

Red Chamber

Dream of the Red Chamber

Red Chamber

Flowing Through The Garden

Truth | Reality | Real | True

Red Chamber

The Garden of Desire

Red Chamber

Mortals of the Red Dust

Garden Through Yin and Yang

Transmutation and Touch

Practice of Seeing

The Void

Connotations of Mountains and
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Red Chamber

Garden / Black Box

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Reimaginings of Chinese
Culture in Fashion

Red Chamber

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ABSTRACT

The following is a composition of a series of keys to unlock the narrative of my fashion practise and MA collection.

The question posed is 'Where lies truth?' How can things be both real and unreal at the same time? There is a philosophical balance or imbalance that creates truth, the real and unreal as a whole.

Constructing the dream as sculptures of fluidity and shift towards a non-narrative way of seeing. The result is a paradoxical equation, formed around how two opposites coexist at once within the same space at the same time.

The context of this is to address the Eastern gaze of the duality of history versus the perception of what is considered as outstanding features of China's heritage. The shifting rooted aesthetic in classical Chinese literature is explained as 虚 Xu (the void, the illusion, emptiness) and 实 Shi (concreteness, reality, something having a physical existence) two interchangeable states.

The discussion ahead touches on cross-cultural translation (more specifically on visual translation), what is perceived as the Eastern gaze and the Western gaze and their use in analysing certain visual language points. A comparison between the Western and Eastern gazes, of looking, or what is the 'being-looked-at-ness' of the matter?

In Dream of the Red Chamber, a sentient stone – a remnant from the fall of the heavens and their subsequent repair by the Goddess Nü-wa, a being with a human face and snake's tail – joins a Taoist priest and a Buddhist monk on a journey that will lead it to the mortal realm. The following is a retelling of the novel, through its translation into English by David Hawkes. Nü-wa is depicted in the novel as the repairer of the cosmos. Saving the world from extinction by repairing it with stones. The earthly supports holding up the sky have collapsed. Nü-wa repairs these supports with magic stones.

Long ago, when the goddess Nü-wa was repairing the sky, she melted down a great quantity of rock and, on the Incredible Crags of the Great Fable Mountains, moulded the amalgam into thirty-six thousand, five hundred and one large building blocks, each measuring seventy-two feet by a hundred and forty-four feet square. She used thirty-six thousand five hundred of these blocks in the course of her building operations, leaving a single odd block unused, which lay, all on its own, at the foot of Greensickness Peak in the aforementioned mountains. Now this block of stone, having undergone the melting and moulding of a goddess, possessed magic powers. It could move about at will and could grow or shrink to any size it wanted. Observing that all the other blocks had been used for celestial repairs and that it was the only one to have been rejected as unworthy, it became filled with shame and resentment and passed its days in sorrow and lamentation.

Nü-wa is part woman (Yin) and part snake (Yang), a being representing polarity, the coexistence of opposites. In this void is generated a polarity of truth and falseness, not in duality as they present the coexistence of Yin and Yang as containing each other. The novel itself conflates the real and unreal, the truth and false, into the idea of the dream. The notion of dreams reappears throughout the narrative. Verisimilitude and allegory are conflated in several ways throughout the early chapters of the novel.

There is an interplay between the real and sudden entrances into what seem like dream states; the real and unreal, truth and illusion.

Footnote:

Dream of the Red Chamber (红楼梦, Hongloumeng) the classical Chinese literature by Cao Xueqin is a tale about Eastern philosophy on the real and the illusion, the fundamentals of Taoism, which are used to structure the novel. Written in the middle of the 18th century, it is considered as one of China's Four Great Classical Novels, alongside Romance of the Three Kingdoms (Luo Guanzhong, C.14th), Journey to the West (Wu Cheng'en, C.16th) and Water Margin (Shi Nai'an, C.14th).



One day, in the midst of its lamenting, the stone saw a monk and a Taoist approaching from a great distance, each of them remarkable for certain eccentricities of manner and appearance. When they arrived at the foot of Greensickness Peak, they sat down on the ground and began to talk. The monk, catching sight of a lustrous, translucent stone – it was in fact the rejected building block which had now shrunk itself to the size of a fan-pendant and looked very attractive in its new shape – took it up on the palm of his hand and addressed it with a smile: ‘Ha, I see you have magical properties! But nothing to recommend you. I shall have to cut a few words on you so that anyone seeing you will know at once that you are something special. After that I shall take you to a certain

*brilliant
successful
poetical
cultivated
aristocratic
elegant
delectable
luxurious
opulent
locality*

on a little trip’. The stone was delighted. ‘What words will you cut? Where is this place you will take me to? I beg to be enlightened.’ ‘Do not ask,’ replied the monk with a laugh. ‘You will know soon enough when the time comes.’ And with that he slipped the stone into his sleeve and set off at a great pace with the Taoist. But where they both went to I have no idea.

