Wabi-Sabi and *Kei*

How Sen no Rikyū's Zen-inspired ideas of human placedness and interpersonal respect enable a human-present world-harmonizing (*Wa*) within object-oriented ontology

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ABSTRACT | Timothy Morton is one of the best-known proponents of object-oriented ontology (OOO), which eschews privileged reference to human beings. In particular, Morton emphasizes the emptiness of all dharmas as a central theme of Western philosophy. OOO thus becomes a Buddhist awakening within the heart of the intellectual tradition of the West. However, in my view Morton's OOO lacks a robust vision of how the human person can subsist in a deanthropocentrized ontological frame. In this paper, I suggest Zen philosopher and *chanoyu* (tea ceremony) practitioner Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591) as informative toward envisioning a patterning by which the human person can exist qua a human person even in an OOO world. I argue that Rikyū's notion of *kei* (respect), contextualized by *wabi-sabi* (an *Einfühlung* toward objects), can help humans situate themselves, and enhance their regard for one another as well as for things (*wa*, human-present world-harmonizing), within an object-oriented ontology.

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> *The garden path, the hut,*
> *The host and the guest—*
> *All are whipped together*
> *In the tea and are without distinctions.*

—Sen no Rikyū, as cited by Tsutsui Hiroichi

1 Introduction

Many, at first blush, may think that object-oriented ontology (frequently abbreviated "OOO") is a metaphysics which elides human beings (Dugin 2021, 54-57; Davis 2015; de Luca 2022, 140). If ontology is to be object-oriented, such thinking may go, then what place can there be for people in such a philosophical scheme? (Roy 2018, 42-43) However, as noted OOO philosopher Graham Harman points out, OOO does not aim to erase humanity, only to balance ontology out so that humans no longer occupy one half of the ontological field (Harman 2018; Wilde 2020, 8-10; Freedgood and Schmitt, 2014, 4-5; Stewart 2016, 32). Thus, as Harman explains, OOO stands as a corrective to Cartesian dualism, the Kantian noumenon-phenomenon split, and the centuries of modernity built on these overly anthropocentric, as Harman argues, ideas (Harman 2018; locs 678-689, 794-808; Peters and Peters 2013, 194).[1] The "amazing achievements" of human beings, Harman argues, "do not automatically make human beings worthy of filling up fifty per cent of ontology" (Harman 2018, loc 678; Husserl 2012, 90-97). Human beings still exist on the mainline Harmanian OOO reading, then. They just do not stand at the center of the existence of everything else.

However, the place of the human in the thinking of another highly noteworthy OOO philosopher, Timothy Morton, is considerably more contested. If Harman's OOO involves a gentle demotion of the human from Cartesian/Kantian metaphysical co-author, as it were, to metaphysical participant and observer equal in ontological status to all other things which can be seen, felt, believed, or imagined, then Morton's OOO is a considerably more aggressive line of questioning about how human beings ought to be, both within the Marxist-inspired ecological framework which Morton adopts in much of his OOO writing, as well as within his more general Heideggerian metaphysics in which the human is seen as equally *Weltarm*, "world poor," as whatever else one might encounter in the universe (Morton 2017, 14; cf. Heidegger 2000, 47; Bégout 2013; Hayes 2007b; Jenkins 2018, 58-61).

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1 Not everyone is convinced (Rayman 2020, 179-180).

Much of the uneasiness which I feel reading Morton as to how the human person is supposed to live a rich and human life in a *Weltarm* universe stems from this very notion of *Weltarm*, the Heideggerian notion which is how Morton frames what he calls "solidarity with non-humans," or the equal worlding of all things (and this category appears to be as broad for Morton as for other OOO thinkers, including fictional characters, but also balanced by subscendence). This co-worlding extends even to vegetation (Haecker 2021, 3) and quasars, thus leaving the place of the human person, at least as I understand him and her, to be even more contingent on the Mortonian ecological OOO arrangement. *Weltarm*, on the narrowcast interpretation I am adopting in this paragraph, would seem a poor foundation on which to build a human world (Lippit 1994, 792-794). The overall portrait of Morton's OOO, as I understand it at least, is that there remains a need to find a place for the human person even after he and she have been radically decentered. Morton's OOO is highly refined on the object and ecology side of ontology, in other words, but still, on my reading, too *Weltarm* for human beings (Morton 2008, 93-94; Colebrook 2021, 523-524; Goodfellow 2019, 19). We need some way to be in the world with other human beings that is amenable to our human natures and so conducive to harmonious relations with our fellow humans.

