dug a hole with a scoop, with flowers and tuna; we buried him under a cheery tree of the cat's daily walk area.

The last 5 days while approaching the cat's death, that time with my friends was the period of *“mourning”*. And then, after having lost something that has always been there, I reached a major crisis in my life. It may have been a catharsis. It has been about 4 years but I still can't free myself from this feeling. Anyways, while going through this crisis or in the middle of my catharsis, I started the Tokyo Art Project. In fact it is the “Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue”. This Tokyo based project is, once again, to look back at the obvious life that passes in Tokyo. From Hokkaido I came to Tokyo to enter a university, soon after I met my cat and at that time Tokyo seemed futuristic to me, even aboard “Tokyo” is the place to go then “Japan”. Anyone can pronounce “toh-kee-oh”. I felt as though Japan is not related to Tokyo. But now it seems as though I am walking among ruins, as though it is dying.

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So, in that case what should be done about *"mourning"* Tokyo? Having been influenced by the mourning of my cat, I may have simply related this experience to Tokyo itself. However, this motivation still continues, than why not take this point of view and analyze Tokyo from its roots. I do not know how far I should delve into this root but when thinking of the future, I feel that the future is a part of the past. Until I can see the future I intend to dig up the past.

As a part of this thinking, last year I visited Aogashima. It is the southernmost island of Izu and so far as it goes it is Tokyo. It is the least populated village in Tokyo with approximately 170 people living there. From Hachijojima I took an eight seater helicopter and at the same time as I landed a typhoon hit island; I observed their life, experienced the nature there and listened to their story. I still have relations with the people whom I met there and still intently watch Aogashima.

And this year I went to the westernmost part of Tokyo, the Okutama Lake. It is an artificial lake where most of the drinking water for Tokyo comes from.

Before the artificial lake there was a village called Oguchi where people lived and in 1957 for the purpose of supplying water to the metropolitan Tokyo it is now under water.

And then there is Ekoda. The town called Ekoda is near to Ikebukuro. On the Seibu Ikebukuro Line near the Ekoda station is my home base and once a month I walk around town which I named it "Ekoda Soup" program, every month on the 17th on the anniversary of the death of my cat.

I normally write and produce plays and have a theatrical company called "Yubiwa Hotel", well maybe not a theatrical company more like a series of productions. We do perform at theatres but we also perform on tennis courts, bookstores and abolished factories. Recently, we have participated at the Setoichi Triennale, the *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, performed in the sea and even in a tunnel.*

I base my work on the memory of the places which I have visited. On the other hand, I have not based my plays on "Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue" not that the opportunity hasn't come up to make a play; it may be that the timing of creating a work didn't match up. Based on the theme of *"mourning"*, for some reason this time I have prepared a table setting.

As I have mentioned the word *"mourning"*, I would like to hear other people's thoughts on mourning. *"Mourning"* is something like a gap or a road; it is mid-way to a place where one listens to a story. A meal together to contemplate on the mourning of people and things, I would like to continue our talk as we eat.

I will be doing the interview but as a symbol between me and the interviewee I have set a table. The setting of the table is not only for a meal but to sense the person who has passed resting there.

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Including me, four artists have participated in this table setting based on the theme of "*mourning*". The titles respectively are: "the spring equinox, the autumnal equinox, the summer solstice, the winter solstice", boundary line of the four seasons.

The spring equinox and the autumnal equinox is OHIGAN (a visit to the graves and hold a memorial service for ancestors), to invite and to see off the person who has passed. The Japanese believe that it is the time where one can meet the spirit of the dead. During the summer solstice and winter solstice, during ancient times, the spirits would increase or decrease during these seasons and is the time to repose of souls.

Even though the way of thinking from present day and ancient times has changed, to include the summer solstice and winter solstice, in relation to things which we have parted with or the things which we have lost, the moment that we may meet again we have named them "*mourning*" of the spring equinox, the autumnal equinox, the summer solstice, the winter solstice". Please see the following. (Pointing to the art works of "*mourning*")

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Hitsujiya: I would like to introduce Kanayo Ueda. She's from the west called Kamagasaki. Hello.

Ueda: Yes, hello. I'm from Kamagasaki, Nishinari, Osaka. In fact, this is the first time that I'm meeting Ms. Hitsujiya; we've decided on this interview without having a meeting beforehand and now here we're sitting next to each other. Thank you for having me.

