

Contemporary Japan 1

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# Nirvana Mini

New tea house concept

Shimada Masahiko



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



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C O N T E M P O R A R Y J A P A N

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New Tea House Concept

Original drawings by Cosimo Miorelli



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## The Imagination of the Stone Age

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Hilly areas in the suburbs of Tokyo, most of which have changed into residential areas, were the treasure houses of the remains of the later Stone Age. In my elementary school days, I was absorbed in collecting earthen vessels of the later Stone Age inspired by passion of our special archeology young teacher.

As children in these days are crazy about exchanging their collections such as cards or figures, I exchanged fragments of earthen vessels with my friends and had some pleasure in enriching my collection.

Just like for the ancient people, it was just natural for me to choose the woods as the playground. Many software game makers of my generation are from suburban areas embraced by the forest. It was not the earthen vessels but the insects that Pokemon designers were absorbed in.

I roped a tree to another tree, laid arrowroot leaves over the rope, and I often lied down in this secret base listening in silence to the sound of the woods. Children stretch their fancy when they put themselves in a place apart from their houses. Through play, children create God or a ceremony that satisfies their wishes and removes their fears.

A person voluntarily invents his own religion, and by believing in it, he makes his own life. People believe their parents in their childhood and in adolescence they believe in friendship, absorbed in sports, music and idols, and in the course of time, they try to carry their belief into action through politics, learning or the management of a company and the expression activities.

At first, I gave my prayers to the forest. In return, the forest stimulated my imagination or rendered mental stability to me. The surface of the stratum was my icon. Staring at that, I felt like watching the stratum of my brain.

I thought that there were twists and turns or rifts also in my brain.

It was in the woods that the germ of culture broke out. The oldest religion was born when ancient hunters used a curse method, gave a prayer to the wood and the lake, buried a dead person and came to consider an animal to be God.

The far past is buried under the soil. Searching for the traces of the people who moved to that place first, archeologists try to dig stone implements and earthenware out of the ancient stratum. The archeologists try to answer the question everyone has: «Wherever did our ancestor come from?».

Around one hundred thousand years ago, human beings left Africa. Spending about ten thousand years at the foot of the Caucasian Mountains, they divided into three ways. One group headed towards the west, and made the European civilization. Two groups which moved to the east divided into two directions in front of the Himalaya Mountains. One took the southern route which ran from the Indus to Southeast Asia, while the other headed north, reaching Siberia. About ten and several thousand years ago, some of the group which had headed south arrived in the Japan Archipelago through the Black stream, and the New Stone Age begun there. Some of the group which followed the north route reached to the Japan Archipelago from the Siberia through the Sakhalin. Stone implements and earthen vessels begin to tell us something quietly.

The New Stone Age in Japan was the era when the two groups divided into north and south met again. The other group which made the European civilization was finally reunited in the Age of the Great Voyages.

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After that, Japan plunged into the national isolation era, but the groups met again in the 19th century. Japan, located at the east end of the Eurasian continent, was the place where human beings who had left Africa and scattered over the continent gathered round after the human races great journey.

The various languages of Latin and Germanic spread out with the extent of the stock raising and the farming in ancient times. Because an etymology is common, the root of the Sanskrit and the European language is considered to be the same.

However, some races like Basque did not accept such Indo-European culture, and led the hunting, gathering life around the Pyrenees mountains.

Even if they seemed to be conquered and assimilated by Spain or France in medieval and then modern times, they never gave up and tenaciously repeated resistance. As a result, the character of the race was kept. It is said that the traces of the Stone Age are left miraculously there, where the primitive art of Lascaux or Altamira caves are.

A Basque has been drawn with an heroic epic of the age of Charlemagne as a barbarous enemy who refuses conversion to Christianity. However, it was a Basque who introduced Christianity to Japan for the first time. His name was Francisco Xavier.

By the way, I have never heard the one episode. When famous French anthropologist Levi Strauss saw the Japanese, he came close to shake hands friendly. Japanese may be reflected in his eyes as the race which left the trace of the Stone Age

The avant-garde which bloomed at the beginning of the 20th century was the result of the combination of the memories of the super-ancient with the dreams of the super-future. The avant-garde appeared in the image of the future of people who are conscious of the ancient memories beyond the modern and medieval ages. The avant-garde flourished in Russia, which could be said to be the European suburbs. The Russian were influenced by the old culture of the hunting-gathering people through the communication with the minority group of Siberia, that is, through the contact with the Asian culture in Russia.

Modernistic artists also underwent a baptism of the ancient culture. It could be said that the avant-garde in Italy, which appeared against Russia, might not have been able to reach the «wild thinking» because the origin of their culture was persistently in ancient Roma, and they never recalled memories older than Roman civilization. The Chinese are likely to return to the principle which is the etymology of China. That is the first united empire Qin (Ch'in) Dynasty and its first emperor Shi Huandi.

Japan has been under the influence of Chinese culture, but being geographically isolated from the continent, it has never been invaded by foreign culture and until now, the relic of the Stone Age remains. There is no way to say that it was lucky that, differently from China and India, Japan has never received the constant invasion of other ethnic groups or influences of religions worldwide such as Christianity or Islam. Of course, in Japanese history, there are ages of ancient dynasties, aristocracy or military regime, and also historical stratum such as the Edo or Meiji periods. But we could see the return to the Stone Age so called Jōmon period before the civilization, in every era.

If I succeeded to the unconscious memory of the ancient land, I am not 45 years old, but I may be 4 500 years old.

The Jōmon is a pottery-using culture, associated with early farming cultures but mainly focused on hunting, fishing and gathering throughout the approximately ten thousand years of its development, from around 11 000 BCE to around 500 BCE. The degree of Jōmon dependence on plants, land animals and fish varied greatly with time and space. Everywhere in Japan the Jōmon people exploited an extremely wide range of land animals, fish, plants and birds. Japanese archeologists assume that the Jōmon culture was coextensive with the present national boundaries of Japan.

I cannot say that «Jōmon=equals-Japan»; however, it was in the Jōmon age that the culture totally different from that of other areas appeared in Japan, and it is certain that those who used a characteristic pottery are our direct ancestors.

Now let me show you some examples of typical Jōmon art.



A «crescent-shaped eyebrow type» figurine from the Tenjindai-site, Kanagawa Prefecture. This is an example of a later form of the «crescent-shaped eyebrow type» (or «heart shaped») figurine typical of the Late Jōmon of the Kantō region and southern portions of northeast Japan.



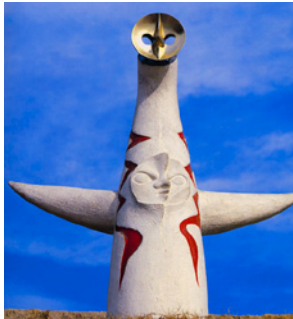
These figurines are examples of a solid and smaller-sized «goggle-eyed» figurine from Aomori prefecture North-east region. Once an American scholar negotiated to buy this figurine for his study. He was the man who worked at UFO section of NASA.

Jōmon means code marked. They printed rope patterns on clay.



Jōmon vessel with flame-like ornamentation. Middle Jōmon (3 000-2 000 BCE).

We can feel strong passion from this. This pottery maker might have been a Sherman, just like the painters of the Lascaux or Altamira cave were Sherman.



These are Japanese modern artist Okamoto Tarō's work. He was a student of French Anthropologist Marcel Mauss. Under Mauss' influence he discovered the values of Jōmon arts after World War 2.





This is TV hero Ultraman. Hyper evolved creature of Jōmon imagination.

Why are we absorbed in the thought standing at the river bank or the seaside? Why are we healed by charcoal fire? Why do we sometimes feel dearness about the stone and the wood? Because we were born from water and evolved from water. Because we are the descendant of the craftsman who processed a tree or a stone, mastered fire, and invented a more advanced tool.

Just like human beings are the product of nature, they get resources from the earth, too. At the moment human hands touched to the soil or a stone or sand, those became the artefact. Human beings learned to use the broken stone as a knife. When they kneaded soil and put it in the fire, they invented pottery.

Every artefact like swords and colors, money, gunpowder and both poison and medicine were produced and processed by soil or stone or sand.

There are some creatures crawled on the soil or stuck to the stone. But it is only human beings who have obsessions in the soil, the stone and the sand.

The technology which has reached modern civilization since the Stone Age via the Iron Age was not only found by practical use. Ancient painters were strongly motivated to draw pictures by their prayers to nature. They must have tried to visualize their instinct. Far from the practical use, they indulged to make weird figurines or vessels with flame-like ornamentation as religious activity.

They trained iron which is not useful for other animals, and made the

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sword which may have deprived their lives. Those acts were guided by the desire for beauty.

Human beings are the creatures tempted by beauty since ancient times. Not only a tool, but just practical and also it must be beautiful.

An iron sword was a sacred symbol before it became the pronoun of the weapon.

