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Sen no Rikyū and the Japanese Way of Tea: Ethics and Aesthetics of the Everyday

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Abstract

Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591) was a tea master who consecutively served Japan's two warlords in the turbulent feudal era. Rikyū synthesized wabi tea into ethics and aesthetics by applying it to every aspect of the ceremony, from the tea setting to the physical environment, and from the manner of making and drinking tea to the way of interacting with the environment. By producing artifacts and environments that clearly showcased the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent nature of their physical aspects, Rikyū succeeded in guiding tea participants to the ontological contemplation of their own imperfect and transient existence. Henri Lefebvre (1901- 1991) and Jürgen Habermas (1929-) both find a deterioration of human values in modernized societies and seek a reconciliation in the study of the

everyday. Rikyū's ethics and aesthetics offer instruction on how to find the meaning of our existence in a simple act of sustenance.

Keywords: *wabi* tea, Sen no Rikyū 千利休, Tai-an 待庵, Henri Lefebvre, Jürgen Habermas, the everyday, ethics and aesthetics of architecture

Introduction

The subject matter of this article is the ethics and aesthetics of Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), a tea master who consecutively served Japan's two warlords in the turbulent feudal era. Rikyū was born in Sakai, near Osaka, when the city was flourishing as one of the most important ports for trading with China (Ming dynasty), Ryūkyū (the present Okinawa), Spain, and Portugal. Rikyū's family ran a warehouse business, and he began the study of tea at the age of seventeen. Sakai was operating as an independent city run by the merchants' organization, without belonging to any feudal governments and protected by moats against the prevalent warfare between them. When the city lost its independence under Oda Nobunaga in 1568, Rikyū became his tea master. After Nobunaga was toppled in a *coup d'état* in 1582, Rikyū went on to serve Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who eventually took control of all the feudal lords in 1585. Rikyū's life ended in 1591 in *seppuku*, ritual suicide by cutting the abdomen, by the order of Hideyoshi, who had been provoked by his tea master for reasons that are only to be speculated.

In Rikyū's theory and practice of tea, which he developed in earnest during the ten years before his death, attention to the everyday took the participant to contemplation on the meaning of life. Studying his ideas, however, requires us to expand our discussion beyond "architecture" and "aesthetics." His design encompassed not only the physical environment for a tea ceremony, including the architecture, interiors, and gardens of tearooms, but also objects used for making and drinking tea, such as cups and spoons. Moreover, his contemplation went beyond the aesthetics of physical objects to the ethics of how one should take tea and what it means to do so. To understand the significance of Rikyū's way of tea, called *wabi-tea*, it is necessary to situate him and his ethics/aesthetics in their historical and social context.

The History of Tea Culture in Japan

Drinking tea is, after all, a mundane act of sustenance. Originating in China, tea is found all over the world, and many world languages share the etymological root of their words for "tea." But it is in Japan that the act of drinking tea developed into an art form and an ethical practice. Japan's cultural relationship with tea goes back to the eighth century, when the imperial court dispatched missions to China to bring back various cultural artifacts and practices, among

which were those related to tea. In the twelfth century, tea spread among Zen monks as an everyday beverage to fight drowsiness during meditation. In the same century, the governing warlord overcame a hangover following a Zen monk's suggestion that he drink tea, and proclaimed tea as "this world's healthful divine medicine" and drinking tea as a "special art of extending man's life span" (Kobori 2003: 14). Tea gained popularity among aristocrats and warlords, while tea and teawares were still imported from China and Korea. It was an expensive undertaking. In the fourteenth century, tea consumption became associated with gambling amongst warlords. High wagers were placed in a game whose object was to identify the "real" tea grown in a specific location over other "fake" ones from elsewhere. By this time the cultivation and production of tea had begun domestically in Japan, making it possible to discriminate the quality of tea based on its origin. In the following century, while gambling declined, drinking tea remained an expensive endeavor limited to rich warlords, aristocrats, and merchants. The tea "ceremony" was an occasion to impress others with a display of imported artifacts in the large and opulent interiors of the host's residence. The activity was a part of high culture.