Hitsujiya: Thank you for coming.

Ueda: While listening to your story, many things came to mind. **I'm actually a poet.**

Hitsujiya: OK.

Ueda: Yes, the Japanese word 詩SHI (poetry) consists of the particle 言 GONBEN (say/word) and 寺TERA (temple), and is pronounced "SHI", the same pronunciation as the word death死 in Japanese. I believe having the same pronunciation is not just a coincidence. So, the word poem and the word death having the same sound has a significant meaning, being around death, makes you want to express this in various forms. For example, I have organized a poem recital at a graveyard. Not on my own, but with other people, we gather together at a graveyard, I ask everyone to find a gravestone which they may like, to sit down and compose a poem there, after 20 minutes we come back together. Then, we recite the poems we have composed. I organize projects of this kind. Some read the name of a person on the gravestone which they do not know, some make a poem as if they were writing a letter to an unknown person, and some write about the person close to them who has passed way. Everyone reads out loud the poem one has composed. Some starts crying, unable to read, but no one can read for another.

Hitsujiya: No one can help read the poem that one has composed?

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Ueda: Yes, the person who composed the poem must read their own poem. The poems made at this time, regardless if it's good or bad, skilled or awkward does not matter, the poems composed are considerably personal. Therefore, we wait until they can read their own poem. So, the word "*mourning*" is the main theme today. I believe because you having the technique of writing a play, undoubtedly "*mourning*" has some kind of significant relation with your plays. While experiencing the mapping out of the process of this project, I would like to know how you have tied "*to mourn*", "*to be mourned*" and "*want to mourn*" to your plays.

Hitsujiya: **Yes. We have our own view of life and death in Japanese we call this SHISEIKAN.** In Japanese we write the character 死 (death), 生 (to be born) and 観 (view). I believe everyone has their own opinion. In my case, from my work I'm able to see my SHISEIKAN as others mention this in reviews on my play. I believe that you often realize this for the first time when told by others. I couldn't have known it on my own. When thinking it over, we tend to think of life as a straight line from the time we are born, to the time we die, but it might be spiral, like climbing up a spiral stairs isn't it?

I try to capture the thought's images and hypothesis on imaginary scenery by using people and words; sometimes create an existence of a variant in a play, like having zombie like characters come out. In some zombie movies, we often see a scene where zombies gather at a supermarket as though they are shopping. Even after becoming zombies, they still do the same thing as they used to do as they were alive, the humor, the stupidity and the fear of the things "we didn't understand why we were doing them when we were alive." I use the characters of the zombies to say these thoughts in lines. I produce plays as such. However, "*mourning*" is like a ceremony isn't it? I haven't been able to make a play about it. If we categorize a play into one of the Japanese fundamental understandings of time in life, as "HARE" referring to the extraordinary, ceremonialism or non-everyday while "KE" referring to the ordinary or everyday conception of time, A play belongs to HARE, "*mourning*" is "KE" if it becomes a play, it would be a paradigm shift.

Ueda: Giggle.

Hitsujiya: **Well, so how many hundreds of people have you mourned?**

Ueda: Well, hmm. I've never tried counting. Sometimes I'm able to be with them when they pass, sometimes send them off, sometimes I'm told that they have already passed and sometimes I hear that there is no hope, so many people have died in Kamagasaki.

Hitsujiya: Do they come there to die?

Ueda: No, it is merely aging of its population. The population density of Kamagasaki is the highest in Japan, so it's natural that there are a lot of deaths. I just remembered something that we discussed concerning ceremonialism. Sometimes, I receive a vision from the place where I am. I manage a make believe coffee shop called "Cocoroom". It is a small place built during the Taisho period. One day, when I couldn't finish my work I stayed there until dawn, while I was dozing off, suddenly the place sent me a vision saying; "the place used to be like this". In a cloud of dust, there were many people carrying fishing poles on their shoulders and selling fish, the place said; "it used to be lively".

Hitsujiya: Wasn't it a dream?

Ueda: I feel like it wasn't a dream. Sometimes I experience such things, a place sends me a vision, it is as though the place is trying to communicate something between the dead and living. I want to be conscious of the things in between the straight lines of the dead and the living. That is why I would like to reveal this "something" in between.