The technology which produced iron was directly connected with power.

One of the three Sacred Treasures which have been inherited from ancient Japanese Emperors is a sword, which is commonly associated to the myth of the world, as well.

Only fool Siegfried, who did not know fear, could train the holy sword Nothung in *The Ring of Nibelung*. «Arthur legend» introduced us. It was only Arthur that could pull out the holy sword which was stuck in the stone. A sword really chose the master. A sword ruled history.

It went through many generals' heart, and cut off their heads too.

And swords made the ground wet with the tremendous quantity of blood.

It is possible to connect the iron sword with the atomic bomb by a straight line in the history of the war.

Iron carries oxygen to our brain, and keeps our brain normal. Iron would rust later on, and return safely into the soil. However, the radioactive substance destroys both a person and the earth.

The technology of the ancient pottery manufacture and the steel manufacturing have changed into computer technology and financial technology at the present day.

The silicon filled up in the soil was processed, and an integrated circuit was made on it, and computer technology was polished up. An iron-manufacturing company is raising a profit with the theory of marketing. They say both theories of making strong steel and marketing are quite similar.

If we try to look back at the historical change of the money form, we can say that rock salt, a shellfish and livestock were money in the old days. When the Bronze Age and Iron Age have come, a piece of metal became the main stream of the money form.

Instead of carrying the heavy metals and exchanging it, words and letters changed into the money of the next time when a trust system was completed.

It changed into the printed matter or the magnetized plastic card and almost changed into clicking of a PC now.

People want to believe in something that will guarantee their homeland in eternity and bring assurances of peace and well-being.

This is why a Nation and a State are like a religion.

Money is the key to every door. And since everyone prays to have it, the religion of Capitalism attracts no end of adepts.

Tokyo is the center of capitalism, so brand-new highly-profitable buildings are being built in every vacant lots. Therefore, most of the people do not know nor care about the history of the land they are living in. The cities which are faithful to the principle of capitalism result in the same landscape, such as Disneyland or Las Vegas. Tokyo and Shanghai are exactly so.

However, in the center of Tokyo, the forest of the Imperial Palace remains. The Japanese Emperor, who is the heir of the oldest royalty in the world, inherits the spirits of the ancestors who lasted for 125 generations. They survived the fickle fortune keeping their own historical views and sticking to their originality lasting from the ancient times.

Shōwa Emperor who was a botanist conserved the ancient natural heritage of the Imperial Palace to preserve the nature of Tokyo suburbs. Neither Japanese biggest building rental company Mori Building nor American M & A (mergers and acquisitions) funded companies can touch this grove of the village shrine. After the war, Shōwa Emperor turned to be the person in the forest rather than the living god. Surrounded by the forest of the buildings, only the Imperial Palace peacefully exists in the ancient nature. I hope this forest will be multiplied and eventually swallow the metropolis. This is not quite a dream, but this kind of transition can be seen ordinarily. In fact, I saw the ruins of the theme parks transforming themselves into what they had been originally, the forest. A scene exactly as it can be seen in the animation movie of Miyazaki Hayao.

Monotheism was born in the desert. At that time, Japan was still slumbering in the Stone Age. The western Christian culture has become the global standard, but Japan still follows the tradition of polytheism of the religion of nature. The program of monotheism made up by European civilization will lead both the front of the politics and the economy while we are living. However, war, environmental disruption and the gap between rich and poor have been expanded by this general situation. This shows that the system is coming to the end of its limit. In the age of the crisis of the 19th century, Karl Marx got out of the framework of the Western history, and criticized Western history itself from the outside and reached to Historical Materialism. Now, a parallel work is being asked.

People who are restricted by laws and rules, and live in the world where everything is processed by the principle of capitalism, would like

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to be under the inspiration of the period of myths, which could also be defined as an infancy of history or an adolescence of human beings. In that period, there were innocent and generous emotions, sympathies with nature and the battle of wits between gods and human beings. These are things that reach the territory of «eternity» or «immortality».

Getting old, people come to have interests in the world of history. This might be because they want to think about things with another time shaft connected with «eternity» or «immortality».

I would like to believe that from the rule sword and the gun the age of peaceful capitalism has finally come.

All creatures made from organic substance and robots made from metal are the combinations of the natural materials on earth.

Not only good things but also evil things were born from the earth.

We keep maintaining a strong connection with the soil.

All creatures born from the soil will return into the soil. We still make our life and art based on the alchemist's thought, just like ancient people used to do.



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Nirvana Mini

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## 1. What is Nirvana Mini?

What is the ideal place for a person to live?

A skyscraping condominium in a prime location in the middle of a city?

A resort hotel at a scenic beach?

A cottage deep in the mountains or a tent in the desert, both far from civilization?

There is a surprisingly common theme among the various mythologies of mankind. We also share the structure of our languages. Similarly, the structure of our homes fundamentally resemble each other as well. This is all because myths, languages and homes are all prescribed beforehand by the structure of the human brain and body.

If you search the ideal space for humans, wouldn't its size, shape, structure and materials all go back to one archetype? Would it be possible to create a single unit out of that archetypal space? Nirvana Mini aims to answer these questions.

Nirvana Mini is a very multifunctional, multipurpose space.

It is very tiny. Although there is no set capacity, it becomes full if four people enter.

However, depending on how you think about it, there is no limit to its size. A boundless expanse of darkness can be felt beyond its walls.

It is the basic form of a house of all ages and cultures.

It closely resembles the caves and dugouts where our distant ancestors, the hunters and food-gatherers, lived. You can say that it is almost like a time machine, in the sense that you can reminisce the ancient times and look back on our past.

All of us want to be alone at one time or another. If you want to day-dream and look into your own unconscious mind without being bothered by anyone, this is the perfect room to do so.

You can invite guests into this room. It can be called a tearoom. Here, difference in social class, wealth, nationality, race, sex or age hold no



meaning. It is a small room that is open to all people. You can invite the President or a Hollywood star, or you could invite a foreign visitor or a runaway girl.

It is a church where you can pray, while it is also a minimal museum or personal art gallery where you can exhibit your own special treasure or beloved collection and show it to others.

You can invite a loved one and whisper sweet words in his or her ear. If you invite someone who is hurt, it becomes a clinic that heals wounded hearts.

It is a device that encourages a return back to your origins.

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## 2. It is neither a drug nor an ideology...

The software of modernism and capitalism is only durable for a limited number of years; someday, something will break it. The financial system that created a global money glut and the political system under the U.S.'s unipolar rule have both lost their power, and have begun to return to an older system.

The situation that the U.S. is currently in is similar to the post-Vietnam era, when the dollar shifted to the floating rate system and the oil crises occurred one after another. But in those days, a counterculture helped rehabilitate the battered U.S.

When Americans reflect upon themselves, what is the origin they can compare themselves to?

Their only point of reference was probably the culture of Native Americans. After the failure of the cultural system which had shaped itself on the complex combination of Protestantism, pragmatism and capitalism, the only choice was to return to the oldest form of culture and reset. Just as we attempt to save a language that is facing extinction, we need to revive lost cultural traditions. The life of people today will probably be prolonged if we reexamine the history of not just the past few decades, but also the past few millennia.

During the post-Vietnam era, the counterculture became considerably spiritual. Timothy Leary, known for his study of behavioral changes due to hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, released the message «Turn on, tune in, drop out» and went on a nationwide mission to spread his word on the psychedelic experience. The children of the ruling class in the U.S. actively participated in anti-war movements, dropped out of school based on their established sense of values, and went into the wilderness and sometimes borrowed the power of marijuana to go into the depths of their unconscious mind. In other words, they underwent the same experience as the Native Americans' rite of passage. What was created during this era, be it literature, film or music, became fairly

known worldwide. The beatniks, psychedelia, Bob Dylan and the American New Cinema are a few examples. Even from a historical standpoint, these cultural products «Made in U.S.A.» back then still have the greatest, most global influence.

America has a tradition to neatly incorporate what deviates from the scientific worldview into culture. The principle of scientism alone is not enough to restore the integrity of humans. We need something that replaces what the hallucinogenic drug was for Timothy Leary and what the isolation tank was for John C. Lilly - something that is neither science, like a drug or a tank, nor an ideology, a religion, ecology or a computer. It is a much simpler device that has the ability to draw out the powers that are latent in humans. That is Nirvana Mini.

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### 3. It is a time machine

A time machine needs neither an engine nor a gauge. What transcends time and space is the brain. Nirvana Mini is a room that stimulates those activities in the brain. In other words, it is a device that transcends time.

We can think back to the ancient times. We can go to ancient Greece like Faust and meet the incredibly beautiful Helen. Using our words and our brain - which has not evolved much during these past 10 000 years - we can go back to the ancient past.