In this context, some attempted to make the practice less exclusive. Zen Buddhist monk Murata Jūkō (or Shūkō, 1423-1502) promoted a blurring of the distinction between domestic teaware and expensive imports. After Jūkō, Takeno Jōō (1502-1555) built himself a small tearoom of four and a half tatami mats (or approximately 9 feet square), giving him the option of offering tea there rather than in a large space (called the *shoin*) in the main residence. Some other tea practitioners followed suit. Jōō also designed a tearoom without raised floor for a practitioner who did not own any imported articles and therefore had nothing worth such conspicuous display. Jūkō and Jōō's practice, however, still remained primarily an expensive enterprise. Jūkō did not approve of a tea setting comprised only of domestic articles. Jōō, who was born into one of the richest merchant families of Sakai, was himself famous for his collection of imports. There was a title, *meibutsu*, literally meaning "famous item," which was given only to highly select articles for their choicest provenance. While a tea practitioner could be famous for owning just one such item, Jōō possessed as many as sixty. His tearooms, even the small ones, still carried design details that reflected rich aristocrats' and merchants' residences.

Wabi Tea: From Rikyu to the Present

The term "*wabi*" may be translated as "incomplete," "imperfect," or "impoverished," but is often elusive, escaping definitive interpretation and analysis. Jōō is believed to have initiated the term "*wabi* tea," finding a parallel between the tea practices in inexpensive settings and the philosophy of *renga*, a type of poem-writing in which a number of poets gathered to compose lines in succession.

Jōō was, in addition to being a tea practitioner, a master in *renga*, the challenges of which are not only to bestow one's own creative twist to the poem handed on by the preceding poet, but also to leave the poem with imaginative possibilities when passing it on to the succeeding poet. Jōō and his contemporaries came to value the insufficient and unfulfilled state of things. But it was Jōō's disciple Rikyū who synthesized *wabi* tea into ethics and aesthetics by applying it to every aspect of the ceremony, from the tea setting to the physical environment, and from the manner of making and drinking tea to the way of interacting with the environment. Rikyū even offered *wabi* tea to Hideyoshi, despite the latter's preference for the garishly expensive. Instead, Hideyoshi made the tea master supervise the construction of a "golden tearoom," showcasing the height of decadence. It was gilded with gold and complete with gold tea settings. Many believe it was this conflicting taste difference between Hideyoshi and his tea master that led the former to order the latter's ritual suicide.

After Rikyū's death, three descendent "families" (表千家, 裏千家, and 武者小路千家) were established. They still oversee much of today's tea practice, which has spread throughout Japan and abroad. Today "*wabi*" is often paired with the notion of "*sabi*," roughly meaning "impermanent," and the term "*wabi-sabi*" has come to designate a certain aesthetic inclination that represents Japanese-ness, which favors the simple lifestyle and authentic materials. The notion is discussed at all levels, from the rudimentary level of tourist guidebooks to the scholarly discourse of philosophy, and is practiced in many aspects of the Japanese way of life, if in a somewhat altered and nebulous form. An early twentieth-century description by the philosopher Okakura Tenshin (Kakuzō) sums it up effectively: "a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday existence It is essentially a worship of the imperfect, as it is a tender attempt to accomplish something possible in this impossible thing we know as life" (Okakura 1994: 219).

In Rikyū's *wabi* tea we find two different strategies to draw attention to the everyday conduct of life. The first one is the rejection of the exclusivity and materialism based on competition for expensive and rare goods and supplies, in an effort to make the practice relevant to and reflective of the commoners of society. To prevent the approachable from becoming mundane, Rikyū's second strategy was to keep the practice elevated with sophisticated ethics and aesthetics. To accomplish this, he added some degree of mysticism. As a result, Rikyū succeeded in bringing the commonplace experience of hydrating the body to the level of an ethical and aesthetic experience, which can be visited daily. With use of the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent, Rikyū accomplished the appreciation of the everyday. What is otherwise seen as inferior is appreciated as an important part of the art of tea.