Footnote on translation:

Literature and history are often so closely connected in Chinese culture it is difficult to read one without the context of the other. There is a difference between Eastern (Chinese) and Western literature and their connections with history. This questions how literature is considered within culture. In the Chinese context, the two are so intrinsically linked that there is no singular term for ‘literature’. Chinese literature is more akin to reinvigorating the past, or a patterning of concepts expressed in the texts of literature and refined using truth, emotion and history. What is so intriguing to think about here is the translation from one language to another is done in a way to avoid the text resulting in nonsensical parables. If translated through connotation, the words themselves have to be transmitted through a reconstructed narration. To compose a shared experience yet somewhat not too far apart from the original, the accuracy of the translated text is rather difficult to define.

The title translates directly to Red Building Dream.

Chinese writing has connotations embedded in the nature of the meanings of words. Words lean toward the visual and the accompanying spoken sound. In the novel, the names of some characters suggest alternate meanings, functioning as homophones. Some of these characters only exist in dreams. This is a purposeful way to create double-meanings, relating back to the polarity of truth (real / reality) and falseness (unreal / dream / illusion).

Fig 1 - 5
Paintings by Qing Dynasty artist Sun Wen 中文: 孙温 (1818-1904), depicting scenes from the novel Dream of the Red Chamber.



FLOWING THROUGH THE GARDEN

The novel continues by portraying the lives of aristocratic families and the construction of a garden. The Daguan Yuan (Garden of Prosperity) is the garden built by Jia's family for the Royal concubine Yuan, a place built for when she is visiting relatives, a villa to live and entertain the guests. Commissioned to the famous garden designer Shan Ziyue, as a design from Ming / Qing dynasty eras, to be inspired to design from poetry and literature of the time. What the garden represents is the visualisation of a poetic translation, thriving on imagination. For the people in the garden, the garden itself become an immersive theatre space. As recorded in the novel, the concubine Yuan states the experience of being in the garden as "the heavenly earth", so it was named "大观园" (Garden of Prosperity).

As the characters walk through the garden, the reading becomes the experience of their journeys along with their virtue through a visualisation by the novel's narrator's perspective as poetry. The description from the narrator is as a poetic ambiguity. The mystic manner of a dream sequence cements the construction to its characterisation of ambiguity. The garden is a metaphor for desires, both earthly and otherworldly, confined within its walls. In the garden, Yin is represented by water and Yang is represented by the stone mountains. The mountain is unreal (Yang), whilst the flowing water is real (Yin), vibrations of the void of the universe, a land of illusion, and the garden of desire. Within this illusion you dream about the real. Within the real you question the illusion.

The author, Cao Xueqin, descriptively paints the garden with poetic sensibility through the use of language.

...they passed through a tunnel of rock on the mountain's shoulder into an artificial ravine ablaze with the varicoloured flowers and foliage of many varieties of tree and shrub which grew there in great profusion. Down below, where the trees were thickest, a clear stream gushed between the rocks. After they had advanced a few paces in a somewhat northerly direction, the ravine broadened into a little flat-

Fig 6 - 7
 Paintings by Qing
 Dynasty artist Sun Wen
 中文: 孙温 (1818-1904),
 depicting scenes from the
 novel Dream of the Red
 Chamber.



bottomed valley and the stream widened out to form a pool. Gaily painted and carved pavilions rose from the slopes on either side, their lower halves concealed amidst the trees, their tops reaching into the blue. In the midst of the prospect below them was a handsome bridge.

Poem by the son of the Jia family, composed to describe the scenery:

*In a green ravine
 A jade stream sped.
 A stair of stone
 Plunged to the brink.
 Where the water widened
 To a placid pool,
 A marble baluster
 Ran round about.
 A marble bridge crossed it
 With triple span,
 And a marble lion's paw
 Crowned each of the arches.*

Over the centre of the bridge there is a small pavilion, into which Jia Zheng and the others enter and sit.

They now left the pavilion and crossed to the other side of the pool. For a while they walked on, stopping from time to time to admire the various rocks and flowers and trees which they passed on their way, until suddenly they found themselves at the foot of a range of whitewashed walls enclosing a small retreat almost hidden among the hundreds and hundreds of green bamboos which grew in a dense thicket behind them. With cries of admiration they went inside...

The aesthetics of layering and complexity amongst the context of the walled garden, with its artificial mountains and manmade interventions of natural objects, allude to a world of illusion. The flora are curated and placed purposefully, stones unearthed from nature positioned together to form imaginings of mountain ranges, streams flow over rocks creating rivers as waterfalls cascade into manmade lakes.

...A door in the rear wall opened onto a garden of broad-leaved plantains dominated by a large flowering pear-tree and overlooked on either side by two diminutive lodges built at right angles to the back of the house. A stream gushed through an opening at the foot of the garden wall into a channel barely a foot wide which ran to the foot of the rear terrace and thence round the side of the house to the front, where it meandered through the bamboos of the forecourt before finally disappearing through another opening in the surrounding wall.

