

Different Smellscapes: Olfactory Patterns Through the Japanese Worldview

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Smellscapes and Japan

Most philosophical accounts of smell could begin with the acknowledgement of how little it has been discussed within European philosophy. The limited attention dedicated to the olfactory elements of our experience throughout the history of European thought would, therefore, be the shadow cast by privilege accorded to sight by Greek philosophy. This is a broad generalisation, sure, and yet it is true that a certain visual primacy is intimately connected with the metaphor of *ideas*, and that the broad features of European ontology have been predicated on the visive quality of objects: stability, defined outlines, a discrete and thematic mode of presence, able to be traced and expressed by *logos*. A history of smell

through Western thought is thus also a challenge to its core categories.¹

For instance, is smell consciousness, in its structure, intentional? Is the smell of a rose part of the rose itself, or something else, a partially or totally different reality? While the two other distal senses, sight and hearing, are (through very different schemes) senses of presence, through which the distant is given as a positive reality, scents are able to evoke spatial and temporal distance within proximity. The presence of scents is not simply *there*, but *yonder* – even in the case of something overwhelming like stench. Even when the source can be identified visually, smell has a weird topology, being at the same time inside us and a stranger assailing us from all sides. In this respect, smell constitutes a medial, atmospheric sense. Smells lend themselves to no *Ideation*, since they have no sides, and therefore do not present themselves through partial, progressively constitutive profiles (*Abschattungen*), lending themselves to no free variation and no formalisation. There is no stable *idea* of a rose's smell, nor in a Platonic or Husserlian sense. Smell, rather, hangs unstably in the air, suddenly appearing and

¹ This text was my first attempt to tackle philosophically the relationship between olfaction and thought in a Japanese context, asking myself whether thinking (with) scent outside a European perspective could grant this idea some novelty and flair in several directions. This hunch became the beginning of my first postdoc (Canon Europe Fellow 2020, University of Kyoto) and of a second one (Japan Foundation Fellow 2021, University of Kyoto). My research has progressed a good deal since this first draft, and a book project is currently underway. I have decided to keep this text as close as possible to its original to avoid overlap with several other articles on these themes currently under review. I wish to thank Professor Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos for his precious prompt.

disappearing as the *quasi-things* described by Hermann Schmitz (wind, voices, feelings), which unlike common things can appear and disappear without notice, very often below the fringe of conscious perception, not present thematically, but arising as part of a 'smellscape', a topology of sensibility in which our consciousness and things of the world are brought together in a certain qualified accord, or *Stimmung*. A smellscape is at the same time something we meet and the phenomenological horizon in which we discover ourselves: our own home, city, country. We are, one might say, grounded in the air.

If this layer of experience has been downplayed in European traditions of thought, a parallel question ought, however, to be asked too, if only for methodological good sense: what about the rest of the world? If the ostensible universality of ideas is predicated on the stability and discreteness of visual experience, but this stress on the visible and abstract is ultimately a defining trait of (post-Homeric Greek) thought, the particularity of this tradition is hidden and assumed unproblematically, rather than transcended. In this essay I will therefore try to address the problem of smellscapes through another intellectual tradition, the Japanese one. Not only has Japanese culture thought *about* the olfactory in rich and detailed ways throughout its history, it has, on occasion, thought *with* the olfactory, developing a 'philosophy of scent' no less rich than the Greek philosophy of vision.

Approaching Japanese scents, I would like to adopt the concept of 'smellscape':

The concept of smellscape suggests that, like visual impressions, smells may be spatially ordered or place

related. It is clear, however, that any conceptualization of smellscape must recognize that the perceived smellscape will be non-continuous, fragmentary in space and episodic in time, and limited by the height of our noses from the ground, where smells tend to linger. Smellscape, moreover, cannot be considered apart from the other senses [...] In combination with vision and tactility, smell and the other apparently 'non-spatial' senses provide considerable enrichment of our sense of space and the character of place.²

It must be stressed, however, how the spatial turn implied by the notion of smellscape does not necessarily point towards an objective ambiance: a smellscape can be defined as a localised, interpersonal mode of the 'surfaceless space' experienced as atmosphere by the living body, as described by Schmitz. What the notion of smellscape grasps well, however, is the vastness of its ontology: smellscape are cities and countries, houses and workplaces, our togetherness (pleasant and unpleasant) with other beings. As an open, cohabited horizon of sensation, desire and memory, a smellscape is also always already a lawscape,³ a folding together of being and knowing, self and otherness, whose binding character also derives its strength from its invisibility. A last advantage of the term smellscape is that by shifting the discourse from single 'scents' and 'smells' to smellscapes we are able to describe not the singular, exasperating 'objects' named smells, which stubbornly deceive thought with their non-objective

² J. Douglas Porteous, 'Smellscape'. *Progress in Human Geography* 9, no. 3 (1985): 360.

³ Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice: Body, Lawscape, Atmosphere* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

behaviour, but atmospheric events and *quasi-things* that characterise interpersonal relationships, lawscapes, even a different metaphysics. To quote Diaconu:

Atmosphere has breathing as its sensory model, and its 'object' is more likely to be a surrounding milieu, in the midst of which the subject is moving and living, than a *Gegen-stand* in the meaning of a static being-as-opposed.⁴

Any exploration of smellscapes has to be located and specific. Are there specific reasons, however, to begin with premodern and modern Japanese intellectual history? While Asian culture at large seems to pay good attention to *plena* (if nothing else, in comparison with their effacement in European thought), it is fair to say that Japanese culture has an interesting and particularly developed passion for smellscapes, and they have often been developed as places of sensory thought.

First, it is not an exaggeration to say that the primacy of visual experience in Japan has never become overwhelming as in Europe. While a heavy reliance of sight is most likely an integral part of human and animal ecology, it does not necessarily translate in the partiality towards *form* typical of Greek culture. If we look at premodern Japanese culture, we can see that it has historically insisted on *plena* such as colour and the qualitative aspects of vision, rather than abstract, objective forms. In early Japanese literature and poetry we find a keen attention to the different elements of subjective experience,

⁴ Madalina Diaconu, 'Reflections on an Aesthetics of Touch, Smell and Taste'. *Contemporary Aesthetics* 4, no. 4 (2006): 136.

distributed across the senses and often integrated into complex synaesthetic spaces and atmospheres. Among these, olfactory stimuluses, their description, and the associations arising from them, are an integral part of such aesthetic lawscapes. Secondly, without the development of a thing-based ontology and a metaphysics of the idea, both Chinese and Japanese culture have been open to a religious and aesthetic exploration of the liminal spaces of impermanence and disappearance, of what manifests itself between things without becoming one.

From these two connected conditions – a strong pull towards multiple sensual and embodied experiences, and an onto-aesthetics open to both positive and negative forms of manifestation – Japanese culture has produced not a unique, unitary olfactory logic, but a series of discourses and practices unfolding the intellectual potentials of smellscapes. These smellscapes have to be understood in this plural voice: through their mediality and atmospheric qualities, not by all-encompassing, unavoidably abstract definitions. A theory of smell is never detached from particular smellscapes.

Three Smellscapes

In this text we will discuss three different Japanese smellscapes, all of which exist as an intersection of the immediate, ecstatic experience of atmospheres and the double ‘folding’ of lawscapes. First, we will try to observe one of the most peculiar and less known Japanese traditions of refinement: *kōdō* 香道, literally ‘the way of incense’, a societal game of perfume guessing and appreciation that probably constitutes the only traditional smell-based game-cum-artform.

The case of *kōdō*, both in its antecedents, the courtly incense gatherings described in *The Story of Genji* and in the rule-bound gatherings of the Edo period, shows how, far from being a simple datum, the smellscape can be the result of training, linguistic definition, visualised cues and rules, and an intersubjective formation of meaning.

The second case is the formation of the metaphoric category of *nioi* におい ('scent') and *nioizuke* におい付け ('link by scent') in the poetic aesthetics of Bashō's school *haikai*. *Haikai* (literally 'humorous verse') differed from the modern, world-renowned poetry form of *haiku* (a single 17 morae verse, composed by an individual author) in being a form of art at once individual and collective, a chain of shifting scenes composed by different authors gathered in a poetic setting. Among the formalised modes of connection between poems Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) and his school developed a theory of connection based not on syntactical wording, ideas or form, but on a harmonising of heterogeneous elements, named in fact 'scent link'. This metaphorisation of smell as a sense of attunement and realisation of a paradoxical non-dual duality (reception and composition, other and self, etc.) highlights with a unique depth the comprehension of the auratic elements of experience active in Bashō's aesthetic thought.