My hangup with Mortonian OOO centers on *Weltarm*. I recall here that Heidegger's *Weltarm* is part of a three-*Welt* array in which animals are world-poor (*Weltarm*), objects are *Weltlos*, without world, and human beings are *Weltbildend*, world making (Crockett 2018, 67-68). It would seem that OOO, to remain true to its objective of decentering the human from Heidegger's human-centered *Dasein* (as "the worlding of the world takes place providentially in and for *Dasein*, the being who has language and can ask the question of being"), must find some way in which *Weltlos* things can join humans in a *Weltbildend* world (or vice-versa) (Crockett 2018, 68; Hayes 2007a, 285-287). Human beings may not be ontologically superior to plants and stones, but we still have human natures unlike those other things. Perhaps I am smuggling anthropocentrism back into OOO, but my reading of OOO is that it does not necessitate the humiliation of the human, only his or her ontological balancing out. *Weltarm* would seem, then, at first glance, to be a disappointing compromise.

And yet, Morton's *Weltarm* may be much richer than it first seems. There is a way to a human place in Morton's *Weltarm* OOO after all, and that way leads, not through Heidegger or any other Western thinker or thought, but rather through Buddhism.[2] Buddhism as a complement to Mortonian *Weltarm* ecological OOO is

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2 Heidegger, via Aristotle and Augustine, may also provide a route, at least indirectly. If, in an Augustinian sense, and in keeping with Aristotle's understanding of the soul, the "soul is an artifice and therefore nonoriginary, unnatural, and separate from the eternity of God," and if "this separation from the absolute fullness or plenitude of being is what opens up the possibility for the soul to strive towards the infinite perfection of God," then an OOO-inclined Heideggerian reading may allow the aporia-driven human to find ontological plenitude in objects as readily as in God. "Living towards something (*Leben auf etwas zu*)," after all, does not specify what the "something" will or should be (Hayes 2007a, 265, 269). One can

not as out of left field as it might sound. For one thing, there are clear affinities between many interpretations of Buddhism and OOO, such as between OOO's real-sensuous object distinction and the Two Truths doctrine of Buddhist thinkers Nagarjuna (ca. 150-ca. 250) and Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) (Morton 2007b, 48). Surprisingly, however, the key to a Buddhist reconfiguration of Mortonian OOO comes directly from Morton himself. While not immediately apparent on reading many of his books and papers, Morton seems to have been influenced in his OOO thinking by Buddhism to a considerable extent. Morton makes Buddhism explicit enough in his OOO thought, and in ways that go beyond general affinities, to inspire a hope that Buddhism may re-humanize (*not* re-anthropocentrize) OOO in ways conducive to human flourishing. In *Dark Ecology*, for example, Morton quotes at length from a 1993 work by controversial Tibetan Buddhist figure Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche to warn of the dangers of a lingering capitalist, consumerist approach to "spirituality" and the natural environment, in contrast to the Tibetan Buddhist approach of detachment and recognition of *śūnyatā* (Morton 2007b, 137-138; Duckert 2012, 274-275).[3] And in *The Ecological Thought*, Morton avers that "A worm could become a Buddha, as a worm" (Morton 2010, 114). There are many more Buddhist-linked notions in Morton's works, some of which I introduce in more detail below. Suffice it to say that there is warrant for reading Morton's OOO as Buddhist-inspired ontology.

Buddhism in general, though, is not specific enough to recoordinate Morton's OOO for the human person. I retain here the Heideggerian emphasis on the "facticity of death" as partially constitutive of human worlding to suggest that we need a human figure, at least initially, to show us how to be human (while going beyond anthropocentrism) in a universally *Weltarm* world (Komjathy 2022, 2). Therefore, in this paper, I propose the highly Buddhist-inflected philosophy of another object-oriented thinker (although, to my knowledge, never characterized as such before the present essay), the Japanese Zen adherent Sen no Rikyū. Rikyū is almost always understood in the West, and in Japan as well, as having advanced the tea ceremony to an extraordinary level of intricacy and philosophical richness. This is true, of course. Rikyū did, indeed, take the acts of preparing, serving, and drinking tea, which had begun to be combined and repurposed as a ritual by Rikyū's predecessors and others in the Japanese cultural sphere long before Rikyū's time, and establish them as an enduring and ceremonial aspect of Japanese culture. But many may not be aware that Rikyū was a devoted Zen Buddhist, and that Buddhism suffuses the tea ceremony he brought forth (Ito 1998).

