

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Architecture Program: Faculty Scholarly and  
Creative Activity

Architecture Program

---

2015

# Experiencing the Architecture of the Incomplete, Imperfect, and Impermanent

Rumiko Handa

*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*, [rhanda1@unl.edu](mailto:rhanda1@unl.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch\\_facultyschol](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch_facultyschol)



Part of the [Architectural History and Criticism Commons](#), and the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#)

---

Handa, Rumiko, "Experiencing the Architecture of the Incomplete, Imperfect, and Impermanent" (2015). *Architecture Program: Faculty Scholarly and Creative Activity*. 40.

[http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch\\_facultyschol/40](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/arch_facultyschol/40)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Architecture Program at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Architecture Program: Faculty Scholarly and Creative Activity by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# Chapter 15

## Experiencing the Architecture of the Incomplete, Imperfect, and Impermanent<sup>1</sup>

Rumiko Handa

### Introduction

For some time now architects have operated with the notion that the building is *complete* when construction is finished. They strive to make the building *perfect* and wish to keep it so *permanently*. Seen from this point of view, any subsequent alterations seem to degenerate the original. And yet, buildings never stay the same as they take part in politics, economics, and religion through the course of time. Their changes may be caused by natural forces or artificial means, and may manifest physically or in meaning. For example, immediately after the inauguration of the Colosseum in Rome, structures were added beneath the arena's floor in order to accommodate gladiators and beasts. Since then, its meaning has changed from a place for spectacles to a temple of the sun god, a Christian site of martyrdom, and a romantic ruin, until it became a site of archeology, tourism, and entertainment. It has served as a source of building materials, a backdrop for squatter houses and fortresses, a specimen of classical architecture, a medium for growing flora, and a stage for Fascist propaganda. Lightning started a fire, which burned the upper levels of the amphitheater's interior in 217AD, and a number of earthquakes damaged the building, including one in 1349, which destroyed a substantial portion of the stadium at the south side. This portion still remains missing with a reinforced concrete wall to prevent further damage.<sup>2</sup>

If changes are the norm rather than exception of buildings, is it not better for architects to find ways to accept and incorporate them into their work as assets than to consider them outside of their realm? This chapter will examine how incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent pieces of architecture engage their visitors and inhabitants in a manner that demonstrates their ontological significance. The study is intended as a first step toward critiquing the long-held assumption about the perfection, completeness, and permanence of architecture and constructing an alternative paradigm of aesthetics and ethics. The following is divided into three categories: synecdoche; palimpsest; and *wabi*. These three divisions roughly correspond to the incomplete, the impermanent, and the imperfect respectively, but the three are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

### Synecdoche

Synecdoche is a term in linguistics that refers to a figure of speech meaning the whole, of which it is a part, or vice versa.<sup>3</sup> Close to synecdoche is metonymy, but they are in strict sense different as a metonymy refers to a thing or a concept by association, not by part-whole relationship. For example, "White House" is a metonymy used to mean the President of the United States (a particular person) or the presidency (a more abstract concept). Synecdoche in this study refers to a part of a building invoking the whole or a larger area of the building in the visitor's imagination. In particular, at a site of ruins a surviving or missing portion (part) of a building inspires a visitor to imagine the building in its prime (whole).

Author Sir Walter Scott, with his sharpened sensitivity to the environment, took the ruins of Kenilworth Castle as inspiration for *Kenilworth: A Romance* published in 1821.<sup>4</sup> The story revolves around three historical individuals: Queen Elizabeth I; Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and the Queen's favorite; and Amy Robsart, Dudley's wife. Amy visits Dudley at Kenilworth Castle, while Elizabeth is on a royal visit. Amy encounters the queen but cannot reveal her relation to Dudley in order to maintain his position at court. Amy eventually is murdered on Dudley's orders because he suspects her of disloyalty.

