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Iro

A Phenomenology of Color and Desire

This essay is a phenomenological analysis of the meanings expressed by the character 色 (Jp. *iro*/*shiki*, Ch. *sè*). They include "color," "love," "eroticism," "sensuous beauty," and even "phenomenon." Is this overlap fortuitous, or can we reach a deep insight on these apparently disparate elements by reflecting on 色? Does the East Asian approach to color *qua* desire reveal something essential about both color and desire, heavily downplayed within European philosophy? I will address this phenomenological issue through five sections. First, we will consider Husserl's description of *plena* and Merleau-Ponty's reflection on sexuality as metaphysics; then, the role of color as a paradigm for emotion in Japanese aesthetics will be addressed. Both these discourses will offer a new perspective on the *Heart Sutra's* equation of 色 and "emptiness" (空). We will argue how and why Goethe's theory of color shows a distinct affinity with these Asian sources. Lastly, I will highlight the interplay of all these elements in Kuki Shūzō's *The Structure of Iki*. Color and eroticism are ultimately connected as the pre-formal and yet transcendental disclosure of the world: central paradigms for viewing experience itself as relation and immersion.

KEYWORDS: color—desire—phenomenology—Husserl—Goethe—Buddhism—Kuki Shūzō—Japanese philosophy—aesthetics

This text tries to approach philosophically what at first glance appears as a lexical problem: the complex intermingling of meanings in the Chinese and Japanese expressions of erotic love and color. Is there an insight to be gained observing how the experience of desire is bound with colorfulness, one of the elements of experience that is least available to abstraction, and thus mostly ignored by European philosophy? My answer is in the affirmative. Both desire and color are omnipresent aspects of reality. But they are also a form of "contingent universal": their omnipresence is only thinkable in a first-personal mode and within momentary relationships. They are ultimately "empty" in the Buddhist sense. This identity has, as we will see, relevant aesthetic and spiritual implications.

To begin, let us observe the Sinograph 色 (Ch.: *sè*, Jp.: *iro*/*shiki*). The character 色 refers at the same time to "color" and to "erotic love," "sensual beauty." In contemporary Japanese, the first sense is arguably perceived as primary,[1] but a graphic etymology of the character itself is that of "a bent woman and a man laying over her, during sexual intercourse."[2] Other ancient explanations of its components, such as that of the classic Chinese character dictionary『說文解字』(second century) and of further commentaries by the Qing dynasty philologist Duan Yucai (1735–1815), explain its two components by connecting "color" to the complexion of the human face, especially as manifestation of emotive states.[3] It is true that the human visage is one of the first places where we experience beauty: and despite its ephemeral

1. The Western idea of "love" imported during the Meiji period, stressing the non-sexual elements of the feeling, led the erotic *iro* to be associated to premodern Japan. The term employed to translate "love," *ai* 愛, originally had the negative sense of "obsession" and "greed" in Buddhist contexts (Ryang 2006, 33).

2. KD, 1484.

3. Fukatsu 1994, 24–5.

quality, the strength of its immediate affection is initially stronger than our impulse towards formal values such as virtue or truth. As Confucius lamented in the *Analects*:

> 吾未見好德如好色者也
>
> I have never seen the person who loved virtue the way he loved physical beauty.[4]

But this plurality of meaning is not limited to ancient sources: indeed, whatever common intuition of chromatic and erotic occurred in ancient Asia, it is still present in modern Japanese.

The character 色 alone will often simply mean "color" (also in the compound *shikisai* 色彩). But we also find expressions such as *iroke* 色気, "sexual desire," *iroppoi* 色っぽい, "sensuous," *irogoto* 色事, "love affair." The word *iroai* 色合い, "hue" or "shade," is a "meeting of colors": in Kabuki it refers to love affairs too. *Iro* is often embodied, referring to complexions: *keshiki/kishoku* 気色 is the expression of emotions on one's face, which effectively or metaphorically "colors" it, as for the Chinese etymologies. An "exchange of color," *shikitai* 色代 (sometimes also 色体, "color and body") refers to greetings and personal interaction. There is a common saying about the varieties of self-expression and taste: 十人十色, literally "for ten people, ten colors." In the duplicated form *iroiro* 色々, this character stands for unspecified qualitative variety. Other compounds refer to the chromatic variety of the world in an aesthetic sense. *Keshiki* 景色 is literally "shade and color," despite its common translation as "landscape": it originally referred to the atmospheric quality of seasonal colors and shadows, rather than to the figural character of a landscape.[5] In a Buddhist context, 色 is used to translate the Sanskrit *rūpa*: "phenomenon," "the phenomenal world" (see below, pages 211ff).

Beauty as form, desire as color

Seen from the perspective of Greek or European aesthetics, this joined stress on sensuality and color seemingly plays along a secular distinction between the "West" and the "Orient," one according to which the

4. *Analects* IX.18; tr. Watson 2007, 62.
5. Sasaki 2006.

cultural pre-eminence of the former is justified by its discovery and appreciation of rational forms. In his book *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor argues that a prejudice against color is a founding trait of what first makes up the "West" as an ideological locus of "whiteness":

> The notion that color is bound up with the fate of Western culture sounds odd, and not very likely. But this is what I want to argue: that color has been the object of extreme prejudice in Western culture. For the most part, this prejudice has remained unchecked and passed unnoticed. And yet it is a prejudice that is so all-embracing and generalized that, at one time or another, it has enrolled just about every other prejudice in its service.... As with all prejudices, its manifest form, its loathing, masks a fear: a fear of contamination and corruption by something that is unknown or appears unknowable. This loathing of color, this fear of corruption through color, needs a name: chromophobia.[6]

Before a claim so sweeping, finding counterexamples is surely possible. But in the genealogy beginning from Greek reflections, beauty has been indeed conceived as something first of all connected to the *formal* qualities of an object. As Derrida remembered, the fact itself of having a form has been equated with beauty: "form is transcendentally beautiful, since it is and makes things be, and that Being is Beautiful.... *Formosus* means beautiful."[7] Such "chromophobia," according to Batchelor, acted on two great lines: first, color was "made out to be the property of some 'foreign' body—usually the feminine, the Oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer, the pathological," while in the second it was "relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic,"[8] identified as a "secondary quality" already in Aristotle, and more crucially in modern European philosophy (see below, pages 199ff).

The destiny of sensual desire seems to have been similar. Even if Greek philosophy recognized *eros* as its fundamental impulse, in Plato and later in Christianity love and beauty were recast as a transcendent movement towards the unchanging world of true forms and virtue; as long as they were oriented towards what is contingent and transitory they had a lesser, or

6. Batchelor 2007, 22.
7. Derrida 1978, 20.
8. Batchelor 2007, 23.

even negative value. Unstable attraction towards particular, unique bodies or phenomena ought to be sublimated into *idea* or *eidos*, that is something with a *shape*.