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take a similar approach through Heidegger's *Weltarm* thinking. "If [the] capacity for speech [in humans] depends upon the capacity of sense perception we share with members of other animal species, we must begin to reconfigure our understanding of the primacy of speech as exclusive to the human domain" (Hayes 2007a, 290). We are world-builders, in other words, but dogs (which have the Buddha nature) and orchids may be so, too.
3 See also Sam Littlefair, "Groundbreaking Scholar Timothy Morton Wants Philosophers to Face Their 'Buddhaphobia'," *Lion's Roar*, September 2, 2017, available at:
https://www.lionsroar.com/groundbreaking-scholar-timothy-morton-wants-philosophers-to-face-their-buddhaphobia/ (last accessed August 28, 2022)

In particular, Rikyū applied Zen-inspired approaches to human life—both with other humans and with objects and the world around—to the tea ceremony, thereby transforming the tiny tea hut where his tea ceremonies were performed into a kind of cosmos of harmonious human-human and human-object (and also object-object) interaction (Handa 2013, 245-246). There is much philosophical richness in Rikyū's thought, and almost all of it is connected in some way to Zen, and to how Zen can teach us how to live like human beings.

In proposing a Rikyuan Zen humanization of OOO, I will use two of Rikyū's key concepts, namely *kei* (敬) ("respect") and *wabi-sabi* (侘び寂び) (*Einfühlung* toward objects), to map out a way in which Rikyū's Zen tea ceremony can humanize Mortonian *Weltarm* OOO such that the human person can nestle into that philosophical outlook in a more distinctly human way. *Kei* and *wabi-sabi* may or may not be distinctly human modes of existence, but they are, all the same, modes of existence which are open to human beings, modes of existence which have been proven (by Rikyū's own life not least of all) to enable human beings to live more aesthetically and interpersonally rich and harmonious lives.

First, what do I, and much more important what did Sen no Rikyū, mean by *kei* and *wabi-sabi*? By *kei* I, along with Rikyū, mean an open and self-deprecating Other-orientedness, a performative graciousness which is accepting of the Other in a way inviting of the enhancement of the human in both the Other and the Self (Mamiya 1937, 15). *Kei*, which is both a way of approaching the Other and a way of comporting oneself to make oneself Other-approachable, is a term suffused with interpersonality (Takeuchi 1944, 67-68). A good definition of *wabi-sabi* and how these conjoined concepts are empleached in the tea ceremony and the wider realization of Zen ideals comes from Dorinne Kondo:

> Perhaps the Zen doctrine bearing most directly on the tea aesthetic is the emphasis on the *mundane* as a sphere of action and a source of beauty.[4] The Buddha nature, hence the path to Enlightenment, is to be found in every sentient being and in the most everyday activities. Extending this exaltation of the mundane to the aesthetic realm, Zen describes a fusion of opposites in which the beautiful and the ordinary are no longer distinct. This leads to the aesthetic appreciation of imperfection and poverty, of *sabi* and *wabi*. Inasmuch as the qualities can be defined, *sabi* is the beauty of the imperfect, the old, the lonely, while *wabi* is the beauty of simplicity and poverty …[5] So closely are these qualities associated with the tea ceremony that the ceremony of the great master Sen no Rikyu was called *wabi cha*, or *wabi* tea. (Kondo 1985, 292, emphases in original)

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4 Recall that Heidegger emphasized the importance of aesthetics, of "being-opened for something that is around me" (Hayes 2007a, 274).
5 See furthermore Iwai (2006, 30-31).

Kei is what you do with human persons, in other words, and *wabi-sabi* is how, where, and with what you do it. Or, *kei* is how you share world with the Other, and *wabi-sabi* is how you share world with objects.

Even better for OOO is that, ultimately, on the Rikyū understanding, there is very little, perhaps no, difference between *wabi-sabi* and *kei*. I suggest that a marriage of the human person in Rikyū's tea-cosmos with the ecological OOO of Timothy Morton could produce a truly human-friendly Buddhist metaphysics instructive of how human beings can and should engage with the natural world (Babich 2017; Latta 2009, 873; Sugimoto et al., 2019).[6] Morton can have his tea cakes and eat them too: we can all live in harmony with non-humans, can even be in solidarity with non-humans, as long as we have human-intelligible guidelines for how to live the everyday of that worlding. The Zen-tea concepts of *kei* and *wabi-sabi* are the answers to the *kōan* which Morton's ecological-ontological interventions pose.