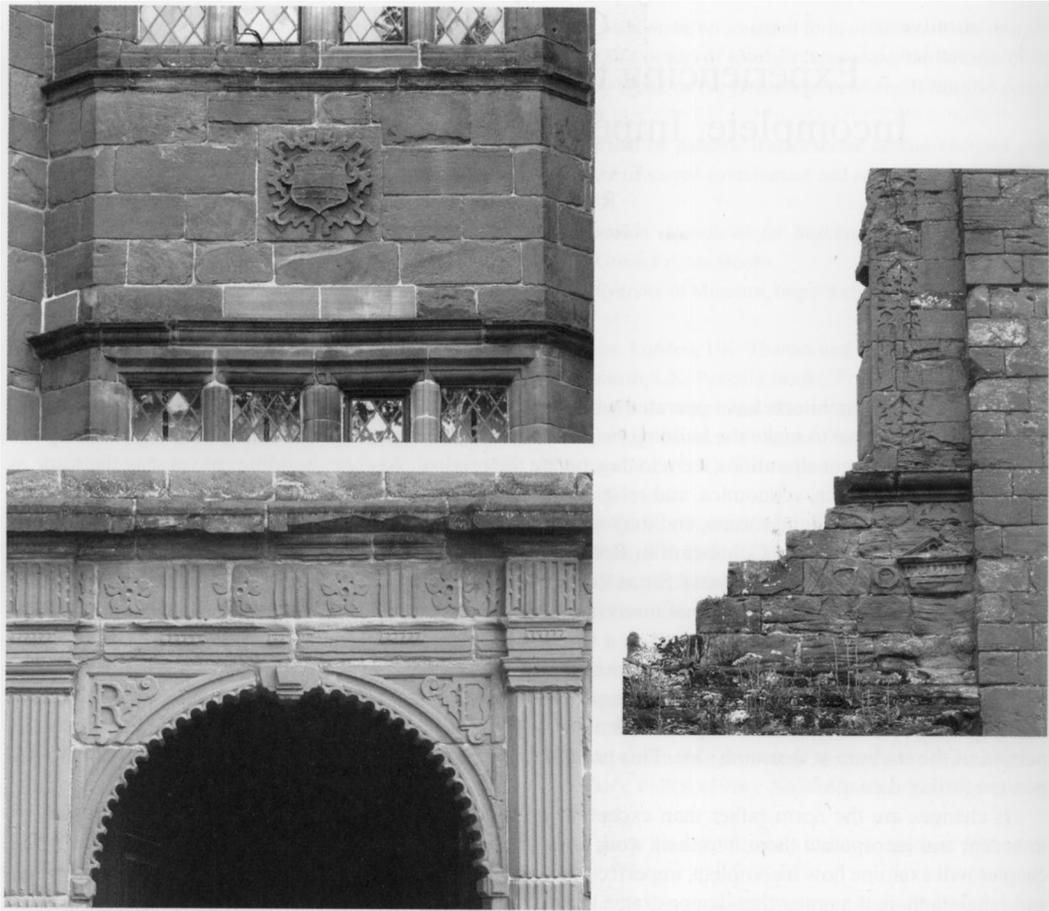


Figure 15.1 Kenilworth Castle: a) Leicester's Gatehouse, south wall, b) Leicester's Gatehouse, west wall, c) Wall adjacent to Keep

Source: Photographs courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

The piece is a historical fiction in the sense that many details of the story, including the Queen's visit to Kenilworth Castle and Amy's premature death, are historical facts while the murder is Scott's fiction. Scott's intention was to tell an intriguing story of ambition and love surrounding Queen Elizabeth I, and by doing so, to give a vivid and alluring portrayal of the past, and its settings.

Similarly, Scott incorporated historical and fictional building descriptions, inspired by antiquarian documents and his own observations of the ruined buildings. Kenilworth Castle, which lay in ruins in Scott's time is located between Warwick and Coventry, and has been an important site of English history because of its close relation to the royal household. It was first constructed in the early 12th century by Geoffrey de Clinton, the royal chamberlain to King Henry I (r. 1100–1135). Major additions were made by King Henry II (r. 1154–89); King John (r. 1199–1216); John of Gaunt (1340–99), son of King Edward III and Duke of Lancaster; and Robert Dudley (1532–88), Earl of Leicester, and damages incurred during the 19th century Civil Wars. In the present day, English Heritage manages the property, which it has done since 1984, dubbing it “one of England's most spectacular castle ruins.”<sup>5</sup>

When he visited Kenilworth Castle for the second time in 1815, Scott is said to have asked searching questions and spent several hours in contemplation at the castle ruin. Comparing what Scott saw at the site

to his narrative will reveal what some details of the ruinous architecture afforded his imagination.<sup>6</sup> First, Scott expanded the range of heraldic symbols on the buildings as far back as to the 12th century, while the only remaining ones were those from Robert Dudley's time. Here, limited physical presence within the incomplete architecture prompted the viewer to imagine similar instances elsewhere in the compound. On the south façade of Leicester's Gatehouse is a shield of a *fess* between six cross-crosslets (a horizontal band between six crosses with each arm crossed) (Figure 15.1a), and on the west are cinquefoils, ragged staffs, and letters "RL" from Robert, Earl of Leicester (Figure 15.1b). Also, the wall immediately west of the Keep are the remains of ornamental carvings, including "70," which refer to the construction of this portion of the castle in 1570 (Figure 15.1c). Above these are cinquefoils and the letter "R" with its vertical stroke made of a ragged staff. These symbols all point to Dudley, who adopted them from his ancestors and predecessors, e.g., Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick and Dudley's ancestor through paternal grandmother, and Simon de Montfort, old Earl of Leicester.