Poetically,

*...through flowers and foliage,
by rock and rivulet,
past rose-crowned pergolas and rose-twined trellises,
through small pavilions embowered in peonies,
where scent of sweet-briers stole, or pliant plantains waved...*

This garden is a microcosm representing the systems of Yin and Yang, as well as the confinement of things. The garden is itself an illusion, the elements within the garden are miniatures of nature, representing the cosmos. The stone mountains and trees when reflected in the lakes and rivers – reflections of the real world – become a duality of an unreal (the illusion) and the real as one. The garden forms a macrocosm of the microcosm.

... Suddenly, through the green of the willows, they glimpsed the scarlet balustrade of a wooden bridge whose sloping ramps led to a flat central span high above the water. When they had crossed it, they found a choice of paths leading to different parts of the garden. Ahead was an airy building with roofs of tile, whose elegant surrounding wall was of grey-plastered brick pierced by ornamental grilles made of semicircular tiles laid together in openwork patterns. The wall was so constructed that outcrops of rock from the garden's 'master mountain' appeared to run through it in several places into the courtyard inside...

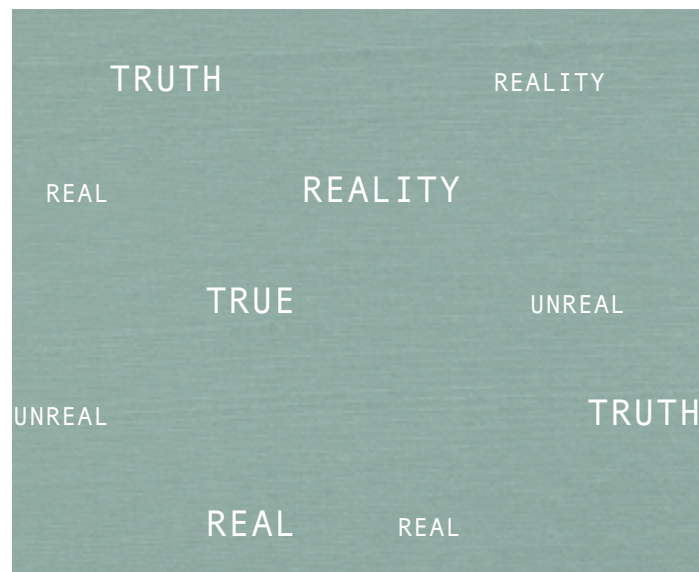


Fig 8

Painting by Qing Dynasty artist Sun Wen 中文: 孙温 (1818-1904), depicting scenes from the novel Dream of the Red Chamber.

This relates directly to Taoist philosophies, each layer of the cosmos folds in on itself forming a balance, a co-existence within the cycle of life, the circle of things. The Yin and the Yang as one complete whole.

...But as he entered the gate... for a miniature mountain of rock, whose many holes and fissures, worn through it by weathering or the wash of waters, bestowed on it a misleading appearance of fragile delicacy, towered up in front of him and combined with the many smaller rocks of various shapes and sizes which surrounded it to efface from their view every vestige of the building they had just been looking at.



In Western philosophy, truth is one of the central subjects. A huge variety of issues relate to truth, having been debated for thousands of years with reliance on theses about truth: what truths are, and what makes them true. From the neo-classical theories of truth, correspondence, coherence and the Pragmatists "Truth is the end of inquiry", to Realists, anti-Realism and Deflationists - all seem to be reliant on an understanding of metaphysics and the human condition or our place within the world and the arguments for and against these conditions. Each one is contending the other to make a verifiable assertion of Truth: the thoughts and claims are about this world as it happens.

Similarly, Western philosophy more often mistakenly views Eastern philosophy with the tendency to define issues with Yin and Yang as positive vs negative, good vs bad. Each state is considered independently instead of being understood as two halves completing one whole. In the manner of Eastern philosophy, truth is not a fully objective matter. Closer to Western anti-Realist views, truth is constrained by our epistemic situation.

THE GARDEN THROUGH YIN AND YANG

There are four basic principles of Yin and Yang which are significant in understanding Dream of the Red Chamber:

Yin and Yang are opposites

Yin and Yang create each other

Yin and Yang become each other

Yin and Yang contain each other

Water and fire, energies in opposition

Light and dark, one creates the other

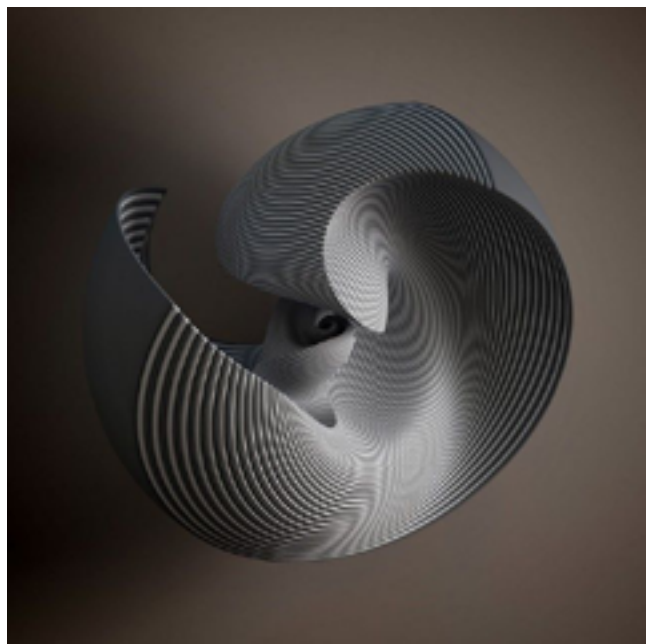
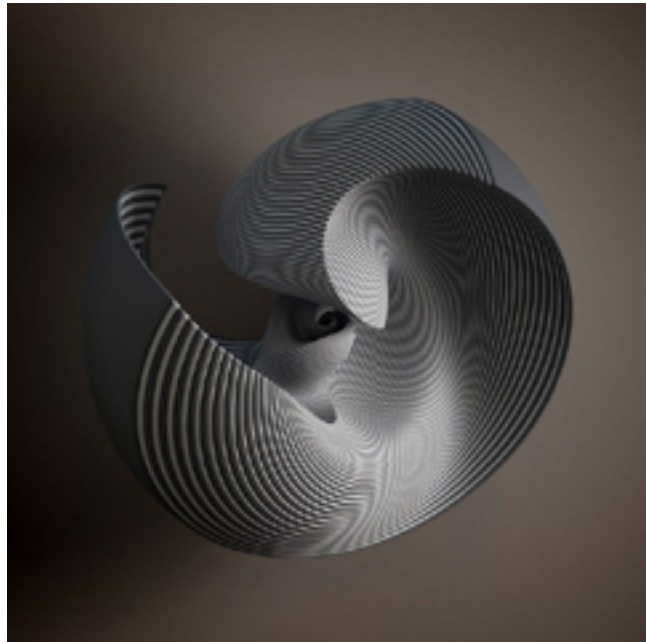
Day and night, turns to the other

Exist in harmony, existence as one

Cities across many eras of Chinese tradition were constructed around the principles of the whole as an imagined cosmology representing the heavens – heaven on earth and a sharing of its delights. On occasion, there are cities inside cities, each walled, each a layer representing the system of society both inside and outside the walls. These walls are also a way to confine things, in order to create the balance between Yin and Yang, to create order from the perceived chaos of the natural world just as creating a retelling of nature in the garden. This is how the representation of the garden in Dream of the Red Chamber can be understood. A microcosm of the macrocosm, a small representation of the larger cosmology, representing the entirety of its own reality.

The problem is this: Such concepts as information, function, purpose, meaning, intention, significance, consciousness, and value are intrinsically defined by their fundamental incompleteness. They exist only in relation to something they are not.... The “something” that each of these is not is precisely what matters most. But notice the paradox in this English turn of phrase. To “matter” is to be substantial, to resist modification, to be beyond creation or destruction -- and yet what matters about an idea or purpose is dependent on something that is not substantial in any obvious sense. So what is shared in common between all these phenomena? In a word, nothing -- or rather, something not present.

(Deacon, Terrence W. 2011)



Figs 9-11
Forms
Christoph Bader, 2013

THE GARDEN OF DESIRE

In the novel the propensity of the garden itself is a microcosm of the macrocosm of the whole cosmology of life. The garden is a replica of reality, it is also the meeting point for the extravaganza for exoticism. The landscape of the garden is heavily painted with the Chinese poetics of the mountains Yang-Shi and the water Yin-Xu. The witness of the landscape of the garden, the mountains, the trees, the flowers, to its mirrored illusion in the water, represent the harmony of what Taoism is expressing, as well as in Buddhism. The mortal world is an illusion of life, the illusion of wanting, allurements, and desire.

Just as the lakes allude to the polarity in existence for both the real and the illusion of the unreal. The surface is always there to remind them of the virtue of being an illusion and is not set in a static moment. The Qi of the wind as something that cannot be seen or touched but such when it touches the surface of the water as a force, it creates the illusion of the wind's movement as well as disturbing the reality. This refers back to Yin becoming Yang, and the two containing each other.

From the title, Dream of the Red Chamber, the colour red itself has vast connotations. In Buddhism, red refers to the things of life and desire that exist in the mortal world. The things which attract, the allurements of desire and wanting in life and within oneself. Depending on its use in text, there is a connotation to the colour red, rather than its simple descriptive meaning as a 'colour'. Herein, 'red' describes the colour of the dust as the colour of the mortal world.

This term originates from Taoist influenced poetry and writings on life in Chang An (the ancient capital) which describes the movement of people around an unpaved city. From a Buddhist understanding, the mortal world is where temptation and suffering is all around, intensified by the growing populous of urban density. A horse's gallop along a busy road with the dust kicked into clouds, illuminated by the setting sun, powdering the people, the people of a red dust world, the world of the mortal, an illusion from a red hued mirage. Red becomes the literature metaphor of our world.



