



Japanese author Kenya Hara about the color "white".

This book is not about color. Rather, I have attempted to investigate an entity called "white" in order to locate those resources of sensitivity that are posited by one's own culture. In other words, I have attempted to find the source of a Japanese aesthetic that produces simplicity and subtlety through the concept of white.

Designing is my job. My professional field is communications. This means I illustrate "circumstances" or "conditions" rather than making "things." I have shown my works in numerous exhibitions and have produced countless posters, package designs, symbol marks and book designs, all products reflecting the nature of the given "circumstance." My profession has led me to ponder how to create images that refresh, things so crystal clear as to leave a lasting impression. This intellectual process, in turn, made me begin paying attention to the means of cultural communication that have developed in Japan and, more broadly speaking, throughout the world. As this train of thought progressed, my sense that it was leading to new answers grew stronger and stronger.

"Emptiness" (utsu) and "completely hollow" (karappo) are among the terms I pondered while trying to grasp the nature of communication. When people share their thoughts, they commonly listen to each other's opinions rather than throwing information at each other. In other words, successful communication depends on how well we listen, rather than how well we push our opinions on the person seated before us. People have therefore conceptualized communication techniques using terms like the "empty vessel" to try to understand each other better. For example, unlike other signs whose meanings are narrowly determined, symbols like the cross or the red disk in the Japanese flag allow us to let our imaginations roam free of any boundaries; they are like enormous empty vessels that can hold every possible meaning. The concept of emptiness can be equally found in a cavernous mausoleum or church, or a small garden and teahouse: all reflect the concept of emptiness. Although I initially began writing about "emptiness," before long I found myself discussing "white" – it was through a confrontation with the broad spectrum of "emptiness" that "white" made its appearance. Linguistically speaking, the character for "white" (白 – shiro) occurs within the Japanese compound for "emptiness" (空白 – kuhaku), a connection that ultimately forced me to investigate the meaning of emptiness in terms of its relation to white. Correspondingly, I ended up writing about white first, and then moved on to emptiness.

It is my hope that, by the time you finish this book, "white" will look differently to you. If you can feel it radiating with a new and higher degree of clarity, then we can say that your senses have been refined. Such an elevated perception of white provides a condition which enables us to see our world in a brighter light. ●



Kenya HARA