Secondly, Scott imagined the complete workings of doors for a number of key locations, while at the site only parts or traces of opening mechanisms were discernible. One instance is an opening on the ground level of the western wall of the Great Hall block, which likely was used to reach the entryway in the outer wall nearby, and still exists in the ruins Scott sometimes calls it a "sallyport or secret postern," and is an important setting, especially in the final chapter when Amy is removed from the castle.<sup>7</sup> In the opening of the Great Hall the remains of a portcullis can be observed (Figure 15.2a), with grooves for the door that was suspended and operated by a pulley from above, which Scott may have taken as an inspiration. Another instance is the door of Mortimer's Tower. Its upper-story and most of the ground-level structure are gone, as they were in Scott's time, but the remains of the stone hinges existed for Scott's observation, and are still visible today (Figure 15.2b).



Figure 15.2 Kenilworth Castle: a) Great Hall, the remains of the portcullis, b) Mortimer's Tower, the remains of the great door

Source: Photographs courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

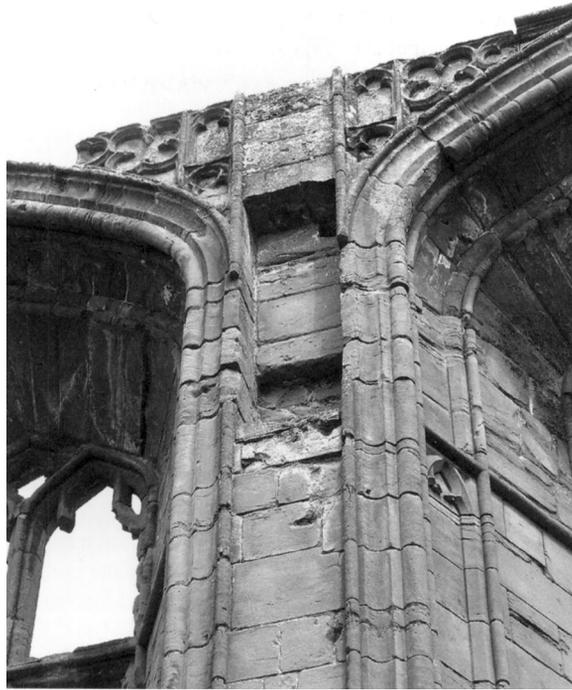


Figure 15.3 Kenilworth Castle, Great Hall, and roof detail

Source: Photograph courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

Third, Scott imagined a “highly-carved oaken roof” along with a splendid interior space magnificently decorated for the queen’s reception.<sup>8</sup> In the ruin, where the Great Hall existed, the roof had vanished completely by the early 18th century. What remain are some fragments of ornate perpendicular-style pointed arches, fireplaces, and window-side benches. In addition, only discernible to observant eyes, are notches in the uppermost position of stone walls, regularly placed above the solid portions of the walls between the arched openings, which would have held the hammer beams (Figure 15.3).

These and other descriptions of the castle in its glory were generated Scott’s the synecdochic imagination. The vivid descriptions of the building in Scott’s novel attracted many visitors to the ruined castle, who were eager to experience in their own ways what Scott created out of his imagination. Among the visitors were Charles Dickens (1838), Queen Victoria (1858), and Henry James (1870s). Scott’s imagination is influential even today. English Heritage is reported to have consulted, in addition to antiquarian documents, his narrative in recreating Elizabethan gardens at the castle. I would contend that the synecdochic nature of ruins, which we have observed in Scott’s case, is not limited to the 19th century but instead is still with us, in some cases. Otherwise, we would not have contained feelings toward ruins, nor would we see the value in adaptive reuse projects.

### **Palimpsest**

A palimpsest is the layer of writing on a writing surface that has been reused by erasing the original. This was a common practice in medieval times when parchment of animal hides, that were durable but costly. The existing script was often washed from the surface to allow overwriting, but the passage of time, however, the earlier writing resurfaced. By presenting multiple layers of writing simultaneously on a singular surface the palimpsest gives physical presence to the past, which otherwise has been obliterated.



Figure 15.4 Leon Battista Alberti, Palazzo Rucellai, and façade detail

Source: Photograph courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

Writing, like drawing and painting, is a physical trace of bodily movements. The palimpsest requires a prior act of erasure, and therefore carries three layers of time: the past perfect or the time of the original writing; the past simple or the time of the original writing's erasure and overwriting; and the present or the time after the original has reappeared on the parchment's surface.

One example of an architectural palimpsest that has three distinct layers of time is the façade of Palazzo Rucellai in Florence, designed by Leon Battista Alberti. Palazzo Rucellai's façade qualifies as a palimpsest as explained by Marco Frascari through its contrasting notions of "apparent" vs. "actual" joints.<sup>9</sup> Channels cut into stone blocks *appear* as if they were joint lines of mortar placed between the adjacent stone blocks. In reality, however, they are mere grooves, and the *actual* joints between stone blocks are much narrower and do not always coincide with the channels.<sup>10</sup> With the strong shadow cast by the channels that are wide and deep, the much finer and shallower actual joints must have been almost completely invisible when the building was newly constructed. Today, however, the actual construction joints have emerged (Figure 15.4). Erosion has taken away sharp corners of stone, both at the actual joint line and at the corners of the channels, and weathering on the stone's surface has happened unevenly from one stone to another, revealing the blocks that used to make a smooth surface of a singular unit. The Rucellai façade therefore is comparable to a palimpsest on parchment, both in the intentional obliteration of the traces of the original deeds and the unintended resurfacing of them in the passage of time.