The people of the ancient times had freewheeling imagination. Various myths from all over the world makes us sigh with admiration with their witty, magnificent and surreal stories. For these people, there were no borders between dream and reality, this life and the afterlife, animals and humans - they were able to go back and forth freely between those worlds. For them, myths were the record of their lives, the source of wisdom to learn the laws and rules of nature from, and the means to accept cruel fate and destiny. The stories concerning death, love, sex, war, interaction with animals, or the invention of tools all transmit to our current generation the thoughts of this era, when religion, philosophy and art were all merged together without any distinction.

Myths do not contradict modern science and philosophy. This is because the problems that the characters in the myths face are inherited by contemporary thinkers, and have much in common with the adolescent confusion of teenagers and the experience of those who are mentally ill. Myths also teach us the menace of nature and the humility of humans. For those who experienced tsunamis, the myth of the deluge probably seems like a very personal story. Natural disasters strike just when the previous experience is forgotten, so those who were affected by the disaster will most likely make an effort to pass on their experiences to the next generation. In this manner, myths have also been passed on from previous generations.

The characters in the myths are not superhumans or monsters - they are humans, just like us. Rather than focusing on the credibility of the events discussed, if you superimpose the emotions of the characters onto your own feelings, you will see that, despite the 2 000 years time difference, they share the minds of people today.



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## 4. It is a cave

Beneath the surface, we ourselves are the ancient people who lived in caves.

If we step outside, there is the sky, and there is the earth. But we are confining ourselves in a large shelter called civilization. We are staying inside a room in a high-rise building, surrounded by electromagnetic waves and cables, and are exposed to an infinite amount of information. We are, by our own choice, in a dark and tiny space like a cave. While wild animals are generally free to walk under the vast sky, nocturnal animals, which yielded to stronger animals the freedom to roam in the daylight, stay inside places like caves to survive the cruel nature. But humans stay inside caves when there is no need to do so. Offices, theaters, movie theaters and bars are all, in a sense, caves.

Since the days of Altamira and Lascaux, humans reside in caves.

The frescos of Lascaux and Altamira are drawn in small places that are hidden in the depths of the caves, where there is no light. As a ceremonial ritual, the artists went into the depths of the cave carrying a torch, and bent down and drew pictures of cows and horses. The shamans who drew the pictures drew images of people next to the images of animals. These were probably self-portraits. Civilization began in the darkness in the depths of caves. This experience is common among Homo sapiens.

The human civilization became refined with language, but language does not exist in the natural world, and while it was a communication tool, it also had the function of defining and dividing the world. Because of this, humans who acquired language created the afterlife at an early stage. While living in a world where humans died both physically and biologically, they created a world where the dead reside, and came up with the idea of the soul. This was also common among the Homo sapiens.

If you stay inside Nirvana Mini, you can immerse yourself in the nostalgia of the era of the hunters. The memories of the time when humans lived in dugouts and caves come back to you.

It is because humans began agriculture that they were forced to settle in one place. Management of fields requires great care. They had to plough the soil, plant seeds and seedlings, draw water, manage the weeds, and chase away the birds, animals and bugs, and were tied down to the land until the time of harvest. Agrarian civilization has the history of only several thousand years, and industrial civilization has the history of only a few hundred years. But in the preceding 2 000 000 years, humans lived as hunter-gatherers. Because human ancestors were all hunters, the memory of moving from place to place, running in fields and mountains in search of prey, is deeply etched onto our genes. This is why we sometimes feel compelled to move to a different place or embark on a trip.

When humans began to lead a sedentary lifestyle, houses came to have a symbolic meaning relating to wealth and possessions, but in the era of hunter-gatherers, they lived outdoors. Since the principle of their lifestyle was to chase after prey and move from place to place, as long as there were walls to keep out the rain and separate the inside from the outside, there was no need for splendid houses. If there were convenient caves or spaces behind big rocks, and there were no unwelcome guests like bears, that was more than enough shelter.

When humans were chasing after their prey in the fields and mountains, they lived in places like dugouts. They were simple huts made from digging a hole in the ground, putting up a pillar, laying branches across it, and topping it with a roof made from leaves. A furnace was built in the center of the house, and the family gathered around it to enjoy each other's company.



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## 5. It is a room for dreaming

Constantly exposed to the fear of starvation and the stress of hunting, the hunters who moved from mountain to mountain did not have the luxury to sleep soundly like other animals. It is after the agrarian civilization began that humans were able to sleep soundly. Because they needed to manage the fields, they settled in one place and kept a regular daily schedule. As they began to store their harvests, they foresaw a stable future and began to sleep longer. Many hunters died in their thirties, but the agricultural people steadily prolonged their life. Life in agriculture, however, is boring. These people were stripped of the freedom to run through the fields and mountains, and the pleasure to travel to unknown lands. So in an attempt to deviate from the everyday life, they began to daydream while they took their afternoon nap.

The brain cannot be controlled by one's own will. That statement sounds self-contradictory. There are those who claim that their actions are all orders made from the brain nestled in the skull, and that there are no contradictions. But how would they explain the difference between what is said and what is done? Would they say that their left brain and right brain had different thoughts? The brain feels stomachaches and neuralgia, but does not feel pain even when the brain itself is stuck with a needle. In the same way, the brain has trouble understanding the brain. This is like me, since I myself do not understand what I am thinking.

Dreams are a good example. Every morning when I wake up, I marvel at the sheer absurdity of the dream I saw. «What on earth am I thinking», I wonder. It is no wonder that I have a crick in my neck, since I shake my head so many times at the ridiculousness of my dreams. But no matter how silly my dreams are, I forget it completely within thirty minutes, and am back to reality. On the other hand, nightmares are often the reflection of stress or frustration caused in daily life. They may be the result that was forcibly created from the contradictions in our reality. Or it may

be that the brain constantly suffers from self-contradiction, and tries to find solutions in dreams.

Because dreams are a physical phenomenon in the brain, it may be said that dreams are real. Since both emotions and pleasure are products that the brain creates on its own, they can be reduced into something corporeal. Even politics, culture and religion are activities of the brain, if you trace them back to their origins. Politics in the ancient times was decided through dreams that shamans had, and through their interpretation of those dreams. Dream interpretation also provides hints for the treatment of neurosis and hysteria. In other words, everything is like a dream. If a beloved person appears in your dream, it is said that that person loves you, or that you dreamt of him or her because you yearn for that person so much. If you see a vision of the future in your dreams, it is a word from God. Religions begin with the dream that a guru sees. Dreams and reality are contiguous. A person making light of a dream makes light of reality.

In dreams, people come and go as they please, and others enter into your dreams uninvited. Likewise, even if you do not wish it, you end up in someone else's dream. It is only in modern times that we have begun to draw a clear border between dream and reality. In ancient times, when the boundary between dream and reality was very vague, the wall of privacy was thin, and the sense of self must have been weaker.

Everyone experiences hardships in this world. When you are being chased, there is not a moment when you can relax. A refuge is necessary for a person living in adverse circumstances. People must have lived in the fear of not knowing when they would be chased into the afterlife, and just like those who are chased run into the mountains and woods, they must have sought refuge every night in their dreams. Dreams offer a moment of peace. Even if it is a nightmare, you are not exposed to life-threatening danger. And in dreams, there is no meaning to victory and defeat, nor any distinction between ally and enemy. You can listen to a grander call of nature. In dreams, miracles happen, letting you forget your troubles.

No matter how much people worry, they are saved by their own dreams. So sleep tight tonight, and sweet dreams!

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## 6. It is a room for daydreaming

I am missing something. What I am missing is not rest, nutrition or sex – rather, it is the «power to dream», which I had in abundance in my youth, but have begun to lose recently. This power does not necessarily decline over age. But when we age, because our choices for the future begin to be limited, our dreams probably shrink accordingly. The elderly dream about their past, and children’s dreams embody their worries for the future. Those who can reflect on their past and have the most realistic dreams about their future are the true adults.

Underneath the surface, adults are just adolescent children. Even in terms of experience, what people thought, read, or were influenced by during the confusing time of their adolescence tend to affect adults in the future. For example, while you are cleaning for an upcoming move, you may find something you wrote in middle school. When you read that, you may be embarrassed to find your distinct self buried in your childish words. But you must face this without embarrassment.

For example, *Star Wars*, *Spirited Away* or *Doraemon*... the hit movies and animations that are said to give children the power to dream are all works by older men who are themselves dreaming. George Lucas, Miyazaki Hayao and Fujiko Fujio are not children with beards, but are older men with beards, just as they look. Children are training their power to dream by borrowing the imagination of these men.

The imagination of these men is stimulated when they think back to their own adolescence, as well as the ancient times of mythology, which can be called the adolescence of history or of humanity. Tied down by rules and regulations, and living in a world where everything progresses according to the principles of capitalism, these men also seek an escape from reality, and flee to the world of mythology. In that world, emotions are innocent and laid-back, and there is interaction with nature, as well as a battle of wits between gods and humans. It has reached the realm of «eternal» and «forever». When we age, we probably become more

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interested in history because we want to see things in a different temporal axes that is based on the idea of «eternal» and «forever».

