

Kuki Shūzō's Redefinition of Metaphysics Through Contingency

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Abstract: *In this paper, we interpret the Japanese philosopher Kuki Shūzō's The Problem of Contingency (偶然性の問題), focusing on the understanding of contingency as a strategic means to acquire a metaphysical way of doing philosophy. Kuki defines contingency as the negation of necessity and, thus contingency breaks what he considers to be necessity's main feature: identity. This negation of necessity by contingency will follow all the modalities Kuki attributes to necessity (categorical, hypothetical, and disjunctive), giving birth to contingent counterparts to each of them. Furthermore, Kuki associates necessity to the being and contingency to nothingness. Considering metaphysics the kind of inquiry that goes beyond the being, that is, beyond necessity, Kuki argues for the proximity between contingency and metaphysics. As contingency negates identity itself, the metaphysical way of doing philosophy can be understood as one which main concern is difference, that is, what does not resolve itself in an identity. However, it does not mean that difference completely lacks identity or necessity, instead difference points toward a complex relationship in which the being is penetrated by nothingness and nothingness is on the way to being. The way of philosophizing based upon difference bears in mind this complexity between the being and nothingness, allowing one to deal with what comes out from the chance encounters that we face. For Kuki, chance encounters are brought about by contingency, there where what could be or not be is still unclear and everything that happens is a surprise. Surprise is a fundamental element for metaphysics, as Kuki understands it, because it will be, rather than identity and the being, the first impulse toward philosophizing.*

Introduction

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Some scholars have described classical Japanese philosophy as an anti-metaphysical thought, stressing this feature as a distinguishing mark of Japanese philosophy. One example is Kato Shuichi, who writes:

“Probably the reason that Japanese culture as a whole has maintained close contact with the realities of everyday life is that the Japanese people have always disliked leaving the real physical world behind them and ascending into the ethereal realms of metaphysics”.²

Also, the philosopher Sakabe Megumi:

“. . . in Japanese thought there is neither the category of Cartesian substance nor any kind of rigid dualism Perhaps in Japan, in order to remain faithful to traditional thought, there is no need either to ‘reverse Platonism’ or to ‘reexamine the metaphysics of presence, the onto-theo-theological metaphysics’”.³

This point of view regarding Japanese philosophy has dramatically changed with the advent of modern Japanese philosophy, especially within the circle of the Kyoto School. I would like to give as one example of the metaphysical concerns of modern Japanese philosophy Uehara Mayuko's interpretation of the concept of *basho* (場所) in Nishida Kitarō's thought as a “translation” or “reinterpretation” of the Aristotelian concept of *hypokeimenon*, which is the root of the metaphysical discussions concerned with the problems of the essence and the subject.⁴ In more general terms, philosophers of the Kyoto School attempted to overcome what they considered the metaphysical elements of Western philosophy as, for instance, Tanabe Hajime's metanoetics that aimed to transcend speculative philosophy toward

² Shuichi Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature: The First Thousand Years*, trans. David Chibbett (Tokyo, New York, and San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1979), p. 2.

³ Megumi Sakabe, “Mask and Shadow in Japanese Culture: Implicit Ontology in Japanese Thought”, in *Modern Japanese Aesthetics: A Reader*, ed. and trans. Michele Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), p. 247.

⁴ Mayuko Uehara, “La tâche du traducteur en philosophie dans le Japon moderne”, in *Frontiers of Japanese Philosophy 3: Origins and Possibilities*, ed. M. Uehara and J. Heisig (Nagoya: Nanzan Institute for Religion & Culture, 2008), pp. 277–294.

a transformative praxis or Nishitani Keiji's focus on the non-dualism of the religious experience of nothingness.

Kuki Shūzō, by his turn, apart from the Kyoto School, takes another path toward the topic of metaphysics, since his philosophy is an unusual encounter between the European continental schools of thought from the beginning of the last century and the intellectual, mostly artistic and poetic, productions of Japan. In this milieu, we find Kuki's main philosophical work *The Problem of Contingency* (偶然性の問題) (1935). A work that employs a somehow analytical approach to the philosophical problem of contingency and, at the same time, affirms that this very question belongs to the realms of metaphysics. This claim brought to his whole philosophical effort a profound contradiction, since he clearly states, in many other writings, that his methodology follows Heidegger's phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis of existence and Bergson's philosophy of life closely. This contradiction led Fujinaka Masayoshi to interrogate, in an article dedicated to Kuki's existential metaphysics,

“taking Kuki's theory of contingency as his very existential philosophy, why does not Kuki employ an existential analysis? How is it possible to explain the gap between Kuki's idea of an existential philosophy methodology and the fulfillment of his existential philosophy?”⁵

Fujinaka's answer to his inquiry is that Kuki had to distance himself from Heidegger's existential analysis due to divergences regarding their different concepts of time. Fujinaka's interpretation is a correct one. However, it is so only if we take Kuki's concern regarding contingency as a thematic one.