Fig 12
Still from *Baby of Mâcon*, 1993
Dir. Peter Greenaway

MORTALS OF THE RED DUST

In this escapism from everyday life, the novel is constructed through the deep rooted moral conducts of the Imperial system of the feudal society. The world of the protagonist Jia Baoyu, as with the other hundreds of characters, is somewhat trapped in confinement. Confined by the identity with which they are born, the confinement of gender rules of the time, the confinement of desire, confined by the walls of the garden. This continues through to the confinement of the illusion they live in, far detached from the outside world, their palace with its perfect garden as a space for utopia. This portrays the social backdrop of the time, the notion of Taoist's ideology that evokes life as being an illusion.

Again the red dust world perhaps is intrinsic to its fantasmic landscape of the auteur's creation. The red dust becomes the paralytic introspection on the dual existence of clarity.

This mortal is a place like the garden. A place of desire and allurement and mixed illusions. The garden is a projection on to the bigger world outside of what we can perceive.

Similarly, in the Frog of the Well (井底之蛙), a fable by Zhuāng Zǐ, sometimes also referred to as '*Looking at a sky down in a well*', the frog only becomes aware of a world beyond that of his visual field when a sea turtle passes by.

TRANSMUTATION AND TOUCH

A cardboard, as material. It started from the idea of a material that is seemingly structural, with rigidity or solidity but also shares the quality of being fragile. The cardboard with a partial silicone coating, just like how knowledge or practice to me, is a constant of accumulation and through experience it calls out to be touched.

It is an object which calls out to be touched.

To go with the descriptive nature. Twist and cut and revealed transmuted to a dismantled matrix of materiality.

What is dismantled is attached to an entanglement, and from what is in the entanglement is tangible. What is touchable is in abstraction. It is the serendipity of discovery, applied through senses, tangible and touchable but not easily breakable.

The serendipity of Rencontre. Material that has been discarded, found, then repurposed. There is not a set goal or outcome, it is an involvement of materiality by dismantling or reconfiguring material that had previously been discarded.

To follow the idea or theories of an accumulation of experiences form knowledge or practice there is a fluidity of doing and making.

I was most interested in both the way in which outsiders to a thing view their dominance in relation to it, and by how they might be consciously or unconsciously inspired by it through encountering it through sensation, predominantly touch.

There is no paraphilia of touching.

In his memoir *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky explains his views on the role of ambiguity in art:

By means of art man takes over reality through a subjective experience... An artistic discovery occurs each time as a new and unique image of the world, a hieroglyph of absolute truth. It appears as a revelation, as a momentary, passionate wish to grasp intuitively and to touch all the laws of this world—its beauty and ugliness, its compassion and cruelty, its infinity and limitations... Through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form.

(Tarkovsky, A, 1989)



Fig 13
In Silicone cardboard sculpture.
Duan, Y. (2019). [Silicone].



Fig 14
Detail of In Silicone cardboard sculpture.
Duan, Y. (2019). [Silicone].



In Do Ho Suh's work body of architectural experiments, materiality goes beyond the subject's means, the see through textile installations give the virtue of the artist's expressions in ambiguity. Its sheered layered solid construction flows in space, the Nostalgia is with the artist, triggering a dream state with the audience, the experience I wanted to portrait has its fluidity, in the visual language itself, the dream poetic, the forever reinterpretation of remembrance, the melancholy of the memory.

The transitory spaces of corridors, staircases, bridges, and entrances are linking spaces through which the body travels between cultures.

Distortion occurs in the process, but it isn't completely rejected by the audience to feel. It lays in touch and also reserved. What is in direct recognition is the architectural forms, recognised by the outline of a building, a distant dream like nostalgia, the inception of otherness in its place, other to its means, other to the memories, to the audience.



Something experienced not just by looking, an immersive experience as a space to get lost in, a dream of the otherness relived by being lost in a dream like cloud. A manipulation of scales emphasising the malleability of space. The forms are temporal voids, into which we enter and onto which we project our perspective gained from the experience of looking. The forms allow us to recall our prior experiences of structures whilst shaping our understanding of an exterior world inhabiting an internal space.

Fig 15
Gate, 2011. Installation View,
Luminous: The Art of Asia, Seattle
Art Museum
Do Ho Suh

Fig 16
Hub, London Apartment, 2015.
Do Ho Suh

PRACTICE OF SEEING

Translation is always assigned with its limitation, the interpretation becomes the conversion of its origin meaning. Words to words can no longer transmit. You can not experience the feeling of being submerged 100 feet deep in the ocean. The moment of witnessing all the brilliancy flowing around you by listening to the story of being in the water.

How do I describe a taste of mangosteen to you for you to know without having the taste of it? Should a poetic interpretation be descriptive?