The Everyday and Modernity: An Intellectual Framework

I believe that Rikyū's way of tea transcends its geographical and chronological specificity and can be relevant to considering the cultural conditions in which we live. Two short but influential articles help set up a framework with which to consider the role of the everydayness in the modern world. "The Everyday and Everydayness" (1972) by Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) and "Modernity: An Incomplete Project" (1981) by Jürgen Habermas (1929–) approach the subject matter from different perspectives, and yet both find a discord between the rationalization in modernized societies and the deterioration of human values, and seek a reconciliation in the study of the everyday.¹

Written as an encyclopedia entry, Lefebvre's piece is a brief synopsis of his life's work centered on everyday life, including the three volumes of *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947, 1961, and 1981) and *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968). Lefebvre begins this particular article by comparing the premodern "prodigious diversity" to the modern "worldwide tendency to uniformity" (Lefebvre 1987: 7). In the premodern era,

Every complex "whole," from the smallest tool to the greatest works of art and learning, ... possessed a symbolic value linking them to meaning at its most vast: to divinity and humanity, power and wisdom, good and evil, happiness and misery, the perennial and the ephemeral. These immense values were themselves mutable according to historical circumstance, to social classes, to rulers and mentors. (Lefebvre 1987: 8)

In comparison, "Post-Cartesian analytic thought has often challenged these concrete "totalities," and every modern object is analyzed and understood for its "form, function and structure" (Lefebvre 1987: 7). As a result, the variety that existed in local, regional, and national architectural styles has been replaced by the universal architectural urbanism, which is comprised of geometric forms that are supposedly rational. The consequence of such universalization is the "collapse of the referent in morality, history, nature, religion, cities, space; the collapse even of perspective in its classical spatial sense or the collapse of tonality in music" (Lefebvre 1987: 9). In this context rises the need for the study of the everyday, according to Lefebvre:

The everyday, established and consolidated, remains a sole surviving common sense referent and point of reference. "Intellectuals," on the other hand, seek their systems of reference elsewhere: in language and discourse, or sometimes in a political party. The proposition here is to decode the modern world, that bloody riddle, according to the everyday. (Lefebvre 1987: 9)

Habermas originally delivered a lecture in 1980 when he received the Theodor W. Adorno prize in Frankfurt. That year's Venice Biennale was the first to include architecture in the exhibition, where Habermas observed the neoconservatives' domination of the architectural scene. He did not take kindly to "avant-gardes of reversed fronts," and criticized them for having "sacrificed the tradition of modernity in order to make room for a new historicism" (Habermas 1983: 3). He called the neoconservatives' analysis weak and their criticism feeble. On the one hand, Habermas shared their observation that the forces of modernism allowed the dominance of the "principle of unlimited self-realization, the demand for authentic self-experience and the subjectivism of a hyperstimulated sensitivity" (Habermas 1983: 6). On the other hand, however, he did not consider it time to pronounce modernity dead. Nor did he agree with the neoconservatives who found in objectified and neutralized history a way of reestablishing the values of everyday life. Instead, Habermas saw, at the root of the problem, the discrepancy between the "system" and the "life-world," which to him was the most crucial point that required attention: While social systems were being modernized, "guided by standards of economic and administrative rationality," or means-and-end rationality, human actions were "communicative," that is, based on values and norms mediated through interaction, and therefore could not be modernized rationally (Habermas 1983: 8). And everyday communication is in trouble in the modern world. For, after the "unified world-view of religion and metaphysics" fell apart, science, morality and art developed as "three autonomous spheres," taking over the specific aspects of validity—"truth, normative rightness, authenticity and beauty"—respectively and according to the intrinsic structures of each segment. As autonomy became stronger, the distance grew larger between "the culture of the experts and that of the larger public." What accrues to a specialized field would no longer "immediately and necessarily become the property of everyday praxis," and the life-world has become "more and more impoverished" as the specialized fields have come away "from the hermeneutics of everyday communication" (Habermas 1983: 9). Attempts were made to "force a reconciliation of art and life" by removing the distinction between artifact and object of use, or by declaring everything to be art and everyone to be an artist. Habermas' appraisal of past attempts is not at all congratulatory: "all these undertakings have proved themselves to be sort of 'nonsense experiments'" (Habermas 1983: 11). A mistake of these attempts was to try to solve the problem through a single cultural sphere, while instead all three spheres need to be involved in everyday communication. Habermas proposes the following program: The project of modernity, whose intention it is to "utilize the accumulation of specialized culture for the enrichment of everyday life," is yet to be fulfilled (Habermas 1983: 13). What is needed is "the reappropriation of the expert's culture from the standpoint of the life-world" (Habermas 1983: 12-13).