The third smellscape is a modern one, and while being very Japanese, also bears the traces (all smells are traces after all) of several European odours: French oysters and perfumes, Western flowers like the rose, the dust of a German library. This unique bouquet characterises the thought of one Japan's most original and cosmopolitan 20th century thinkers, Kuki Shūzō (1888–1940). Kuki's philosophical work reveals, at several points, a unique attention to

smellscapes. His most well-known work, *The Structure of Iki* (1930), explores from a phenomenological perspective the notion of *iki*, a specific style of elegance and seduction that defined itself in the floating world (*ukiyo*) of 18th century Edo. Based on the interplay of sexual attraction, tension of the will and the eventual realisation of desire's impermanence, *iki* is considered by Kuki a cultural *unicum*, specific to Japan. But rather than perceiving this cultural specificity as earthbound 'roots', Kuki is employing an atmospheric paradigm, and defining *iki* as perfume, breathing, and atmosphere. Desire and culture are realms of the specific, residing not within an insular subject, but literally becoming the air of a place, its perfume. More than an 'essentialist' in ontological terms, Kuki is interested in the scent-like 'essence' carried by specific conformations of desire, locality and memory: this is why *iki* resists abstraction and generalisation, but not a philosophical discourse *per se*. In his works on literature and contingency, Kuki rediscovers smell as a sense of temporality and even metaphysics, able to grasp absence as such and open the immanent plane of experience towards a perpendicular mode of transcendence.

There is no unique, ahistorical ground to these experiences and theorisations of smell: no general and unifying ideas, no hidden 'essence' of Japanese uniqueness. Or rather, following the olfactory trails of Kuki, we can turn the term 'essence' over, and realise that it refers originally not to a stable identity, but to *the scent of something*, something that goes beyond the positively given thing, becoming a *non*-thing, and yet bringing within itself what is most intimate, *essential* to it.

To avoid both Western and Japanese exceptionalism, we can in fact rely on this idea of *essences* as particular auras

of different smellscapes, defined through their interactions and contingent progress. The three Japanese smellscapes presented in this text are thus 'other' not only in respect of a European point of view, but other from each other – with shared family resemblances, but no common identity – and through the particular phenomenology of scents, being other even to themselves.

On the Path of Incense

Incense is one of the quintessential exotic smells: beginning a discussion on Japanese smellscapes with it might even be a little dangerous. Nothing seems to compliment better the mix of spirituality and sensuality associated with the other in orientalist discourse, the fascination for the distant land constantly reassembled in lists and purple patches. In his long, erudite essay on incense in *Ghostly Japan*, an equal mixture of traveller's reminiscence, orientalist projection and a piece of scholarship, Lafcadio Hearn imagines a (still unwritten) *Book of Incense*, which ought to be composed of no less than thirteen different sections:

- a) A brief account of the earliest knowledge and use of aromatics in Japan;
- b) Records and legend of the first introduction of Buddhist incense from Korea (551 A.D.);
- c) Something would have to be said about those classifications of incense made during the 10th century;
- d) Then mention should be made of the ancient incenses still preserved in various Japanese temples;
- e) Then an outline of the history of mixed incenses made in Japan, with the one hundred and thirty varieties collected by the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa (1435–1490);

- f) We could list the traditions attached to historical incenses preserved in princely families, and recipes should be given for those strange incenses made ‘*to imitate the perfume of the lotos, the smell of the summer breeze, and the odor of the autumn wind*’;
- g) Some legends of the great period of incense-luxury should be cited (such as the story of Sue Owari no Kami [Sue Harukata, 1521–1555], who built a palace of incense woods and set fire to it on the night of his revolt, perfuming the land over a distance of twelve miles;
- h) A study of documents, treatises and books, such as the *Kunshūruishō* [薰集類抄] and the teaching of the Ten Schools of the Art of Mixing Incense;
- i) A special chapter should certainly be given to the incense bags (*kusadama*) hung up in houses to drive away goblins, and similar perfumed talismans to be carried on the person;
- j) Then a very large part of the work would have to be devoted to the religious uses and legends of incense – a huge subject in itself;
- k) There would also have to be consideration of the curious history of the old ‘incense assemblies’ whose elaborate ceremonials could be explained only by help of numerous diagrams;
- l) One chapter at least would be required for the subject of the ancient importation of incense-materials from India, China, Annam, Siam;
- m) A final chapter should treat the romantic literature of incense [...] and especially those love-songs comparing the body to incense, and passion to the eating flame.⁵

Of these thirteen voices I would like to focus on just one, the ‘curious history’ of incense gatherings, first in the imperial court during the Heian period (794–1185)

⁵ Lafcadio Hearn, *In Ghostly Japan* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co. 1889), 22–24.

and further formalised during the Tokugawa regime (Edo period: 1603–1868). I justify this choice not only for the relatively unknown status of *kōdō* (the name of the practice from the 17th century onwards) in comparison with other traditional ways of refinement such as the tea ceremony or ikebana, but also because of the lack of scholarship and experience of it outside, and even within, Japan.⁶ *Kōdō* offers a unique aesthetic puzzle, being probably the oldest and possibly the only formalised smell-based art form of the world. There is probably no other pre-avant-garde example of such an endeavor and quite surely not in Europe, where smell has been deemed an ‘anti-aesthetic sense’, too close to animality to reach the degree of detachment necessary for aesthetic appreciation. Kant, for instance, was particularly critical of the invasiveness of smell in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, declaring it ‘contrary to freedom and less sociable than taste.’⁷ *Kōdō* turns this supposed aesthetic disadvantage on its head, managing to be not only a smell-based artform, but also a convivial one, at the same time a serious aesthetic cultivation and a society game. Smelling is a highly subjective experience, and yet in being atmospheric it surrounds and attunes the whole gathering. To understand how some ritualised manifestation of smellscapes became the basis of a specific artform, we need to go back to the – obviously alien – social norms of the Japanese imperial court in the

⁶ An important, recent exception is the French volume by Chantal Jaquet, *Philosophie du kōdō: l'esthétique japonaise des fragrances* (Paris: Vrin, 2018).

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006 [1798]), 50.

Heian period. It would be hard to find a place in which smellscapes and lawscapes are more intimately connected.

The Heian court of Kyoto was a highly formalised society, in which rank was not only arranged by means of politics, but also through numerous displays of sophistication: poetry, taste in clothing, calligraphy, personal smells. A poetic competition was roughly the equivalent of jousting among European nobility – no less fierce in competition, no less important in order to raise one's status, no less disgraceful in the case of failure. Mostly disengaged from actual politics, Heian aristocracy lived in a social space of extreme formality and refinement, of strong feelings mixed with ennui and melancholia, but also love play. Men and women were kept physically separate by strict etiquette and a host of protocol and rank distinctions. The forced separations of this lawscape were not simply a hindrance to seduction, however, they were rather integrated into a different sort of erotic interaction, also highly formalised. Accounts of courtly love in Europe focus on the appearance and the *gaze* of the beloved, such as in Dante or Petrarch, following the much older visual character of the erotic, first defined by Plato. The Japanese 'lovescape' revelled instead in mediations: not the body, but clothing and hair; not touch, but calligraphy; not voice, but poetry and letters; not sight, but smells:

One reason why incense was held in such high esteem arose from the customs of upper-class Heian society. People rarely saw each other. Even members of the same sex, if not on close terms, met with a curtain between them. To make matters worse, in the case of romantic conversations, the man might not

hear the voice of the woman whom he was courting until the romance reached its later stages. Until then he had to be content with the voice of a lady's maid repeating her mistress' message.⁸

An appreciation of absence is the basic structure of longing. What is given visually, however, often loses such pathetic sense of distance: separation becomes the *condition* of sight, not its theme. Smell, on the contrary, means being surrounded and infused by the other, without necessarily constituting them as a definite object or a presence. Rather than by transitive expressions like 'loving someone', a phenomenology of olfactive desire might rather be expressed as, literally, 'being into' them.

Smell did not just 'express' a lady's character, it was part of it. Conceiving this olfactory datum (again, never simply bodily odours, but clothing, perfumes, wood, food) as something only *associated* with a person means missing a crucial point: the being-given-together, one within the other, of the material-visible and the etheric-auratic poles of the same atmospheric space.

This mutual belonging of scent and person is true in general: it was however even truer for Heian aristocrats, among whom incense making and appreciation was a form of self-cultivation as common and as important as poetry. Crafting incense (*takimono*) was a sign of one's good taste and sophistication, but was also a display of status, and many recipes were jealously guarded knowledge, transmitted along noble lineages. All incenses were composed of six staple ingredients (aloeswood, clove,

⁸ Aileen Gatten, 'A Wisp of Smoke, Scent and Character in the *Tale of Genji*'. *Monumenta Nipponica* 32, no. 1 (1977): 36.

seashells, amber, sandalwood and musk) in varying proportions, plus a seventh, different ingredient for each of the six basic types of *takimono*.⁹ A formalisation of six basic scents dates to the reign of Emperor Nimmyō (833–850) by Prince Kaya and the Minister, Fujiwara Fuyutsugu, and each of them was furthermore connected to seasonal and literary references.

As is quite clear from the descriptions of Go-Fushimi, describing a smell is always, if not difficult, a dip into non-literal language. In the *takimono* list we see descriptions of flowers, that are *not* an ingredient of a perfume, but its *metaphor*, a visual cue of its character; or otherwise, a synaesthetic ‘colour’; a seasonal scene like falling leaves and *susuki* billowing in the wind; a direct feeling of impermanence (*mono no aware*) or lost love. As a place of belonging and meeting, smellscape held together personal sensitivities and interpersonal literary references that were central to the self-expression of Heian-era aristocrats.