What is your sweetest joy?
Close your eyes... Ask yourself:
What do you see? What do you feel?

A misty morning, a long walk in the mountain forest with the dearest ones.
What do you see? What do you feel?

A remembrance of a soft touch.
An intimate eye contact.
What do you see? What do you feel?

A bite into a ripe Nectarine. A sip of hot cocoa after a night of binge drinking. Whipped cream topping. Waffles. Ice-cream. Next to a fireplace in a chilly late autumn evening after a long day of walking through the countryside...
What do you see? What do you feel?

Or it is just pitch black with the feeling of a twitchy eye? In this case, what do you see and what do you feel?

We may hear in a conversation when someone says they have had the same experience as the one being discussed. In many ways they could have, but in many ways it is impossible to have had. They simply acknowledge a similar experience having occurred to them, or near them or they witnessed something with similarity.

The poetic interpretation isn't descriptive in continuum.

Exhausted
Absence
Rending
Void

Two persons can recount a shared experience, but one will recount from their own perspective and not of that of the other person. (truth, perception, categorisation of memory/event/experience as 'the same' as another).

THE VOID

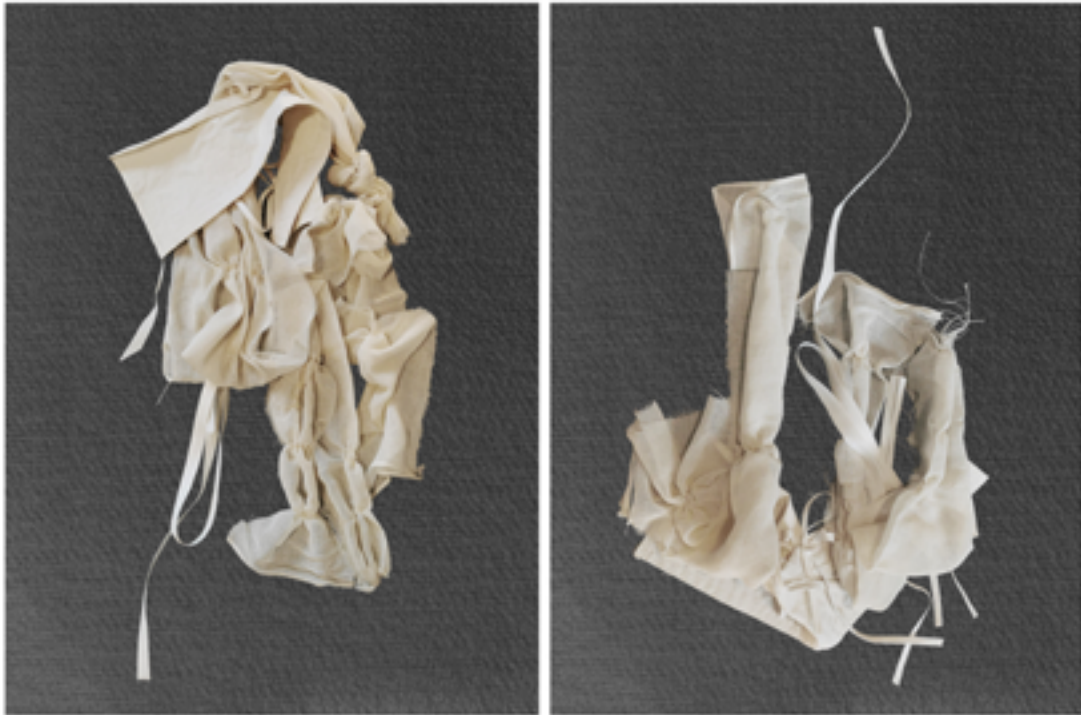
The void here opens a passage to a polarity of Yin and Yang, which cannot be defined if it is in stasis, the constant interchange of one to another by the shift of Yin and Yang, the becoming and completion. When reaching the completion, in turn it crescents opposingly. There is no such decimation as a vanishing moment, what is attained can only be read by the confinement of the illustrated realness through the mirrored self to see the truth. The self in the state of being, the recognition of the self as mirrored in reflections, the being of real reconciles with the illusion. The real is the state of being. Being of the real becomes the real and the becoming of being, being of being, being in perpetual movement.

being of the real

becoming of the real

becoming of the being

All are in a constant state of flux, interchanging, the process of motion. This stages the situation as the novel states at the begins with a couplet puzzle 'where truth becomes fiction when the fiction becomes true. Real becomes not-real where unreal is real.' These are in harmony and interchangeable. Coexistence of opposites. The truth in the garden is how Ying and Yang flow here philosophically. The illusion of the garden is not unreal, it is inherent in the formation of the garden, its boundaries (horizon) and its state of movement between Yin and Yang. The garden is both real and unreal at once.



It is the perpetual streaming landscape that is in transmutation, in continuum.

It is not about the forceful exhaustion of possibilities, by doing it is by letting the apprehending process of unknowing resume in the unknown, led to a void to open up to a contingency of possibilities. In subtlety or in pause.