The Japanese tea ceremony in general, and Rikyū's way of tea in particular, offer the case of an artist's attempt to reappropriate the expert's culture from the standpoint of the life-world. Rikyū relied on the properties of the imperfect, incomplete, and impermanent in order to create physical objects that induced participatory interpretation in the viewer. Rikyū did not create art objects that are too specialized and exclusive, nor did he turn the tea back into a mundane activity. Instead, he demonstrated how everydayness might contribute to the betterment of the life-world.

Lack of Perfection, Completion, and Permanence

At about the midpoint between Japan's ancient cities of Kyoto and Osaka, where the three rivers—the Katsura, the Uji, and the Kizu—merge to become the Yodo River, is the town of Ōyamazaki. Coming on the train from Kyoto or Osaka, one sees a small wooden temple gate across from the station plaza. This is the temple of Myōki-an, in which the Tai-an tearoom is found. Some believe that Hideyoshi ordered Sen no Rikyū to design and construct the building while staying at the castle of Yamazaki, up on the hill to the north. Others argue that the tearoom had been a part of Rikyū's residence and was moved here after his death while the rest of the house was condemned and destroyed. Either way, Tai-an is the only extant building designed by Rikyū. It consists of the tearoom, measuring 6 feet square, or two tatami mats, with an additional raised floor to the north, the anteroom of one mat to the west, and the preparation space of another mat to the north (Figure 1). While the tea ceremony can be practiced in a space of any size, Rikyū was reported to have set 4.5 tatami mats/9 feet square as the largest possible limit of the ideal hermitage, following his teacher Takeno Jōō's philosophy. In such a restricted space, where even a slight change in breathing was detectable, any careless maneuver by either the host or the guest would have spoiled the proceedings of the ceremony. The inconvenience and discomfort would have put the participants in a state of alarmed sensibility, making them attentive to the goings-on, while a larger space, though perhaps providing perfect dimensions, would have relaxed them and dulled their senses.

The same principles apply to the design of teawares. Some teawares that were in Rikyū's possession are extant. Raku is a type of pottery developed by Rikyū in collaboration with his potter Raku Chōjirō (d. 1589), and is characterized by hand-molding clay rather than turning it on a potter's wheel (Figure 2). Raku also uses a low firing temperature that results in a porous body. As a consequence, the pottery never achieves a complete circle, uniform thickness, or smooth texture; these subtle irregularities made the guests more focused on the cup during the tea proceedings. When the host offers the tea, he/she places the cup on the floor in such a way that the guest faces the cup's "front," that is, the side that combines superior features with the aforementioned irregularities. The guest

Figure 2. Raku Chōjirō [楽長次郎], black raku teacup called Amadera [黒楽茶碗 銘 尼寺]. Reproduced by permission of the Tokyo National Museum TNM Image Archives.

picks up the cup from the floor in both hands, supporting the weight with the left palm and rounding the right palm to feel the curvature and the surface of the cup. The guest then turns the cup in the hands, caressing the irregular surface. After turning it so that the cup's "front" faces back to the host, the guest drinks the tea. The guest's interactions with the cup therefore involve not only the eyes but also the entire body as the guest bends over the floor, the palms as he/she feels the weight, form, and texture of the cup, and the mind as he/she is careful to take care of the "front" of the cup. In the same manner as with the teacups, Rikyū stayed away from aligning stepping stones in a perfectly straight line (Figure 3). He chose