In this paper, I intend to argue that Kuki's philosophy of contingency does not have contingency as the theme of its investigation. Rather than be about contingency, it is about how, following the flow of contingency, we can disclose a way of doing philosophy, a way of philosophizing that builds a philosophical attitude. Then, through and by contingency's strategy, the questions of nothingness and difference are shown in a renewed light. This way of philosophizing will come to be a redefinition of metaphysics.

⁵ Masayoshi Fujinaka, “Kuki Testugaku ni okeru Keijijōgakuteki Jitsuzon no Mondai”, *Shisō* 668, no.2 (1980), p. 74, my translation.

Negating Necessity; Affirming Contingency

It is indispensable for Kuki to begin his *The Problem of Contingency* with a straightforward reference to necessity in his definition of contingency: “Contingency is the negation of necessity”.⁶ This definition, by itself, does not say much unless we pay attention to the emphasis put on *negation*. Following, Kuki polishes his definition of necessity bringing to it an Aristotelian tone: “. . . it [necessity] has within itself the reason for its existence, that a given thing itself preserves itself precisely as it is given. Self-preservation or self-identity is a matter of self-preserving itself at all costs”.⁷ Self-preservation of its own essence through necessity has no other meaning than identity to itself. In the end, Kuki, making use of a fortuitous Japanese idiom, defines necessity as “that which is necessarily as such” (必ず然か有ること)⁸. Therefore, we realize that necessity *affirms* itself in three ways: identity, preservation and the being.

Contingency as the negation of necessity could be wrongly conceived as which finds itself out of necessity's sphere of identity, preservation and the being. In a certain sense, Kuki would agree with the previous affirmation, that is, contingency is outside identity, preservation, and the being. However, it is outside as something that *is not* identity, preservation, and the being. Here, we have to take some lines to understand the implications of such a definition inside Kuki's philosophy.

I think that the definition of contingency as the negation of necessity could be better understood by looking at the structure of the Japanese language. The Japanese language strictly ends with a verb, and to construct the negative form it is added the plain negative form ない (nai) at the end of the verb. This plain negative form can function as an adjective or as a noun. As a noun, it is written with the Chinese character 無い (nai or mu) which meaning is “nothingness”. Thus, reading Kuki by his language, we could better understand what he meant by “contingency is the negation of necessity”: contingency is what *does not have (is empty of)* identity, preservation, and the being, rather than what is not identity, preservation, and the being. This distinction is important for us speakers of Western languages that, due to our predicate logic, could be easily misled in taking the negation on the following terms: “contingency, not being identity” *is* its opposite (difference), “not being preservation” *is* its opposite (destruction) and “not being the being” *is* its opposite

⁶ Shūzō Kuki, *Gūzensei no Mondai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Bunko, 2012), p. 13, my translation.

⁷ Ibid., 17; James W. Heisig, Thomas P. Kasulis and John C. Maraldo, ed., *Japanese Philosophy: A Sourcebook* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), p. 832.

⁸ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 16, my translation.

(non-existence). Rather, contingency, by *not having* necessity, is not merely its opposite, as if necessity and contingency, having strict borderlines, would not relate to each other unless through tension, opposing each other and never coming together, blending, mixing because they would run into a contradiction. It is such understanding that allows Kuki to define contingency as “meaning that which is by chance as such, contingency is that within itself existence does not have enough foundation, that is, an existence that includes negation (否定), that could not be (or be nothing) (無いことのできる)”.⁹

Kuki leaves behind at the very beginning a “hard” opposition, “black and white” kind of thought by defining necessity and contingency placing both in a gray area where the most fixated thing we have is contingency’s definition as negation. Even if we had necessity firmly rooted in identity, preservation and the being, it would be threatened all the time by its negation’s shadow, by the *possibility* of its necessary features being engulfed by nothingness.