Encountering the possibility and dip and jump and leave the stream of this process and come in and flow with it, where it ends where it flows to is not to be designated.

And what exalts always lies in the next encountering. The present act recommencing for another, the next.

Fig 17
Fabric experiments
Yuchen Duan, 2020



CONNOTATIONS OF MOUNTAINS AND WATER IN CHINESE AESTHETICS

The poetics in the novel plays on homophones. The connotation is to give the text a second reading to reveal deeper meanings. The narrative of the novel is composed in a way that the story line is often carried by the concept of a retelling. Just how the layers of the cosmos in Taoism turn back on each other, as with the red dust as the mortal world, what can one really experience as real?

The polarity of the real self and the un-real self. The un-real being the reflected, in water and in mirrors, and the truth being the self. In the novel, the theme of the mirror is a reoccurrence. The mirror reflects to us the truth whilst the reflection is itself an illusion. In Buddhism, Neo-Confucianism, the mirror reflects things as they really are, both the real and the unreal. Other connotations in the novel present the mirror (镜子, Jingzi) as a homophone for a different character; 镜子 being both the mirror and exotic desire, a conflation of mirrors and romantic attachments. These are attachments between characters and between Yin and Yang as analogies of the balance of natural elements: water and stone, fluid and solid.

In the traditional Chinese painting style of Shan shui (山水), the painter is not presenting the image of nature, rather their thoughts about nature. There is no importance if the representation is real object or not, the Shan shui is a vehicle of the philosophy for the viewers mind over the viewers eye. The unreal beyond the real. The same situation occurs in Shanshui shi (山水诗) a movement of classical poetry, which contributed to the formation a unique aesthetic outlook, one inherently Chinese in style and thought. Shan shui initiates ways of seeing that look in different ways at things Chinese.

Just as the garden appears natural it exists as truth (real) to the characters in Dream of the Red Chamber yet exists at the same time as an illusion of nature (unreal), the coexistence of Yin and Yang, the reality and the dream as one.



GARDEN / BLACK BOX

The dreamers in the Chinese garden are contained within a discontinuous spatio-temporality. Beyond the perimeter of the garden lies an horizon. For the dreamers to step beyond confinement of the garden they are stepping into the horizon. If a perspective is what is visible and what is invisible, it is at the horizon that perspective crashes. If a perspective is what is real and what is unreal, it is at the horizon that perspective crashes. Yet the horizon of the real/unreal is unseen, it is invisible. Still the perspective crashes at the horizon.

If the horizon is the mark of absolute that makes itself into a boundary delineating the particular, then any space dreaming of being liberated from the confines of localisation struggles to annihilate the horizon.
(Popa, A. 2016)

The Horizon offers alterity from the confines, yet it is unreachable. It is only the imagined space between here and there that accounts for possibility to pass beyond the boundary of confinement.

A terrestrial paradigm, the speculative potential of the unreal creates a fictional overlap between the outside (unreal) and the inside (real) of the garden. As the sentient stone pleaded to join the journey of the Buddhist and Taoist, so does the Horizon plead to be reached, even though it is existentially disconnected from the real and remains as part of the unreal. It exists and at the same time does not exist. The horizon is Yang to perspective's Yin.

From the outside looking in, the viewer is confined to the unreality which the nature in the garden possesses. Here, perspective can vanish at every step, every line of perspective is a possible horizon.

Just as with performance in a black box, the experience is in confinement, just as the in the garden. The illusion grounds for 'in' and 'out' sides to meet, the looking of inwards being outside, and the looking outward from the inside.

The architecture of the “black box” reflects modernity’s aspiration to universality by negating peculiarity and constructing an absolute edifice liberated from the spacetime fixity of given the horizon.
(Popa, A. 2016)

The “Black box” exists in isolation to all other internal and external influences. The audience looks inward from within, observing the performative experience. It is discontinuous to itself being located at the limits of modernity.

The black box is the same kind of entity as the garden. Both are existentially disconnected from the world beyond. Both concealed within themselves, as with each layer of the Taoist cosmos folding in on itself forming balance. Those who occupy the garden reside in a form of utopia, concealed from the outside world, unobserved, without horizon and with their confined perspective. They carry with them through their construct of utopia a determination to seek liberation from the torment of the Red Dust.

There is an infinity to the black box to accentuate the unlimited possibilities of what is contained within. A long dark infinity, localised with borders disguised as what cannot be perceived. It is within the black box we perceive and receive information. It is here that exoticism gives sense to the heightened immersion from within this confinement. Illusion as theatre.

The garden topology of artificial mountains, rivers and lakes does not know of its totality. It is limitless, as are the confines of the black box which is a wholeness of space, a protocol for the continuous infinite space placed in view as something confined. Yet in neither of these spaces are we confronted with incomprehension of what is around us. The real and the unreal as one, set in a void that distorts the Yin of perspective against the Yang of the horizon, as day turns to night, night turns to day, as being of the real becomes the real and the becoming of being. All finite things reveal infinitude.