One of the clearest and most influential descriptions of this vertical movement is Plato's *Symposium*:

> He who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms... and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms;... [he] will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty..., a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul..., but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting.[9]

This movement joins the epistemic, the aesthetic and the ethical. But by encouraging a certain contempt of the particular and the unique, all the non-formal elements of experience, color included, are reduced by Plato to a σμικρὸν, a "little thing." At the same time, the "love of the one" is rejected as something "violent." As Batchelor observes, the typical expression of prejudice or phobia is declaring its object both "sinister and superficial."[10] Plato's attitude fits in this pattern. This move is one of the founding expressions of Greek and European dualism, and the series of oppositions fitting in this mold is quite extensive:

"West"	Form	Rational	Mind	Universality	Transcendental *eros*
"East"	Color	Intuitive/emotive	Body	Particularity	Sensuous love

The aim of this paper, however, is not to defend or affirm elements of the second line as they are presented by this opposition. A non-formal, qualitative account of color and desire is in fact not a refusal of transcendence, but rather the acknowledgment of a different kind of transcendence *through* phenomena. Color and desire can in fact be gateways towards nonduality.

9. *Symposium* 209e5–212.
10. Batchelor 2000, 23.

To better substantiate this claim we will first try to understand them phenomenologically.

Colors and phenomenology

Phenomenology represented a significant discontinuity in the treatment of colors in European philosophy. Despite its great stress on visual affordances, European philosophy had rarely given much weight to the experience of color. One of the chief reasons, humorously expressed in Goethe's famous quip, is that the philosopher "raves" or simply fails to explain and explore color because he speaks of it "only in a general way." Goethe's *Farbenlehre* was a bold attempt to characterize color, in open polemic with Newton, as an irreducibly qualitative phenomenon, which only arose in relation to a context and to a personal perception: "at all times specific, characteristic, significant." Goethe's take was criticized by scientists and enthusiastically embraced by artists and philosophers throughout the nineteenth century;[11] but according to Seamon, it is in the twentieth century that Goethe's method could be effectively recognized as a precedent of the key insights of phenomenology in the sense opened up by Husserl.[12] As a quest for "the things themselves," his approach attempted to follow the unfolding of phenomena, neither objectifying them nor pre-understanding them as subjective psychological experiences (we will further discuss Goethe below, pages 216ff).

In the case of color, this suspension is essential. Chromatic phenomena are multiple, fleeting, contextual. They are perspectival, personal, emotive events, and yet they present themselves as wordly, object-oriented, even shaped by culture.[13] They cannot be reduced to retinal events, nor naively posited as something actually existing within objects. In fact, color is always bound to specific and temporary constellations of objects and to diverse conditions of lighting, time, weather: horizons that do not necessarily become themselves objects.[14] Color and shades are thus just as much

11. Barsan and Merticariu 2016, 3.

12. Seamon and Zajonc 1998, 2.

13. Berlin and Kay 1969; Ratner 1989.

14. A rich collection of such color illusions is available on Ritsumeikan professor Kitaoka

atmospheric phenomena as qualities of the colored objects. The Latin word "aura" suggested how visual qualities were something gaseous "breathed in" through the eyes: color was at the same time something irradiated and the atmospheric medium itself.[15]

Colors emerge therefore out of a threefold relation with (a) other surrounding colors, (b) our acts of vision, and (c) atmospheric conditions. However, they *do not* immediately reveal this relational quality: "When we see an object as red we see it as having a simple, monadic, local property on the object's surface.... The color is perceived as wholly *on* the object, not as somehow straddling the gap between it and the perceiver."[16] Or, to quote the Japanese phenomenologist Murata Jun'ichi, "color shows itself, firstly, always only as the color *of* something and secondly as the color of something *in a certain situation*."[17] But in the general style of our vision, color is omnipresent. From a certain perspective, we might even say that insofar we see at all, colors are *all* that we see.

Husserl and color: Abschattung, plena, hyle

Husserl thought about color deeply and originally. Despite his commitment towards idealities, the particular status of chromatic phenomena is acknowledged and explored often in his works. His account of color revolves around three different technical terms of his philosophy: *plenum*, *Abschattung* and *hyle*. Their interplay clearly shows the originality of phenomenological thought in relation to color. *Plena* (the Latin for "full things") is the term used to refer to the strictly first-person, qualitative aspects of the lifeworld, preceding and making possible the definition of objective idealities. *Abschattung*, "adumbration," is the endlessly partial and perspectival givenness of objects in our actual experience. With *hyle*, from the Greek word for "matter," Husserl refers to the non-intentional element of sensation data, that which is necessary to constitute a form but never becomes one. Significantly, among his main examples for *hyle* is color, a clear departure from classical takes on the concept.

Akiyoshi's personal website: http://www.ritsumei.ac.jp/~akitaoka/index-e.html.

15. Onians 1988, 74.

16. McGinn 1996, 541.

17. Murata 1998, 295.

Husserl's account of *plena* appears in the context of the *Crisis*, in his reconstruction of the genealogy of modern European science. The innovation, but also the essential limit of modern science, according to Husserl, lies in its "secondary mathematization of the world." Spatial coordinates and shapes lend themselves to abstraction and quantification with a relative ease, through their invariance and universal applicability. But what about all other elements of experience, such as "color, sound, smell and the like"?

> The difficulty here lies in the fact that the material *plena*—the "specific sense-qualities"—which concretely fill out the spatiotemporal shape-aspects of the world of bodies cannot, in their own gradations, be directly treated as are the shapes themselves.[18]

If the central novelty of modern European science is the reduction of experience to what can be described mathematically, a translation of qualities into quantities, elements like color have to be declared a purely subjective "illusion" or objectively described as a function of matter, at the cost of ignoring that they must actually unfold in our experience. As Murata observes:

> Color in "free and spontaneous perception" cannot be considered as something that can be identified with a functional relation of elements in a commensurable dimension. Nevertheless, Newton began trying to breed the "raw and wild" being of colors and to make them manipulable.... The science of color, the founder of which was Newton, could be seen as a "forcible" attempt... to make incommensurable spatial depth commensurable. In the Newtonian view, colors are first abstracted and separated from both the things to which they adhere and from the situation that they inhabited, and are then analyzed, manipulated, and calculated.[19]

Husserlian *plena* include other sensorial aspects such as scent and textures; and all these aspects of experience have been in fact heavily downplayed in European philosophy. But the "forcible attempt" to grind down color to an objective quantity assumes a decisive meaning because color is the irreducibly aspectual side of *visual* affordances. Sight is the sense out of which geometrical-mathematical notions are grafted onto the world. But

18. Husserl 1970, 33.
19. Murata 1998, 298.

the insistence on the aspects of vision that can eventually be manipulated and abstracted from a viewer, rather than on what involves us personally and pathically such as color, is already an highly selective understanding of sight itself.

The notion of *Abschattung*, "adumbration" or "shading," is another key to recognize the actual unfolding of color phenomena. Husserl stressed the gap between the relatively stable perception of an object (a red cube; a table; a tree trunk) and the flow of consciousness actually constituting it. While the noematic color of something will often be stabilized according to its "normal appearance," to what shows itself to us "in normal daylight and in a normal orientation," this is a "*secondary objectification*."[20] This color, "put into parenthesis, belongs to the noema," not to the actual process of perception as "a really inherent component piece." In actual perception, *noesis*, the color "is being adumbrated in a continuous multiplicity of sensed colors."[21] Here its "appearance can and *must*, in the case of a legitimating experience, be continually changing."[22] Husserl stresses how it is this chaotic multiplicity that is real (*reel*), in contrast to the unreality (the ideality) of the noematic color. Unlike idealities and imagination, the distinctive quality of real experience is its non-absoluteness, its perpetually partial and perspectival character.