2   De-Heideggering Being and De-Anthropocentrizing Marxism

A very good overall explication of Timothy Morton's take on object-oriented ontology can be found in his 2017 book *Humankind: Solidarity with Nonhuman People* (Morton 2017). Morton is crystal clear on the very first page of his work that his is an ecological approach to OOO on the one hand, and that it is heavily informed by Marxism on the other.[7] "Whoever severs himself from Mother Earth and her flowing sources of life goes into exile," runs the Emma Goldman (1869-1940) epigram to Morton's introduction. (One of Morton's central ideas in the book is a kind of ecological alienation he calls the "Severing.") This epigram is followed by the first sentence of the introduction, which reads, "A specter is haunting the specter of communism: the specter of the nonhuman" (Morton 2017, 1). What Morton wants to do, as I understand him, is thus to rejigger Marxism for the Anthropocene (Kim 2019; Hudson 2014).[8]

Marx is the baseline, then, but Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), too, figures prominently in Morton's rethinking of metaphysics in an ecological key. The way to have solidarity with non-humans, Morton argues, is to give everything world. "World needn't be a special thing that humans construct," Morton writes (Morton 2017, 37).

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6 A very helpful glossary of tea terms is available in Hanes and Nintze (2008, 52-53).
7 Morton is hardly alone in reading ecology through Marx, and vice versa. See, e.g., the 2020 runaway Japanese bestseller 'Das Kapital for the Anthropocene' (*Hitoshinsei no 'Shihonron'*) (Saitō 2020). Morton is also not unique in arguing for paying greater attention to, and evincing greater openness toward, the "nonhuman" (du Toit 2016).
8 This can have repercussions in various surprising fields (Hohmann 2021).

> *World* is always and necessarily incomplete. Worlds are always very
> cheap. And this is because of the special non-explosively holist inter-
> connectedness that is the symbiotic real; and because of what OOO
> calls 'object withdrawal,' the way in which no access mode whatsoever
> can totally swallow an entity. 'Withdrawn' doesn't mean empirically
> shrunken back or moving behind; it means ... *so in your face that you
> can't see it.*" (Morton 2017, 37; emphases in original)

Elsewhere, as well, Morton references Heidegger's "world" thinking, and critiques
it in the context of *Dasein* (Morton 2018b, 113). *Weltarm* is a curious concept in
the *Dasein* array, Morton avers, because while *Dasein* seeks to dislodge the hu-
man-centrism of being, *Weltarm*, conversely, privileges it (Morton 2018b, 113-114;
Brickey 2022, 140-141, and Harman 2013, 227-228). This insight into the anthro-
pocentrism of the *Weltarm* idea in Heidegger seems to have propelled Morton
on a quest to put as much distance between himself and the German philoso-
pher as possible. This is what he does in *Humankind*, in a big way. And it revolu-
tionizes ontology, OOO, and Marxist ecological thought. Indeed, the farther
Morton goes from Heidegger, the more *Dasein* recedes into the background with
the German thinker. Morton's "hyperobjects," for example, an idea which he de-
veloped before *Humankind* and which involves the worlding of great, sprawling
entities such as ecologies and climate change, de-privilege human epistemology
in worlding in a way of which Heidegger probably could not have dreamed (Meis
2021; Hudson 2021/2022).

3   Buddhist Shadows in Timothy Morton's *Weltarm* OOO

While Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Heidegger, as well as other Western thinkers
such as Luce Irigaray (Morton 2022, 11-12), Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Charles Dar-
win (1809-1882), G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) figure
prominently in *Humankind*, in many of Morton's other books and essays Bud-
dhism peeks out much more noticeably from behind the curtains of the thoughts
playing out on the stage of the text. For example, in *Being Ecological*, Morton
notes that "many Buddhist meditation teachers ... write about ecology" (Morton
2018, 77), and also speaks about the ecological significance to the karmic flash-
backs one experiences, according to Tibetan Buddhism, in the liminal *bardo*
phase between reincarnations (Morton 2018, 55-56; Morton 2013, 54). In a 2007
essay, Morton engages with Hegel's (and Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) and
Theodor W. Adorno's (1903-1969)) views on Buddhism from a decidedly Buddhist
perspective (Morton 2007a). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton makes a perceptive, and
profound, etymological comparison between Greek and Tibetan, working Bud-
dhism into his understanding of how one may "become familiar with a stranger

(thought, lifeform, stone) such that the strangeness is canceled out" (Morton 2016, 92):

> [Immanuel] Kant [(1724-1804)] cleaved to the idea that a thing was ul-timately a mathematical correlate of itself in a human mind, perhaps in the manner of someone clinging for dear life to a stalk in a flood … The stalk Kant clings to says that a thing exists because I can mathe-matize it. *Mathematics* comes from the Greek *mathēsis*, which means *getting used to*, acclimation. The Tibetan Buddhist for *getting used to* is *göm*, which is also the term for *meditation*. There is mathēsis and there is computation: a limited, logistical application of mathēsis. In the same way meditation consists of awareness, an open part, and mindfulness, a logistical part. (Morton 2016, 92)

Other of Morton's Buddhism references are even less oblique, even less couched in criticisms of Western philosophers. In *Nothing*, for instance, Morton comes right out and says that he is "a proud 'X-Buddhist' member of the Drupka Kagyü sect of Tibetan Buddhism" (Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton 2015, 190; Wallis 2016; Wigder 2019). It seems unmistakable that Morton is approaching OOO from a very definite Tibetan Buddhist commitment.