When we reach a certain age, we become CEOs or professors, or fathers or teachers loved by our children or our students, and we begin to act according to the status we have achieved. The days go by while we are busy fulfilling our responsibilities in the offices that we belong to or spend time working on our personal relationships. In other words, we have no choice but to age while we follow the schedule of the world around us. So regardless of whether we want it, we are forced to become boring older men. The question is how to incorporate the temporal axis of the present and different temporal axes into our everyday life.

The world of myths gives us a temporal axis that is different from the everyday life. In that sense, academic studies such as astronomy, biology and archeology also have temporal units that are different from our everyday life, and lead our imagination to something of a grander scale. A person's life is eighty years at most, and we usually think of things in a span that is shorter than our lifetime, but as soon as we introduce a completely different temporal axis, our problems of male or female menopause, our worries about our life, the economic recession, or wars are all blown away, and seem almost funny by comparison.

Maitreya is a sort of a «future Buddha». It is believed that he will appear on earth 5,67 billion years after the death of the Buddha and teach Buddhism to all creatures. But his arrival is so far away in the future that he is a being who is irrelevant to those who live today - in fact, he cannot even be called a being; rather, he is just a product of our imagination. When I discussed this with an astronomer, he laughed and said that, by the time Maitreya appears, the sun will have begun to end its life - and since the sun will have become a supergiant star, swallowed by its expansion, the earth will have completely disappeared. In any case, why does Maitreya make us wait for so long? I cannot help but think that if he had at least made the wait three thousand years, we could have had more hope in anticipation of his appearance, which would have come in a thousand years from now. But even a thousand years is close to eternity. When we pray to Maitreya, we are praying towards eternity. Even if it does not lead to a direct solution for the evils we face everyday, we find calm in our soul by praying towards eternity.

Everyone is ailing, one way or another. How do we live with this fear, this melancholy that cannot be healed by vitamins, Viagra, sleeping pills or alcohol? This is a theme that most religions deal with, but we as individuals also face our various problems by meditating or praying. Nirvana Mini is a room for such meditation and prayer.



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## 7. It is the basic form of a house

The Masai people in the African savanna still live by breeding cattle and chasing cows. They make their houses from cow dung. I have once been invited to such a house. It does not stink. It is made by crossing branches with each other and creating a framework, then, like a clay wall, covering it with fresh dung that is still damp. Once the dung is dry, it becomes a wall that provides both ventilation and heat retention. Most cow dung is filled with fiber, and resembles paper clay. If you dry it thoroughly, it actually does not smell. One weakness of this type of house is that it is susceptible to rain. As may be expected, the roof uses dried grass and tin, but if it rains so strongly that the walls melt, the house has to be reconstructed.

Inside the house made of cow dung, the Maasai people cook using dried cow dung. The way dung burns is perfect for stewed dishes. It does not create a strong fire like wood, but it provides a medium to low heat over a fairly long combustion time. That probably means that the houses made from dung also burn well.

The basic pattern to build a hearth in the middle of the house is common throughout the world. We create a cooking space at the center of the house, and family members and guests gather around in a circle. The origin of family get-togethers is probably this act of sitting around the fire.

The mobile house of the nomadic people of Mongolia, called ger, is extremely functional. After putting up a single pillar, they spread an expandable, grid-patterned lattice made of wood, and create a circular wall. Putting a beam that looks like an umbrella rib between the central pillar and the wall, they cover it with a felt made of sheep wool or a cloth made from sheepskin sewn together. Then, poking the stove chimney through the middle of the roof, they adjust the temperature and ventilation inside the house by pulling on a string connected to the cloth roof, and opening or closing the air flow orifice near the chimney.

The extreme cold during Mongolian winters is like Siberia, with temperatures dipping down to 20 to 30 below Celsius. Gers have an innovative device to withstand the severe winter, too. Mouton is set up inside the ger to make an inner wall. This is like the liner of a coat, and has high heat retention. Of course, people light the stove for heat, but gers also have floor heating. They spread sheep dung that is still damp all over the floor, and use the heat of fermentation to warm the house.

The Eskimo and the Inuit also create houses like gers using fur. Because their regions are even colder than in Mongolia, they usually create another inner room inside their tents. This is like a canopied bed, and becomes a bedroom that is small but warm. And when they go out to hunt, they build igloos. They cut out blocks of snow or ice and pile them together to create a dome. If they light a candle inside, it becomes like a thermos bottle, and heats up using the reflection of the ice. If the temperature outside is 35 below Celsius, the temperature inside the igloo will go up to about 5 below Celsius.

Hunters and cattle breeders have perfected the form of house that can be built in one day, be it a mobile house like a ger or a house made of cow dung, and they have continued to keep that tradition. That is an active cultural asset, and is the basic form of every house through all ages and cultures. Nirvana Mini follows this basic form as well.

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## 8. It is a tearoom

The tearoom is not just for drinking tea, but for ceremonial ritual as well. You choose to be in an atmosphere that is far from everyday life, use special tools, and drink tea with a chosen partner. It is a restaurant. It is a party room. The tearoom is the place where you can face a person one-on-one without regard to social class. It is not only a space where you can drink tea, it was also created to be a space where you can face your own unconscious mind or have a philosophical discussion with someone.

In a room with an area of only three tatami mats, it is somewhat awkward for two people to face each other. But to break that awkwardness, people think about possible solutions. This is similar to how a child without television or toys begins to think about various ways to play with a single rock. If left alone, it is just an ordinary rock, but as soon as the child holds the rock and twirls it in the air, it turns into various objects, like a bird, a warplane, or a UFO. Nirvana Mini is a room like this rock, which changes depending on your imagination.

People are trained by the rooms that they are in. It is actually unpleasant to sit cross-legged in a comfortable house. The comfort of a house is born through the creativity of the person who resides in it.



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## 9. About the historic origins of tearooms

Japan began to interact with the West beginning in the 16th century. Back then, Japan did not have any good products. But after that, through its isolationist policy, Japan gradually lost its Chinese color, and Japanese culture became refined while incorporating influences from Portugal and the Netherlands. Like the avant-garde movement, cynical artists like the tea master Sen no Rikyū helped bring about a shift in aesthetic values, by claiming that a Philippine octopus pot is more beautiful than ceramics from China, or by deliberately using a toilet bowl from the Rhee Dynasty as a teapot. He insisted on the value of relishing vague feelings like «loneliness» and «quiet simplicity», and created a sense of beauty that was unique to Japan and unlike that of China, from which Japanese culture had originated. In addition, incorporating Western culture or Christian culture - he refined the art of tea ceremony, drawing inspiration from the rituals of the Christian mass - he polished the concept of Zen and created the Japanese «suki» style of taking delight in elegant pursuits.

In the 16th century, people and products flowed into Sakai - the greatest trade city in Japan back then - from Portugal, China, Luzon, and every place imaginable. The merchants who were based there did not own lands, but had stocked wealth that was greater than that of daimyō lords. Perhaps owing to this, there were many trading houses, mansions and temples that were built luxuriously, and all the residents dressed up ostentatiously in the Western style. This city was not under the control of outsiders, and was governed like an independent nation. Therefore, even when there were intense battles in other regions, where many castles and cities were burned, this city alone retained its peace. Because this city was safer than any other place, during wars, people from various regions came in throngs to seek refuge. The values that governed this city were different from the values of military commanders. The wealthy merchants, who were proud to enjoy their privileges

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and freedom, were determined to protect the tradition of the city by any means necessary.

Because novel foreign products were constantly introduced into Sakai, this city also had the best tea utensils. In addition, this town also helped form many accomplished masters of tea ceremony. Sen no Rikyū is one of those people, and he is known for creating a new form of tea ceremony that is called «suuki», or «delight in elegant pursuits».

Sakai was originally in a flatland by the sea, and there were no mountains or forests nearby. There was no place suitable for meditating alone. Because the mansions inside moats were not large either, the tea masters of Sakai created a small tearoom inside the tiny garden of the mansions. These tearooms were modeled after the hut of a hermit living far from civilization, and were called «a mountain hut in the middle of the city». This was similar to how a European living in the city might watch a rustic landscape or enjoy spending time in the forest.

Back then, when Christian missionaries visiting Japan went to the mansions of the merchants in Sakai, they were always invited to the tearoom and offered tea. The tea ceremony seemed mysterious to them. At first, they had difficulty understanding why the Japanese, from the noble class to the common people, were so particular about drinking tea. You pour hot water onto powder made from dry leaves, elegantly stir it with a bamboo whisk, and sip it with appreciation. What was so great about that?

The appearance of the tearoom is simple to such an extent that it looks poor, but in reality, it is full of luxury, and a considerable amount of money is spent to construct it. The tearoom is deliberately made to look plain, using shabby wood, sooty bamboo, dry grass and mud. The material is left untouched in various places, the way nature intended it. The interior of the room has four and a half or three tatami mats, and while it is kept clean from corner to corner, it is so small that it is suffocating for three adults to be inside at the same time.