Hitsujiya: Yes, yes.

Ueda: I love to ask people to compose poems; I developed a method and named it "KOKORO NO TANE TO SHITE" (*A seed of the heart*). Two people interview each other and compose poems. I have them compose a poem from their conversation with each other. One holds the seed and then passes it on; in that way it is circulated, which is my hope.

Hitsujiya: I just received your collection of poems.

Ueda: Another story about "*mourning*", in Kamagasaki there are many people who have caused trouble to those close to them. Escaping or leaving their families.

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So often, their families or their bereaved families do not want to see them again. Even when the police inform them of their death, many do not want to take custody of the deceased, and there's no response from the family for about half a year. In the meantime, the decision of what to do with the corpse are being made, they are cryopreserved. So on the day of the funeral there's water drops dripping from the coffin.

Hitsujiya: They 're thawing.

Ueda: Yes, thawing. I see a lot of bodies like that. They are frozen, kept frozen for half a year, and at the end the bereaved families decides not to take custody , then finally a funeral can be held. But, it doesn't necessarily mean that the deceased didn't want to see their families who they left.

Cocoroom is a café, but we also serve alcohol as well. Maybe because of the alcohol, they open up to us. They start with "well actually", and talk about their feelings for their family they left. His son might think that his father left him. It's true that he has but at the same time he was thinking of him, I believe it would be better to tell his son at that last moment of his father's feelings. Is it meddling? But, it is not easy to decide how to tell those bereaved families who I have never met before.

Hitsujiya: Hmm...

Ueda: **One of them is Ichiro or his nickname is Ichiro.** Do you see him? (Showing a photo album) This tough-looking guy, we weren't informed of his death for about two months, he died alone. Even though Ichiro had a family, we were unable to meet them. Because his family thought Ichiro was in trouble and that he may have had debts or committed a crime.

Hitsujiya: They didn't want to get involved, did they?

Ueda: Yes, the police said that they never want to be informed of him. But I have made thirty photo albums of him (Showing the photo album). I know there's a very little possibility but I made these albums for the hope that it might reach his son someday.

Hitsujiya: We do want to tell his story, what Ichiro thought and what his family thought. Someday the photo album might bring their thoughts together.

Ueda: I know I'm such a busy body. I think that if the sense of one's existence is regarded as important then it becomes important.

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The people of Kamagasaki have taught me this. As a return gift, I made the albums to express the fact that "Yes, we value your life."

Hitsujiya: It will take time. I might be obsessed about his bereaved family, but hope that the message will be delivered to his family, what his father was like after he came to Kamagasaki.

Ueda: I hope so too. **There are various older men talking about their various lives.** For example, this one guy said he has three children, and the eldest son committed suicide. Despite of this, because he was busy with his job he didn't pay any attention to his family. After his son committed suicide, his wife must have had a hard time but did nothing to console his family. Now that thing has come to pass. While crying he says his wife's name every day. Also cries and yearns for his children.

Hitsujiya: It seems as though it's RAKUGO (Japanese traditional storytelling)

Ueda: Well, his third daughter as a baby suffered from an intractable disease and needed expensive injections every day; it cost a lot of money. At the time, he was a truck driver and decided to sell his truck. It sold for 2 million yen. This was 20 some years ago. Nevertheless, after having sold the truck, their life became considerably difficult and then the relation between his family members became worse. And now, the third daughter doesn't speak to him. He has heard that his daughter has said; "My father is terrible." He comes to the café to have a drink and talks about such things.

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Hitsujiya: Do women come to Cocoroom?

Ueda: Yes, we have women customers. In a sense you can say they are strong-minded

Hitsujiya: I see. So they don't cry while they talk about their story? Like the story I just heard, about leaving their families or not being able to face their family? Why do women go there?

Ueda: For women, there are many cases. Some of them have psychological disorders.

Hitsujiya: They sever ties to be there right?

Ueda: I think in part it's that they come because it is easier to live here. There are some in very terrible situations. There is a lady now who I'm concerned about; when I run into her on the street, she comes up and starts to blur out her story in one breathe. There are some who are in very severe situations.

Hitsujiya: Do you mean her livelihood?

Ueda: Well, her livelihood and circumstances surrounding her. But I really don't know what to do in her situation.