As such, it cannot be said that Morton is indifferent to the place of the hu-man in his ontology. If anything, Morton's books are about just this, about how to place the human in the universe and the ecosphere while not privileging the human above other entities. And much of this reflection is Buddhist-themed. For instance, Morton speaks with great respect in *Being Ecological* about Buddhist meditation. "Mind 'minds'," Morton writes:

> just as the ocean has waves. Movement is intrinsic. This fact becomes especially interesting when the meditation object is mind as such: when mind tunes to mind. What is experienced here is not absolutely nothing, but rather a strange beingness that cannot be pinned down to a presence I can point at. There is a deep ontological reason for this: appearing (waves) is intrinsic to being (ocean), yet different. (Morton 2018, 142)

There is much Tibetan richness here, but there is also a certain slipperiness to Morton's understanding of humanity in passages such as these. On the one hand, it is very helpful to have Morton's thoughts on meditation so we can know how to place mind in context and can thereby understand how humans can in-teract. On the other hand, however, Morton's insights about "mind tun[ing] to mind" (and he is speaking here in extension of the legendary Buddhist metaphor about "meditation as a form of tuning," as in a sitar (Morton 2018, 141)) can easily be rendered in the case of mind "tun[ing]" to the minds known by other human

beings. In *Hyperobjects*, by the same token, Morton references the Buddhist practice of "tonglen: 'sending and taking', a meditation practice in which one breathes out compassion for the other, while breathing in her or his suffering," but here, as well, Morton shifts the conversation from human suffering to a much wider consideration of environmental degradation (Morton 2013, 127). Likewise, in a 2012 essay, Morton interprets the "guilt" and "shame" of ecological degradation by means, in part, of Buddhist reflections on sadness (Morton 2012, 17-18). In a 2016 interview, Morton counters that "*Dasein* is not human" in response to his interlocutors' question, "Is Buddhism how you ended up avoiding the traps of Marxism?" (McIntyre and Medoro 2016, 172-173) And in the introduction to *Nothing*, Morton and his two co-authors write in the introduction that on the Tibetan reading, Buddhism is both an inward- and an outward-directed enterprise (Boon, Cazdyn, and Morton 2015, 3). In *Dark Ecology*, Morton invokes "the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara" as a model of compassion for "all sentient beings," which of course includes humans, but also non-humans too (Morton 2016, 150-151).

It is therefore not clear, to me at least, how, as a human being, I am concretely supposed to live in Morton's OOO universe. I cannot be as the ocean is, at least not yet. I need someone to take me by the hand and let me know how to live a human life in an object-oriented ontology. I turn, therefore, to Sen no Rikyū, and he invites me in to his little teahouse to have a cup of bitter green tea.

4 Tea Time: Respect, Object-Oriented Einfühlung, and the Space for Human Persons in *Chanoyu* OOO

General knowledge of Sen no Rikyū in the West can be traced to Japanese pan-Asianist Okakura Tenshin's (1863-1913) 1906 introductory monograph *The Book of Tea* (Levine 2016, 15). This introduction has tended to produce the impression in the West that Sen no Rikyū is just about tea, and that tea ceremony is a distinctly Asian practice which must be approached as a foreign cultural element. Even among Western scholars, the *chanoyu* (茶の湯), or tea ceremony, has often been considered in an anthropological way, or otherwise as a ritual evocative of a cultural type (Anderson 1987, 475).

However, the life and art of Sen no Rikyū are much more elastic than the flat moniker "tea master" might at first suggest. Indeed, it is impossible to understand Rikyū or his work in any way other than as religious, and specifically Zen Buddhist (Anderson 1987, 475; Lomas et al. 2017). Rikyū's involvement with Zen Buddhism was, in fact, pervasive (Kokushi Daijiten Henshu Iinkai 1987, 482). Current Urasenke *iemoto* (grand master) Sen Sōshitsu XV (十五代千宗室) (b. 1923) holds that "tea is the practice or realization of religious faith, no matter what

you believe in" (Anderson 1987, 478). In Japan, the tea ceremony is implicated with "Buddhist and Shinto ritual calendars," thus imbricating tea deeply within the experiential religious life of Japanese people (Anderson 1987, 483; Anderson 1987, 489-495). Beyond this religious coloring, or in fact because of it, the tea ceremony is not Asian; it is human (and also object-oriented), and therefore open to all. *Chanoyu* has only incidental cultural coloring. Its ethos is universal—it seeks to habituate the human person to a world of objects and other human persons, in peace.