During the tea ceremony, when guests have one sip of the tea, they wipe the bowl where their lips have touched, and return the bowl to the host, or the tea master. The tea master sips the same tea from the same bowl. For a few moments after that, the two stare at each other with downcast eyes, hearing each other breathe.

There is nothing there besides heavy air. Three of the walls are plastered thick, and there is only a tiny window in the remaining wall to bring light into the room. The room is dim and small, but because the edges of the clay wall are slightly rounded, the walls seem farther than they are. This is probably how the insides of a silkworm cocoon looks like.

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The silence is so deep that you can almost hear each other's heartbeats. But for some reason, in this room, even that does not make you anxious. The two of you try to clear your own minds. In this room that has nothing, you do nothing, and you think nothing. That is what is most comfortable. Emotions like vanity or lingering awkwardness with the other person melt into the darkness, and your hearts somehow become lighter. As you stare at the wall that has the color of dusk, you forget the small size of the room, and you feel as if you are looking into the distant mountains of an unknown place.

There are a few trees in the garden, and there is moss on the ground. The trees in the garden cannot be just any type, either; trees that seem suitable for the garden are chosen, carried in from afar, and planted to look like a natural group of trees. Unwanted branches are cut off, and unwanted grass is weeded out by hand one by one. The moss is also grown by hand. Stones are spread over the thin alley which only one person can pass at a time, but even for this small area, stately stones are chosen. In the garden, there is a basin made of stone, but this too is expensive, and even the gate made by simply crossing bamboo together is built carefully by a craftsman. There is nothing here that is pompous, artificial, or decorative. The style of «delight in elegant pursuits» opposes things that are fake, frivolous or showy.

There is nothing in the small tearoom besides utensils that are used for the tea ceremony. Because much importance is put on the ritual of drinking tea, utmost attention is paid to the utensils as well. A certain merchant of Sakai, who was also a Christian, paid one hundred thousand dollars for an iron trivet that was used as a place to put the lid of the iron pot. The missionaries had trouble understanding why there was so much value in a battered tool that was used just to keep the lid. In another example, a ceramic tea caddy that was the favorite of a Kyushu feudal lord named Otomo was a masterpiece called «counterfeit eggplant», but this had the value of one million dollars. For this container that had no use besides giving water to a bird in a birdcage, he had paid enough money to buy two castles.

Other tools and accessories were also bought and sold at a high price, from the iron pot used to boil water, the tea jar used to keep tea, the tea scoop used to scoop matcha powdered tea, tea bowls, even the metal, ceramic or plant (a gourd cut in half) containers used to keep the charcoal, the vase to display flowers, and hanging scrolls. Of course, these items were made by a master craftsman, or were so rare that there were only a few in this world, or had the history of being used by a shōgun, but you could not tell its value just by looking at it. There were greedy merchants who tried to make a profit by selling fake items, but the tea

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masters had refined eyes, and could easily distinguish the good from the bad. Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who were both rulers at the time, collected special tea sets, showed them off, and gave them to their generals as prizes for meritorious service in wars. Not only was it an honor to receive them, but they could also be converted into money, just as diamonds and rubies substituted for money.

Once, a pot that was brought in from the Philippines was traded for a very high price as a tea jar. It was not originally intended as something to put tea leaves in; fishermen used it to catch octopuses. The use of an object changes according to where it is. It is the tea master Rikyū who began to call the octopus pot - which is cheaper than a chicken in the Philippines - a tea jar, and began to sell it to various daimyō lords. The octopus pot indeed suited the simple and austere taste of the suuki style, but to sell it at an outrageous price is like exhibiting a toilet bowl in a museum and auctioning it at a high price. Art is a type of counterfeiting.

Rikyū was the head of tea masters under Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and like the artists who served the Medici during the Renaissance period, preached aesthetics to those in power, headed rituals and receptions, and was responsible for the design of castles, its interiors, and tea-rooms. More than anything, it was the golden tearoom that fascinated people. This was what was used to serve tea to the Emperor and other Imperial princes, but it was a mobile tearoom that could be assembled, disassembled and taken anywhere. It was created by a goldsmith in Sakai, and even the frame of the shōji window and the metal fittings of the cabinet were made of gold, not to mention the ceiling board and wall panels. In addition, most of the tea utensils used, from the tea bowls, the portable brazier, the round pot, the tea ladle rest, the tea caddy, the lid rest and the square tray to the tongs, were all gleaming in gold so brightly that it was almost embarrassing to the viewer. They were usually put away in a lacquered box decorated with mother-of-pearl.

From transforming a Philippine octopus pot into an expensive tea jar without adding any embellishments, to create a mobile tearoom of just three tatami mats, this Rikyū was a man who managed to ridicule everyone. Rikyū could do what others would never think of. Once, when someone asked him about a tea utensil - which Rikyū was using at a tea ceremony - that seemed unfamiliar, he apparently replied that it was originally a toilet bowl from Korea.

A toilet bowl can be filled with ablution water or can be used to display flowers. Once they cross the ocean, both octopus pots and toilet bowls turn into something incredible.

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Warriors fight with swords, and tea masters like Rikyū fight using the tea ceremony. A sense of fun is indispensable to take «delight in elegant pursuits».

The smallest tearoom that was ever made is probably the tearoom that Sen no Rikyū made in the Juraku mansion in Kyoto. It only had one and a half tatami mats. It is half the size of a jail cell, and it was almost as small as a bathroom stall.

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## 10. It is the smallest church

You can confess in this space.

Just as the mass is a ritual for Christians to reexamine their faith, the tea ceremony is also a ritual where you can take away all that is unnecessary, all that is ostentatious, and face yourself and your destiny. Just like a church, the tearoom is also a place open to all people. When you drink something bittersweet after a meal, your mouth is refreshed and you sober up from any alcohol you may have had. First you drink weak tea, and then you begin to take turns with the strong tea, which is more like sipping than drinking. Drinking tea from the same bowl shows the camaraderie you feel with others when you share the same tea. The way you wipe the bowl when you pass the tea to the next person is very similar to the Catholic communion.

Everyone becomes honest in this space. The Christian mass and the tea ceremony developed independently from each other and in completely different worlds, but seem to have reached the same state of mind. Takayama Ukon, who was both a Christian and an accomplished tea master, thought that the way of «the delight in elegant pursuits» led to a way of religious faith. He once said the following:

How much has the style of «delight in elegant pursuits», which focuses on one's tastes and hobbies, helped faith and seclusion?

Ukon prayed to God in the tearoom and reexamined himself. He distanced himself from the trite and miscellaneous things in life, and came to see the reason of things while he sat in the tearoom alone or one-on-one with a guest.

You can make confessions in a tearoom as well. You can also admit to your own sins and ask for forgiveness. Just as all people are equal in front of God, during the tea ceremony kings, nobles and common people are all equal. The tearoom becomes an altar that allows people to be forgiving and sincere.

The missionaries who were in Japan at this time tried to set up a tearoom in every monastery, even assigning someone to greet the visitors. It was their attempt to adopt the custom of this country, in order to help them conduct their missionary work more smoothly. Even if you could not go to church, displaying the Virgin Mary in the alcove turned the tearoom into a church. One tearoom like this was enough to help Christians keep their faith.

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## 11. The history of «Made in Japan»

Even after the Edo era began, Japanese products such as ukiyo-e, prostitutes in brothels, tea utensils, ceramics and textiles gained commercial value in the Western market. These products had acquired further sophistication due to Japan's withdrawal from international wars, and after the end of Japan's isolationist policy, they came to be regarded as an expression of a unique form of aesthetics.

In the end, culture and languages all served this aesthetic, and shunning the world standard or global trends, established a unique and independent sense of beauty.

To this day, the aspects of Japanese culture that are exported are products of the Edo era. Today's highlights of «Made in Japan» are karaoke, anime, computers or computer games, but these are technology created to kill time, and in that sense can be called the modern version of Edo culture.

The Edo shogunate took an isolationist policy and withdrew from the world economy and the wars it caused. During this time - 250 years of peace and decadence, interrupted by no one - Japan was free to create its own unique culture of the common people. It was actually during this time, when Japan took the road of localism, that Japan was able to create an aesthetic world that would trigger a Japan-craze in Europe at the end of the 19th century. Pleasure and games that were created to kill time, like the tea ceremony, Japanese flower arrangement, ukiyo-e paintings, kabuki theatre, haiku poetry and frolicking with high-class prostitutes, became increasingly refined, and ended up creating hobbies that could not be found anywhere else. Conversely, it was because Japan was able to stay withdrawn in localism that Japan could remain, well, Japan.