Thanks to these ambiguous definitions of contingency and necessity, Kuki can go on to a more systematic analysis of both, giving to each one the same modalities: to the categorical necessity (定言的必然) corresponds the categorical contingency (定言的偶然); to the hypothetical necessity (仮説的必然) corresponds the hypothetical contingency (仮説的偶然); to the disjunctive necessity (離接的必然) corresponds the disjunctive contingency (離接的偶然).¹⁰

Furthermore, I would like to associate each one of these modalities with one of the features of necessity that I have pointed out, with contingency negating these features according to the modality to which each one belongs. Therefore, identity is associated with categorical necessity, preservation is associated with hypothetical necessity and, finally, the being is associated with disjunctive necessity.

Categorical Necessity and Contingency

Let us start by briefly exploring the categorical necessity and contingency. Categorical necessity and contingency belong to the field of classical logic that is conducted by identity. As Kuki defines it, categorical necessity is the identification between the concept and the essential feature (distinguishing mark), that is, the

⁹ Ibid., p. 13, my translation.

¹⁰ According to Obama Yoshinobu, who wrote the explanatory notes for the Iwanami Bunko edition of Kuki’s *Gūzensei no Mondai*, Kuki had in mind Kant’s transcendental dialectics when he divided necessity and contingency in these three modalities. Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 296.

identity shown between the concept (subject) A and an essential attribute (predication) B: A is B. “The essential features are characterized by the fact that if they were negated the concept itself would be negated. For the constitutive content of the concept and the totality of essential attributes form an identity”.¹¹

What is vital to this way of doing philosophy is the universal determination, that is, a concept that would be identified with a shared attribute belonging to all the members that fall under such a concept. Using Kuki's example; “all clovers have three leaves”; the concept “clover” is essentially identified to the predicate “having three leaves”. The negation breaks this logical identity: “not all clovers have three leaves”, that is, some do not have three leaves. Here the *question* of the particular and the universal appears. We are dealing here with the exceptionality of a particular that does not fall under the universal, the rule. If we take the side of necessity in this case, we would be willing to do philosophy thinking that contingency is merely a rare, particular occurrence that does not interfere directly in the identity between the concept and its predicate. Kuki names this the “fixed and static” (固定的靜的) concept.¹²

Contingency puts at risk this stability by bringing into the stage contingency's dynamicity that problematizes the logical identity (necessity). It is important to stress that Kuki is not invalidating predicate logic as if it was wrong. Instead, he is pointing out that by prioritizing logic and identity over *difference*—that belongs to the particular—we inevitably incur in a fixed and static philosophical doing that ignores and puts aside the dynamics of problematizing, inevitably bringing serious questions. For instance, when we think huge philosophical questions as, for example, that of the human being.¹³ Tanaka Kyūbun writes the following about this question:

“The true ‘general concept’ for the human beings must not be a ‘fixed and static’ one, rather it has to be a continually transforming ‘dynamic and

¹¹ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 23; Heisig, Kasulis, and Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy*, 832.

¹² Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 46.

¹³ Kuki, in the lines of a *tanka*, expresses such question:

How many years have I spent
Lamenting to myself
This body of mine-
As difficult to grasp
As a category?

Shūzō Kuki, “Sonnets from Paris,” in *Kuki Shūzō: A Philosopher's Poetry and Poetics*, ed. and trans. Michael F. Marra (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 92, poem 128.

generative’ one that envelops and always pays attention to the human contingencies that are the exceptional ‘particulars’”.¹⁴

However, necessity does not easily give up. *For* “this” particular to be as such outside the concept it *should* have fallen under, there *must* have been some *necessary reason*. As “The Positivist” says in the humorous poem written by Kuki, titled “Yellow Face”, to explain the reason why Asians have a yellow face:

It seems that our ancestors
Somehow overate
Pumpkins and tangerines.
Maybe they also drank too much
Of the Yellow River and the Yellow Sea.¹⁵

From the field of logic, we enter into the field of reason and experience of the hypothetical necessity and contingency, where the priority is preservation.

Hypothetical Necessity and Contingency

Kuki attributes three modalities to the hypothetical necessity: rational, causal, and teleological. They appear to explain that categorical contingencies are, in fact, necessary; there must have been a reason for an exceptional particular to exist. Expressing logically this particular, we would have: “A is because of B”, or “if B, therefore A”. The logical conclusion is that to a particular to be as such, not adapting itself to its concept, there must have been a *necessary reason* behind it. This conclusion that belongs to the rational hypothetical necessity can be proven by two means: empirically and teleologically. Thus, the rational modality of the hypothetical necessity and contingency (as much as the categorical necessity and contingency) belongs to logic, but the other two modes move to the field of experience with the goal of proving the logic of rational hypothetical necessity.