At Palazzo Rucellai the traces of the construction, which were originally concealed, have been revealed drawing attention of today's observers, who then imagine the act of construction that took place more than half a millennium ago. Today we hide the traces of construction. This applies not only to exterior and interior finishes, like the Rucellai case, but also to structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems. It is as if, in order for a building to be complete, we need to hide its construction, but in doing so, we are

taking away opportunities for the visitors and inhabitants to experience and appreciate the construction process of the building, and placing the architect on the passive side of the architectural palimpsest at the mercy of the erosion of building materials.

A good case of an architect actively involved in the production of the palimpsest, is Carlo Scarpa as evidenced by the Castelvecchio Museum, in Verona. The history of the castle itself dates to 1354 when the Lord of Verona, Cangrande II della Scala, began building a fortified residence inside the old Roman city walls in the center of the town.<sup>11</sup> Three systems of walls had been constructed as Verona expanded each: the oldest and innermost one by the Romans, a subsequent one from the 12th century when the city was an independent state (“Commune”), and the newest and outermost one completed early in the 14th century. Cangrande located the new palace where the Commune wall met the Adige River. After Cangrande, a succession of alterations were made to the castle. The Venetian Republic, which subdued the Scaligeri, used the castle for a military academy, but otherwise kept the building fairly unaltered. It fell to Napoleon’s forces in 1797; the French forces took down the top portions of the existing walls and towers and built a defensive wall along the river against Austrian forces stationed on its opposite side of the river. They connected the courtyard to the upper-level battlements of this north wall by building an exterior staircase along the Commune wall. They then built an L-shaped building block on the north and the east sides of the courtyard along the walls for use as military barracks.

In the 20th century, under Antonio Avena’s directorship of the city’s art museums, the Castelvecchio was designated as a place for a centralized collection. In the 1920s the building underwent what was at that time considered “restoration” to create the illusion of a historical palace, much of which caused negative rather than positive effects on the historical building.<sup>12</sup> The battlements of the walls and the upper portion of the towers were rebuilt, but not in an historically correct manner. Interiors were decorated and painted after the 16th- and 17th-century domestic styles. False fireplaces and chimneys built inside closed the narrow openings on the riverside fortification. The courtyard façades received door and window frames that had been salvaged from a Gothic palazzo demolished in 1886.

Scarpa was hired by its new director Licisco Magagnato in 1957, and worked on it until the museum’s reopening in 1964 and again between 1964 and 1973.<sup>13</sup> Not all design aspects of Scarpa’s work at Castelvecchio fit into the architectural palimpsest, but, this study will focus on the aspect of Scarpa’s Castelvecchio design in which the architect is an agent that reveals the physical traces of past deeds and events that had been concealed or obliterated.

In 1958, a year after Scarpa began his undertaking; Morbio Gate was discovered in the Commune wall and an inner moat shortly afterwards.<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, Scarpa’s work focused on what would become the Cangrande space of the present museum. In Avena’s time, the arched opening at the western end of the Napoleonic block was closed with a set of wooden doors. Contemporary photographs show how the archway, once these doors were opened, revealed another arch further west, and at the much lower level. Once, the Morbio Gate was a connection between the two sides of the Commune wall. With this connection revealed, Scarpa and Magagnato determined to recover it for the museum’s circulation purposes (Figure 15.5a), and with this decision, they went on to demolish the exterior grand staircase from the Napoleonic era. The inner moat was also excavated (Figure 15.5b). While it is not evident to the contemporary visitors that the gateway had once been concealed and was revealed later, the number of round rocks, which used to be among the materials that closed up the gateway, were left at the site to suggest this history.

Another act of revealing was the stripping off of the stucco on the courtyard-side façade of the Napoleonic block. Another contemporary photograph shows a man working on the main, south-facing façade, stripping off the existing stucco. What is revealed is the construction, which is a mixture of the Napoleonic one and those at the time of Avena’s “restoration.” Bricks, stones, as well as a concrete beam from Avena’s intervention can be seen. Scarpa decided to keep this trace of past construction visible in a number of spots on the building’s façade when he applied new layers of stucco (Figure 15.5c).

At the Castelvecchio, then, the architect literally is the one who reveals the physical traces of the past, showcasing them in such a way that they are clearly apparent, regardless of the public knowledge of the building’s past. In doing so, Scarpa allowed the impermanent aspects of architecture to act as a palimpsest.