Be it Sony, Nintendo or Karaoke, Japanese products that were pioneers in the world market were all an assembly of technologies that were created to kill time. In the U.S., cutting edge technology was originally developed for military purposes. Computer technology has also made

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progress this way, such as when the technology of raising the hit probability of missiles or improving the accuracy of radars was applied to home appliances. After the Second World War, technology development for military purposes was virtually absolved under the arrangements of the Japan - U.S. Security Treaty, and was turned primarily into technology development for tools that were convenient for daily use. Japanese cars, the bullet train, transistor radios and televisions can be called products that symbolize the rapid economic growth at this time. Concurrent to the nationalization of transportation and telecommunication technologies, it was the mission of the period of rapid economic growth to develop various technologies that would enrich domestic life, from home appliances such as rice cookers and refrigerators, clothes and household goods such as pantyhose, to a combination of music classes and Japan-made instruments like pianos and violins. The goal of technology development was the improvement of life. Superior «Made in Japan» products were also the very bastion of Japan's nationalism after the War.

After a while, the goal of technology development shifted from the improvement of life to the direction of games and other pastimes. The improvement of life brought people spare time and boredom. The 1980s, when the image of Japan as a technological empire was solidified and the appreciation of the yen became clear, were a turning point. All at once, people began to turn to computer games and karaoke. Japan created a new world market by refining its technology to kill time, but the technology to kill time ended up taking away the patience to withstand boredom as well.

We no longer need high-tech machines that provide leisurely entertainment. Instead, we need a device that would bring back an imagination that is as vivid as that of the people of the ancient times.

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## 12. It is a clinic

We all have a sense of discomfort within ourselves. If you call that trauma, then you will need therapy like healing or psychoanalysis. If you do not tend to that discomfort, after a while, it will likely become a source of hysteria or nervous breakdown, and might become a gruesome wound on your wrist. If you want to get rid of the discomfort before something like that happens, you need to express your pain with words. If you turn it into words, you would be able to convey it to other people and analyze it. Be it psychoanalysis or fortunetelling, unless the troubled person speaks, nothing can be done. Conversely, if you can accurately define your own discomfort, you do not need psychoanalysis or fortunetelling.

Inside the tearoom, the relationship between the host and the guest is similar to the relationship between a counselor and a patient. That relationship is easily reversed.

In Japan, every night, a ritual of business people takes place in pubs located under the expressways. Coworkers, or bosses and subordinates, wear their ties and bring out different aspects of each other while exchanging dirty jokes or discussing baseball. While they cannot break free of their relationship in the office, they become more relaxed with each drink. Even with colleagues that they dislike in the office, they discover that they actually get along over drinks, or that they have hobbies or worries in common. This ritual that takes place at the halfway point between the office and their homes - in which these individuals face each other as ambiguous selves who are neither businessmen nor family men, and massage each other as if to ease their discomfort and stress - plays an important role in their mental well-being.

Rationalists who clearly distinguish front (the surface) from back (what is hidden) may think that babbling in a pub is meaningless, but the human mind cannot easily distinguish front and back. The mind's structure is like that of a Möbius strip, where the front and back merge

together. In conjunction with that, Japanese people enjoy socializing with each other while keeping front and back ambiguous. They have the luxury of drinking together over the Möbius twist in each other's minds.

Japanese people casually ask their friends for psychoanalysis by asking them to «take a look at the darkness» in their minds. They have no need to consult expensive psychiatrists. As for those who do not drink or have coworkers, they visit the fortunetellers who are also under the expressway. Fortunetellers, who keep their booths in the same area as the pubs, listen to these people's problems, and give them a supportive push on the back. Nirvana Mini can turn into such a «counseling pub», too.

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### 13. It is a museum

Inside every tearoom, there is a place called the tokonoma alcove, and hosts entertained guests by using this space to arrange flowers or hang scrolls of historical calligraphy or paintings. Upon entering the tearoom, the guest headed towards the alcove, admired the calligraphy or painting, and used it as a topic of conversation with the host. By changing the scroll according to the guest, the host tried to convey a hidden message to the guest, and the guest attempted to read it. This is a room where such games secretly take place. You cannot exhibit many works of art, or a large-scale piece, and you cannot invite many viewers at the same time, but if you choose a single masterpiece, one or two guests can appreciate it for as long as you want.

Inside the tokonoma, you can exhibit not only calligraphy or paintings by master artists, but all objects imaginable, such as smaller pieces by old masters, metalwork, jewelry and accessories, old vases and bowls, antiques that are a source of your pride, dresses and kimonos, handwritten manuscripts by a great writer, handwritten scores by a musical virtuoso, antiquarian books, works of contemporary art, small sculptures or art installations, counterfeit works, photographs, paintings by children, small statues, vintage wine, the image of someone who has passed away, special stones, choice wood, meteorites, junk, collections of bug or plant specimens, bones, and live animals. In an attempt to surprise his special guest, one person even asked his guest to sit in the alcove.

A personal museum is not something anyone can own, but anyone can own a museum if it is a minimal art gallery in the form of Nirvana Mini. Nirvana Mini is the frame to put pictures in, and the showcase window to put smaller pieces in. Unlike the inorganic walls, frames, and cases of museums and galleries, the walls and spaces of this Nirvana Mini, which are filled with nuance, guarantees that you will discover qualities that you never noticed before in the artwork that you display. This is the bare minimum as far as museums or galleries go, but it is the best there is

in terms of frames or cases. Guests who admired the artwork until they were fully satisfied may say that they want to buy the piece. In that case, this becomes a room for business transactions as well.

An artwork often becomes an object of speculation, passed on from buyer to buyer. When it ends up in the hands of an individual, the opportunity for others to appreciate the art is lost. Museums have limited budget and cannot afford to buy every masterpiece. I would therefore like to make a suggestion to those who own works of art: why not use Nirvana Mini as a space to exhibit your collection? This way, the aura of the artwork will be shown to as many people as possible.



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## 14. It is a room for creation

For work that requires creativity, it is best to stay in a small room. In large rooms, thoughts become spread out and diffused. People tend to be absentminded in large spaces like riverbanks and beaches, and if you want to concentrate on your thoughts, you should keep yourself confined in a small study or the bathroom. But if you shut yourself up in a small space, your thoughts will come to a standstill. When that happens, you might be inspired if you suddenly release your mind and body in a large space, and then come back to the small room. From childhood, I had the habit of daydreaming, and needed a small space to free this imagination.

The Sistine Chapel in Vatican City is known for one of Michelangelo's best work, the fresco of *Creation*. While Michelangelo was devoting himself to painting this fresco, he had a room in a different location called «the room of imagination». This was a small room with an area of only about three tatami mats, and he sometimes shut himself in there and fine-tuned the artistic visions he had in mind. Ceiling paintings force the artist to keep an uncomfortable posture for hours, and it must have been painful. Besides, with frescoes, nothing can be redone. After the wall is painted, the artist must quickly draw everything before it dries. It is a game of concentration, not to mention imagination and the ability to sketch. To boost his willpower, Michelangelo probably stayed in the «room of imagination» until his mind was about to explode, then immediately went into the large space of the chapel and devoted himself to his art.

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## 15. It is a studio

We do not need a doctor's report to know that simple tasks calm our minds: we know that from experience. In any case, using our hands and fingers and using tools and instruments stimulate our tired minds and refresh our central nervous system. And that, in turn, gives us pleasure.

For example, we use knives. We cut bamboo from what we find broken in a bamboo forest in our neighborhood, and create a cup, a small flower vase or a ladle. In the past, we made panpipes or wind chimes too. We become absorbed in the work of cutting or chipping the bamboo using saws, hatchets, hammers and chisels. You might discover that, although knives are often used as weapons for injuring or killing people, they were originally created for creation rather than destruction. Since ancient times, civilization has evolved through the use of tools and instruments, but our ancestors used them not only because they were convenient, but because they provided relaxation as well.

Nirvana Mini invites people to craft with their hands. You are compelled to use your favorite tools and create something. When you become a craftsman of the ancient times and play with the materials, this room becomes a studio. In this room, you automatically become strongly aware of the mutual relationship between yourself and the earth, wood, stone and metal.



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## 16. It raises your awareness of objects and materials

The children's story of *The Three Piglets* illustrates the essence of architectural theory. It is the most basic text of architecture, discussing the materials of straw, wood and bricks. It is a story in which the youngest piglet who built the strongest house with bricks comes out ahead, but if you change the angle of the story, Japanese wooden structure also has high durability and is suitable to humid climates. If you look at it from an ecological perspective, a house made from straw is the most eco-friendly. The choice to build a house from straw, wood or bricks is not just a superficial issue. There is philosophy in the selection of materials.

Japanese architect Kuma Kengo said in talk with me.

However, modern architecture is judged just by its planning. Construction planning, such as how to set up the bedroom next to the living room, decides everything. And even within this planning, the planning of the layout has been the basis, ignoring the philosophy and spirit behind the choice of materials.