Hitsujiya: Yes, about 10 years ago, I produced a play with people who were physically handicapped, in wheelchairs and people who have sexual disorders considered as minorities to the public. At that time I recruited people to participate. For the requirement to participate I wrote; "I will use the term 'disabled' on purpose, looking for those who accept their disability, and furthermore believes that their disability is beautiful". It might have been a bit defiant. Because at that time or even still now, for example at a school for the blind, art with the handicapped person was done in collaboration with an artists and the handicapped children's intention to participate was secondary. That was something that I didn't want. I wanted to meet those people who would come on their own free will. One of the participants, a man who lived his life in a wheelchair, at that time in his sixties, who passed away last year, said; "I've gained life, I'm here because now I want culture". They want culture after having obtained life. Now you may call it as "arts" but we were able to have a variety of self-motivated participants including sexual minorities and also people with eating disorders. I still wonder about the disabled people who wanted culture, if a play would be sufficient? Contemplating, I started anyway. How about the people who visit Kamagasaki? They live and they write poems, is this what the community is like?

Ueda: Kamagasaki, alias the Airin district, is 0.62 square kilometers in size with a population of about 25,000. Among them, 10,000 people are on welfare and 85% of them are male. About 500 of them have no fixed address and live on the street. We regularly meet a lot of people who are welfare recipients. We certainly have contact with them, but it is not easy to do something together with our programs since they need to work such as collecting cans. But once a month we walk around in the evening and give out rice balls.

They sometimes turn up at the café, some of them like poems and haiku, they call me "teacher," they bring me their poem or haiku along with a little treat. What I feel from my relation with such people is that they know how to express one's life. Cocoroom is a café like place, people show up for no reason or they may be on welfare, it provides a space for programs and opportunities but many of the people we encounter their lives are unstable. For example, I organize a chorus named "Kamagasaki Chorus." Recently, we are frequently invited to sing. They say; "come and sing for us", at that time lunch boxes are served, all of a sudden the number of members increases.

Hitsujiya: Food is important!

Ueda: Yes it is! At the beginning, many of them may have joined for some reason or another, nonetheless they meet new people, we have them laughing and some of them are moved to tears. Also it is interesting to meet people from different age groups. I believe these are the reasons why they come to sing. But still many are advanced in age and their physical conditions are not stable, some are hospitalized and some pass away; after getting to know these people, I worry about them. After we have been able to meet each other it is quite lonely when we do not see them anymore. When the choir was invited to the Yokohama Triennale in 2014, one of the members who became close to us had terminal cancer.

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As we were preparing for the Triennale, he passed away the day before we went to Yokohama. I was with him at his last hour. About a month before his passing, **he said to me, "I'm always sleeping; the ceiling is so white I feel so lonely."** We often practiced calligraphy with everyone so I asked him, "Shall I put the calligraphies we wrote on the ceiling?" "Yes, he said a lot of them, please". I put many of the calligraphies from various people on the ceiling of his narrow room.

Hitsujiya: It must have been a magnificent view.

Ueda: Yes. When I visited him a few days later, he had written letters and put them on each of the calligraphies. He said; "I wrote each person a reply." "After I die, the calligraphies should be returned to each person so I wrote a letter of my thought as I looked at each of the calligraphy." Isn't it amazing?

Hitsujiya: He had the will to live until he finished writing; I wonder if a body possesses a will. They were handwritten, right?

Ueda: Of course, they were handwritten.

Hitsujiya: For instance, the calligraphy "blue sky", he wrote something in regard to sky...

Ueda: He wrote some kind of reply.

Hitsujiya: Like a poem as a return gift.

Ueda: Yes. He wrote responses to people he didn't even know. It was his final days but the responses he made and because many people were involved he was able to let go a little. I believe that having been able to let go he was able to complete his life. We were able to be with him in his last moment. That is, his death opened things for us.

I realized that we learned the richness of living and dying from him. **Life and death is to let go, to settle and to open**

Ueda: And his story continues. The following day, I went to YOKOTORI, his scent of death still remaining on my hands. But left it as it was and started to prepare for the exhibit. I stood in front of the wall which I planned to put the works and I said; "I want to paint on the wall." I talked to the volunteers about a conversation that I had with him, it was a story of the ocean in Wakayama. I said to them; "I will draw a line of the wave of the ocean, please add your drawings on to it." They drew the waves on top of my line of waves. It was almost 8 meters. The big waves were being added. After a while I returned and the beautiful ocean of Wakayama was completed. At that moment, in the corner of the exhibition, I felt him grinning and winking at me. I felt confident that the exhibition at Yokohama Triennale would be successful. I just remembered this.