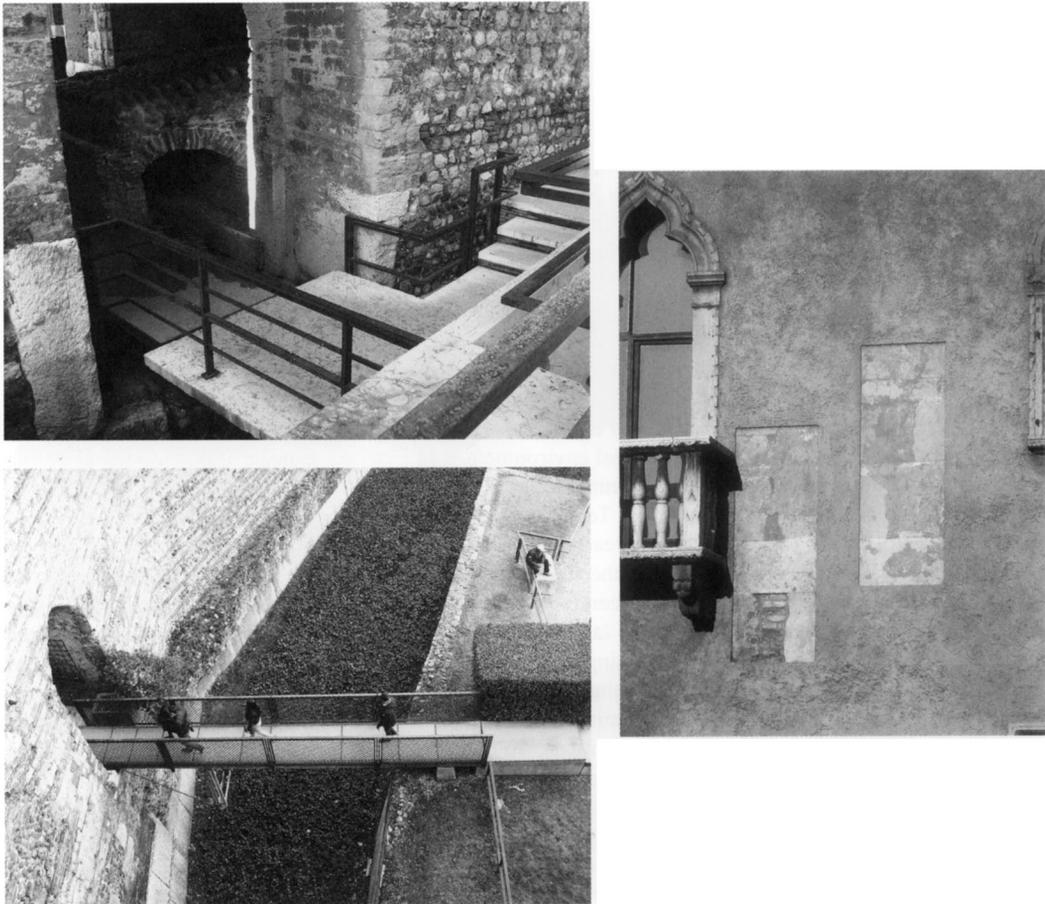


Figure 15.5 Carlo Scarpa, Castelvecchio Museum: a) Morbio Gate, b) Moat and the bridge, c) Façade detail

Source: Photographs courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

### *Wabi*

In 16th-century Japan, we find an artist who relied on the properties of the imperfect, which in Japanese are called *wabi*, in order to create physical objects that induced participatory interpretation in the viewer. The artist is the famed tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–91), who consecutively served Japan’s two military generals in the turbulent feudal era.

The drinking of tea, which originated in China, can be a mundane act of sustenance. But, in Japan it developed into an art form and ethical practice. Japan’s history of tea goes back to the 8th century when the imperial court dispatched missions to the continent to bring back various cultural artifacts and practices, among which were those related to tea. In the 12th century, tea spread among Zen monks as an everyday beverage to fight drowsiness during meditation. In the same century the governing warlord overcame his hangover by following a Zen monk’s suggestion to 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.”<sup>15</sup> Soon tea gained popularity among aristocrats and warlords, but was an expensive undertaking since tea and tea wares had to be imported from the continent. Eventually, the tea “ceremony” became an activity of

high culture, and an occasion for the host to show off an impressive display of imported artifacts. In this context, some attempted to make the practice less exclusive. In particular, Zen Buddhist monk Murata Jūkō (or Shukō 1423–1502) promoted the blurring of the distinction between domestic tea-ware and expensive imports, and Takeno Jōō (1502–55) built a small tearoom of four-and-a-half tatami mats (approximately 9 square feet) for drinking tea. 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 in one of the richest merchant families of Sakai, was himself famous for his collection of imports.