Houses that are sturdy, durable, and strong in the face of disaster are preferred. People believe strongly in solidness. There was an implicit understanding that it is best to build houses with concrete, which is durable and remains strong in fire and earthquake.

In Japan, there is a southern island called Minami Daitōjima, which is constantly struck by typhoons. On this island, there are no splendid buildings. The only concrete building is the food co-op, and residences and cafeterias are essentially barracks made of tin. I felt such graciousness from this, as if the residents of the island were saying, since typhoons are going to come and destroy the buildings anyway, if that happens, let's just reconstruct them. Instead of focusing on the resilience of the building, they choose materials that are easily renewed, based on the assumption that the buildings will be destroyed. This thought process is in direct opposition to the idea of concrete.

Kuma Kengo said.

By building houses with concrete, which stand strong when disasters strike, people try to find relief in their own lives as well. They think that if they take out mortgage loans to build a nice concrete house, the sturdy house would support their lives too. Unfortunately, concrete cannot support lives. Concrete houses only become rigid prisons that trap us inside, while we slave away to pay back the loans.

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## 17. It has no form of completion

Let us think back to the architecture of Japanese temples. Wooden temples are easily reproduced. In construction, you begin with the selection of wood, and build up the wood without using nails, making the most of the materials by partially interchanging or transferring areas that receive weight. As a result, these temples have survived for a thousand years. Because wooden buildings rot or grow mold, durability is a problem, but because the materials can be replaced, they last as long as stone buildings in Europe.

Kuma Kengo said.

Horyūji Temple uses ordinary wood and has simple details, but is extremely durable. Just as we want a conclusion to a story, we want a storyline and a conclusion in buildings, too. However, there are some forms in architecture that are «always in progress». In fact, every house undergoes the process of repairing old parts. In contrast, time is discontinuous for concrete, and once the sludgy material hardens instantaneously, there is no going back. Wooden buildings, on the other hand, are constantly repaired by hand, and any damaged parts are replaced.

Tearooms, which have clay walls, are similar to this. When it is exposed to rain and wind, the soil collapses and melts away. However, as you repeatedly repair this with your hands, the walls begin to acquire a unique look. Through this process, you play with the materials and become more familiar with them.

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## 18. The relationship between people and materials

Just as people are the products of nature, products that people make use resources from the earth. No matter how gruesome it may be, everything has its origins in nature. Soil, stone and sand all become artificial as soon as human hand touches them. Humans created knives by breaking stone and using its sharp surface, and created bowls by kneading clay and baking it in fire. Swords, guns, paint, gunpowder, poison, medicine that cures ills and money were all created from soil, stone and sand. No animal is as obsessed with soil, stone and sand as humans. While there are animals who are covered in soil or attach themselves to rocks, humans are the only ones who go mad for soil, lust for stone, and play with sand. The technology that developed from the Stone Age, evolved through the Iron Age, and arrived in modern civilization was not simply led by practicality. You select a stone with bright colors, create paint from it, and use it to draw. You create earthenware and clay dolls that are far from practical. You forge iron, which does not have any use for any animals, to create knives, which could even take your own life. All of these acts were led by the lustful desire for beauty. Since ancient times, humans have always been seduced by beauty. Tools and instruments need to be not only practical but beautiful, as well.

You create steel from black sand and hammer out a strong sword with an incomparable sharpness and diabolic pattern. That is the «hi-tech» of the ancient times. What enabled humanity to take a leap forward from the Stone Age was steel. In world history, we are taught that the Hittite were the first users of steel. What is said to be the oldest sword in the world was created from a meteorite. Before they acquired the technology to make iron, people were forging knives from the remains of celestial objects that fell from outer space.

Before the Iron Age was the Bronze Age. The process of making iron is extremely complicated, and cannot be done by just anyone, but the

process of making bronze is not much easier. In its natural state, bronze is too soft and is unusable as a sword, so they made an alloy by mixing in tin. But how did they come up with that?

In every world, there is a pioneer. The developers of the atomic bomb or the IC chip are historically known, but no one knows the names of the people who first baked clay, who first created earthenware, or who first hammered out an iron sword. Furthermore, people have long used various minerals such as rock salt as medicine, but how did they find that they were good for the body? These people are all descendents of Prometheus, who was prosecuted for his sin of robbing fire from God, and whose heart was eaten alive by hawks. The lives of heroes often end tragically. The first person who created gunpowder was probably caught in an explosion just as he found success. Many mycologists have likely died from eating poisonous mushrooms. Paint is made from minerals too, but vermilion and chrome yellow are both strong toxins known as arsenic and hexavalent chromium, respectively. Artists are risking their lives, too.

Iron swords are synonymous to weapons in general, but more importantly, they were holy instruments. The technology to create iron led directly to power. One of the Three Sacred Treasures, which are the symbols of the Imperial Family, is also a sword. This is common to other myths in the world as well. In *The Ring of the Nibelung*, the fool Siegfried, who knew no fear, was the only one who could forge the holy sword Nothung. In the Arthurian legend, the only one who could pull out the holy sword from the stone was King Arthur. Swords certainly choose their own master. Swords have also changed history. They pierced the hearts of many warriors, and beheaded many warriors. They let the earth absorb a copious amount of blood. In the history of human battles, there is a direct line that leads from iron to the atomic bomb.

The technology of ancient times to create pottery or iron has now been replaced by computer technology and financial technology. We refined computer technology by taking silicon, which was buried underground, processing it and using it to create integrated circuits. Steel companies have made profits through the theory of marketing.

Let us look at the historical transition of the form of money. In ancient times, rock salt or seashells or livestock acted as currency. When we entered the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, shards of metal became the main form of money. After a while, once a trust system of carrying old metal and exchanging them was established, words became a currency. Money then transformed into printed paper, then into plastic cards with magnetic strips. Now, it is mostly a click on the computer.

Darwin once said the following:

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We humans have a fairly elevated nature, but the framework of our body has the inerasable evidence of our low origins.

Living creatures that are made from organic matter and robots that are made from metal are both, in the end, made from a combination of natural matter and other substance on earth. Good things and bad things were all born from the earth. We still keep a strong bond with soil. Everything is born from soil and will go back to soil.

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## 19. There, you can also play with charcoal fire

Inside the tearoom, the charcoal fire is always lit, and hot water is always boiling in the tea kettle.

You will never tire of staring at the charcoal fire. Charcoal fires have a curiously tranquilizing effect, and when you gaze at the heated charcoal that burns red, you are led into a cozy absentmindedness. It could be the effects of infrared rays, but as you face the fire, the core of your body is warmed, and you will feel as if you had stayed in lukewarm water at a hot spring for a long time.

A charcoal fire becomes bright red or dark as if it is breathing, and also makes noise, so you sometimes fall under the illusion that it is alive. You begin to feel as if you are playing with a little animal. In fact, you do have to take good care of it, by breathing on it, fanning it, changing its position, or adding fire companions. With fires lit by gas, there is no need to do such things, and nor would you feel the desire to. Forest trees emit elements that enable us to feel refreshed. We go on walks in the woods to bathe in and absorb these elements. Likewise, charcoal fires probably also emit this natural energy. After all, charcoal used to be a tree in the forest, too.

Where there is a fire, there is a group circling it, enjoying each other's company. That place becomes a kitchen, as well as a restaurant.

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## 20. It is a «restroom»

Whether you are at your own home, in your office, at someone else's house, traveling, out drinking, or flying in the sky, you place yourself in the restroom a few times a day. Everyone has something to say about the restroom. In his book *In Praise of Shadows*, the great writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō wrote about his almost nostalgic feelings for the wooden toilet bowl of a dimly-lit Japanese-style restroom. As a child, I once used that wooden toilet bowl in rural Nagano, but I could not understand at all why Tanizaki would praise that restroom. While I took care of my business, I felt compelled to leave as soon as possible. After all, it was a place where I could barely breathe, and was far from a «room where one can rest».

Not many restrooms are actually true places of rest. But the restrooms of daimyō lords are different. I once had the opportunity to see the restroom that Date Masamune used to use. It was a replica, of course, but it seemed like a comfortable space that lived up to the name «restroom». Like a tearoom, the floor is covered by tatami mats. It is said that in the mornings, Date Masamune would shut himself up in the restroom for hours to think about things alone or do deskwork. We probably have the habit of shutting ourselves up in small places when we need to concentrate or think deeply about something. Furthermore, when we have just woken up, our mind is clear, and that is the best time to think about things. I often unexpectedly find my inspiration in the morning, while I am in the restroom. When that happens, my stay in the restroom is prolonged. This is something that Date Masamune and I share. This room is a «restroom» as well as a «meditation room».