Hitsujiya: Does it still remain? Or was it removed after the exhibition?

Ueda: It was dismantled.

Hitsujiya: Hmm

Ueda: Hmm

Hitsujiya: Too bad, oh well. Cocoroom is a place where many things happen, people have said to me; "you should visit and meet Kanayo". And while being recommended, I haven't had the opportunity to visit and now this April I've heard Cocoroom will be renewed. **Is Cocoroom a part of the visitor's daily routine?** Or it's not a daily routine; I wouldn't go as far as saying it's a festival but something different?

Ueda: I think it's a kind of a daily routine. As we pretend to be a café, we are basically open from 10 AM to 7 or 8 PM daily. When we have programs, we often rent other venues. People come to our café even if there are no events, so Cocoroom is a part of the daily life. Everyday places are very important. If you know that a place is just HARE (extraordinary, ceremonial or non-everyday) and it is there only for a little while, right. Even after the HARE, it is important to have a usual place to go, a place that functions normally.

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Hitsujiya: At the theatre, people who perform and people who come to see the play only gather together at that time. If we had some place where we could spend trivial time together, it could be considered as a daily routine, right? Besides our private time, there are only few places where we can spend a part of our daily life. This could be an alley or a street, but if a place were made artificially, it would be odd. I believe that Cocoroom has naturally made a place that has a daily routine, but what kind of café did you want initially?

Ueda: The café was predetermined. The current space is very small, with no room for an office. I usually sit at the narrower space of the L-shaped counter but the staff has to move to another area once the place gets crowded. We have nowhere to go, but stay there.

Hitsujiya: How large is the space?

Ueda: The counter sits about six people and there is a small 4.5 tatami size raised space with a low dining table.

As the salary of the staff is low, we serve them lunch and dinner and we eat together there. We ask customers to pay 700 yen for meals.

It's a place like that!

Hitsujiya: It looks delicious.

Ueda: Yes, it is. We have calligraphies that everyone wrote on the ceiling. Nowadays, people tend to eat alone. You eat by yourself, right. But here, at the low dining table, we can put 10 people max; we have them eat cram packed in that space.

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Hitsujiya: Did you intend to make the café like that?

Ueda: Actually, I did.

Hitsujiya: Did you expect that such people would come when you opened the café?

Ueda: That's right, I did. So, it has only been a few years that we clearly state that this café is a "make believe kind of café". I felt guilty for the people who run a real café, so now it's a kind of like café. There was a time when many of the staffs quit and there was nothing I could do about it. I wrote on a big piece of paper; **"how to spend time at the Cocoroom, it is a participatory type café, please do anything that you can do."** Some of the incomprehensible point noted was that because it's a café, and pay money it necessarily doesn't mean you get anything you want. I decided and asked; "let's work together".

Hitsujiya: But if you pay money, you still provide food, a place and time, right?

Ueda: A lot of people who cannot pay come as well.

Hitsujiya: Have you been asked if it's charity?

Ueda: Of course, just saying its NPO, it's serious. NPO is where the country gives subsidiary funds and to the Kamagasaki older men, they believe that we must give serve to everyone. We tell them that, "we don't do that anymore."

Hitsujiya: Is water self-service?

Ueda: Yes. But some of the people like the homeless are sensible. They do not come often, and when they do they bring a small gift.

Hitsujiya: A small gift, I see.

Ueda: There is no sign "Free Consultation" anywhere, but every possible problem you can imagine are brought in. It's really surprising. Like, "Please help find a runaway person". I'm not a detective.

Hitsujiya: For some of the cases, does your staff including yourself try to solve the problems if you can?

Ueda: Yes

Hitsujiya: Wow.

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Ueda: Well no, it's a bit different than giving them solutions, when someone has a problem, they don't know where to go for advice, in many cases it can be solved if one knows where to go for consultation. But many have trouble because they do not know where to go. For example, some were scolded at a municipal office, or some could not write. They believe "this place will help us," they come to the café with lots of unreasonable demands. We say; "it sounds tough" or heave a sigh. What's great about Kamagasaki is that there are many organizations with various experienced people.

