As an aesthetic expression, iki alludes to a certain style of life and of art that was current in the amusement districts of Edo, reaching a fashionable climax around 1830. However, in spite of its mundane outlook, iki has spiritual roots enabling it to reconcile the idea of Buddhist renunciation with Bushido idealism. Kuki Shûzô (1888–1941) established iki as a more abstract, philosophical term by attempting to define it, in his famous book The Structure of 'Iki,' with the help of Western metaphysical and anthropological methods. Surprisingly, Martin Heidegger mentions the notion of iki in an essay published in 1959 entitled “Aus einem Gespräch von der Sprache.” Though Heidegger’s reflections are interesting as such, they do in not grasp the real concept of iki. (TBB)

Kuki writes that “‘iki’ has its origin in the ‘World of Suffering’. [...] Now, ‘resignation’, that is the disinterestedness in ‘iki’, is an urbane and well-formed heart which has gone through the polishing of the hard and heartless floating world” (20). Iki is produced through a “resignation to fate and the gaiety based on ‘resignation’” (ibid.). Iki asks for the negation of an “everyday world” which Kuki calls the “conventional” world. If we resign from the “conventional” we discover style: “You will be chic when the conventional has been rubbed away” (20). In many ways iki comes close to a philosophical ideal of “coolness.” The decisive point is that through the negation of the “conventional,” iki will not be “discovered” as an “essence” that already existed “out there”, outside everyday life. On the contrary, the act of resignation from everyday life reveals a kind of iki that always existed within everyday life (and even within ourselves) but that was covered by the conventional. In this sense, Kuki writes: “If we are able to combine the abstract conceptual moments of transformation obtained through analysis, and to constitute the being of ‘iki’, that is because we already carry iki with us as experiential meaning” (73). The particular act of stylization through which the conventional is “cut off” depends on the stylistic cut called kire, which is essential to the aesthetics of iki.