The term *wabi* may be translated into “imperfect” or “impoverished,” but is often elusive, escaping definitive interpretation. Jōō is believed to have initiated the term “*wabi* tea,” finding a parallel between the tea ceremony practiced 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, of which he a master. Engaged in the challenges not only to bestow one’s own creative twist to the poem handed by the preceding poet, but also to leave the poem with imaginative possibilities when passing it onto the succeeding poet, Jōō and his contemporaries came to value the insufficient and unfulfilled state of things. But it was Jōō’s disciple Sen no Rikyū who synthesized *wabi* tea into ethics and aesthetics by applying it to every aspect of the tea 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.<sup>16</sup>

Tai-an Tearoom, located at Mhyoki-an Temple, Kyoto (1582), is the only extant building designed by Rikyū (Figure 15.6a).<sup>17</sup> It consists of a tearoom of two tatami mats (6 square feet), an approximately one-half mat to konami recess to the north, the anteroom of one mat to the west, and the preparation space of another mat to the north. While the tea ceremony can be practiced in a space of any size, Rikyū was reported to have set 4.5 tatami mats as the largest possible limit of the ideal tearoom. Such a restricted space, where even a slight change in breathing was detectable, may have been construed as imperfect, as any careless maneuver by either the host or the guest would have spoiled the proceedings of the ceremony. But Rikyū preferred it because the inconvenience and discomfort put the participants in a state of acute sensibility, making them attentive to the tea rituals. To compare, a larger space, while perhaps providing perfect dimensions, would have relaxed them and dulled their senses.

Rikyū also stayed away from perfect alignments in his design. For stepping-stones of the garden path, he chose individual stones that were imperfect and placed them in an irregular formation. For window arrangements he also avoided perfection. The eastern wall of Tai-an has two windows that are of different sizes and without any regular alignment (Figure 15.6b). As a result, Rikyū’s design features look as if they had been found in nature rather than heavy-handed. For Rikyū it seems that an imperfect setting would induce the disciples’ contemplation more than tea equipment. It is reported that at one tea ceremony water was leaking from a flower vase made of bamboo by the tea master himself and the raised floor was getting wet. It had developed a crack, which naturally happens to bamboo when it dries. To the guest who pointed this out Rikyū replied, “This dripping water is the life.”<sup>18</sup>

Rikyū developed, in collaboration with his potter Raku Chōjirō, a type of pottery called Raku, which is created by hand-molding clay (as opposed to turning it on a potter’s wheel), and by firing it at low temperatures, which results in a porous body.<sup>19</sup> Rikyū preferred this process because the potter has to surrender to the forces earth, fire, and water, which are beyond his control. As a consequence, the pottery never achieves a perfect circle, uniform thickness, or smooth texture. Subtle irregularities to make the guests focus on the cup occurred during the tea ceremony. The host offers the tea by placing the cup on the floor with its “front,” or the side combining superior features, facing the guest. The guest then picks up the cup from the floor in both hands, with the left palm supporting its weight and the right palm rounded to feel its curvature and texture. The guest then turns the cup in the hands, caressing the irregular surface, such that its “front” faces back to the host, before drinking 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 of the cup as well as its form and texture, and the mind as he/she is careful to take care of the “front” of the cup.

By producing artifacts and environments that clearly showcased the imperfect nature of their physical aspects much like the bamboo vase, Rikyū succeeded in guiding tea participants to the ontological contemplation of their own imperfect and transient existence. If Rikyū’s guests were to look for beauty in imperfect objects, they needed to be readied for these types of experiences and appreciation.