We have a prime example of this multidimensionality of incense in a major literary document of the Heian period, *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Monogatari*). The whole novel is awash with perfumes: we see scenes of courtship take place through incense burning, or courtship failing when too sweet a perfume reveals the vulgar character of a lady (XXV, *Fireflies*). Further, two male characters are identified in their roles and relationship by their fragrances (Prince Kaoru, whose body emits naturally a wonderful scent, and Prince Niou, who out of jealousy becomes obsessed with the alchemy of incenses).¹⁰ There is a whole chapter

⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰ Ibid., 41.

INCENSE (TAKIMONO)	SEASON	DESCRIPTION ACCORDING TO THE <i>METHODS OF BURNING INCENSE RECORDED BY FORMER EMPEROR GO-FUSHIMI</i> , 14TH CENTURY
梅花 <i>Baika</i> Plum Blossom	Spring	'Similar to the smell of plum blossom.'
荷葉 <i>Kayō</i> Lotus leaf	Summer	'Approaching the smell of lotus flowers.'
侍従 <i>Jijū</i> Chamberlain	Autumn	'A smell that brings forth old memories, like the melancholic pathos (<i>mono no aware</i>) of the heart in the autumn wind.'
菊花 <i>Kikka</i> Chrysanthemum	Autumn Winter	'Like the colour of chrysanthemum flower, not unlike the perfume of dew.'
落葉 <i>Rakuyō</i> Fallen leaves	autumn Winter	'Imitating the falling leaves of <i>momiji</i> , reminiscent of the gentle shape of <i>susuki</i> .'
黒方 <i>Kurohō</i> Black	Winter (special celebrations)	'Like the cold air of deep winter, a smell that gets deep in the body, and reminds of a lost love across the four seasons.'

of the *Genji Monogatari* dedicated to incense gathering (XXXII, *A Branch of Plum*), describing an incense competition a by Prince Genji for several ladies (many of which are present or former lovers):

Genji planned something exceptional for his daughter's donning of the train. The Heir Apparent was to come of age in the same second month, and her presentation to him would presumably follow. [...] He had his incense woods old and new arranged before him and then passed out to his ladies with the request that they make two blends each. Everyone at Rokujō and elsewhere was caught up in preparing superb gifts for the guests, rewards for the senior nobles, and so on; but now each had choices to make as well, and iron mortars rang loudly everywhere. [...] Genji sequestered himself in the main house and blended away according to the two methods (how had he ever learned them?) covered in the Sōwa Instructions. His lady had had herself specially installed in the deepest recess of her eastern extension to master the method taught by the Hachijō Lord of Ceremonial. So the two vied with each other, and her strict secrecy moved Genji to remark, 'After all, a fragrance wins or loses according to whether it is shallow or deep!'¹¹

The role of perfumes here is both aesthetic and political: Genji hopes that his daughter can become a lady-in-waiting for the Empress and meet the Crown Prince, who is of the same age.

But, just as with smells, the scene also has different overtones: each of the women present perfumes that express something private and personal – her status, her

¹¹ Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Royall Tyler (London: Penguin 2016). Chapter 32, 'The Plum Tree Branch'.

residence, the season that best represents her personality, and her relationship to Genji.¹²

Such all-encompassing aestheticism is a hallmark of Heian court life. In later eras, with the rise of the military class, incense gatherings retained their role as a demonstration of status and wealth but moved towards a sensitivity distinctly different from that of the Heian aristocracy. Sasaki Takauji (1306–1373), a military governor for the Ashikaga Shogunate, famous for his accomplishments in poetry and the luxurious extravagance typical of this period (*basara*), once famously lit a block of incense, weighing almost a kilogram, at once. During the same period, two other military lords with a passion for poetry and the newly formalised tea ceremony, Shino Sōshin (?–1480) and Sanjōnishi Sanetaka (1455–1537), started codifying a new way of incense burning. The aesthetics of the military class in the 15th century, which also developed through its relationship with Zen and the tea ceremony, ultimately developed a penchant for essentiality and impermanence. Rather than personalised blends, the smelling gatherings of this period were thus increasingly based on pure aloeswood, an expensive imported material that was classified by six main proveniences and five particular flavours. This further formalisation developed into incense meetings (*kōkai* or *kumikō*) in which art and refinement met in a game of guessing.

The number of varieties to guess varied from setting to setting; in many cases the host provided most of the incense, and guests might contribute with one variety. A sample of the host's incense was burnt as a reference

¹² Gatten, 'A Wisp of Smoke', 45–46.

before the start of the game, but the guest's incense was kept as a surprise. Very often, incenses were named after poetic images according to the season or literary references. Gatten describes one of the easiest forms of *kōkai*, the Pine-Bamboo-Plum:

The three scents, *Shō* (Pine), *Chiku* (Bamboo), and *Bai* (Plum) are first presented in a *tameshi*, or trial run. Each scent is identified by the master of ceremonies before it is passed on to the participants. When everyone has had an opportunity to sample the three scents, the packets containing the incense are shuffled to mix up the order. The three scents are then passed around again, and one must identify them by their characteristic odor. This is more difficult than it may seem. One cannot rely on the memory of familiar fragrances: the scent named Pine, for instance, does not smell especially like a pine forest, nor does the Plum resemble the fragrance of a plum blossom. The scents are entrancing but abstract; they are distinct when one samples them, and have passed from memory by the second round. [...] Approximately twenty people took part: all but one failed to identify the scents correctly.¹³

Hearn describes a more complex game, in which the number of possible scents is four, with ten smell-rounds (十炷香 *jicchūkō*). But the variants are numerous. A particularly interesting version, which developed during the Edo period, is *Genji-kō*, in which the game references the perfumed world of *Genji Monogatari*. I personally tried it in 2018 at Yamadamatsu, a traditional incense manufacturer not far from the grounds of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto. In *Genji-kō* twenty-five fragments of aloeswood, of

¹³ Ibid., 48.

five different kinds, are mixed. Five pieces are picked up and arranged in order, noted down by the master of the gathering, and then put on braziers and passed among the participants. While it is possible to have the same scent repeated five times or five different scents, most combinations will contain some repetition. There are 52 possible combinations. To note the sequence down, another highly aesthetic system of graphic cues has been developed, the *Genjikō no zu* (源氏香). For each of the five incenses passed among the participants, each traces a vertical line on a piece of paper, from right to left. Then, if the current fragrance is the same as a previous one, a horizontal line is drawn across the vertical ones, connecting them to form a sort of bridge shape (see Figure 1). By doing so, the participants of *Genji-kō* can trace 52 possible patterns, which are named after *Genji Monogatari*'s 54 chapters (with only the first and last, 'The Paulonia Court' and 'The Bridge of Dreams', excluded). The logic of smells as a means of poetic expression, a cultural development that characterized the *Genji Monogatari* itself, is employed recursively, as a reference for aesthetic patterns and to evoke a perfumed world that existed in centuries long gone.

Genjikō glyphs make visible a temporal, invisible sequence; translate it into a literary realm, connecting it to the events, characters and emotive tones of the corresponding chapters; and can also be reproduced on the tools used in the ceremony, becoming patterns on a kimono or obi, or appear in graphic arts, hinting at the world of *Genji* and that of *kōdō* simultaneously. For instance, we see them in many of the *ukiyo-e* illustrations by Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865) for

						
帯木 Hōki	空蟬 Utsusemi	夕顔 Yūgao	若紫 Wakamurasaki	末摘花 Suetsumuhana	紅葉賀 Momijinoga	花宴 Hana no en
						
葵 Aoi	賢木 Sakaki	花散里 Hana chiru sato	須磨 Suma	明 Akashi	滯櫻 Miotsukushi	蓬生 Yomogiu
						
関屋 Sekiya	絵合 Eawase	松風 Matsukaze	薄雲 Usugumo	朝顔 Asagao	乙女 Otome	玉鬘 Tamakazura
						
初音 Hatsune	胡蝶 Kochō	螢 Hotaru	常夏 Tokonatsu	篝火 Kagaribi	野分 Nowaki	行幸 Miyuki
						
藤袴 Fujibakama	横柱 Makibashira	梅枝 Umegae	藤裏葉 Fuji no uraba	若菜上 Wakana jō	若菜下 Wakana ge	柏木 Kashiwagi
						
横笛 Yokobue	鈴虫 Suzumushi	夕霧 Yūgiri	御法 Minori	幻 Maboroshi	匂宮 Nioumiya	紅梅 Kōbai
						
竹河 Takekawa	橋姬 Hashihime	椎本 Shiigamoto	総角 Agemaki	早蕨 Sawarabi	宿木 Yadorigi	東屋 Azumaya
						
浮舟 Ukifune	蜻蛉 Kagerō	手習 Tenarai				

Figure 1: *The 52 Genjikō no zu* 源氏香図.

the *Nise Murasaki inaka Genji* (*Fake Murasaki and a Country Genji*), a parodic work by Ryūtei Tanehiko published between 1829 and 1842. Switching from the refinement of Heian court to the humorous fictional adventures of the second Ashikaga shōgun's son, Mitsuuji, and swapping the classic poetry of nobility,

waka, with the popular and ironic form of *haikai* (the antecedent of modern *haiku*), the *Nise Murasaki* is an example of the Edo taste for parody, graphic puns, and comic intertextuality.