Figure 3. Tai-an exterior, stepping stones and *nijiriguchi* (teahouse entrance). Reproduced by permission of Myōki-an.

individual stones that were imperfect and arranged them in an irregular formation. The same spirit can be found in the arrangement of windows. The eastern wall of Tai-an is composed of two windows (Figure 4). Here again, as with the arrangement of stepping stones in the garden path, Rikyū placed two windows of different sizes

Figure 4. Tai-an interior, looking east. The composition of two windows and the shadows of exterior grilles. Reproduced by permission of Myōki-an and Heibonsha.

without lining them up in any regular relationship. Rikyū's design is intended to avoid looking heavily designed and to make the features look as if they had been found in nature.

Rikyū also avoided the appearance of completion. This can be observed around Tai-an's raised floor, the visual focal point of the tearoom, whose wall is adorned with the only decoration, either a flower pot or calligraphy. For the framing of this space, Rikyū used unhewn logs, with some bark still remaining (Figure 5). In Rikyū's time it was typical to use smoothly finished rectilinear timbers, as seen at the White Study at Nishihongan-ji 西本願寺. Also, Rikyū finished Tai-an's walls in yellowish gray mud with cut straw mixed in and with the black charcoal color seeping out from the depth of the wall to the surface.

There are a number of instances that demonstrate Rikyū's preference for impermanence. Impermanence is important because it shows the limitation of human control in comparison to natural forces. Rikyū's desire to submit to forces beyond human control extends to allowing the artifact not to function in its primary utility. It is reported that, at one particular tea ceremony, water was leaking from the bamboo flowerpot and the raised floor was getting wet. To the guest who pointed this out Rikyū replied, "this dripping water is the life" (Tanihata 2011: 28). The flowerpot in question was made of bamboo by the tea master himself, and is extant (Figure 6). It had developed a crack, which naturally happens to bamboo when it dries. For Rikyū, an object under the influence of time—impermanence—is proof that it has a life, while a permanently fixed object is lifeless. For an appreciation of life, Rikyū was willing to let go even of the fundamental utility of the pot: to hold water. Rikyū's predilection was to let nature's course take precedence over his craft. Rikyū recommended sweeping the garden passage to the tearoom much in advance of the tea ceremony, in order to allow enough time for some leaves to fall on the passage. He also recommended keeping a spider's web, if found with morning dew on it.

Viewer Engagement: Imagined Perfection, Completeness, and Permanence

Rikyū preferred situations in which he had to put forth effort to find a small object of beauty in a vast, barren land. He is reported to have said that he would be satisfied to live even in the deserted mountains if he were to have a flower vase, a teacup of black raku, and some calligraphy in Indian ink. *Nanbō-roku*, a collection of Rikyū's teaching, quotes two classical short poems.

見わたせば花も紅葉もなかりけり浦のとまやの秋の夕ぐれ

Look around, no flowers, no colored leaves. A cottage in a seaside village, in an autumn sunset.

(Kumakura 1983: 76)

Figure 5. Tai-an interior, raised floor. Reproduced by permission of Myōki-an.

Figure 6. Sen no Rikyū [千利休], bamboo flowerpot called Onjōji [竹一重切花入 銘 園城寺].
Reproduced by permission of the Tokyo National Museum TNM Image Archives.

花をのみ待たらん人に山ざとの雪間の草の春を見せばや

A person waiting only for flowers. Let him see spring in
grass emerging from the snow, in a mountain village.
(Kumakura 1983: 77)

If Rikyū's guest was to look for beauty in imperfect or incomplete objects, or to appreciate time's passage and nature's forces on objects, the guest needed to be readied for these types of experiences and appreciation. Rikyū stated that the principle of tea is only to boil water, make tea, and drink it. Here he was recommending that one rid oneself of self-inflicted desires.