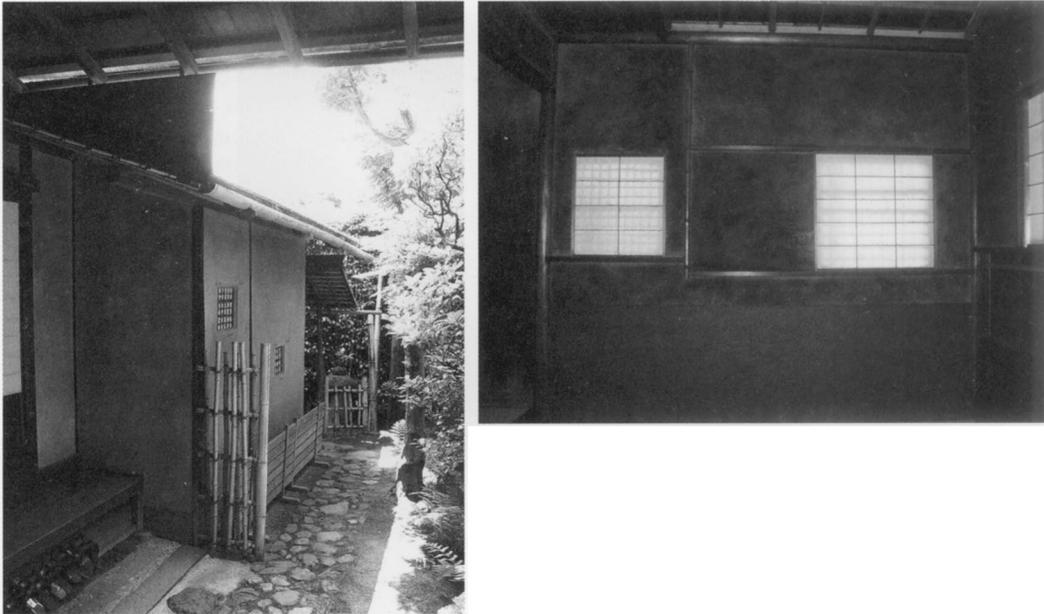


Figure 15.6 Temple and replica: a) Sen no Rikyū, Tai-an, adjacent to Myōki-an Temple, b) Heisei no Tai-an, replica of Rikyū's Tai-an built in Daitoku-ji Temple Kohō-an, eastern wall

Source: Photographs courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

Rikyū stated that the principle of tea is only to boil water, make tea, and drink it. The *Roji*, or the garden path leading to the tearoom, was a place for guests to rid themselves of their desires and wills in anticipation of the pure experiences of tea. As such, the *tsukubai*, a stone water basin set on the path for the guests to wash their hands, has an important role. Rikyū designed water basins in such a way that the guests had to bend over to wash their hands. In a similar manner the entrance to the tearoom, the *nijiriguchi* (from the Japanese *nijiru* meaning crawl), also required humbling postures intended to induce humility and openness. The proceedings of the tea ceremony have specific moments when the guests are expected to observe particular objects. For example, Tai-an's raised floor is situated directly opposite the *nijiriguchi* entrance so that when the guests crawl in, their eyes go directly to the flowerpot or the calligraphy displayed there.

Both *tsukubai* and *nijiriguchi* are important features in the film *Rikyū*, directed by Teshigahara Hiroshi and based on the popular novel 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.<sup>20</sup> Elements of the story of the Rikyū, Hideyoshi and the morning glory indicate that Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the powerful warlord who Rikyū served as a tea master, hearing of the beauty of blooming morning glories in the garden of Rikyū's house, demands a visit. Hideyoshi arrives early in the morning, but no flowers are to be found. Puzzled, he enters the tearoom and understands. Rikyū has picked one flower for display, destroying the rest. Hideyoshi observed the flower 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.

Rikyū eliminated the use of movable display shelves in a room smaller than 4.5 mats, and instead placed tea wares directly on the floor. As a result, all the attention is given to the tea wares, 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. The same rounded corner treatment is used for the raised floor. Contemporary scholars think these rounded corners were for the purpose of making the small space appear larger. Considering Rikyū's philosophy, however, it is more likely the rounded corners were

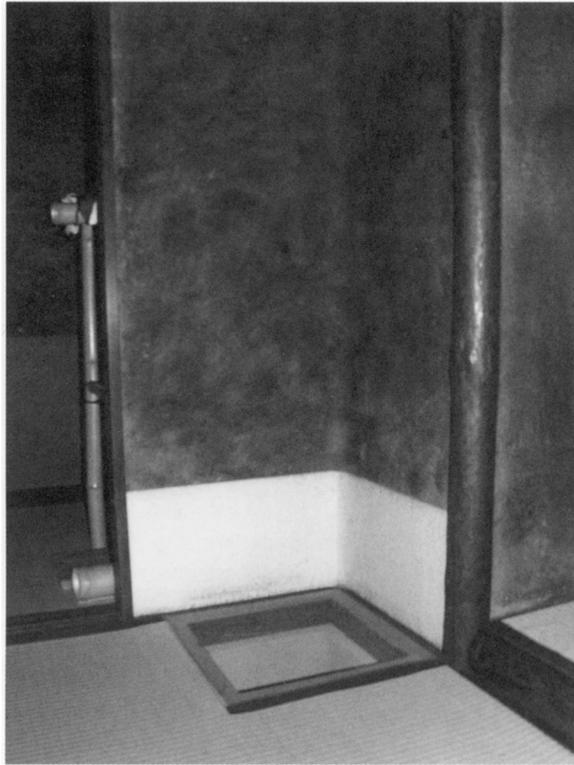


Figure 15.7 Heisei no Tai-an, replica of Rikyū's Tai-an built in Daitoku-ji Temple Kohō-an, corner detail

Source: Photograph courtesy of Rumiko Handa.

intended to hide the wooden post or beam, which otherwise would have drawn the viewers' attention and distracted from the tea wares near the hearth or the art object over the raised floor.

For Rikyū, the state of imperfection is desirable because it allows the pursuit of the mind's eye, or beyond simply seeing a perfect object. At Tai-an, once the doors are closed, the outer world is shut out, and the tearoom becomes its own world. Rice paper screens cover the windows, creating a subdued interior space to 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 by the amount of sunlight and can hear the birds or the leaves in the wind. With this subtle relationship to the outer world, once again, the guest is drawn into the imagined outside world, which may not exist beyond the walls.