This interplay of scents and intertextuality is itself significant. There is in fact a certain isomorphic relationship between the two texts, original and parody, on one side, and the way in which scent can connect two moments in time on the other. Literary reference is a particular mode of unity in duality: the original is not present, but it lingers in the derivative text exactly as a 'scent' would do in the lifeworld. It is active in absence: remembered, but in a partial, non-representational way that does not obstruct what is present, but gives it a surreal depth. This is the inherent quality of scent-memory, the difficulty of which the games of *kumikō*, *Genjikō* included, rely. The paradox is that while smell is certainly *the* sense of memory, we cannot recall smells. This is confirmed by Gatten, who, in recalling a *kōdō* meeting, notes that, 'the scents are entrancing but abstract; they are distinct when one samples them, and have passed from memory by the second round.'¹⁴ I have experienced myself this unexpected difficulty during my experiences of *kōdō*, and overheard a Japanese woman attending the ceremony perfectly express the reason for their surprising self-erasure from memory: *Katachi ga nai no de...* 'It is because they have no shape...' Thus, *kōdō* is a form of art rather than a simple game not only because of its multi-layered refinement, and for the skills required to participate, but because it reveals through its rules, through the particular

¹⁴ Ibid.

lawscape of the gathering, something essential and yet often unrecognised about the phenomenology of smell: its non-linear temporality. Smell is for us the sense of connections – among people, environments, and especially across time. And yet it is not at our disposal as a voluntary remembrance or a stable object. Its representation must be a *re-presentation* in the literal sense of a *happening again*. We do not hold smells under our control, we are not able to evoke them at will; rather, the opposite is true, since a smell from the past can hold sway over us and bring back a forgotten memory, which seems for a moment to be in the air. This dynamic of disappearance and re-presentation, which is then centrifugally expressed in literary forms and images, is nothing less than the central experience of *kōdō*.

Discussion of ‘connection’ also forces upon us another question. The atmospheric value of smell is not only a spatial connector (the smellscape), but also acts temporally, as we have seen. Both personal memories and past identities surface again in smellscapes. Of the traditional five senses, hearing has perhaps the strongest temporal connotations. But while the temporality of hearing is linear, and once exteriorised and made visible in language or music notation belongs to a spatialised, objective temporality, the temporality of smell is sudden and discontinuous, a gap or absence followed by a magical return of the selfsame. The Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shūzō, reflecting on the nexus of smells and time, speaks of its ‘metaphysics’, as we will see. But the art form that seems best suited to explore this pattern of discontinuous temporality through which such ‘connection’ can arise, is literature.

The use of odor in literature emphasizes that while one may stand outside a visual landscape and judge it artistically, as one does a painting, one is immersed in smellscape; it is immediately evocative, emotional and meaningful. Literature, largely British and twentieth century, provides ample data for the discussion of smells of persons and landscapes in space and through time.¹⁵

Porteous' claim is correct, even if his belief that smell-literature is 'largely British and twentieth century' is at best dubious. It is true, however, that one of the best-known reflections on smell and taste in Europe is not the work of a philosopher but the *madeleine*-triggered reminiscence at the beginning of Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and that in *kōdō* the indescribable quality of smellscape sequences becomes image and poetry through its transfiguration into literary references.

Is there a structural affinity between scent-time and literary time? There is one uniquely Japanese literary form in which this temporal quality of smell has been grasped and rendered into an essential tool of aesthetic understanding, creating what Haruo Shirane has called, very appropriately, 'the poetics of scent': the chained poetry of *haikai*.

The Poetics of Scent

The notion of 'scent' (*nioi* 匂い) has a central role in the lawscape of *haikai* – Japanese comic chained poetry – and especially in the school led by Matsuo Bashō

¹⁵ Douglas Porteous, 'Smellscape', 360.

(松尾芭蕉 1644–1694), beginning from the late 1680s. Today, Bashō is known as a *haiku* poet, the first premodern master of the Japanese 17-morae poetic form. But the modern form of *haiku* was actually first named and defined by Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), during the Meiji period (1868–1912), in a dialogue with an idea of literature already influenced by Western standards. One of Shiki's peeves against *haikai* was it being a multi-authorial and impromptu composition, a poetry of sudden connection between friends or even strangers, too far removed from authoriality in its modern, Western sense.

The use of poetic dialogue in Japanese poetry had already begun with the tradition of courtly poetry, *waka*. Following a 5-7-5/7-7 morae pattern, *waka* lent itself to being composed by two different authors, with the first 17 morae (*kami*) creating a scene and the second fourteen (*shimo*) completing it through a series of formalised associations. During the 11th and 13th centuries, courtly games meant that the form evolved into longer chained sequences: after the 14-morae *shimo* a third poet would attach another 17-syllable fragment, meant to be read just with the 14-morae immediately before it (the first sequence was to be 'pushed away', *uchikoshi*). This effectively created a shift in the scene, which gained a cinematic quality and could move (always according to a specific set of often very complex rules) through seasons, characters, places and themes. While an extreme example of refinement, the stiff conventionality of this kind of poetry meant that by the 14th century an informal and less serious form, not limited to the aristocracy and the samurai class but also increasingly enjoyed by bourgeoisie

and commoners, gained ground. It was called *haikai no renga*, ‘comic linked verse’. Mixing common spoken language and Chinese words with the classical Japanese of *renga* and employing a playful language that often relied on puns or crude humour, *haikai* was considered a minor divertissement until the 17th century, when masters like Teitoku, Sōin and Onitsura more earnestly explored its aesthetic potential, respectively stressing its continuity with *waka*, its freedom and irony, and its ability to re-stitute experience with sincerity (*makoto*). Bashō synthesised all these elements in a unique, powerful formula that mixed high and low, and oscillated masterfully between the courtly tradition, Buddhist themes, and the everyday lives of ordinary Japanese citizens, blending Chinese classics and Japanese sensitivity. Before his death he became the undiscussed master of *haikai* throughout Japan, also thanks to his constant travels in the last ten years of his short life.

Haikai is unique in being a composition that is at the same time individual and collective. While each author could be better or worse at producing single verses (*ku*), often excelling in one or two types of scenes, the artistic quality of the sequence arose not only from the beauty of the single verses, but from the ‘negative’ element of their linking, the gap between them. Bashō once declared himself *better* at linking verses, rather than as the author of single poems. This stress on linking means that *haikai* poets were both passive and active, composers and audience at the same time. The assembly of the poetic session (*za* 座 ‘sitting’) was an attuned lawscape in which human beings explored both their individual and their collective

existence; *haikai* poets had therefore to show, through their contribution, how finely they understood the preceding verse and the lingering atmosphere of the whole session in order to produce something new by letting it affect their own feelings and imagination. Too much distance meant that the aesthetic unity between two linked verses was broken; too little was a sign of little talent and self-confidence. Each poet had to 'create and interpret each strophe in light of the poem's totality while at the same time attempting to understand each individual strophe within the contextual atmosphere of the particular *renga* as a whole.'¹⁶

Before Bashō, these links between poems were mostly based on formal associations or diction (*monozuke*, 'lexicon link') and on the overt elements of its scene (*kokorozuke*, 'content link'). Bashō however became interested in new kinds of indirect, atmospheric links that were gathered under the term *nioizuke*, 'scent link'. Haruo Shirane, in his seminal essay 'Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent' notes that by recognising the aesthetic potential of linking two different worlds by an overtone or an atmosphere, rather than explicit content or wording, the *nioizuke* produces a dynamic metaphorical effect, close to that of montage in cinema:

A succession of seemingly unrelated shots are closely linked by connotation or overtone. Sergei Eisenstein, a pioneer in film production and theory, once define

¹⁶ Tadashi Ogawa, 'A Short Study of Japanese Renga: The Trans-Subjective Creation of Poetic Atmosphere', in *Destiny, the Inward Quest, Temporality and Life*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (New York: Springer, 2011), 259.

montage as ‘an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots’ and that may result in ‘emotional dynamization.’¹⁷

We can think of this ‘emotional dynamization’ not simply as a visual phenomenon: in fact, the smellscape, too, works by interactions, letting objects extend beyond themselves and turning them into a new dynamic whole. In the case of *haikai* two distinct images in temporal sequence, from two different subjectivities, come together in what is in effect a negative space: the temporal pause between them. As in cinema, or, an even better comparison, comics, the space between two frames is the implicit device allowing this discontinuous temporality to create an emotive or narrative effect. This empty space is what lets the atmospheric be: scent and atmosphere are connecting two things *without making them one*, since the later verse should only carry ‘the atmosphere of its predecessor much as the fragrance of a flower is carried by the wind.’¹⁸

This elevation of scent to a general principle of poetics was later stressed by another *haikai* theoretician and disciple of Bashō, Kagami Shikō (各務支考 1665–1731) who, in his *Jūron’i benshō* (*In Defense of My ‘Ten Treaties’, 1725*), equates the notion of *nioi* to another central concept of classic Japanese aesthetics, the ‘emotive overtone’ (*yosei* 余情): ‘what is called an overtone (*yosei*) in classical poetry is called scent (*nioi*) in *haikai*.’¹⁹ *Yosei*,

¹⁷ Haruo Shirane, ‘Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent’. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (1992): 86.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

overtone, was the term originally used for poetry capable of an emotive effect going beyond words, leaving an element unsaid and invisible, as the ‘atmosphere that is not revealed through the form of the poem.’²⁰ If the atmospheric element of *yosei* is what goes beyond the given words in a single poem, the effect of *nioi* relied too on this aesthetic potential of gaps or atmospheres between different moments in poetry. Shirane also argues that the principles of *nioi* poetics are active in Japanese aesthetics at large:

The aesthetics of *nioi* is by no means limited to Bashō. It can be found in a variety of traditional Japanese arts, from landscape gardens to architecture to flower arrangement, and forms a part of the larger medieval aesthetics of resonances.²¹

But however general a principle, it is in the *haikai* use of *nioi* that this metaphoric scent becomes paradigmatic. Given that *haikai* chains are little known by Western and even Japanese readers, let us observe one. The poetics of scent is prominent for the first time in the Bashō School collection, *Sarumino (The Monkey’s Straw Raincoat)*, published by Nozawa Bonchō and Mukai Kyorai in 1691. It includes four *kasen* (36 verse chains) considered the peak of Bashō School style, and it is closed by another of Bashō’s masterpieces, the short poetic prose (*haibun*), *An Account from the Illusory Dwelling*.