Roji, or the garden path leading to the tearoom, is the place for guests to rid themselves of their desires and wills in anticipation of the pure experiences of tea. As such, *tsukubai*, where the water basin is set for the guests to wash their hands, has an important role. Rikyū expects himself, not his assistant, to fetch water from a nearby well in preparation for a tea event. At the same time, Rikyū designed water basins in such a way that the guests have to lower themselves—"tsukubau" in Japanese—to wash their hands. The lowering of one's bodily posture here as well as at the very entrance to the tearoom, *nijiriguchi* (Figure 3), from the Japanese "*nijiru*" meaning crawl, was intended to bring the guests to a state of readiness.

Both *tsukubai* and *nijiriguchi* are important features in the film *Rikyū* (1989), directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi and based on the popular novel (1964) by Nogami Yaeko, who in turn had referred to an anecdote reported in one of the written records of oral transmissions produced several generations after Rikyū's death. The story is that of the morning glory, which is well known among Japanese as well as overseas. Such an anecdote, which may or may not be an accurate depiction of Rikyū's deeds, has promoted multiple interpretations. The story says that Hideyoshi, hearing of the beauty of blooming morning glories in the garden of Rikyū's house, demands a visit. He arrives early in the morning, but no flowers are to be seen. Puzzled, he enters the tearoom and understands. Rikyū has arranged one flower for display, destroying the rest. For Okakura Kakuzō, the anecdote was an expression of the flowers' bravery toward death, while Nogami's novel and Teshigahara's film version took it as a manifestation of the precarious power relationship between the tea master and the military ruler. Hideyoshi, on the one hand, was a tyrant, having united all the warlords of Japan, but he had grown up as a farmer's son in a region known for its vulgar dialect. On the other hand, Rikyū, born in the wealthy merchant city of Sakai, had already served as the celebrated tea master of Nobunaga, who had ruled over Hideyoshi. Rikyū was disgusted and troubled by Hideyoshi's garish taste and his desire to flaunt his power and wealth. Hideyoshi observed the water basin and the cramped entrance that made even him lower his head and body and could not

but concede the sophistication and superiority of his tea advisor and political confidant.

The proceedings of the tea ceremony have specific moments when the guests are expected to observe particular objects. For example, the raised floor is situated directly opposite the aforementioned entrance so that, when the guests free themselves from the crawling position, their eyes go directly to the flowerpot or the calligraphy located there. Rikyū eliminated the use of movable shelves in a room smaller than 4.5 mats (about 9 feet square), which were used to display teawares. As a result, all the attention is given to the teawares, without the shelves distracting the guests' interest.

In Tai-an, the interior corner of the two walls is rounded where the hearth is cut; this is where the host makes tea (Figure 7). The same rounded-corner treatment is used for the raised floor. Contemporary scholars think that these rounded corners were for the purpose of making the small space appear larger. Considering Rikyū's

Figure 7. Tai-an interior, rounded comers. Reproduced by permission of Myōki-an and Heibonsha.

philosophy, however, it is more likely that the rounded corners were intended to hide the wooden post or beam, which otherwise would have drawn the viewers' attention and distracted from the teawares near the hearth or the art object over the raised floor.

The search for a small object of beauty extends to the situation in which even the slightest beauty cannot be found. To Rikyū, the pursuit of the mind's eye would be more fulfilling than one's physical eyes actually confronting a beautiful object. Tsutsui Hiroichi, the contemporary tea expert and scholar, compares this idea with the Japanese people's strong interest in the Silk Road. Tsutsui states that the Japanese are interested not because of the actual landscape or history, but because its distance lets them keep imagining the place without ever being able to go there.

Once the doors are closed, the outer world is shut out and Tai-an becomes its own world. This is quite different from the norm of Japanese space, in which *en*, a wooden floor, covered by the extension of the roof but connected to the outside with no walls or doors, makes only an implicit boundary between the interior and exterior spaces. With ricepaper screens over the windows, Tai-an's space is not at all bright, and is more like an earthy cave. The qualities of the interior space help the guests rid themselves of their earthly desires and willfulness and to concentrate their minds and spirits on the experience of tea. It does not shut out the outer world entirely, however. One can see the shadows of the window mullions changing with the amount of sunlight and can hear the birds or the leaves in the wind (Figure 4). In this subtle relationship with the outer world the guest is once again drawn to a participatory interpretation of surroundings. That which is beyond the walls is to be imagined.