The hypothetical necessity is based on the preservation of a chain of events that are necessarily linked, thus preserving this chain’s identity. For example, “using

¹⁴ Kyūbun Tanaka, *Kuki Shūzō: Gūzen to Shizen* (Tokyo: Pericansha, 2001), p. 120, my translation.

¹⁵ Shūzō Kuki, “Yellow Face”, in *Kuki Shūzō: A Philosopher’s Poetry and Poetics*, p. 56, lines 18–22.

a microphone, the voice is amplified”; there is here a necessary connection between “using a microphone” and “the voice is amplified”; in the same fashion, there is a necessary connection in “for amplifying the voice, a microphone must be used”. The difference between these two chains of events is that the first example belongs to the causal hypothetical necessity, because a necessary effect follows a cause, while the second one is a chain in which a defined end follows the necessary means for achieving or realizing such an end; this last one is the teleological hypothetical necessity.

The hypothetical contingency comes into the stage when, as we have already noticed, this necessary chain is negated. Therefore, hypothetical contingency expresses itself by negating the maxim “if B, therefore A”, replacing it by “despite B, not A” or “despite B, therefore C”. Kuki names these two expressions of hypothetical contingency, respectively, “negative” and “positive”. Furthermore, it is attributed to each modality of the hypothetical contingency one of these expressions. Thus, we have positive and negative causal hypothetical contingency, positive and negative rational hypothetical contingency and positive and negative teleological hypothetical contingency.

The main point of negative contingency expressions is the absence of one of the elements of the logical statement; for example, when neither the cause or the effect of a causal chain is known, or when they cannot be defined, whereas in the positive hypothetical contingencies which the cause of an effect (in the case of a causal hypothetical contingency) is different from the one expected from that chain.

It is because only the lack of a single phenomenon's [logical] antecedent is grasped that we can call the negative contingency an *absolute* contingency. It is because the relationship between two or more phenomena has been determined as contingent that we can say that, in the positive contingency, it is a *relative* contingency. . . . Nevertheless, we need to call attention to one thing: any negative absolute contingency has, after all at its roots, the positive relative contingency. . . . In fact, because a contingency that completely lacks a positive direction is unthinkable, for example when this positive direction is not consciously grasped, there must have a positivity somehow. If any kind of positivity—or even a property that have to be noticed in another way—is not perceived we cannot say that it is a true

contingency. In this sense, we can say that all contingencies are positive relative contingencies.¹⁶

There are two crucial notions for us in the above citation: *relativity* and *positivity*. To think a contingent philosophical (metaphysical) doing is essential to break down the *preservation* of identity in a necessary chain of events and, also, claim that this rupture is *positive*. The Japanese word we translate as “preservation” consists of the junction of two verbs, 保つ (*tamotsu*) and 持つ (*motsu*), used to say, respectively, “to protect, to preserve” and “to hold, to have a thing with one”, as we find on the *Shogakukan Progressive Japanese-English Dictionary*.

Something that protects itself near itself is what avoids any relationship unless it is with oneself, that preserves, at any costs, its *being* near itself against what is *other of itself*. Relativity, which precondition is having a relationship with what is not itself, obstructs any preservation, any holding itself near itself. Bearing this in mind, Kuki not only calls all hypothetical contingency “relative contingency”, but also relates this relativity to the *chance encounter* (邂逅) that, by its turn, will become the core meaning of all and any contingency: “The chance encounter of two independent events”, “the chance encounter of two independent dualities”.¹⁷

Because these dualities are independent—as the positive contingencies that lack any hypothetical relationship, but in contrast open other kinds of relationships—, they engender events that negate the proposition “if B, therefore A”, events that *affirm through negation* the proposition “despite B, then C or D or Z (but not A)”. According to Kuki, an “absolute contingency”—a contingency that lacks the positive relativity of contingency entirely—does not exist, because nothing happens out of nothing. At the same time, the reasons, causes and/or ends of such events cannot be absolutely and decisively calculated, since encounters—and they are always by chance—are impossible to be *foreseen beforehand* as well as what will come from them. In this way, relativity (what encounters will happen?; which independent dualities will meet?), as well as positivity (what will come from that?; what will we have to deal with?) are surprises for us.