²⁰ Michael Marra, *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1999), 149.

²¹ Shirane, ‘Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent’, 109.

One of the four *kasen* series, ‘Summer Moon’, begins with a poem that has a smellscape as the theme of its scene, and then goes on to explore this scented world through the gaps in *nioi* connections. The three poets participating were Bashō and two of his most accomplished disciples, Bonchō and Kyorai. Here are the first four linked verses:

市中は 物のにほひや 夏の月 (凡兆)	<i>Ichinaka wa Mono no nioi ya Natsu no tsuki</i>	Out in the city The smell of things – Summer moon
	(Bonchō)	
あつし／＼と 門／＼の声 (芭蕉)	<i>Atsushi atsushi to Kado kado no koe</i>	It’s hot, oh so hot! Voices say gate by gate
	(Bashō)	
二番草 取りも果さず 穂に出て (去来)	<i>Nibankusa Tori mo hatsazu Ho ni dete</i>	The second weeding Not yet done, and already Ears of rice
	(Kyorai)	
灰うちたゝく うるめ一枚 (兆)	<i>Hai uchitataku Urume ichimai</i>	Tapping off the ashes a thin dried sardine
	(Bonchō)	

The city of Kyoto, surrounded by hills, is unbearably hot and damp in summer. Moreover, the poem does not describe the refined northern side of the city, but downtown, the more popular and commercial part (*ichinaka*). In the hot evening, the city’s smellscape, with its nature, food, people and animals, melts into a big, powerful note:

in the night, as vision is reduced and the paper doors have to stay open to allow fresh air into the home, the smell of the world is everywhere. The expression *mono no nioi*, ‘the smell of things’, might even hint at a much older, noble ideal of sensitivity from the Heian period, the *mono no aware* (pathos of things), the ability to be moved by the presence and impermanence of things. If the reference is there, it is half serious and half parodic, in *haikai* style. The damp sweat of summer and the smell of roasted fish is surely far from classical images of beauty: but things of the world are present and fused together in their smell, seeping into our sensitivity and at the same time ready to scatter and disappear, just like the cherry blossoms of classical poetry. Scents, like emotions, are first and foremost *of things*: not a private, internal sensation, but a pathetic affection that reveals our subjectivity as part of a whole, emplaced in an impersonal ‘it smells ... it feels’ in which it can first become conscious of itself.

Bonchō’s *hokku* juxtaposes this horizontal expansion of the smellscape with a sudden vertical jolt. The moon, waxing and waning, is something aloof, beyond the passions of the world. Typically a seasonal word (*kigo*), indicating autumn, in this case is overtly stated to be the moon of summer: this not only implies that the city smells are those caused by the heat of the season, but introduces another specific poetic essence (*hon’i*, the ‘true idea’ of a thing as revealed in poetry), in this case freshness, the topical meaning of a summer moon. The moon is seen, not smelled: this vision however, rather than suggesting one of simple contemplation, is fused with an olfactory scene of the city. What the two elements of this *hokku*

have in common is a sense of distance. But rather than subtracting from their aesthetic effect, their heterogeneity becomes the unique smellscape of a summer evening. Even the moon has a certain scent.

Bashō's *waki*, answering to Bonchō, adds aurality to this scene, integrating people and movement to the development of the poem. This verse's structure is all acoustic, not just in terms of content, but with its repetition, rhythm and alliteration (*kado kado no koe*). Not a single sound or a unified music, but a sense of shared connection via a climate – isn't discussion of the weather the smallest of small talk, and yet the also surest sign of our belonging together, in the same atmosphere?²²

Just as this first image is complete, the addition of a third verse by Kyorai moves on from the night city smells (as with all smells, they are impermanent) and shifts the scene from the city to the countryside. The heat wave is making rice mature faster than normal, before the second weeding. The explosive plant growth of the hot, damp Japanese summer gives the sequence a different kind of depth, invoking the seasonal life of farming families. The 'emotional dynamization' of montage realises a new setting with a *nioi* link that is atmospheric: the hot air of summer.

The fourth verse, again by Bonchō, is another scent link. The transference here is from the vast to the small, the 'thin' (*hosomi*, another ideal of Bashō School *haikai*). With the haste of the field work, a single dried

²² Watsuji, Tetsurō. *A Climate; A Philosophical Study* (Tokyo: Printing Bureau, Japanese Government, 1962), 15.

sardine covered in ashes becomes a very frugal lunch before returning to the rice fields. Smell is back, the mix of charcoal and fish that speaks of the worn poverty praised and spiritualised as *wabi* by Bashō's poetics. From the general overview of farming life we move to a concrete image, another technique that anticipates cinematic montage. But the *nioi*, connecting the rural environment and the meagre dried sardine, is not simply a synecdoche. As Shirane notes, *nioi* counts as a metaphor not simply by describing as 'scent' the linguistic formalisation of distant links: the metaphoric axis of poetry is recognised by *haikai* poetics as a smell-quality, with its capacity of blending and relating different sides of being:

Roman Jakobson has argued that literary discourse develops along two fundamental lines of verbal behavior, selection and combination, that is to say, a metaphorical axis, in which words are linked by substitution, similarity, or dissimilarity, and a metonymic axis, in which words are joined by contiguity, particularly as a combination of elements in a grammatical or narrative sequence [...] An ideal *nioi* link also did not depend on metonymy in its more general forms of cause and effect, narrative continuity, character portrayal, or dilation on an existing scene. Instead, *nioi* poetics favored a more metaphorical juxtaposition in which the *maeku* and the *tsukeku* intersected on a shared connotation, often in montage fashion. [...] *Nioi*, in short, was a rhetorical trope in which the two linked verses often had the function of mutual metaphors. These were not metaphors in the traditional sense of the word, in which a direct transference was made between one image and another. Instead, the *nioi* link relied

on selective juxtaposition, in which the connections were only suggested.²³

The unexpected blending of two different things is not limited to metaphor. It can be considered for instance typical of irony, and the laughter of *haikai* often works through such juxtapositions. In the poetics of scent, *nioi* is not simply an intra-textual metaphor, but works also as a second-degree one, employed to describe and visualise the invisible *poiesis* of the metaphorical activity at the core of language. Scent moves through a vertical axis that transcends what is visible and present, both temporally and physically. If the essence of scent-as-metaphor, in this more radical sense, is in its *beyondness*, there is always some *metaphysics* in the *metaphoric*, and vice versa.

This discovery of smell as a metaphoric axis does not apply only to the chained poetry of *haikai no renga*. On the contrary, as the reliance on scent links meant that single *hokku* were increasingly perceived as independent units, the structure of *nioi* connections eventually started to be employed within the single poem also. A fine example of this internal scent in the Bashō School already appears in the *hokku* about the city smells and the moon by Bonchō: as we saw, the horizontal plane of smellscape is intersected with a sense of freshness of the moon, and the two are blended without fusing, with the verticality of this association making the *hokku* a crossroad of immanence and transcendence. Another *hokku* by Bashō,

²³ Shirane, 'Matsuo Bashō and the Poetics of Scent', 82.

which uses scent both as an image *within* the poem and as instantiation of the associative-metaphysical structure of poetry, is this composition, dated autumn 1694, a few months before his death:

菊の香や	<i>Kiku no ka ya</i>	Chrysanthemums' scent
奈良には古き	<i>Nara ni wa furuki</i>	In Nara many ancient
仏たち	<i>Hotoketachi</i>	figures of Buddhas

Chrysanthemums and their scent have been associated with autumn since antiquity. Nara, the most ancient capital of Japan (from 710 to 784), was greatly shaped by Buddhism, which arrived in Japan bringing with it the incenses essential to its rites. According to Shirane, 'the dignified, elegant statues of buddhas that fill the temples of the old capital of Nara have no metonymic connection to the scent of chrysanthemums – the statues are not surrounded by flowers – and yet the overtones of the two parts fuse: both possess antique and elegant atmospheres.'²⁴ What is separated physically and temporally – *many* statues, a faraway past, living flowers and ancient human art – exist together in a state of non-obstruction as atmosphere. Scent hence reveals a particular metaphysical overtone, both in a sense of temporality and as pure, metaphysical transcendence. Even if we don't assume that Bashō's failing health – he died aged just 50 – would mean his thoughts would turn to Buddhist salvation, and even bracketing his own nuanced understanding of Buddhist philosophy, the overlapping of Buddhism