What does characterize these ever-changing *Farbenabschattungen* is their being *hyle*, "matter" or "stuff,"[23] "animated" by the noematic activity but in itself pre-intentional: presentation *of* something before its representation *as* something.[24] *Hyle* is an *Ichfremdes*, "something other than the ego." Husserl introduced the reference to *hyle* in §85 of *Ideas I*, using color-data as first example and stressing the ambiguous, foundational role of "sense-stuff" (*sensuelle, wohl auch sinnliche Stoffe*), related to both sensual enjoyment and the formation of meaning. But in the same passage he declared that, in contrast to a "*hyletic-phenomenological*" approach, a "*noetic-phenomenological*" one calls for "incomparably more important and richer analyses."[25] In unpub-

20. Husserl 1983, 82, §44.
21. Husserl 1983, 203, §97.
22. Husserl 1983, 74, §41.
23. Husserl 1983, 203, §97.
24. Husserl 1983, 172, §85.
25. Husserl 1983, 75, §85.

lished manuscripts on temporality, however, Husserl distinguishes the sense of *hyle* described in the 1913 *Ideas I* and "*hyle* in the broader sense of what appears as a world at all, perceptually or as impression" (*Hyle im erweiterten Sinne des impressional oder wahrnehmungmäßig weltlich Erscheinenden überhaupt*).[26] In this wider sense, *hyle*, and thus color, is identified as mutable, living core of our being in a world that affects us, and in which we never become absolute subjects. The emotive, usually downplayed not only by Husserl but by European thinkers in general, resurfaces in this sense of *hyle*. Ogawa Tadashi, in a study connecting Husserl's insight with the atmospheric perspective of neo-phenomenology and premodern Japanese sources, offers a compelling observation on color as *hyle*:

> What stands out and affects us within the field of phenomena is first of all color, or to use a more general concept, *hyle*. What stands out within atmosphere is *hyle*.... *Hyle* is the "core" (*Kern*) of manifestation... Somebody might ask in which sense such a "new study of sensibility" connects "hyle," that is the core of manifestation," and "color" (色彩). Color is radiance, it is the bright, flower-like (華々しさ) aspect of what appears. The core of what appears is color. *Hyle* as color breaks open the forms and the unity of phenomena from the inside, it exposes itself within the world. *Hyle* is thus something that affects (*Affekt*) us.... In other words, as someone sees color he is affected and "enamored" (*verschossen*) by it, experiencing within that color pleasure and longing. It is significant how Husserl employed the concept of *Affektion* to describe the most fundamental process belonging to the ego.[27]

In *hyle* we discover the primordial consubstantiality of "color" and "enamorment." Reaching out for the core of perception through its non-eidetic element, phenomenology finds radiating feeling: a kind of desire that is warp and weave of the world we experience as subjects.

Perception as desire, sexuality as ambiguity

Husserl never fully focused on this affective layer of being. He warned of how the erasure of the first-personal, qualitatively experienced world of colors, smells and textures in modern science is directly mirrored in a loss of "all that is in any way spiritual, [of] all cultural properties that are attached to

26. Husserl 2006, 70.
27. Ogawa 2000, 52.

things in human praxis,"[28] but he barely discussed how this *geistlich* involvement includes affective, sensual elements. Husserl's diagnosis of the "crisis" of Europe and modernity was that of a loss of the "soul" as a transcendent movement; but he did not stress how even in Plato the first impulse of transcendence unfolds in the realm of erotic desire.

This connection between perception and desire has not been completely ignored within the context of European phenomenology, however.[29] Before turning to East Asian sources, I would like to observe in particular Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, a study that not only offers again and again examples of color to discuss non-objectifiable phenomena, but dedicates a whole section to the "body in its sexual being." Husserl's appreciation of the living body was mostly limited to its being a site of consciousness; in Merleau-Ponty, on the contrary, emotion and sexuality become crucial elements of how the world "begins to exist for us." Color, as we have seen, is the fold of perception in which the objective world reduced to "space and things perceived" is instead rediscovered as our subjective involvement in an affective relation. Merleau-Ponty stresses how the same structure unfolds in what we think of as "sexuality":

> Now so long as we considered space or the things perceived, it was not easy to rediscover the relationship between the embodied subject and its world, because it is transformed by its own activity into the intercourse between the epistemological subject and the object. If then we want to bring to light the birth of being for us, we must finally look at that area of our experience which clearly has significance and reality only for us, and that is our affective life. Let us try to see how a thing or a being begins to exist for us through desire or love and we shall thereby come to understand better how things and beings can exist in general.[30]

Both color and love are in other words paradigms of what, while presenting itself as "being," is always and thoroughly "being for us." Rather than placed in the world as simple spectators, we are originally involved in it by acts of desire. Pre-formal bodily existence, as the site of this meeting, can-

28. Husserl 1970, 61
29. Heinämaa 2003.
30. Merleau-Ponty 2005, 178.

not be left behind in a transcendent movement, since it is the very place in which such a transcendence constantly occurs.

> The importance we attach to the body and the contradictions of love are, therefore, related to a more general drama which arises from the metaphysical structure of my body, which is both an object for others and a subject for myself.... To thought, the body as an object is not ambiguous; it becomes so only in the experience which we have of it, and pre-eminently in sexual experience, and through the fact of sexuality. To treat sexuality as a dialectic is not to make a process of knowledge out of it, nor to identify a man's history with the history of his consciousness. The dialectic is not a relationship between contradictory and inseparable thoughts; it is the tending of an existence towards another existence which denies it, and yet without which it is not sustained. Metaphysics... begins with the opening out upon "another," and is to be found everywhere, and already, in the specific development of sexuality.[31]

Taken in this "metaphysical" sense, sexuality is not a particular moment or a specific involvement with certain objects: "Sexuality is neither transcended in human life nor shown up at its center by unconscious representations. It is at all times present there like an atmosphere."[32] This characterization of desire as "atmosphere" is another element corresponding to color as aura and adumbration: they both are that which never arises outside of a particular relation with an *Ichfremdes*. As atmosphere and adumbration, desire and color are inexhaustible, always at least *suggesting* something more than what currently appears. A different perspective or new moment would make the same scene or person come forth in a new, surprising shade, but none of these shades can become a stable or objective attribute. This plurality is not simply an accumulation of definite traits; rather, desire and color always carry within them a certain chaos or ambiguity. Such ambiguity is "the essence of human existence," showing us how "everything we live or think has always several meanings."[33] Freud's great discovery, according to Merleau-Ponty, was not that of sexuality *as such*, but the acknowledgement of its refractive quality, of its open-endedness and pervasiveness. This

31. Merleau-Ponty 2005, 194.
32. Merleau-Ponty 2005, 195.
33. Merleau-Ponty 2005, 196.

shifting desire is at the same time always particular, a "love of the one" and "coextensive with life."

Iro: VARIETY AND PHENOMENON

These phenomenological frames offer a first vantage point from which I would like to observe again two of the meanings of 色. The first one is its sense of "variety," "qualitative plurality"; the second one is that of "phenomenon" itself in the context of Mahayana Buddhism.