It should also be mentioned, contra the common Western understanding, that Rikyū did not invent the tea ceremony out of whole cloth. As a teenager, Rikyū (born Yoshiro) became interested in the tea ceremony already fashionable in the Sakai area. At seventeen, Rikyū studied *shoin-no-cha* (書院の茶) ("drawing room tea") in the Nōami (能阿弥) (1397-1471) style, and later studied Murata Jukō (村田珠光) (1422/1423-1502) -style *wabi-cha* under wealthy merchant and tea afficionado Takeno Jōō (武野紹鷗) (1502-1555) (Kokushi Daijiten Henshu Iinkai 1987, 481; Takeuchi 1944, 45-48; Kinoshita 1936, 23). And, of course, rituals involving the drinking of tea extend much farther back into the Japanese, and East Asian, past than does the lifespan of Sen no Rikyū (Anderson 1987, 479-480).[9] So, there is much more about tea than Rikyū. But there is also much more to Rikyū than tea.

What sets Rikyū apart is the whole-of-life approach he took to *wabi-cha*. A contemporary Japanese designer, Satō Kashiwa, said in an interview in 2021 that he views Sen no Rikyū as a fellow designer, someone who was interested in implementing a holistic philosophy and design concept in his work (Morgan 2021). This is borne out in practice. For example, one of the most striking things about *chanoyu* is the equality of all human participants, something reinforced constantly. Guests enter the tea hut or tea room through a very small door (躙り口) (*nijiriguchi*). In Rikyū's time, warriors had to remove their weapons before entering. Even Rikyū's patron, the powerful shōgun Toyotomi Hideyoshi (豊臣秀吉) (1537-1598), obligingly removed his swords and scabbards before paying call on Rikyū for tea. The very entrance into the "tea world" is not just indicative of equality. The passage from the mundane outer realm to the ritualized sphere of tea is meant to call to mind a transition from "everyday life" to "ritual event" (Anderson 1987, 483; Handa 2013, 243). Rikyū intentionally grounded this passage from the secular to haven or refuge in the Lotus Sutra (Anderson 1987, 483). The *kakemono* (掛け物), or hanging scroll, in the *tokonoma* (床の間) alcove in the tea room is also usually a Zen didactic saying in calligraphic form, while the repast and sake served to guests are redolent of Buddhist monasteries and Shinto *naorai* (直会) rituals, respectively (Anderson 1987, 487). Rikyū's *chanoyu* was about how to live a human life in an often inhuman, war-wracked world, and among an array of non-human things. *Chanoyu* was for the whole person, body and soul, mind and senses, stomach and heart.

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9 And beyond East Asia as well (Takeuchi 1944, 52-57).

I will consider here two key facets of Rikyū's *chanoyu*, *kei* and *wabi-sabi*, as especially conducive to the whole-of-life transformation which Rikyū sought for himself and for his guests. First, *kei*, in the context of *chanoyu*, is taken from *wakei seijaku* (和敬清寂), a phrase indicating that the ideals of chanoyu are harmony (*wa*), respect (*kei*), purity (*sei*), and what is often translated tranquility, but what might better be termed silent equipoise (*jaku*).[10] This ideal, often called "that which explains the spirit of chanoyu" (*chanoyu no seishin wo iiarawasu no ni*), is not a rejection of the world, but an attempt to live in quiet peace with it and with others in it (Suzuki 1958, 74-76; Fujimura 1939, 120-127). *Wa* has even been described as the state of blending existentially with the Other, and then forgetting even that one has done so (Mamiya 1935, 3). Further, *wa* and *kei* are conceptually in harmony with one another *prima facie*. Taken altogether, *wakei seijaku* as the heart of *chanoyu* is rooted in the presence of the Other, both other hearts and other things (Ogiwara 1946, 3-5; Awakawa 1966, 261-262).[11]

As anthropologist and tea practitioner Jennifer L. Anderson points out:

> a practitioner of *chado* [i.e., tea ceremony] usually conceives of and ritually expresses an emotional and intellectual requirement for cosmic order in a more immediate way [than in Chinese Taoism and Japanese Shintō]. The concepts of harmony (*wa*) [(和)], respect (*kei*) [(敬)], purity (*sei*) [(清)] and tranquillity (*jaku*) [(寂)] are all distillations of specific aspects of this need. They have become the central litany of tea values, the most commonly recognised and recited words in *chado*. Every symbol, every movement and every thought in tea ritual eventually relates back to one of these ideas and, through them, to a universal urge to order. (Anderson 1987, 491)

While Anderson appeals to anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1926-2006) argument that "ritual functions to relieve the suspicion 'that life is absurd and the attempt to make moral, intellectual, or emotional sense out of the experience is bootless'" (Anderson 1987, 491), I think it is a bit different than Anderson says. The human person is the centerpiece of the tea ceremony. This is not placative or comforting, but a direct confrontation, Zen-style, with reality. It is not to apotheosize the human, but to bring him or her into harmony with the world, that one boils water and whisks up a bowl of tea. *Chanoyu* is not a ritual on the Geertzian understanding, then. It is an awakening and an adjustment, a noticing and a re-ordering of learned human behavior. There is no comfort in *chanoyu*. There is, instead, a new way of understanding where one sits in the cosmos (most certainly not in the middle or at the top). Or, to put it another way, the tea ceremony is for enacting an object-oriented ontology in which the human per-

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10 On the social context of this phrase, see Nishibori (1946, 60), and Sen (1943, 96-113). *Wa* is of course a concept which predates *chanoyu* (Watanabe 1940a; Watanabe 1940b; Okuda 1959, 209).
11 The term *wakei seijaku* originated in Song Dynasty China, but by Sen no Rikyū's time it was already a long-established phrase in Zen, and Rikyū and his teachers would have understood it as such (Takahashi 1941, 26-28; Tanaka 1905, 146-148).

son can come into harmony with other human beings while foregrounding and cherishing the existence of objects (Weiss 2010).

Anderson continues in her explication of Geertz's view of ritual by arguing that, "to achieve these goals," that is to allow the religious ritual of the tea ceremony to "make sense out of parts of human life which otherwise seem uninterpretable and [to] convince man that he can somehow affect his place in the larger scheme of things," those taking part in the tea ceremony must:

> (1) establish their credentials; (2) identify the portion of the culturally defined cosmic model to be manipulated; (3) define the specific sphere of endeavour; and (4) project the results of the effort to those affected [by the ritual]. In *chado*, the concept of purity (*sei*) relates to establishing the credentials of the practitioner and associating the ritual field with the cosmic model. Harmony (*wa*) and respect (*kei*) clarify the area of endeavour. A special kind of tranquillity (*jaku*) is the projected result. (Anderson 1987, 491-493)

Notice here that harmony and respect "clarify the area of endeavour." This is of crucial significance for our purposes in this essay, as the "area of endeavour" is, on my reading, none other than the scope of object-oriented ontology, that is, the realm of the human with the human, the human with objects, and objects with other objects. (This is strengthened by Anderson's characterization of the tea ritual as "creating ... a metaphorical relationship between physical space and the cosmos" (Anderson 1987, 493), which dovetails neatly with Harman's focus on the metaphor as central to OOO.) The human person can have a place in OOO, even in a radically de-anthropocentrized OOO such as Timothy Morton advances. All it takes is some Zen training, preferably in the mode of Rikyū's *chanoyu*.

I say this because, in the tea ceremony, the concepts of *kei* and *wabi-sabi* blend, so that humans can be at peace with one another, and with the things around. This, after all, is what I understand the ideal of humans in an OOO arrangement to be. A key aspect of *kei* is to accept the other for who he or she is, to practice *omotenashi* (おもてなし), or the full acceptance of the human Other in the midst of the everyday—a phrase commonly translated in English as "hospitality" (Wakafuji 1963, 62). And a key aspect of *wabi-sabi* is to appreciate the unfinished nature of things, to accept and even celebrate the incompletion and imperfection of objects in the world (Handa 2013, 232). A cracked and asymmetric teacup, on this reading, is preferred over a perfectly-shaped and flawless one. The same goes for human beings, who are presumed to be imperfect and who are to be respected just as they appear before one. One reflects deeply on one's own place in the world, and with direct and honest simplicity welcomes the Other into the world that the two now share (Wakafuji 1963, 68, 75). And share, not just with one another, but with a myriad of inanimate objects which are presented in the tearoom with at least as much respect as is shown to hu-

man persons. Everything comes together. Everyone forms a whole which, to re-dound to Mortonian thinking, is *less* than the sum of its parts, and in a way that is very humanizing indeed.