²⁴ Ibid., 103.

and scent – if not a classic theme in poetry – is far from uncommon in Buddhist history and practice:

Buddhism always honored scents. Its statues are of fragrant woods, sandalwood is used to evoke the mysteries of the cult [...] like many other religions, incense and Buddhism weaved together this symbolic relationship, that is that of transcendence. Incense and its fumes become the evanescent ways that elevate man towards divinity.²⁵

By being a symbolic or metaphoric connector, scent here links two elements – Buddha statues, with their own aura of dignity, and the smell of chrysanthemums. But both elements of this smellscape have a distinct *temporal* connotation. Just as the smell of *nioizuke* worked in the temporal gap between poems, letting the absent linger, here the temporal disclosure of smell is even stronger. Bashō is separated from the ancient Buddhism of Nara and the old incense rituals of the Imperial Court by 1,000 years. But this temporal distance is not perceived as the spatialised, objective time criticised by Henri Bergson: it is a gap or distance within the present scene, making both moments exist differentially within the smellscape. While the connection of memory and smell is commonplace, in the context of a phenomenology of smellscapes we can turn this idea on itself, and rather affirm that *it is temporality that exists like scent*. We do not remember a scent: we exist within it in a cross-temporal way, *feeling* the past

²⁵ Louise Boudonnat and Harumi Kushizaki, *La voie de l'encens* (Arles: Picquier 2000), 41–43.

within the present. Smell is at the same time a sense of proximity, intimacy, and of metaphysical distance:

Fragrance has no rhythm, to be sure: one does not have fragrance *within* time. [...] The oral sensorium does not merely create in us a state of attunement, but also a sense of *repetition*. We cannot of course repeat the fragrance, as we would repeat a line or a melody; but the fragrance repeats *us*, as it were [...] *in fragrance and flavor the enduring element of the past, its atmosphere, is preserved.*²⁶

This temporal ecstasy is even clearer in another *hokku* by Bashō, which reveals a perfect understanding of this dynamic, and effectively anticipates the grammar of the Proustian *madeleine* of a couple of centuries later:

橘や いつの野中の ほととぎす	Tachibana ya Itsu no nonaka no Hototogisu	Wild mandarins- And a cuckoo, yes, But in which past field?
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Bashō was a highly spatial poet: his own sensitivity is breathing through things themselves, and even time here manifests itself as an atmospheric ‘place’. The scent of wild mandarins and the call of a cuckoo, two symbols of summer, compose a quick and brilliant synaesthesia. But the middle verse, with its ruminating nasal repetitions (*itsu no nonaka no*), suggests even in sound the process of recalling – the oral sensorium of mouth and nose is the

²⁶ Hubertus Tellenbach, ‘Tasting and Smelling – Taste and Atmosphere – Atmosphere and Trust’. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* 12 (2), 1981: 223–4.

place where scent becomes *us*, after all. There is a vertical *durée* discovered in the smellscape, that does not become a specific memory, but is a place in itself. Unlike Proust, Bashō is not discovering his own lost time, but rather finding eternity in a half-remembered instant of smell.

Bashō never wrote about the philosophical elements of his poetics, which included Buddhist, Daoist and Neo-Confucian views and an unmatched phenomenological attention towards his own experiences as a traveller. But we know from the records of his disciples that he spoke often of art's paradoxical temporality through a notion of his making, *fueki ryūkō* 不易流行 'eternal-changing'. *Fueki ryūkō* refers to the constant elements and ever-changing modishness of artistic style, but also has an ontological meaning, grounding human creativity in the mix of ever-changing phenomena and non-phenomenal a-temporality (or meta-temporality) of nature. According to Toshihiko Izutsu, 'in the linguistic 'field' of *haiku*, the phenomenal transiency (*ryūkō*) is made to assume a positive form while metaphysical constancy (*fueki*) is given a position of hidden, negative subsistence as its background.'²⁷ This interrelation is quite clear in the scent of mandarins: it is both a quickly fading whiff and a trans-temporal, metaphysical field.

Does scent really have this metaphysical relevance, as something intimate and transcendent at once, flesh becoming spirit and vice versa? Here, I would like to

²⁷ Toshihiko Izutsu and Toyo Izutsu, *The Theory of Beauty in the Classical Aesthetics of Japan* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1981), 71.

conclude by focusing on the keen interest in the philosophical conundrum of smellscape and atmospheres shown by modern Japanese philosopher, Kuki Shūzō.

Intimacy as Metaphysics: Kuki Shūzō and the Smellscape of *Iki*

With the turbulent opening to the ‘West’ coinciding with the beginning of Meiji period (1868–1912), Japanese philosophy faced several unique problems. Philosophy described itself as one of the practices defining the ideological reality of the ‘West’, grounding it in the myth of its Greek origin beyond any effective historical continuity. All the while attempting to translate this corpus and adapt to it, aspiring to a participation to Western philosophical discourse, Japanese philosophers, especially after the turn of the century, also began to critique its ethnocentric assumptions, drawing from key insights of Japanese culture. In doing so, however, they were also – often unwittingly – reshaping and transforming that very tradition into a discourse that reflected their cross-cultural formation.

One of the most compelling figures of this intellectual milieu was Kuki Shūzō 九鬼周造(1888–1940). The intersection of globalism, tradition and the fractured self of Japanese modernity is evident in Kuki’s biography even before his birth. Kuki was the son of the baron and diplomat Kuki Ryūichi (1852–1931), himself a disciple of Japan’s first political moderniser, Fukuzawa Yukichi, and of a former geisha from Kyoto, Hatsuko, who had accompanied her husband in his role as cultural ambassador to the United States in the 1880s. Due to difficulties during

her pregnancy, Hatsuko was sent back to Japan, in the company of the younger Okakura Tenshin (1862–1913), an influential intellectual and one of the first advocates of traditional culture's worth in Japan and in the West.

During the boat trip back to Japan, Okakura and Hatsuko began a love affair that eventually resulted in her divorce from Baron Kuki and ended with her descent into mental illness. Shūzō's early years thus bore the mark of familial fracture and the dangers of desire. Further, Baron Kuki and Okakura were themselves two opposing models of Japanese intellectual modernity. Shūzō's thought was also a lifelong quest to reconcile such contradictions, or to find meaning within contradiction itself.

After formative years that reflected his elite background, schooling at the First High School and then at the Imperial University in Tokyo, Kuki left for Europe in 1921. His financial means (and the European post-war economic crisis) allowed him to remain for eight years – much longer than contemporaries who typically stayed only one or two years, relying on scholarships for funding. Moreover, his evenly split interest in both rigorous academic philosophy and the aesthetic nuances of a dandy's life meant that he regularly spent time not just in Germany, but also in France. The list of his meetings and friendships made during his European stay – Rickert, Husserl, Becker, Heidegger, Bergson, Sartre – reflects his eclectic approach to philosophy, and an impressive flair for intellectual brilliance. But despite his privilege and recognition, his works also bear a distinct mark of melancholia and rootlessness.

Kuki's most famous work, *The Structure of Iki*, was published in 1930, shortly after his return to Japan. *Iki*

is an ‘uniquely Japanese’ notion of taste, a mix of sensuality (*bitai*), willpower (*ikiji*) and detachment (*akirame*). Developed in the pleasure quarters of Edo (nowadays Tokyo) in the late 18th century, *iki* is, for Kuki, a particular mode of being that does not only characterise the relation between sexes, but overflows into architecture, clothing, and a common life ideal, ultimately becoming a symbol of national character, and a particular take on human existence. However, this analysis of a ‘Japanese atmosphere’ also relies on German and French philosophical discourses, and his text has been heavily discussed in the 30 years since its first Western translations. The stress on *iki* sometimes overshadows Kuki’s other works – he later developed a theory of contingency (*The Problem of Contingency*, 1936), and a complex philosophical reflection on poetic and literary language (*On Literature*, 1940). Kuki’s early death in 1941 left these three threads of his thought superficially distinct, but it is evident that his reflections on contingency, beauty and cultural particularity were, if not parts of a system, grounded in the same intellectual and existential problems. Some of these problems can be approached if we recognise that Kuki was doing philosophy with his nose, too. It might even be that starting with the complex integration of smellscapes in his thought could be the most appropriate way to assess Kuki’s reflection on the lawscape of national character.

In fact, Kuki started reflecting about *iki* not in Japan, but in Paris: his very first mentions of this term are not an organised philosophical reflection, but a list of ‘Japanese things’ and a 1926 poem full of sensual perfumes, in which a Parisian seafood restaurant and a French *demimondaine* are superimposed to the Japanese smellscape and to a geisha.