The manifold of autumn

In colloquial Japanese The doubling 色色 expresses abundance and variety of different objects, people or events. Duplication of a character is often used to express the plural (which is usually not marked grammatically in Japanese); in this case, however, the plurality is not one of number, but qualitative, stressing how even within a discrete unity there can still be an inexhaustible variety of living, non-abstract presences.

A modern literary example of *iro* as variety is a playful but poetically deep *haiku* by Natsume Sōseki:

一山や	*Ichisan ya*	A mountain:
秋色々の	*aki iro iro no*	so many autumns
竹の色	*take no iro*	the color of bamboo.[34]

The mountain is one (*ichi*), and autumn is in its logical sense also a single moment. But as Sōseki's poetic sight stops perceiving the mountain as a single shape and is absorbed in the color of bamboo, the greens, the yellows and the browns under the autumn light reveal themselves as qualitatively endless *Abschattungen*. Within this relationship, "autumn" is rediscovered not as a discrete time state, but as *aki iro iro*, "many autumns" or "an inexhaustibly various autumn," a distinctive mood that endlessly unfolds its internal differences, both as temporal cycle and as a space for affection. The category of plurality normally assumes that the referred objects are qualitatively indifferent: here we have a chaotic "qualitative plurality," a situation in which

34. NSZ 17: 2157.

"the distinction between identity and difference is only partially available and opened up."[35]

Thus the "landscape," which we often tend to reduce to a system of "things" (the mountain, autumn as an objective time), becomes a mobile, emotionally charged relation through the experience of color as an atmospheric emotion. Words like *keshiki* 景色, literally "shading and color," reflect this unfolding of aesthetic spaces as chromatic manifolds of shadings, not as stabilized images.

The color of things

Sōseki's outlook on landscape as color, expressed in the cultural form of *haiku*, belongs to a wider context of East Asian aesthetic reflections on color, landscape and poetry. We find a reflection on colors as aesthetic pulsations of reality already in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* by Liu Xie 劉勰 (465–522), a classic of Chinese literary aesthetics influenced by both Daoism and Buddhism. The 46th chapter of Liu's work, titled in Vincent Yu-chung Shih's translation "The physical world," is originally *wùsè* 物色, "things and color" or "colorful things." We read at the beginning of the chapter:

> 春秋代序，陰陽慘舒
> 物色之動，心亦搖焉
> Spring and autumn follow in turn,
> *yin* and *yang* darken and brighten.
> As the colors of things shift,
> our emotions vibrate with them.[36]

The cyclical shift of seasons is understood as a primary opening of the world through *yin* and *yang*. But before being "metaphysical principles," they refer to "bright" and "gloomy" as primary hyletic properties: never objects in themselves but qualities referring at the same time to chromatic hues in the yearly and daily cycles and to moods and atmospheres as the co-originary affective disclosure of the world.[37] The connection between

35. Schmitz 1964, 312.
36. Liu Xie 1959, 245; tr. modified.
37. Marinucci 2019.

seasons and moods is not chance; they both inextricably belong to the chromatic-hyletic dimension of phenomena.

Liu Xie continues:

> As the new year is rung in and the spring begins to burgeon, we experience a joyous mood; as the luxuriant summer rolls by, our minds become filled with happy thoughts; as the sky heightens and the air becomes clear and brisk, our hearts become darkened and heavy with distant thoughts; and when the ground is covered by boundless sleet and snow, our souls become burdened with serious and profound reflections.... One responds with different emotions to these varying phases, and the form of language used depends on the emotion.[38]

This second passage adds to the color of things the theme of poetic expression. Language in this perspective is not an objective representational tool, but another interface, synthesizing not an external world and an internal *feeling*, but the unfolding of world as atmospheric emotion. As F. Jullien argued, in China "The poem is already woven without the interference of human consciousness as subject; or rather, subjective consciousness is from the very start integrated into the process of mutual interactions that makes the whole of mundane realities alive and able to affect one another."[39] Poetic language coincides with a mode of consciousness in which the atmospheric matter of the world is kept active, reaffirming the endlessly emotional power of *hyle*. In this sense, as a mirror of "colorful things," poetic language too "has a color."

The color of poetry

This identification between color and the emotive tone of a poem is affirmed in Japanese *haikai*, within the theoretical reflection among Bashō's school.[40]

38. Liu Xie 1959, 245.

39. Jullien 1985, 65.

40. *Haikai* 俳諧, an abbreviation of *haikai no renga* or "comic chained poetry," is the humorous, less aristocratic take on traditional Japanese 連歌 *renga*, a mode of collective poetic composition favored by Japanese aristocracy since the late middle ages. *Haikai* allowed a relaxation the rules of composition, the use of popular language, and the introduction of Chinese terms, while offering the charm of a collective poetic gathering, becoming widespread also in bourgeois milieus. Inscribing his work in a period of flourishing for *haikai*, the greatness of Bashō (1644–1694) was making *haikai* into a spiritually elevated poetry while never forsaking its popular

Bashō's artistic excellence had been matched by his intellectual depth: Daoist and Buddhist notions had been seamlessly integrated into a literary space that included Chinese lyrics and Japanese classic poetry both in earnest homage and ironically. But since Bashō never left a theoretical treatise, after his death his disciples tried to redact texts of *haikai* theory (*hairon*). Among the most authoritative stands Hattori Dohō's *Three Booklets* (『三冊子』, 1702). In the "Red Booklet," the one most concerned with theoretical reflections, the idea of poetry as a "colorful heart" is introduced. Here I would like to compare the original quote together with two authoritative translations, arguing how maintaining the sense of "color" is essential to make sense of Dohō's argument:

> 常風雅にゐるものは、おもふ心の色物と成りて、句姿定るものなれば、取物自然にして子細なし。心の色うるはしからざれば、外に詞をたくむ。是則常に誠を勉るといふは、風雅に古人の心を探り、近くは師の心よく知るべし。[41]
>
> As for the poet whose mind is in constant accord with the aesthetic creativity, his mood of the inner activity would emerge by itself (onto the linguistic dimension) only to be crystallized immediately into a certain form of poetic expression. Thus what he describes or expresses should be superbly natural, with no arbitrary intricacy in itself. If, however, the mood of the poet's mind lacks refined serenity, he tends to have recourse to verbal artifices.[42]
>
> Pour celui qui à tout instant vit son art, ce qu'il ressent en son esprit se confond avec les objets concrets pour déterminer la forme du verset, si bien qu'il en saisit tout naturellement l'objet, sans la moindre diversion. Si l'esprit par contre n'est pas épuré, l'on recherchera une perfection formelle dans l'agencement des mots.[43]

In the first sentence, Dohō explains that when poets are "abiding in *fūga*" (常風雅にゐるもの), "the color of the heart becomes that of things" (心の色物と成りて). In Izutsu's free translation this process seems internal: the "*mood* of the inner creativity" emerges into a poetic form. Sieffert is more

character and adherence to experience. It is worth noting that *haiku*, as a single poem by a single author, did not exist as such in Bashō's time, but is an innovation introduced by Masaoka Shiki 正岡子規 (1867–1902), deriving from the 17-morae *hokku* at the beginning of a *haikai* sequence.