Hitsujiya: Depending on the problems, do you allocate this to specific organizations?

Ueda: Yes, because with the organizations assistance, the lives of the person who came for advice are put in order. And they come to have coffee and are able to tell us, "I am fine." I believe to have another third place is very important.

Hitsujiya: I totally agree with you.

Ueda: In a sense, Cocoroom is like a theatre. It is not exaggeration to say that it's a play without a script.

Hitsujiya: Are there any good actors?

Ueda: There are so many. Giggle.

Hitsujiya: Like your choir, they practice as well.

Ueda: Well we do practice. But then when something happens like a subsidy cut, "what should we do"? We need to pay the teacher. I ask them "can everybody make a little contribution? Suddenly participants decrease. I feel, "not even 300 yen"? Phew~

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But it somehow continues. It's good to get together at least once a month, including confirming their well-being.

Hitsujiya: Like a survival confirmation. By the way, a new Cocoroom will be opening in the neighborhood, isn't it?

Ueda: Yes. I'm planning to open a guesthouse where you can stay the night. I'm not sure how it will unfold.

Hitsujiya: **How many years since the opening of the first Cocoroom?**

Ueda: It's already 14 years

Hitsujiya: 14 years! Your life work which you're doing now, do you think this will continue beyond this point? Do you believe that there can be a time when it will not be necessary anymore?

Ueda: I believe it will take another 300 years. I hope that it might be the first step of the 300 years; it's a feeling of sort. I intend to experiment and inspect this a little more.

Hitsujiya: 14 years of 300 years.

Ueda: Yes, it's still a baby.

Hitsujiya: I've been doing "Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue" for only 2 years, it's just a toddler.

Ueda: Right, but anyway we need to begin.

Hitsujiya: Yes, I think so. My plays are my heartland, but one day, I started thinking, "the theatre is too small for me". I may have needed a reason to touch something distantly removed from the theatre like "Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue". But, I've already fly out from the theatre. I stick out.

Ueda: Ha,ha,ha.

Hitsujiya: Well, I wanted a different field than the theatre, partly for fun. But I wanted to challenge something new and to continue to work in the usual way. We will see what will happen.

Ueda: That's why you watch the details of your daily life; like this, that and the other. In my case, they're words or poems, but for some time I've thought; "there is a gap between the daily life and poems, I like this gap". The gap is important. Because, I thought I could find everything in the gap, but from just last year, I've started to feel that it would be unbearable if you were stuck in the gap.

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I realized that “**while I’m in between, I want to go through the gap.**” I’ve been working to create something everlasting; I realized that at times to pursue putting in the expression of going through the gap makes it continuous.

Hitsujiya: Kanayo, you’re good at finding the gap, you find it easily. You stand still in it, make a nice gap and then boom you go through it.

Ueda: But, it’s not “me” in particular.

Hitsujiya: To receive a vision, it’s feels like you’re being pushed by someone.

Ueda: Yes. It’s like going through something, and then I feel I am in between a new gap.

Hitsujiya: Excuse me, I just been notified that “it’s time”.

Ueda: Oh yes, there is the gap or interval in time too.

Hitsujiya: Yes, the word間MA (gap, in between or interval), 時JI (hour) and時JI hour’s gap or interval, which make the word time時間 JIKAN. Kanayo, it’s nice meeting you and thank you very much for speaking a great deal with us.

Ueda: Thank you.

About "Mourning"

Hajime Ito, Assistant Director, Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue

The project *Blanket* from Aogashima has moved to the next stage. Initially, we planned to go to Hokkaido and shear wool from sheep to make blankets by ourselves. But, having looked for a connection between making blankets and observing the ending of places, we decided to focus our attention on Okutama in Tokyo where it produces silkworms. There used to be a village named Oguchi in Okutama that was buried under a dam in 1957. We are on our second year of researching near the area of where the buried village was. What we observed by spending time in Okutama, we saw the process of the end and the form of life style which transferred from there. We were able to see the beginning of change of this area.

Having experienced this research, and as the stories pile up every month on "*Ekoda Soup*", the theme "*mourning*" was born. It's like a table setting placed right next the stories when talking about a loss of a person, a thing or time.