<p>魚料理屋</p> <p>ああ、海、海 遠い東の島国に生まれた僕は 青い海が恋しい 貝殻の落ちている浜辺、 朝日を浴びた白い砂、 藻のほい、浪の音、 巴里そだちのお前には 僕の気持ちが解るかしら。 今夜はヴィクトル・ユウゴ街の プリュネエへ行こうか。</p> <p>柱の様子は帆立貝、 電燈の形は海蟹。 壁には水泡、 なげしには魚、 天井はうすい水色、 敷ものは紅い藻の色。 仄かに漂う光、 夢より淡いかをり、 海の底で呼吸（いき）する ような あの僕の好きな魚料理屋。</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>着物は黒地の絹のにしますわ、 銀の壁から姿が浮き出ていい でしょ、 胸に真白な薔薇の花を一つ、 頸飾は真珠、 腕には白銀の時計、 指環は白いダイヤ、 帽子は石蓴のようなみどり 色のを まぶかに、いきに被るわ。 口紅を濃くささして頂戴、 乙姫だなんてまたおつしやるの。</p>	<p><i>A Seafood Restaurant</i></p> <p>Ah, the sea, the sea! Born in an island in the Far East How I long for the blue sea Beaches covered in seashells White sand bathing in the morning light Seaweed scent, the sound of the waves I wonder if you, grown up in Paris Understand how I feel. How about going to Prunier tonight, In Victor Hugo Avenue?</p> <p>Scallop pattern on its columns, Lights shaped like sea crabs. Walls covered by sea foam, Fish on its moldings, Ceiling blue like water Carpets red like seaweed. A faint light floating, A perfume lighter than a dream Like breathing at the bottom of the sea My favorite seafood restaurant</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>I will wear black silk for you, Floating over the silver wall</p> <p>With a pure white rose on my breast, And pearls around my neck, A silver watch at my wrist, A white diamond ring, A seaweed green hat</p> <p>Covering my eyes in an <i>iki</i> way. Let me wear heavy lipstick tonight, Will you tell me again I am the princess of the sea?²⁸</p>
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²⁸ Author's translation from the original. See also *Kuki Shūzō Zenshū*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1980), 117–120; also trans. in Michael F. Marra, *Kuki Shūzō: A Philosopher's Poetry and Poetics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 46–7.

The first thing that we notice is that Kuki's lifestyle in Paris must have been pleasant, if not outright decadent. He enjoyed a certain *insouciance*, openly dealing with themes of sexual desire, food and extravagant consumption that were very far from the image of a professional philosopher. And yet, several themes of his philosophical reflection are active in the 'scent links' of this poem. As Porteous notices, travel is an activity that lets smellscape emerge with an increased force: 'almost all literary descriptions of smells ... are the work of non-residents. Thus in the humanistic study of smellscape, as elsewhere, the insider:outsider antinomy is a crucial one.'²⁹

Indeed, the whole scene of the poem is about smell (or the 'oral sensorium', smell-taste) working as a mediation between very distant things. Such distance is not simply physical – the thousands of kilometres separating Paris and the Japanese sea are no less intensely felt than the tablecloth full of perfumed seafood separating him from this sensual (or *iki*) French woman. The scent of nostalgia is already a crossing of the spatial and temporal: Japan is not simply far, but also *past* – a metaphysical heritage, that lets Kuki wonder about the chance of a mutual understanding. The contingency of one's birth and memories are a constant connection to this elsewhere, which is lost and rediscovered on an axis of memory and desire, but never simply present on a phenomenal level. Here, Kuki uses a significant image to suggest the existential *depth* of this sensual dimension: 'A perfume lighter than a dream/Like breathing at the bottom of

²⁹ Douglas Porteous, 'Smellscape', 358.

the sea'. As human beings we are surface-dwellers, and most of our senses work on the horizontal-phenomenal axis of presence. The 'verticalization' of poetry, dreams, desire, memory and imagination is thus often perceived and expressed as a *vertical* shift in reality, that we perceive airily, as a flight or breathing,³⁰ or as watery depths (Freud's main metaphor for the unconscious). 'Breathing a scent at the bottom of the sea' is an impossibility, but this unbridgeable distance holds together both the temporal desire for the absent land, Japan, and the erotic drive towards a woman that seduces and yet keeps herself distant as a siren, shrouded in perfume. Sex and food find this common meaning in the oral sensorium, the first and strongest locus of intimacy:

This type of communication from the environment manifests itself most directly and resolutely in our oral sense, human relations under its aegis show special characteristics of intimacy, such as we primarily find in the culinary and erotic sphere.³¹

And yet this proximity hides an infinite distance, both in the discontinuous temporality of memory and dream, and as desire, since the smell is not the positive presence of the other as a reality, but already their phantasm, their *possibility*. According to Kuki, one of the first conditions of *iki* as erotic attraction was not to objectify the other as a stable reality, but to preserve them as *just a possibility*

³⁰ Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988).

³¹ Tellenbach, 'Tasting and Smelling', 223.

(*kanōsei no mama*).³² This very expression is used again by Kuki in a later essay about smellscapes and memory ('Sound and Smell – The Sounds of Contingency and the Scent of Possibility'):

Scent, too, is one of the things I yearn for. I have to confess, that in the age of my youth I felt an irresistible attraction for the perfume of powder. When I was in Paris, women for their perfume loved the smell of Guerlain's *L'heure bleue* and Lanvin's *Quelques Fleurs*. Sometimes I would sprinkle too some drops of Guerlain's *Bouquet de Faunes* inside my vest. All of this is now sunk in the past. Therefore, in some quiet days of autumn I like to smell the scent of the tea olive tree in my garden from the window of my study. I am there, alone, and I just smell deeply. And as I do so I am transported to a place far, far away. A place even further away of my birth. A place where possibility was just as a possibility (*kanōsei no mama*).³³

Perfume works both ways, reminding Kuki of Japan when he is in Paris, and of Paris when he is back in Japan. But the otherwise very sensual piece of prose ends with a metaphysical twist: in the verticality of scent and desire, presence and reality become relativised, and Kuki is brought into a place before birth, before the real fact of being born or located in Japan or France – that is, before individuation, in a different degree of possible temporality.

In 1928, shortly before coming back to Japan, Kuki presented at two conferences in French at the *Décades*

³² Kuki Shūzō and Nara Hiroshi, eds. *The Structure of Detachment: The Aesthetic Vision of Kuki Shūzō* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 16.

³³ Kuki Shūzō, *Kuki Shūzō Zenshū* v. 5 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1982), 167.

of Pontigny, later collected in the little book *Propos sur le temps*. Both in the first paper Kuki presented, *The Notion of Time and Repetition in Oriental Time* and in the second, *The Expression of Infinite in Japanese Art*, he was already shaping philosophically his interest for the ‘verticality’ of smells and desire, and their relationship with temporality. For Kuki, the essence of oriental time is a repetition of the equal. He calls this form of temporality ‘metaphysical’ or ‘imaginary’, but does not mean it in a disparaging way. Kuki wants rather to say that the time of transmigration, a discontinuous return of an eternal past in the moment, happens within consciousness, intimately connected with will and desire, as already recognised by Vedas and Buddhism. Heidegger qualified the onto-phenomenological structure of time as ‘ecstatic unity’, but only conceived it in a horizontal plane. Kuki speaks here instead of a vertical ecstasy in the idea of transmigration and eternal return, creating a ‘thickness of infinite depth’ in every instant. While the ‘horizontal plane represents the ontologico-phenomenological’, and is continuous and heterogeneous, the repeated, vertical time of the ‘metaphysical-mystical ecstasy’ is *homogeneous and discontinuous* of ‘elements connected only by a kind of attraction at a distance’ – like the incenses of *kōdō*, the scent link in *haikai* poetics or the extra-temporal smellscape of mandarins and cuckoos. In fact, Kuki quotes enthusiastically the aforementioned *hokku* by Bashō about wild mandarins in the second Pontigny conference, and in several later points in his work.

Bashō smells the scent of mandarins. He remembers then that he smelled once the same smell of the same

flowers, listening to a cuckoo in the fields. Allow me to present a commentary on this: '[...] let a sound already heard or an odor caught in bygone years be sensed anew, simultaneously in the present and in the past, real without being of the present moment, ideal but not abstract, and immediately the permanent essence of things, usually concealed, is set free [...] A single minute freed from the order of time recreated in us through our sense a man freed from that order too' (Marcel Proust, *Le temps retrouvé*, vol II, 16).³⁴

Kuki might have been the first to note the deep affinity between Japanese scent poetics and Proustian temporality. But how is this reflection on smell, desire and metaphysical time in his French period transformed into his exploration of ethnic particularity in *The Structure of Iki*? Concluding the conference on time repetition, Kuki posited two possible ways of escaping, or rather finding freedom in this time of desire: first the transcendent, intellectual liberation of Buddhism, and secondly the immanent, voluntarist liberation of Bushidō, the way of the samurai.³⁵

The Structure of Iki brings such will and detachment together, as different moments of the breath-like dialectic of seduction: as a style of behaviour and taste, *iki* is a lawscape, a desiring space of negotiation between closeness, distance, identity and otherness. But being the place where this metaphysical contingency is revealed, the lawscape of encounter and atmospheric belonging is binding, enviroing, and yet without positive laws. As Kuki writes

³⁴ Kuki Shūzō, *Kuki Shūzō Zenshū* v. 1 (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten 1980), 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 285.

in another poem: ‘You and I, I and you/the secret of a chance encounter I saw/of love the anti-law.’³⁶ Here contingency – the contingency of ethnic being, our arising in determined configurations of meaning, and the contingency of the encounter with the other, in the unbridgeable closeness of erotic allure – is ultimately thinkable only in terms of atmosphere.