From Artifact to Participation, From Aesthetics to Ethics

Rikyū's philosophy of tea focused not on an artifact for its own sake but on the ways it enticed participants into imaginary interpretations. The same can be said about his style of teaching. Rikyū did not produce a comprehensive treatise; he left behind only letters and brief manuscripts. By not writing down his teaching, Rikyū was following the principles of Zen, which teach that the enlightenment of the Buddha can be experienced directly by devoting oneself to the sitting practice of meditation, away from the words of scriptures. Even when asked face-to-face by a disciple, Rikyū avoided theorizing his praxis, instead only reciting a well-known classical poem or producing a brief and enigmatic statement. Rikyū seems to have been interested in enticing disciples to contemplation of his implied meaning, or what I have called the participatory interpretation. The lack of a written record continued after his death, with his son and grandson following his example. Only after the grandson's death did disciples begin to inscribe the oral transmissions, often in the form of anecdotes, for the benefit of an increasing number of followers.²

Rikyū's ethics and aesthetics were aimed at guiding tea participants to the ontological contemplation of the world and the self. Rikyū accomplished this by producing artifacts and environments that clearly showcased the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent nature of their physical aspects. Rikyū had no quarrel with relegating his control over form and matter. No artist could have been further from the desire to produce beautiful artifacts that were perfectly shaped and made of high-quality materials. Instead, his objects could be deemed as unremarkable as those found in the commonplace, imperfect scenes of everyday life. Though potentially alike in appearance, however, the differences are crucial. On the one hand, the primary value of objects of daily use would lie in their utility, while their physical properties could easily have escaped the user's notice. These material features, standard at best, were no target of aesthetic appreciation. On the other hand, the physical properties of Rikyū's objects presented themselves without relying on a building's functional purpose or historical significance. They engaged the imagination, not *despite* but *because* of their imperfection, incompleteness, and impermanence. The viewers could therefore participate in the appreciation of the objects more deeply and more abstractly, not relying on the extrinsic meanings derived from their function or provenance. The viewers even drew parallels between themselves and these objects, contemplating their own imperfect and transient existence.

To reconcile with our modern world, we may try to respond to Lefebvre's quest for finding a meaning of life in the everyday, overcoming the temptation to operate on a purely rational basis. Or we may aim to follow Habermas' lead and reappropriate the experts' culture so as to make sense of it from the standpoint of the life-world. In doing so, however, we are met with the danger of seeing the world's commonplace events and artifacts as banal, with daily life seeming impure, uncertain, and unstable, governed by chance and happenstance. Nothing about our ordinary lives would seem precious or worthy of our attention. Rikyū's ethics and aesthetics provide an antidote, offering instruction on how to find the meaning of our existence in a simple act of sustenance.

Acknowledgments – The author would like to express her gratitude to the University of Michigan's Center for Japanese Studies and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Research Council for supporting research for this article.

Notes

1. Habermas' piece, delivered in Frankfurt, was originally published as "Modernity versus Postmodernity" in *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981). Lefebvre's article was originally published as "Quotidien et Quotidieneté" in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, vol. 13, *Sen no Rikyū and the Japanese Way of Tea* ed. Claude Gregory (Paris: Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1972). A

reprint of the English translation is also available in *Architecture of the Everyday*, ed. Steven Harris and Deborah Berke (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), pp. 32-7, together with Mary McLeod's introductory piece to Lefebvre's oeuvre, "Henri Lefebvre's Critique of Everyday Life: An Introduction," pp. 9-29.

2. I have relied on Rikyū's extant letters, the disciples' texts, criticisms and interpretations by contemporary scholars, surviving teawares, and, above all, Tai-an, the only tearoom that is said to have been designed by Rikyū that is still in existence, although evidently with some alterations.

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