Seasons are very important in our daily lives. We focus on the 24 divisions of the solar term which was used for a long period of time. We've picked the spring equinox, the autumnal equinox, the summer solstice, the winter solstice from the term, and asked four artists including Shiratama Hitsujiya to participate on a work of what they think if being placed in a situation of mourning. The outcome of this activity became "*The Mourning*."

The works are to be placed while having a meal and discussing about the end of something. Possibly it may be practiced routinely among close friends. By using our work as an intermediary, we would like people to take a short break which is a bit more formal than usual. This is our proposal put into our work "*The Mourning*".

Photograph: Discussion of Travelogue Autumn 2015; photo of the film during a discussion of "*mourning*". (ceramic works shown by Tetsuro Kano)

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Posters of *"Mourning"*

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Introduction of Artists for "Mourning"

(Includes the period and the comments on the work)

"Spring Equinox" (Ceramics, Glass, Wood)

Tetsuro Kano, Artist

When is the moment when sceneries change? There are no such things that always stays the same or flat. Transformation is the intention of someone and is the end result. Once we have accepted this, we are finally able to realize the changes of the sceneries in front of us.

"Summer Solstice" (Ballpoint pen, Paper)

Tsubasa Takahashi, Ballpoint Pen Artist

I draw with only one color a gel ink 0.4mm ballpoint pen. From trace of the container the color of ink has begun to blur, I created a dining table yearning the existence of "the thing that have been there before me."

"Winter Solstice" (Acrylic mirror laser-cutting)

Erika Kobayashi, Author, Cartoonist

It is the angle of the sun in the winter solstice.

"Autumnal Equinox" (Sailcloth, Embroidery Thread, Beads)

Shirotama Hitsujiya, Director of Tokyo Soup, Blanket and Travelogue

I made this by overlapping the original sceneries which everyone treasures on a dining table, the time spent in having a meal with someone or something which no longer exists and the hope that this will come to us in our daily life.

About Tokyo, Soup, Blanket and Travelogue

statement: comment by Shiroshima Hitsujiya, Director

For quite a long time Tokyo was a futuristic city for me. But now I believe that I walk among its historic remains. I am a habitant, I am a musician, both aspects of the note are exquisite but Tokyo is like a symphonic suite and its musical scores accelerate at a pace hard to keep up. Like a spring I would write down some of the musical rest.

project: Tokyo (habitat) + Soup (Meal) + Blanket (Clothes) + Travelogue (Mark)

These small themes are about lifestyle, each theme progresses simultaneous, each theme influences the other, dividing and unifying eventually they will become one large theme. The first theme titles are the four noted below.

Tokyo One box

Rolling a Dream Box in Tokyo

Ekoda Soup

Getting Lost in Ekoda

Tokyo labyrinth of crossroads

Aogashima Blanket

Viewing Tokyo from the Blue Japonesia Island

Travelogue

Examine Tokyo

Roll about, getting lost, view, and talk to Tokyo.

When these four projects have been rolling about, when accomplished our present world will stop in a moment and the time spent on the process will ask us in a three dimensional way. These are the kind of art projects which we are aiming for.

people: operation and creative

Shiroshima Hitsujiya - Director, Kei Ito - Assistant Director, Kiyomi Miyahara - Chief Administrator, Yuko Itoyama / Yui Saito - Assistant Administrator, Ryo Kusanagi - Designer, Yoshinori Itoyama - Technical Director, Yusuke Nakazawa, Photographer

Organized by : Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture) , Yubiwa Hotel

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Tokyo, Soup, Blanket and Travelogue “To Hesitate, To Wander, To Mourn”

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Contact

Tokyo, Soup, Blanket and Travelogue Administrative Office

web <http://soupblanket.asia>

mail sec@soupblanket.asia

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About [Tokyo Artpoint Project]

In cooperation with various arts organizations and NPOs, Tokyo Artpoint Project pursues art projects with local community and citizen involvement as a way to foster an environment where everyone can be actively engaged in culture and to create and disseminate Tokyo’s charm. The project is organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture.

<https://www.artscouncil-tokyo.jp/en/>

Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture)

Kudan First Place 8F, 4-1-28, Kudanshita, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-0073

TEL 03-6256-8430

<http://www.artscouncil-tokyo.jp> E-MAIL info-ap@artscouncil-tokyo.jp