In fact, Kuki begins his account of *iki* with another statement about memory and perfumes, noticing how their resistance to abstraction and their extra-temporal quality is something common to both smellscapes and the equally particular being of cultural ‘essences’:

Even if we were to engage in what is referred to as *Ideation* in a domain of the possible by freely making changes to a phenomenon, the being of which is ethnically and historically determined, we would only gain in the end abstract general concepts containing that phenomenon as a part. The important thing to bear in mind in the understanding of a cultural state of being is that one must grasp the living form of it, as it is, without altering its actual concreteness. Bergson states that when we recall the past as we smell a rose, it is not that the fragrance triggers the memory. Rather, we smell in the fragrance the memory of the past. Immutable objects, such as the fragrance of roses, or, equivalently, general concepts that are universal for all men, do not exist in reality.³⁷

Thus, an explanation of *iki* begins for Kuki with the Japanese taste for duality – that is, the possibility of the other, preserved as such – in the art of seduction. This material

³⁶ Michael Marra, *Kuki Shūzō: a Philosopher's Poetry and Poetics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004), 17.

³⁷ Kuki Shūzō, *The Structure of Detachment*, 17.

base is refined by will (*ikiji*) that allows this duality to be appreciated as such, without losing oneself into it – a pivot between individuality and collective being that was also sought by the collective-individual atmosphere of *haikai* poetic communities. The third moment of resignation (*akirame*) is, according to Kuki, an existential realisation of Buddhist impermanence in this field of desire. The word used to name the pleasure quarters during the Edo period, ‘floating world’ (*ukiyo*), was originally employed in a Buddhist context, with the homophonous sense of ‘suffering world’ – and no-one experiences the impermanence of beauty and desire as acutely as the ageing lover or courtesan. The two modes of transcendent time are grafted on the desiring body that is the origin of this temporality, without denying it, but distilling it into its ‘essence’:

Iki is the ‘very essence’ (*sui*) of coquetry. *Iki* ignores an unproblematic positing of reality, and boldly brackets the actuality of everyday life, playing autonomously, without purpose and without preoccupations, transcending all life and breathing the empty air between things.³⁸

As we can see, the ‘essence’ here is something breathed, going beyond formal abstractions. *Iki* resides, like smell-scapes and atmospheres, in the gap between real and unreal, I and other, self and the world. As stated previously, the stubborn resistance opposed by atmospheric, olfactive experiences to formal, abstract theorisation is something that we can appreciate in any culture. Smell reveals something about the ‘inherent nature of the thing’

³⁸ Ibid., 23, translation modified.

within the structure of our perception, and yet hints at a surplus ‘which lies beyond the actual fact of the experience, but which we sense as belonging to it [...] what we call atmosphere.’³⁹

This logic of atmospheric surplus leads Kuki’s efforts in the second part of his essay, in which he looks for expressions of *iki* in natural and artistic spaces. While a series of body types, gestures and embodied attitudes is also listed as *iki*, it is telling how, for Kuki, the best expressions of *iki* are artistic ones, able to express it non-representationally, in an atmospheric way. The first example made by Kuki is that of *vertical stripes*. It ceases to seem a curious example if we acknowledge, with Kuki, that parallel lines are a *Gestalt* of erotic duality (so close, and yet never touching), and their verticality accompanies the eye towards the same vertical gesture that, for him, is distinctive of metaphysics. The decorative patterns derived from *Genjikō*, in which the temporal and qualitative discontinuity between smellscapes and narrative worlds is given in vertical lines, can be, according to Kuki, another of the visual manifestations of the ‘breath-like’ essence of *iki*. This spatialisation of the non-spatial, or the expression of the atmospheric, ‘surfaceless’ space of *iki* is also a possibility of architecture, through contrasts of colours, materials, partitions and lines, and a sparing use of light. In architecture the Japanese ideal of *iki* is achieved through the atmospheric ambiance of penumbra:

The lighting of *iki* is subdued; the color of its radiance is that of a paper lantern. *Iki* lighting must allow one

³⁹ Tellenbach, ‘Tasting and Smelling’, 227.

to sink into the depths of the soul, its subtlety inspiring one to inhale the scent of perfumed sleeves.⁴⁰

Architecture here is another art of atmosphere and scent, whose task is not creating objective forms, but an enveloping space for life and desire. Kuki's mention of 'perfumed sleeves' is a reference to an old, anonymous poem from the imperial *tanka* anthology *Kokinshū* (*Poems Ancient and New*, 920 A.D.), and another classic instance of desiring smellscape:

色よりも	<i>Iro yori mo</i>	More than the sight
かこそあはれと	<i>ka koso aware to</i>	is the scent that moves me
おもほゆれ	<i>omō yure</i>	On whose sleeves seeped
たが袖ふれし	<i>ta gas ode fureshi</i>	the plum blossoming
宿の梅ぞも	<i>yado no ume zo mo</i>	close to my home?

According to Kuki, the non-visual eroticism of the Heian Court, in which one's lover was more a space of perfume than an object of vision,⁴¹ is not completely dead, even in contemporary Japan. Or rather, it is conserved in the vertiginous discontinuity of smell-time, as an *essence of the past*, an absent element which can, however, be constantly retrieved in the chance of an encounter, as an atmosphere.

Some readers criticised Kuki observing that, after the irreversible process of Japan's modernisation, the world of *iki* was already then something past, and talking about its existence and essence, or its belonging within an ethnic character, was a form of cultural exceptionalism, and even more questionable because this antiquary fixation

⁴⁰ Kuki Shūzō, *The Structure of Detachment*, 51.

⁴¹ Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Spatial Justice*, 45.

had a specific political meaning after the rise of Japanese 'fascism' in the early 1930s.⁴² Such criticism, I believe, misses the original point of *The Structure of Iki*, and fails to understand it textually and in the context of Kuki's philosophy. *Iki* is not an immutable possession of Japanese people. It is an atmosphere and a taste, and as such existing in a 'place further away of their birth', a place of possibility manifesting in the vertical time of scent, desire and memory. In other words, the air-like characterisation of *iki* corresponds to its being an *essence in an atmospheric sense*. Thus, its intersubjectivity and communality is the atmospheric quality of an environment, coming before any political fetishisation:

Atmospheres [...] cause people to form groups that bear witness to this atmosphere in such inexplicable radiations as emanate from human relations, attitudes and value judgments. Through atmosphere people recognize those that belong to their particular world.⁴³

By being an opening to contingency and desire, the smell-scape of *iki* invites us instead to be guests of this otherness, or rather to discover the essence of otherness (essence as otherness) within our own globalised worldviews. Unlike abstract vision, *taste* has to be trained with a concrete, infinite engagement with the world of lived experience – this is Kuki's own invitation:

We literally 'learn the taste' of something. We make value judgments based on that experience. We rarely

⁴² See for instance Leslie Pincus, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴³ Tellenbach, 'Tasting and Smelling', 229.

experience taste as pure taste. The expression *aji na mono*, ‘scrumptious thing’, suggests not just taste, but a certain scent in which the sense of smell itself takes part. It hints of fragrance faint and elusive. Moreover, it sometimes involves the sense of touch as well. The tongue itself is part of taste, with tactile sensations of its own. [...] In a very fundamental sense, the senses of taste, smell and touch comprise ‘lived experience’. [...] The significance of scholarly investigation resides in *eternally* pursuing the *task* of actualizing logical expression. At the same time the scholar must be clearly mindful of an incommensurable discontinuity between meaningful experience and its conceptual recognition. I believe that an understanding of the structure of *iki*, too, will have significance in this sense.⁴⁴

Sniffing Conclusions

The refinement of Heian incenses and *kōdō*, the aesthetics of scent of the Bashō School, the sensual metaphysics of Kuki’s philosophy and *iki*: all of them are examples of Japanese smellscapes, places where theory has to meet ‘lived experience’. Are they available to the non-Japanese, or even to the Japanese themselves, as the increasing globalised world keeps erasing, perhaps before everything else, the *scent* of particular places? Yes and no. Since they are not objects, they are *not* available to theory alone, to an attempt of understanding sheltered within the safety of visive and ideal discrimination, cultural exceptionalism, and Eurocentric universalism. But scent, as I have hopefully argued, is a sense of connection, or even transgression, in which intimacy and incredible distance curiously

⁴⁴ Kuki Shūzō, *The Structure of Detachment*, 54–56.

coexist. Scents and smellscapes, flowing through bodies and spaces, arising again and again in a discontinuous temporality transcending chronological time, might even be privileged tools for intercultural understanding – an infinite task only fuelled by desire, since the other, in the logic of *iki*, can be other only as the *possibility* of an encounter. What do we have to gain from this delving into foreign smellscapes (but is there a smellscape which is not foreign)? In one word: transcendence. Transcendence within immanence. A never guaranteed, yet always rediscovered involvement with a dimension of subjectivity and intersubjectivity whose loss comes at the harsh cost of neurosis, and whose elusive retrieval hints at a state of intellectual and emotive wholeness.

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