For inspiration to strike, the restroom needs to be comfortable. It is even better if there are hints for further thinking in various places. With the goal to create my ideal restroom one day, I thought about picking the best aspects from restrooms all over the world. In terms of the comfort of the restroom, Japan doubtless is at the forefront. Japanese restrooms have toilet seats with heaters or bidets, toilet seats and cov-



ers that open and close automatically, deodorant capabilities, and even machines that emit the sound of babbling streams while we take care of our business. But as the various functions are enhanced, we have become aware of a different sense of beauty. We decorate a single flower, hang a simple painting, or create a bookshelf and set up our favorite books. The restroom I saw in the Netherlands was wonderful. Delft tiles adorned the walls, and the same artwork as delftware dishes decorated the toilet bowl. When I went to a certain bar in Berlin, all of the walls of the restroom were fully mirrored. I felt uneasy seeing myself take care of my business from the front, back, and both sides. The discomfort and nervousness that we are being watched by someone automatically makes us stand straight. Inspiration is born when we are under some degree of tension.

In the end, we made the restroom in our house opaque with fogged glass, laid stones randomly on the floor, and displayed a statue of Buddha. This meditation room has been contributing quite a bit to my creative work as a novelist.

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## 21. It is a child's bedroom for adults

The forest in the hills near Tokyo was my childhood playground, and I often made «secret bases», or little spaces known only to us, with my friends. We would choose four thin trees growing nearby, bind them with a string and make a square. When we covered that square with a cloth or a plastic sheet, then a simple hut was made. Or we took many small bamboos, leaned them towards each other so that they formed a wall, and fixed them in place by sandwiching them with two bigger bamboos. We invited our friends to this hut, ate snacks together and talked about our dreams. This was a tearoom for children.

Because children have small bodies, they can fit into any place. They tend to like small places that match the size of their body. The oshiire closet, where we would put away our futons and blankets, was also a special space. In fact, the secret bases that we made in the forest were the result of our attempt to create a place like the oshiire outdoors. In that sense, the oshiire was our hideout in the house. In my case, if something was not to my liking, I shut myself up in the oshiire. I would stay there as a form of protest.

The upstart millionaires of Saudi Arabia who became wealthy thanks to petroleum live in splendid mansions now, but it is said that they sometimes reminisce over their nomadic ancestors by pitching a tent in their gardens and spending time there. But because they want to watch television too, they pull an extension cord and watch it in the tent. My ancestors may be hunters, but I did not particularly feel the desire to pay them respect. Nor did I hope to train for the street life that may be awaiting me in my future - I just wanted to spend time in a tent for no reason. When friends came, I hosted them by pitching a tent in the garden and spending time with them there. Because it gets boring to camp in the garden, we tried to look for a place to sleep in the mountains behind our house. Little by little, we tried to approach more serious forms of survival games.

My idea of houses comes from a very primitive place like this. It is said that Japanese architect Andō Tadao made his own bedroom when he was only a schoolchild. He apparently gathered many bottles like beer bottles, and buried them meticulously in the ground to make a floor. He made his architectural debut when he was only in elementary school by designing a child's bedroom that had much in common with a tearoom.

The great master of modern architecture Le Corbusier spent his last years in a small cabin that had an area of only 3.66 by 3.66 meters, slightly larger than a tearoom. He built it in 1951 for his wife Yvonne in southern France, and it was called «Cabanon» or «the cabin of Cap-Martin». The space inside the cabin contained only two beds, a small work table, a minimal cabinet, and a toilet and a sink. The work of Le Corbusier extended to huge apartment complexes and municipal buildings, but when he thought of his ideal living environment, he arrived at the idea of this residence that had only the bare minimum. The ideas of the architect are doubtless aggregated in the design of minimal spaces like the tearoom.

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## 22. It is a room for being alone

The Russian orbital station Mir is equipped with facilities that enable astronauts to stay in space long-term, but what is important is that it also includes a space where the astronauts can be alone. Even in an orbital station, which is designed as a unit that has only the bare minimum, there is a place to be alone. This place was set up as a result of careful consideration of the mental well-being of the astronauts, who live in outer space with the same members for a long time, far from earth as well as gravity and air. Of course, it is nothing like a tearoom, and is simply a small corner, but as a result of long-term analyses on human behavior on earth, it was concluded that this space was absolutely necessary.

Incidentally, the space shuttle itself has an area that is about the same as a tearoom. But in areas that are not affected by gravity, the walls and the ceiling become floors, too. If the inside of the space shuttle is a rectangular solid, the floor area is simply multiplied six times. If a tea ceremony is held here, the host or tea master can sit on the ceiling, and the guest can sit on a wall.

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### 23. It is a jail cell

We call areas where a person is confined alone a jail cell or a guard-house.

A jail cell, which is also about the same size as a tearoom, has a bed and a restroom. This is likely a space that has the bare minimum. Considering that someone has to live here, its size probably barely keeps the resident sane. In essence, one room with an area of three tatami mats would suffice as a residence. Everything else is extraneous, and makes no difference whether they are there.

A person with solid thoughts and beliefs may not be swayed by the environment, but in general, humans are closer to water than stone, and are greatly affected by the change of their containers. The space where we live probably influences our thoughts. Anyone who has been hospitalized or who has stayed in prison should know that there is a very strong connection between place and thought. What is written in prison is full of firm beliefs and thoughts, and what is written in hospitals is colored with a deep sense of the body.

When we move to a new place, we want to go on walks. Even if it is an ordinary street lined with stores, because it is slightly different from the one that was in our previous town, our eyes and nose become sharper, noting any differences. The same thing happens in our own houses; the slight differences in the color of the wall, the height of the ceiling or the hardness of the floor stimulate our brain. Because the fact that we are in a different environment heightens our brain activity in and of itself, it is only natural that our thought processes change. Quite a few artists move frequently, but they cannot help it, because they need to stimulate their creativity. The moving charges mount, but those who know their own habits well do not own much furniture or other household goods.

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## 24. It is a place to face the boredom of your twilight years

Even if they are healthy, the life of the elderly is a daily struggle with boredom. How the elderly fight with boredom is likely an important issue that the future civilization must face.

I once had a short conversation with one of the three wealthiest people in Japan. He apparently was bothered by a passage in one of my books, and in front of me, the writer, he lamented: «To think that no assets of any kind can be taken to the afterlife!». I sympathized with him and said: «Even if you had assets so large that you became bored from it, you can only use it in this life. Millionaires must surely be distressed in thinking of ways to use everything». To become wealthy, you probably have to be fairly selfish and beat others in competition, but once you have enough assets, it is likely best to use them altruistically and achieve peace of mind. But in fact, there are more people in this world who die before using up their assets than those who do not. When it comes to the length of life, there is not much difference between the wealthy and the poor. Furthermore, the amount of pleasure that people feel through their lifetime is also fixed, and the wealthy do not have more pleasure than the poor. This is because pleasure cannot be bought with money; rather, it is created by the brain.

Because you cannot take this life's riches into the afterlife anyway, you might as well rid of your assets, keeping yourself and your belongings light.



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SHIMADA MASAHIKO (fiction writer, b. 1961, Japan) is one of the most visible authors and commentators in Japan today. During his studies in Russian and East European languages at Tokyo University of Foreign Languages, he published the novella *A Tender Divertimento for Leftists* (1983), which was named runner-up for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. The following year he received the Noma New Writer Award for *Music for a Somnambulant Kingdom* (1984).

Other works include the novellas *Cry of the Refugee Vacationers* (1986) and *Requiem for a Conscious Machine* (1985), the short story collection *Donna Anna* and a socio-pathological study of AIDS entitled *Unidentified Shadow* (1987). Several short stories and his 1989 novel *Dream Messenger* have been translated into English. He is currently writing a serial novel *The Idle Prince (Tsurezure Oji)*, in the daily «Asahi Shinbun», which is simultaneously appearing as a cellphone novel. His 1999 novel *Voluntary Death Penalty (Jiyū Shikei)*, was made into a TV drama, and aired in spring 2008. Shimada also translated Steve Erickson's *Rubicon Beach* into Japanese.

Shimada founded and directed a successful theater group during the 1990s, and continues to work in performance arts. He is the author of two opera librettos, *Chūshingura (47 Rōnin)* and *Jr. Butterfly*. The latter, which tells a tragic romance of Madame Butterfly's offspring, was performed at the 52nd Puccini Festival in 2006. In 2000, Shimada participated in a poetry boxing match held by the Japan Reading Boxing Association, becoming the fourth lightweight champion; the following year he defended his title against the singer Sunplaza Nakano. He now teaches at Hōsei University. In 2003, Shimada participated in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, courtesy of the Freeman Foundation.





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COSIMO MIORELLI, live painter and freelance illustrator, has participated in several editions of the international art festival Stazione di Topolò / Postaja Topolove as guest performer, as well as being part of the festival crew. He has been amongst the founders of the street drumming group Les Tambours de Topolò, and performed with them in various Italian and European cities (London, Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, Rijeka...); he occasionally joins Les Tambours now, but as live painter and illustrator. His works and live-painted productions have been exhibited in various shows and performances in Venice, Bruxelles and other locations.