41. KBZ 7: 174.

42. Izutsu 1981, 162.

43. Sieffert 1983, 120.

faithful: he writes "son esprit se confond avec les objets concrets." But "color" cannot refer to a constellation of concrete objects as *noemata*, only to the momentary appearance of *Abschattungen* in *noesis*. They are "concrete" in the sense of *hyle*, not in that of stable objects detached from the self. The expression"the color of the heart/mind" (心の色) describes the emotive attunement between poetic mind and the core of manifestation as their commonality, "color." Here Izutsu, translating "the mood of the poet's mind," rather than simply "esprit" like Sieffert, offers a better grasp: "mood" (気分 *kibun*) shares with color and matter its being an *Ichfremdes*: not a private psychological state, but the primary affective charge of the world's disclosure (Heidegger's *Stimmung*).

In the context of *haikai* this sense of "color" constitutes the real mark of poetic language. Poetry is not something made, but something that becomes, a state of attunement to the world unfolding linguistically.

> If one always keeps this inner activity, he will attune with things themselves; the color of his heart will become a poem (その心のいろ句となる).[44]

If the self does not constantly open up to things in their actual unfolding, the ego affirms itself on calcified objects (as in the case of the "unreal," noematic color), and projects on them an inert meaning (私意, the "meaning of the ego"). A good verse is one in which language does not simply deal with such objectivities, trying to impress over them an extraneous emotion. Real poetry behaves like color phenomena: partial, contextual, achieving its mood through the co-originary correspondence between world and emotionally involved existence. Therefore, a good verse, too, has/is "color." In the『去来抄』(1702), another essential text of *haikai* theory, once asked to clarify the sense of *sabi*, the "patina" often chosen by Bashō as aesthetic ideal of his poetry, his disciple Kyorai answers:

> *Sabi* is the color of a verse (さびは句の色なり). It does not mean that the verse is about some serene loneliness. Let's make an example: even if an old man dons a full armor on a battlefield, or if he wears brocade robes to an imperial banquet, there will still be the aspect of old age. *Sabi* can be in a lively verse or in a quiet one.[45]

44. KBZ 7: 178.
45. KBZ 7: 148.

And we read in Kyorai's『俳諧問答』(1698):

> *Sabi* does not refer to a quiet conception, wording or subject matter. *Sabi* and a lonely (*sabishiki*) verse are not the same thing.... It is hard to explain with words. If you insist, one might say: *sabi* exists in the color of a verse.[46]

Sabi lies neither in the objective content of the poem nor in the formal arrangement of its elements or its wording. But if we take the idea of color literally, we can instead understand *sabi* as a specific "hue" of Bashō's *haikai* style ("his scent and color," in Kyorai's words). Like dusk, rust, or old age, *sabi* is not an alteration of forms, but rather it covers and seeps into things as their adumbration, letting them appear not as isolated, stable *noemata*, but as something constantly surrounded by a chromatic-emotive aura. Kuki Shūzō clearly illustrated this phenomenological sense of *sabi* and its relation to temporality:

> An object also changes its hue if it is seen in the full light of day or in the shadow of dusk: in this case it is not space but a temporal relation—the flow of time—that assumes a determinant meaning. Something quite alike happens with the creation of a work of art: every object presents itself surrounded by a color gradation, might it be that of *hanayaka* ["bright"] or that of *sabi*. *Sabi* has been called "the color of the poem" exactly because this hue of the poetical object was recognized.[47]

According to Kuki, there is a "necessity" that eventually negates everything colorful and moves it "towards *sabi*."[48] In other words, the "actual" color of a bright red flower, the "unreal" and stable color attributed to it noematically, will always be progressively negated by the approach of dusk, as the ambiance reveals new, sombre hues before making it disappear in the dark. Also, as seasons progress, flowers fade and leaves turn yellow or brown. Fabric loses its sheen and metal rusts: *sabi* refers to all these phenomena of oxidation. But by the process through which color fades, what is most essential to color is also revealed. We come to realize that it exists as a shifting relation of mind, things and atmosphere, not as an inherent quality; the

46. BTS, 554.
47. KUKI 2019, 109–10.
48. KUKI 2019, 111.

fleeting, illusory status of colors here is recognized as a fact full of aesthetic and spiritual implications.

In his essay "The Elimination of Color in Far Eastern Art and Philosophy," Izutsu Toshihiko argued that this East Asian tendency towards monochromatic painting or poetry is not a mere stylistic variation, but expression and exploration of emptiness within phenomena. As example of such monochromatic poetry he quotes Bashō's first *sabi* masterpiece:

枯枝に	*Kareeda ni*	On the branch of a withered tree
鴉のとまりけり	*karasu no tomarikeri*	a raven is perched
秋の暮れ	*aki no kure*	this autumn eve.

> This is indeed a verbal painting in black-and-white, the black figure of a solitary raven… against the background of the illimitable Emptiness of an autumn eve. [Bashō] characterized the basic attitude of verse-making peculiar to his school in distinction from that of all other schools by saying: "The *haiku* of the other schools are like colored paintings, whereas the works of my school must be like monochrome painting. Not that in my school all works are invariably and always colorless. But… the primary concern in my school is the spiritual subdual of all external colors.[49]

Izutsu translates as "spiritual subdual of all external colors" what in the original Japanese was simply *sabishiori* (さびしをり).[50] But Bashō's choice is clear. If color is the subjective, emotionally vibrant sensible world, transcendence must be not a simple negation of color (the stress on invariant forms, on the eidetic) but a *subdual* of it: going *through* color and discovering it empty, coinciding with the relational shifts that make it disappear and appear.

Emptiness and the color of the sky

The Buddhist notion of "emptiness" 空 (Jp. *kū*, Ch. *kōng*), particularly central in Indian Madhyamika and Chinese Chan (Jp. Zen) schools,

49. Izutsu 1974, 450–1.

50. Bashō's quote is taken from the『祖翁口訣』(Sayings of the Old Master), a section of the『俳諧一葉集』. *Shioru* is a verb meaning "withering," but in Bashō's school it was often used in conjunction with *sabi* to describe something that has become more fragile and subtle—and thus aesthetically relevant—through this very process of negation.

refers (with numerous nuances related to different traditions and texts) not to simple non-being, but to the interdependent origination of all beings, their lack of intrinsic existence. Perception, feelings, desire, the phenomenal world at large are not simply negated, but recognized as impermanent, perspectival, relational, "empty" of the autonomous and permanent being we attribute to them at first. This realization is epistemological, ethical and psychological: even when emptiness is discussed in a strict logical fashion, as in Nāgārjuna's fourfold negation, the ensuing realization makes emptiness a state of mind, a "mood."