The positive relative contingency points us to a way of philosophizing that could be summarized as follow. The negation of identity’s preservation feature puts

¹⁶ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, pp. 128–129, my translation.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

us in a relationship with the otherness that comes to us in chance encounters, making us think what will come from that moment of the encounter—the here and now.¹⁸

In defense of necessity, we could still claim that to the chance encounters precede other encounters that could be defined, attributing necessity to the encounters we face in the here and now. This persistent determination of the previous reasons, causes, and ends that have generated the present, only seemingly contingent, could go on until the primordial event, the ultimate reason, cause, and/or end of all after-events. As it is well known in the Western philosophy, immortalized by the Aristotelian metaphysics, this ultimate cause is the First Immovable Mover. Nevertheless, Kuki sought the counterpart for the Aristotelian First Immovable Mover on the pages of Schelling, the so-called “Primordial Contingency” (*Urzufall*): what *without* (無^レ) reason, cause or end puts in *movement* all other encounters.¹⁹

For that reason, Kuki will not only name his last contingency's modality disjunctive contingency, but also metaphysical contingency. Because, in opposition to Aristotle's First Immoveable Mover, a totality enclosed within itself, not necessarily needing anything of other, Schelling's Primordial Contingency, precisely because it lacks any enclosing inside itself brings within itself the disjunction of the parts, that is, “despite being B, it could be A or C”. It is blended into the option (part) that becomes (comes to be) the option of *not being*, the option that withdraws itself to nothingness. In this way, leaving the logical (categorical necessity and contingency) and empirical (hypothetical necessity and contingency) fields looking for the ultimate reason, cause, and/or end, Kuki enters into the field of metaphysics. However, bringing into metaphysics the question of the nonbeing and nothingness, Kuki redefines metaphysics as a *way of philosophizing*.

Metaphysical Contingency

¹⁸ Kuki's philosophy prioritizes the temporality of the present, encompassing in it the spatiality of the here. It is out of the scope of our present investigation to deal with the specificities of Kuki's view on temporality. However, as the question of temporality have an important role within his philosophy, we need to clarify, in regard to the “now and here” of the contingent encounter that, apart from the past and the future, the present emphasizes the concrete particularity of this *particular* moment at this *particular* place, building the ground for an encounter that has not happened before (past) and could not happen again (future).

¹⁹ Kuki's use of Schelling's “primordial contingency” is discussed in more details in Fujita's recent work on Kuki's philosophy. Masakatsu Fujita. *Kuki Shūzō: Risei to Jōnetsu no Hazamani Tatsu “Kotoba” no Tetsugaku*. (Tokyo: Métier, 2016), pp. 127–131.

On the first pages of his work, Kuki informs us that the question of contingency is a metaphysical one.

In contingency, existence confronts nothingness. So, the core meaning of metaphysics lies in going beyond existence toward nothingness, going beyond the physical toward the metaphysical. Assuredly, metaphysics deals with the problem of actual existence. However, actual existence originally becomes a problem only in relation to nonexistence. Existence as it forms the problem of metaphysics is an existence that is enveloped by nonexistence, by nothingness. This is what differentiates metaphysics or philosophy in its primary sense from the other disciplines. . . . Insofar as the problem of contingency cannot be separated from the question of nothingness, it is strictly a metaphysical question.²⁰

Nothingness is what goes beyond the physical, beyond the being; what is meta-physical. Nothingness is not about the absolute nonbeing (as the Kyoto School or, in another sense, the Western metaphysics could make us believe); instead it is about what “partly” is not. Moreover, it is precisely there where disjunctive contingency touches. This dealing with the parts opposes the disjunctive necessity: the whole presumes nothing but itself, an identity enclosed in itself, while the parts presume other parts that *could* be or not be. This “could” brings two more elements into the discussion: possibility and impossibility.

We can summarize the relationships between those four elements established by Kuki as follows: in one hand, necessity and contingency relate to each other regarding reality; on the other hand, possibility and impossibility relate to each other regarding unreality—what is possible did not have occurred yet; what is impossible, will not occur, they are both outside reality. However, necessity and possibility come to relate themselves to the being, that is, the more something is possible, the more it will come to necessarily be. Finally, contingency and impossibility relate to each other through nothingness, that is, something that is impossible would not and cannot become, but when something near impossible actually becomes, it is regarded as a surprise, as a rare event, in short, as a contingency.