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 without relying on the 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 enigmatic statement. Rikyū seems to have been interested in enticing the disciples to contemplate 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.<sup>3</sup>

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. Consequently, 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, and expanding the Tai-an tearoom, presented themselves without relying on their 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 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.

## Conclusion

This chapter has observed particular cases of not-so-perfect buildings, categorizing them into three types: synecdoche, palimpsest, and *wabi*; all to argue that imperfect buildings engage the viewer's imagination, more so than the buildings' purpose, events, construction, or historical significance. Consequently, the viewer engages the object deeper, and beyond mere superficial appearance. Not only that, the viewers can be drawn to employ their imagination, and because they do, they can involve the whole of their being in relating to the object. With incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent architecture some certain existential opportunities are afforded to some participants who engage their imagination. As a result, it seems that in some occasions the physical object transcends its prosaic, matter-of-fact existence to something poetic, which allows the viewers to contemplate their own existence, including the transient nature of existence in time's continuum.

Architects need to acknowledge the nature of viewer involvement when designing structures as the architecture and consider the capacity of the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent to engage the viewer. Our modern worldviews commonplace events and artifacts as banal, and daily life as impure, uncertain, and instable, governed by chance and happenstance. Thus, nothing about our ordinary lives seems precious or worthy of our attention. The ethics and aesthetics of the incomplete, imperfect, impermanent may provide an antidote, offering instruction on how to find the meaning of our existence in simple acts of creation and participation.

## Endnotes

- 1 Portions of this chapter are condensed versions of two previously published articles: (2012). Sir Walter Scott and Kenilworth Castle: Ruins Restored by Historical Imagination. *Preservation Education & Research* 5, pp. 29–44; and (2013). Sen no Rikyū and the Japanese Way of Tea: Ethics and Aesthetics of the Everyday. *Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture* 4(3), pp. 229–48. The chapter as a whole is a summary of a section of a book: (2015). *Allure of the Incomplete, Imperfect, and Impermanent: Designing and Appreciating Architecture as Nature*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- 2 Hopkins, Keith (2005). *The Colosseum*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 3 Geeraerts, Dirk and H. Cuyckens (2010). *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Linguistics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, pp. 238–40.
- 4 Scott, Walter (1821). *Kenilworth: A Romance*. Edinburgh, UK: Printed for Archibald Constable and Co. and John Ballantyne; and London, UK: Hurst, Robinson, and Co.

- 5 Morris, Richard K. (2006). *Kenilworth Castle*, 2nd revised edition. London, UK: English Heritage.
- 6 For a detailed comparison between Scott's textual descriptions of the building and what he had available in the historical documents and site observations, please refer to my journal article or book cited above.
- 7 Scott (1821), vol. 3, p. 54.
- 8 Scott (1821), vol. 3, pp. 87–8.
- 9 Frascari, Marco (1984). The Tell-the-Tale Detail. *Via* 7, pp. 23–37.
- 10 Borsi, Franco (1989). *Leon Battista Alberti: The Complete Works*. New York, NY: Electa/Rizzoli, pp. 62 and 68.
- 11 Murphy, Richard (1990). *Carlo Scarpa and the Castelvecchio*. London, UK and Boston, MA: Butterworth Architecture.
- 12 Magagnato, Licisco (ed.) (1982). *Carlo Scarpa a Castelvecchio*. Milan: Edizioni di Comunità.
- 13 Schultz, Anne-Catrin (2007). *Carlo Scarpa Layers*. Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges.
- 14 Murphy (1990).
- 15 Kobori, Soujitsu [小堀宗実] (2003). *Cha no Yu no Fushigi* [茶の湯の不思議]. Tokyo: NHK Book, p. 14.
- 16 Tsutsui, Hiroichi [筒井紘一] (1990). Taka Akanuma [赤沼多佳], and Toshinori Nakamura [中村利則], *Rikyū No Chakai*. [利休の茶会]. Tokyo: Heibonsha.
- 17 Nakamura, Masao [中村昌生] (1993). *Tai-an: Wabi-Suki No Sekai* 待庵—侘数寄の世界. Kyoto: 淡交社.
- 18 Tanihata, Akio [谷端昭夫] (2011). *Chawa Shigetsushū Kōshin Gegaki* [茶話指月集・江岑夏書]. Kyoto, p. 28.
- 19 Raku, Kichizaemon [楽吉左衛門] (2007). *Rakuyaki-Sōsei: Rakutte Nandarō* [楽焼創成 楽ってなんだろう]. Kyoto: Tankōsha.
- 20 Yaeko Nogami, Yaeko [野上弥生子] (1964). *Hideyoshi to Rikyū* [秀吉と利休]. Tokyo: Chūō-Kōronsha.