Color as Emptiness: the Heart Sutra

By referring to the relationship between color and emptiness, Izutsu had most likely in mind the fact that in a Buddhist context, the character 色 (*shiki*) is used as a qualified opposite of 空 (*kū*). The meanings we have seen—chromatic phenomena and other *plena*, endless variety, desire or enamorment as constant of our mood-attunement to the world—are collectively expressed as 色 in a Buddhist context. 色 was in fact used to translate the Sanskrit *rūpa* in Mahayana sutras, a word that already possessed a similar layering of meanings. *Rūpa* can indeed mean "having the form or appearance or color of," "handsome form, loveliness, grace, beauty," and "a single specimen or exemplar," what is particular.[51] 色 is this primary, unabstracted world of phenomena, the state of desire in which our "violent love of the one" unfolds. While in Platonism this state of sensual enamorment is a mere byproduct of ignorance, in contrast to an eternal world of archetypal origins, in Buddhism it is desire that is to be recognized as ontogenetic: we are born and reborn in a world traversed by desire at its core, and therefore the phenomenal world and our subjectivities are *relata* of a desiring relationship, neither existing before or independently from it.

The Buddhist attitude towards desire is nuanced. On the one hand, Buddhist ethics tried to reject desire, to quench phenomenal world and subjectivity alike. But a different, complementary attitude also existed, based on a non-dualistic rediscovery of this desiring world. Rather than simply rejecting physical or sublimating desire, as the Platonic-Christian tradition had done, Buddhism also attempted to recognize emptiness through

51. Monier-Williams 2008, 885.

desire itself: "through the concept of 'pivoting' or 'overturning' (Skt. *Paravrtti*)," instead of "negating passion, desire and sexuality, one can transmute them."[52] The "colored world" needs not to be erased: it is rather in the very working of desire and colors that one can grasp emptiness not as theory or ethical ideal, but as an existential, emotional realization in the things themselves.

In what is probably the most influential expression of non-dualism in Mahayana Buddhism, the central passage of the *Heart Sutra*, we thus find 色 and 空 connected by the "contradictory identity" of the particle 即. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara explains:

色即是空空即是色
受想行識亦復如是

In Conze's translation:

> Form is emptiness and the very emptiness is form; emptiness does not differ from form, form does not differ from emptiness, whatever is emptiness, that is form. The same is true of feelings, perceptions, impulses, and consciousness.[53]

Conze translates 色 as "form," but in doing so a key aspect of the text is erased, perhaps due to the "prejudice against color" lamented by Batchelor. 色 does not refer to an abstract, stable ideality such as "form": it is "color," subjectively and affectively experienced phenomenona. The sutra reveals how this endlessly various "matter" is nothing else than emptiness. Moreover, this relationship is reciprocal. Once recognized as empty, a bright patch of red, the show of blooming flowers or the desiring relation oriented towards another subject are not erased; on the contrary, all emptiness must in turn endlessly manifest itself as color, coincide with the world of manifestation. The character *soku* 即, "that is," addresses the paradoxical relationship of such "coincident opposites." Another *soku* formula, 煩悩即菩提, "the very worldly desire is enlightenment" clearly transfers this pivoting relationship to the realm of human emotion. *Bonnō*, intense states of passion, need not to be negated: once observed as they are, they reveal the empty, relational

52. Faure 1998, 4.
53. Conze 2001.

quality of all things, consciousness included, pointing to a form of enlightenment that never needs to erase the phenomenal world.

The phenomenology of emptiness

Emptiness can be compared, in this sense, to the "bracketing" of phenomenology: not an annihilation, but a suspension, seeing through the naive but understandable belief in the existence of fully independent things. There is a degree of similarity between the two stances, recognized even by Husserl, who praised Buddhism as a "transcendental" rather than "transcendent" theoretical effort once he read Neumann's translation of early Buddhist writings.[54] As we move towards "the things themselves," the things themselves disappear, losing their apparent solidity.

Klaus Held has tried to consider Buddhist emptiness as an eminently phenomenological concept. It is worth to follow his argument here, since it confirms several points observed in 3 and 4. Held begins byarguing that as the reverse side of all what is presently given is actually only ever grasped as a possibility, our whole experience of the world is that of a horizon in which objects open to different kinds of apprehension, to endless "subjective potentialities." The "normal mood" that accompanies our daily lives lets this spacing self-conceal; but this relationship is reversed in "deep moods"—"whether joyful or sad"—reveal this constantly shifting quality. Instead of dealing with solid things, we are part of a "space that leaves place for everything." Held highlights the similarity between this emptiness and *chora*, stressing how even "the Greeks designated the world as a whole as a sky—*uranos*," a "remarkable" fact, since:

> The Chinese and Japanese character for "emptiness," read in Japanese as *kū*, is identical to a symbol that originally designated sky; this indicates that interculturally there exists an experience of emptiness in which it is grasped as synonymous with the openness of the sky.[55]

This endless opening is not mere indistinctness, however: the constant shifts of moods, perspectives, qualitative perceptions and bodily states through which this emptiness becomes an event can also "contract into a

54. Hanna 1995.
55. Held 1997, 157.

compact thickness" experienced through the "alterations through which determinate qualities change into their polar opposites."[56] These "elementary qualities" are "essentially polar" because they cannot be abstracted or referred to a constituted object as their essential property: they "always refer to the whole of the atmosphere in which the world appears to us in particular situations"; they are "world-opening qualities."[57] They include bright and dark, cold and warm, all the kind of qualitative, relative polarities expressed by the *yin-yang* coupling. According to Held, an actual observation of these polarities has been heavily hindered in Greek and Greek-based thought because of the Platonic paradigm of seeing things as secondary products of something "already-lying-before," an unchanging prototype. On the other hand, in a Japanese context anything can become a focus for this pivoting movement of quality and emptiness: "In a touch of moss or a stone of a rock garden, the elementary qualities of the world are just as experienceable moodwise as, for instance, in the movements of a Noh dance or in the gestures and features of an eminent artist's personality."[58]

This asymptotic coincidence of transcendental and unique is "shown especially clearly" in the phenomenon of color:

> Thus, one is correct in saying that the world as such presents itself with a certain "color" in every mood-attuned experience of an elementary quality; it becomes visible as the "atmospheric" or "moodful" color of being-in-the-world. The nothingness of emptiness, as which the world happens, appears in its coloring and visibility understood in this sense.... The interrelation of the appearance of all things is characterized as their coloring or visibility, *shiki*... *Shiki* means the same as the "emptiness" of nothingness, *ku* in Japanese: "*Shiki soku ze ku; ku soku ze shiki*," which could be translated, for example, as: "'Visible is synonymous with 'empty,' and 'empty' is synonymous with "visible.'" The character for *ku*, as I have noted, originally also designated the "sky" in its openness, hence the world.[59]

For Held the central passage of the *Heart Sutra* is an "exact confirmation" of how it is most of all by its being-color that what exists around us mani-

56. Held 1997, 159.
57. Held 1997, 160.
58. Held 1997, 162.
59. Held 1997, 163.

fests itself not as an object with stable properties, but as something empty and yet atmospheric, "moodful"; on the other hand, emptiness itself does not really consist of an abstract negation, but of the cyclical, affective dynamism of these contractions and expansions.

Sky and Urphänomen

The way in which "emptiness" and "sky" coincide in 空 is stressed by Held several times, but always in the sense of a phenomenological "spacing" (and indeed, that of "space" is another meaning of the character 空). But by its very being an omnipresent background, the phenomenon of the sky is also nothing else than color: a formless non-object manifesting itself only as hue and mood, endlessly interacting with light, season, landscapes. Nishitani argued:

> The sky is an eternally constant empty space with unlimited depth and endless width. It is the only "eternal thing" we can see with our eyes.... The empty space that phenomenologically signifies the sky reflects itself as a visible reality in the emptiness of the sensory world, and the relationship between the two is much more pronounced than a simple metaphor.[60]

Sky-as-emptiness is transcendence opening within phenomena. But by stressing this coincidence between color, sky and emptiness, Nishitani had likely in mind not only Buddhism, but also a European thinker: Goethe.