Then, we can tie up our discussion so far by saying: in the face of the wholeness of an *identity* that *preserves* the *being* of necessity, contingency’s

²⁰ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, pp. 13–14; Heisig, Kasulis and Maraldo, *Japanese Philosophy*, pp. 830–831.

disjunction *happens*, becomes, but it is a reality pregnant with nothingness; an event that is more nothingness than being. In Kuki's words: "Through contingency, nothingness deeply penetrates the being. In this extent, contingency is a fragile existence. Contingency is merely a feeble existence tied only to 'this place' and 'this instant'".²¹

We can inquire further into this relationship between contingency and (im)possibility that left us with nothing, just to hear from Kuki that "it is because the problem is thrown unsolved 'before us' that contingency stirs the exciting feeling of surprise. . . Possibility and contingency, having this problematizing feature, bring a strong dynamic feeling of excitement and tension".²²

Here we find the parts for a metaphysical way of doing philosophy in which metaphysics itself is redefined. Let us pay attention to three points in Kuki's quotation: surprise, problem, and dynamicity. Contingency, having nothingness as its background, negates necessity's stability, *problematizing* a statement constructed as "A is B", showing that "A could be not B". In this way, we are led to consider that "A is or is not B, is or is not C" and so forth. Thereby we move dynamically stimulating our thinking toward non-stable ways, constantly breaking such stabilities as "A is B" by adding beside (the) "being" the negation "not"—"A is not B". The feeling of surprise is born from the breaking of identity, preservation, and the being in the hands of problematizing and dynamism. Kuki describes the surprise that follows the almost impossible, almost no happening of contingency as:

"Surprise—the feeling tantamount to contingency—, in the instant of the present when a possible disjunctive option is acknowledged, is a metaphysical sentiment attached to the absolute reason of this acknowledgment . . . Philosophy is, in fact, born from the surprise in the face of contingency".²³

In Kuki's terms, to metaphysically philosophize is to take surprise, the feeling born from contingency, as its starting point and therefore philosophize close to almost nothing. Kuki is not the only one claiming this philosophical position.

In a special issue of *Alter: Revue de Phénoménologie* dedicated to the topic of surprise we find, among others, an article by Jean-Luc Marion that has many

²¹ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 271, my translation.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 234–235, my translation.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 235–236.

similarities to Kuki's surprising way of philosophizing. Coming from an argument claiming that surprise "takes us", Marion points out that it is precisely because what arrives as surprise cannot be foreseen as an object that surprise makes possible a comprehension beyond metaphysics or science; one that he calls philosophical.

It may be a definitive ignorance or, most often, a temporary one that will fade away when the astonishment yields to the recognition of the objects there where, at first, only events have appeared. In this sense, the progress of the sciences is measured at the expense of surprise's death. However, a high epistemological price is paid: we have to admit that we only know what we understand—that is, precisely the object—, and those objects would enrich our science only on the express condition of never admitting that they are unknown. Concerning metaphysics, we would not admit which withdraws itself from anticipation. However, surprise excludes anticipation, because surprise claims arriving, delivery as its norm. At the risk of simplifying (but, in the end, we must always end by simplifying), surprise makes philosophy possible but turns metaphysics impossible.²⁴

This position would explain Kuki's claim for a metaphysics that is not "lonely" or scientifically, but instead radically philosophical; a metaphysics based upon contingency and surprise that let the event itself gives the rules, methods and/or approach fit to its own "showing". Such metaphysics (or metaphysical doing) has to resist at any costs necessity's urge to identify this surprising phenomenon to an object; it has to resist explaining its appearance through the preservation of a causal chain of events that would root it in *a priori* categories; and also it has to resist the anticipation of its being claiming that this phenomenon is and could not not-be. In these terms, it seems that Kuki and Marion (and following them us) are proposing an irresponsible way of philosophizing, one that by putting everything in the hands of contingency *negates* knowledge and its precision, everything comes to be relative, far away from the truth. Against these representations, Marion has to say:

²⁴ Jean-Luc Marion. "Remarques sur la surprise, la méprise et la déprise", *Alter: Revue de Phénoménologie*, p. 24, (2016), URL = <http://journals.openedition.org/alter/410>: §6, my translation.