Consider, for example, the use of utensils and other items in *chanoyu*. In presenting the "raku" (楽), or delightfully imperfect, teacup to the guest, the host in the tea ceremony shows the "front" of the cup to the guest, the part, that is, which "combines superior features with ... irregularities" (Handa 2013, 235). The guest admires the cup, and then turns the "front" back to the host when return-ing the vessel (Handa 2013, 235). Both guest and host have now formed a silent bond. Both have now recognized, wordlessly, that objects are not perfect and can be filled in with the heart, and that the heart is not perfect and can be cheered by objects, and that both people and objects can be known and re-spected by other human beings.[12] Solidarity with non-humans is important, and so is solidarity with humans.[13] Zen Buddhism, on the Rikyū and Mortonian read-ings, can provide patterns and cadences to help us understand how to achieve both paradigms going forward. The tea ceremony is object-oriented ontology with a drink served at the end.

5 Conclusion

Sen no Rikyū's object-oriented ontological approach went far toward soothing the pitiless nature of the period of civil war in which he lived. Not only did the tea ceremony capture—for a time, at least—the wild heart of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, but other strongmen of the time, too, found in the drinking of tea and the cher-ishing and exchange of tea objects such as cups and whisks a cultural grounding, a way of being in the world which did not involve the shedding of blood (Sankei Shimbun 2022, 16; Pitelka 2019). In the tea house, all were equal, all were treated with respect. In the world of *wabi-sabi*, the human heart could know pathos for people and things, could be at home in a world in which humans are often strangers, to one another and to the material universe. As architecture scholar Rumiko Handa puts it:

> By producing artifacts and environments that clearly showcased the incomplete, imperfect, and impermanent nature of their physical as-pects, Rikyū succeeded in guiding tea participants to the ontological

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12 On the connection between imperfection in the tea ceremony and incompleteness and imagination in linked Japanese verse (see: Handa 2013, 231-232).
13 Note that Heidegger's *Vorhandenheit* (to-hand-ness) and *Zuhandenheit* (readiness-to-hand) need not necessarily work in an object-human direction. An ontological flatness, such as OOO suggests is possible, is not excluded by the comingling of human and object worlds (Cheung 2014, 509-512, 520). *Chanoyu* implements, like other objects, have the ability to retain the trace of human presence and re-present those traces later—OOO in human-crossed action (Tatsumi 2003, 299).

contemplation of their own imperfect and transient existence. (Handa 2013, 229)

Sen no Rikyū himself put it best in the poem cited epigrammatically at the outset of this essay.

> *The garden path, the hut,*
> *The host and the guest—*
> *All are whipped together*
> *In the tea and are without distinctions* (Anderson 1987, 495)

"A tea master," Anderson states, "uses the many symbolic aspects of *chaji* [i.e., extended tea ritual] to recreate a cosmic model which includes a human factor" (Anderson 1987, 495). Or, as Rikyū again puts it, "through concentrating on *chanoyu* both guests and host can obtain salvation" (Anderson 1987, 495).

To live among human persons and objects is a risky affair. Life is fraught with uncertainty, as Zen reminds its adherents with each passing moment. Rikyū was not exempt from the perils of existence in an OOO world, a world which is clearly not at the beck and call of human beings. Rikyū fell afoul of Hideyoshi's violent temper, perhaps for refusing to go along with Hideyoshi's request to make a member of Rikyū's family a part of the cultural entertainment, perhaps for being suspected of opposing Hideyoshi's planned invasion of the Korean peninsula, or perhaps for disapproving of the gaudy gilded tearoom which Hideyoshi had had built. In any event, Hideyoshi ordered Rikyū to commit ritual suicide (Fukui 2012). Chanoyu is an existentially perilous endeavor.

Rikyū complied with Hideyoshi's command, after composing a Buddhist poem to the dagger he used to disembowel himself (Okada 1886, 255). The blade, Rikyū raptured, was to be the implement of his enlightenment. Even in death, Rikyū showed respect to people and things, and placed himself on an equal ontological footing with objects and with fellow human beings.

Object-oriented ontology is an emerging Western philosophy which also has deep and often unexamined roots in non-Western ways of thinking about and being in the world. The example of Sen no Rikyū, and the deeply Zen Buddhist *chanoyu* which he developed as a way of humanizing human persons and cultivating regard for objects, can help human beings today understand how to navigate OOO. Zen Buddhism, in other words, can light the way to a new frontier in Timothy Morton's radically de-anthropocentrized, *Weltarm* ontology.

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