As we mentioned, in *Zur Farbenlehre*, Goethe's qualitative approach to color is also based on its "empty," that is relational quality. Goethe argues that understanding color means grasping it as an atmospheric, moodful effect and conceiving its particular affective imprints as its primary manifestation, not as secondary psychological effects. Tracing the unfolding of color, Goethe stressed its "essentially polar" dynamic: not only is all color an interplay of light and darkness, but this interplay also creates absolutely qualitative connections between one color and its opposite. Held's definition of "elementary qualities" is already sketched in *Zur Farbenlehre*, which constitutes an almost unique European example of the dialectical monism more present in Chinese and Japanese thought patterns.[61]

60. Nishitani 1999, 180.

61. By dialectical monism we refer to a philosophy that considers reality as a fundamental

Significantly, one of the central passages of Goethe's *Zur Farbenlehre* recognizes in the sky the "*Urphänomen*" of color:

> The highest is to understand that all fact is really theory. The blue of the sky reveals to us the basic law of color. Search nothing beyond the phenomena, they themselves are the theory.[62]

This passage has been quoted very often. Unlike Kant's starry sky, Goethe's sky is not a metaphor, but an actual phenomenological observation. In the sky, a turbid medium holding in itself both light and darkness, color can "dependently arise" into consciousness. Blue does not belong to it as the hue of a given object would in a normal condition and background, since the sky as ultimate horizon is never a thing, but an open space in which this relational, "empty" quality of color manifests itself most clearly. This "negativity" explains the particular attention shown by Goethe towards blue:

> 778. As yellow is always accompanied with light, so it may be said that blue still brings a principle of darkness with it.
>
> 779. This color has a peculiar and almost indescribable effect on the eye. As a hue it is powerful, but it is on the negative side, and in its highest purity is, as it were, a stimulating negation. Its appearance, then, is a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose.
>
> 780. As the upper sky and distant mountains appear blue, so a blue surface seems to retire from us.

Crucially, in §781 this negative aspect entices desire:

> 781. But as we readily follow an agreeable object that flies from us, so we love to contemplate blue, not because it advances to us, but because it draws us after it.[63]

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unity, but also follows its unfolding into "elementary qualities" (Held) organized in polar opposites: positive and negative, cold and hot, bright and dark and so on. Not only Goethe's theory of color was based on this thought pattern, but this idea shaped his intellectual biography as a whole: for instance in the image of the ginkgo leaf (one and two at the same time) in the *Eastern-Western Divan*, or the notion of systole/diastole characterizing not only his work on color, but also his poetry, autobiography and work on plants (Huber 1998). This trait of his work was obviously not lost on East Asian interpreters, glad to find a thought pattern reminiscent of Daoism and Mahayana Buddhism in an important European thinker (Kimura 2000).

62. Matthaei 1971, 76.

63. Matthaei 1971, 258.

The emptiness of the sky entices as a sort of *love*—not as attraction to a positive trait, but as something arising out of a "stimulating negation," an opening that calls forth a fleeting relation. In this piece of "theory within the fact," Goethe is giving an example of love that turns Platonism over. What we love in our experience of color, our emotion of desire *qua* color, is not the attraction towards the formal, stable qualities of some kind of presence, but rather an open-ended, particular connection with unique moods and hues. It is by being "empty" that color "draws us after it." Such attraction is not nihilistic: the sky is what surrounds our lifeworld, what colors it with a mood; its unattainability is not abstract transcendence, but an endlessly renewed, liminal, relational experience.

Kuki Shūzō and the color of *iki*

We tried to show how transcendence and desire are held together in the contradictory equation of color and emptiness. This is a kind of universality that does not leave phenomena behind, but rather constantly arises from and between their intercourse: color and desire are omnipresent, even in the "chromophobic" history of European philosophy. But to conclude, I would like to analyze a uniquely original synthesis of these four reflections on color/desire (European phenomenology, Japanese aesthetics, Buddhism and Goethian science): Kuki Shūzō's *The Structure of iki*.

Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造 (1888–1942) is a philosophical figure characterized by creative tensions. He was born in the highest echelons of Meiji society, but his family was fractured by a sexual scandal shortly after his birth. He was a philosopher but also a dandy; a cosmopolitan traveler living between France and Germany for eight years, but also steeped in the peculiarity of Japanese culture.

The Structure of Iki (1930), his most famous work, was published shortly after his return from Europe, and is based on a draft begun in France. It deals, however, with a very specific Japanese aesthetic ideal, *iki.* According to Kuki, geishas, artists and libertines of early 19th century *ukiyo* ("floating world") synthesized experiences and contradiction of their life space into this notion, which, by holding together desire and detachment, reveals the common nature of both. Kuki's attempt is turning philosophy, usually conceived as a quest for the rational and the universal, toward desire and

contingency: his first problem is how philosophy should approach a matter uniquely tied to a single moment and a specific people. Significantly, this singularity is described as a kind of "color": *iki* is a word "tinged" (帯びる) with the "specific colorings of the experience of that ethnic group,"[64] one whose meaning is "rich in ethnic coloring."[65] Colors are mentioned almost constantly in *The Structure of Iki*: in the relatively short text the character 色 recurs 185 times. This metaphor is not cosmetic, but structural: color is not an essential, abstract property of some object, and the "ethnic coloring" is not an invariant essence, but rather the experience of a shared atmosphere. Just like a hue (色合, "a meeting of colors"), *iki* defies abstraction:

> In other words, we cannot attempt to "intuit the essence" of *iki*, that is, treat it as a specific concept and attempt to discover abstract universals among general concepts that subsume *iki*. The understanding of iki as an experience of meaning must be a concrete, factual, and specific "comprehension of being."[66]

Just like color and desire, *iki* cannot be grasped through Husserl's free *Ideation*, aimed at "abstract general concepts." This ethnic and historical determination happens instead on the level of *Abschattungen*, in which we face "the living form of it, as it is, without altering its actual concreteness."