How could this non-knowledge of mere “faces” and “images” be conceived? How its imprecisions remain strong enough to impose an astonishment that “stones” us? The answer doesn't seem questionable in the eyes of Descartes: the thing, even badly or not known, immobilizes and freezes me in astonishment because, without any theoretical status, but in another way perhaps even more powerful, the thing that arrives *presents itself* (“... it has been presented by itself. . .”, “. . . they have been presented by themselves. . .”). These terms, extremely rare to be found under Descartes' pen, don't mean little: the thing certainly comes to be present, however not because the *mens* imposes to the thing its conditions of presentification led, derived and conditioned by presence, in its *a priori* as much as in its forms, as such as in a regular (and methodical) theoretical situation; rather because the thing imposes to the *mens* (and thus taking it by surprise) the emergence of its own presence, because it gives itself and agrees under its own requirements. In this way, surprise, through its lack, sets the thing free from any theoretical horizon allowing it to present itself. The thing, in this situation of surprise, is authorized to phenomenalize itself.²⁵

Hence, we can realize that a metaphysical way of doing philosophy is not an irresponsible one that negates knowledge, instead it is a responsible way of doing so, one that respects and welcomes (here we have a topic dear to Derrida, under the name of hospitality) the way in which the thing, the phenomenon presents itself to us without imposing, and by thus violently imposing, an identity that it is not its own. Here is the reason why Kuki insists on the co-dependence between contingency and nothingness. At the moment when contingency comes to be, surprise arrives, and then a thing that cannot be rendered by the theoretical framework of necessity presents itself as something beyond that framework that is already there, that already has its being; something that is beyond the being (and beyond the ways in which we are used to dealing with it) could only be nothingness. Following this metaphysical, contingent way of philosophizing we linger on the nothingness embed in things, letting them present themselves in their own terms, always trying to break necessity and the theoretical situation imposing identity.

Our approach to Kuki's investigation on contingency could seem a little out of place since the works of scholars like Graham Mayeda and, more recently, Furukawa Yuji place it alongside ethics. In this sense, for them, the “Conclusion” of

²⁵ Ibid., §12, my translation.

The Problem of Contingency plays a central role. The research of Obama Yoshinobu, by its turn, takes the question of temporality and existence running through Kuki's philosophy as an axis for his interpretation of contingency. In this way, our own effort is an attempt of placing *The Problem of Contingency* inside the discussion of, on one side, the methodological concerns we find in Kuki's works and, on the other, the formalism that takes place in his investigations that deal with literature and poetry. Methodology, that is, the way of philosophizing appeared in his previous work, *The Structure of "Iki"* in the form of a hermeneutics of the ethnic being, a method that, we consider, has failed in achieving its goal. *The Problem of Contingency* is, in this regard, an answer to this failure by seeking a more appropriated philosophical method. Kuki's subsequent works on poetry take contingency into the very form of the poems, explaining it as "a system of pure linguistic contingencies" in which rhyme "has a philosophical beauty".

A Surprising Conclusion

Finally, Kuki coins the concept of "Metaphysical Absolute", calling it also "The Contingent-Necessary One". This last one, by its turn, seeks for the concreteness of an existence invaded by nothingness and of nothingness on the way to being beyond the abstraction of the absolute necessity (identity, preservation and the being) and the emptiness of the absolute nothingness. In this way, the "Metaphysical Absolute", as a direction to philosophize, points toward a difference that is not seen anymore as the opposition between two elements tightly enclosed in themselves, colliding against each other without mixing, rather a difference, paradoxically, indistinguishable, that is, unable to be clearly defined in its outline and essences. What gives the first impulse to this philosophical *pathos* is contingency's differential surprise (驚異). Kuki summarizes this philosophical doing as:

"The absolute one is 'The Contingent-Necessary One' because, at the same time, the absolute one is the absolute being and it is also the absolute nothingness. Contingency—that exists even having the possibility of not existing—is nothing else than a bound existence that dangerously takes its ground on the borderline between nothingness and the being".²⁶

²⁶ Kuki, *Gūzensei*, p. 268, my translation.

For Kuki, to metaphysically philosophize is to stay together with contingency on the dangerous borderline between the being and nothingness. This philosophical attitude takes difference as its polestar, dynamically moving from the being to nothingness; from nothingness to the being, having as its raw material, not identity but the absence of it, always surprises us, fueling our questions.

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