This experiential drive is also present in the "intentional structure" of *iki*, since its "material cause" is the moment of 媚態, erotic desire. Here, the other meaning of *iro* surfaces:

> From the fact that *ikigoto* (lit. "*iki* affairs") means *irogoto* (色ごと lit. "romantic affairs"), we know that this relationship with a person of the opposite sex constitutes the fundamental being of *iki*.[67]

Merleau-Ponty stressed how erotic desire is a living dialectic; Kuki, too, characterizes desire as a kind of relation to the world in which the self loses its monistic stance by meeting a single, unique otherness. What further characterizes *iki* is that desire is cultivated not towards its resolution—either into the pleasant indistinction of the "orgiastic" or by sublimating it towards the

64. Kuki 2004, 14.
65. Kuki 2004, 16.
66. Kuki 2004, 17–18.
67. Kuki 2004, 18.

idea—but appreciated in itself. As the outcome of fulfillment is withheld by "will" (意気地), desire as color is the "dualistic and dynamic possibility that is made absolute only in the form of a possibility":[68] this is what transforms the erotic (媚態) into *iropposa* 色っぽさ, "erotic colorfulness." The motif of a polar dynamism between the sexes surely reflects the East Asian pattern of *yin* and *yang*, feminine and masculine engaged in an eternally dynamic relationship with their opposite. But in the case of Kuki's philosophy, the Goethian idea of colors as polar constructions is equally important. Elemental qualities are only disclosed through an experiential relationship with their opposite, as Held noted: thus *yin-yang* is at the same time both light and dark, hot and cold, feminine and masculine. If we look at Kuki's own copy of *Zur Farbenlehre*,[69] we can see how he especially highlighted passages dealing with this principle:

> Inspiration already presupposes expiration; thus every systole its diastole. It is the universal formula of life which manifests itself in this as in all other cases. When darkness is presented to the eye it demands brightness, and vice versa: it shows its vital energy, its fitness to receive the impression of the object, precisely by spontaneously tending to an opposite state.[70]
>
> Considered in a general point of view, color is determined towards one of two sides. It thus presents a contrast which we call a polarity, and which we may fitly designate by the expression *plus* and *minus*.[71]

But if the relationship of color and desire is always maintained as a possibility, rather than becoming a "reality," it means that it can change and fade away. Even Husserl realized in saying that a cube *is* red, we are referring to its "unreal" noematic color, removed from the fleeting, relational shading that really makes up actual chromatic phenomena. In the same way, in *iki* the endlessly dynamic tension of desire cannot be enshrined into the stable union of "romantic love." The very relationality of color and desire means

68. Kuki 2004, 19.

69. Kuki's private library is conserved in Kōbe, in the Kōnan Daigaku Kuki Bunko. Its contents are listed in Kōnan Daigaku 1976. We base our observation in particular on the red pencil annotation by Kuki in the volume *Goethes Naturwissenchaftliche Schriften*, vol. III (1897) edited by Rudolf Steiner. The marked paragraphs are §23, §38, §50, §696, §697, §762, §769, §773, §777, §778, §787, §801, §802, §809.

70. § 38, Matthei 1971, 217.

71. §696, Matthei 1971, 254.

that despite their affective strength, they are also impermanent, they both *fade away*. The third moment of *iki*, *akirame* (諦め), is nothing other than the consciousness of this fading, the acknowledgment of the empty quality of desire and color. Kuki describes *akirame* as a stance with Buddhist overtones, that together with *ikiji* constitutes the "ethnic, historical coloring" (民族的、歴史的色彩) of *iki*. It is an appreciation of impermanence and emptiness that does not negate desire but "brackets" (括弧) it: detachment not *from* desire and color, but *within* our experience of them.

Iki must therefore include emptiness as a kind of color itself, a mood that as in the case of *sabi* manifests itself through desaturation: negation does not simply erase color, but reveals instead its relational, empty core. Just as in his description of *sabi* as darkening, Kuki's color metaphors clearly reflect his reading of Goethe. Western notions of romantic love, such as Stendhal's description of "un tableau où, jusqu'aux ombres, tout droit être coleur de rose"[72] are contrasted by recognizing *iki* in the series of colors that Goethe defined as "negative." The second series of highlights on Kuki's copy of *Zur Farbenlehre* are in fact in the paragraphs on negative colors: grays, browns, and especially blue. *Iki* colors "must speak to duality in a subdued manner."[73] Such duality is asserted directly by gray, which however does not suggest coquetry by itself. Brown, defined by Goethe as a paradoxical "dark yellow," is instead a "flashy color that has lost its saturation," embodying *iki* by bringing together "the opulent characteristic of a color and the loss of saturation." Its mood is that of "a sophisticated sensuality and coquetry that knows resignation."[74] But it is in the portrait of blues, holding darkness within themselves even at the brightest, that the dual appreciation of passion and emptiness is especially revealed:

> Blues make up the third group of colors expressive of *iki*. Why? First, we must consider another question, namely, which bright colors that have not lost saturation exemplify *iki*? I would say they must be colors that go well with dark colors.... Reds, oranges, and yellows do not adapt to decreasing amounts of light striking the retina.... In contrast greens, blues and violets

72. Kuki 2004, 23.
73. Kuki 2004, 46.
74. Kuki 2004, 48.

> remain in contact with the twilight vision of the soul.... Colors expressive of *iki* offer inactive afterimages that accompany a luscious experience.[75]

The color of the empty sky was the "fundamental phenomenon" of color, emptiness made visible. It is described by Goethe as the color of desire, something that "draws us" towards it by its very moving away. "Blues" are colors, but also a mood, and even the name of the Western musical genre mixing sadness and longing, the specific "ethnic coloring" of another non-white population dealing with its own uprootedness. For Kuki too this sensual transcendence was a concrete experience of infinite nostalgia: his descriptions of the aptly named Côte d'Azur, in Southern France, testify this poetic attunement. The wintry blue of the sky and the sea was "almost unbearably beautiful,"[76] and yet filled with melancholia; the color most resonating with a traveler and a lover, compelled to experience infinite emotions within finite experiences.

Conclusions

Highlighting the phenomenological relevance of color theory within *The Structure of Iki* is not only meant as a new framing contribution to an already well-studied text. Kuki's treatment of color is relevant because it sums up his whole intellectual biography, his commitment to make philosophy "fill the whole of being," including the contingent, relational elements that have been ignored or disparaged in the "chromophobic" evolution of European philosophy. But this attempt to deal with the "uniquely Japanese" was only made possible by his utterly cosmopolitan biography. Discovering the quality of colors in an Edo-period kimono, in the reflections of a German author or in the blue of the Mediterranean winter does not reduce their authenticity, the uniqueness of their "historical-ethnic hue," but rather suggests that culture, like color, is also a thoroughly relational phenomenon. Desire, love and color can only be personal and connected to a specific time and place, to an *Ichfremdes* that forces us to go beyond a monological self and a stable identity. Philosophy in this sense can only arise through a constant engagement with the relational, qualitative aspects of life and culture,

75. Kuki 2004, 48.
76. Tanaka 1992, 190.

trying to understand their nature without abstracting them. And yet this very movement is not one of simple relativism; it strives to discover the universal through the unique, the theory through the fact.

Approaching in earnest the problem of color as we have tried to do means striving to reinclude emotion, even sensuality, into the philosophical field. Despite Husserl's claim, hyletic phenomenology holds just as many fundamental insights as a noetic one: it can even disclose fundamental spiritual realizations, such as the metaphysical emptiness revealing itself as sky and feeling. Is phenomenology, rather than being simply a very technically advanced trend in "Western philosophy," never challenging its deepest assumptions, a stance willing to actually start every time anew, letting things appear to us as if for the first time—or in the case of love and colors, acknowledging that *every* time is in a way the first? Can its "bracketing" include not only a safe, theoretical skepsis towards being in general, but also turn inward, disrupting cultural biases and ethnocentric assumptions? Our answer is in the positive: we have tried to show how enriching it can be to let such "hyletic phenomenology" dialogue with East Asian thought on the endless variety of love, color, emotion and cultural belonging.

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Abbreviations

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