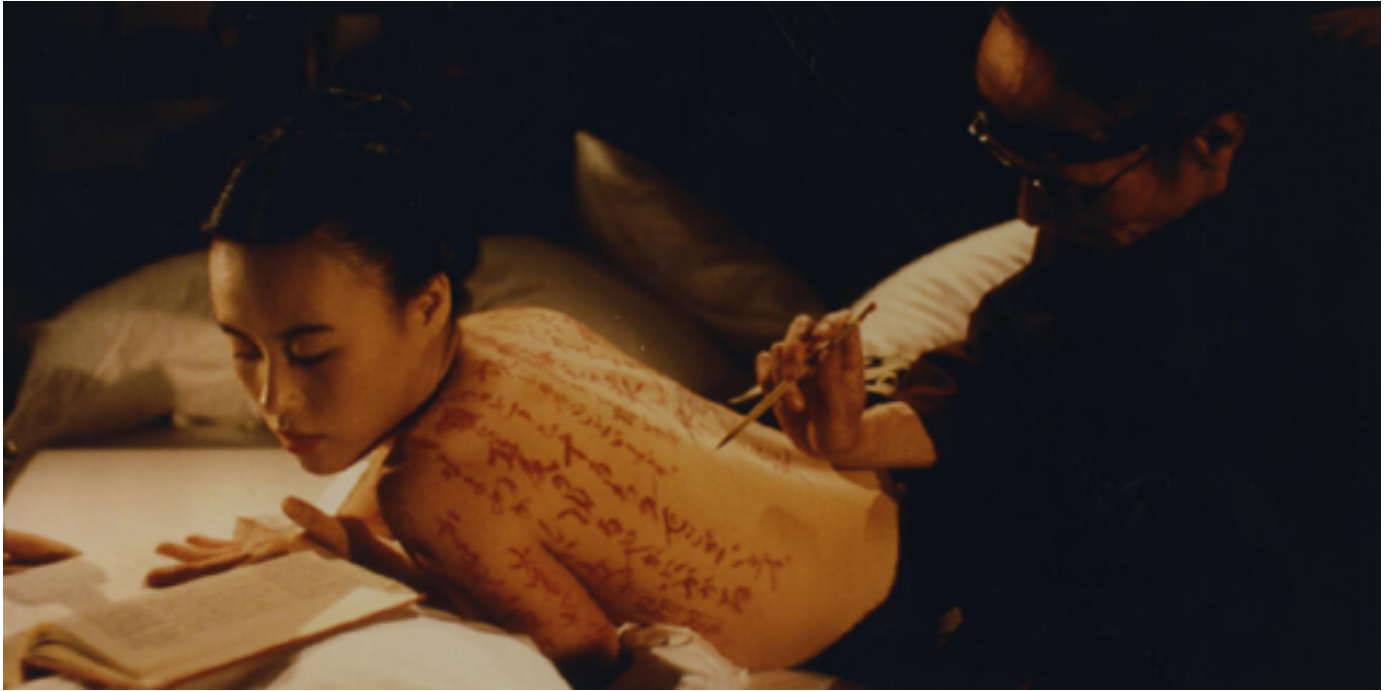


Fig 20
Still from Pillow Book, 1996
Dir. Peter Greenaway

THE PAINTERLY ENDEAVOUR

*"I was always disappointed the paintings didn't have sound tracks.
So maybe what I make is not cinema but paintings with sound tracks."*
— Peter Greenaway

Peter Greenaway uses a classical painterly language with which to construct film in a manner of distortion, distorted the narrative, and arrives at an abstract expressionist's analogy.

The auteur's art work inclined to embrace the pure phenomenology of film as film, film as painting and imagery making, which is a way of the narrative-construct of film making. His film narrativity is non-linear, or even to a degree of non-narrativity.

*The very best painting is non narrative, it does not need narrative to
give you meaning.*
— Peter Greenaway

We often question and seek for meanings and definitions of things, which leads to a deficit on arrival to the truth. There are limitations when trying to read images as text. Allegory of the textual based way of looking and reading become powerless in Greenaway's cinema, we often come to ask the question, do image always have to be experienced in accompany by literature-reading way of looking. The experience of a realist manner of reading becomes impossible to reconcile.

Greenaway's films are compositions of framing, and the feeling it invokes by looking. An emotion invoked by the visualisation of text reading, then on to the experience of looking. Greenaway's scenography is emblematic of the aesthetic stage and the fixation on these divertments.



REIMAGININGS OF CHINESE CULTURE IN FASHION

Literal translation seemingly results in an obscure language of symbolic translation read from a fictional narrative. Done right it is there to appreciate, wrong doing, by being literal, on the surface, is misplaying the symbolic redefinition.

Metaphoric translation can be read from both gazes by disrupting. This reconfiguration results in something not directly recognisable. Anything can result in a different way of conducting translation.

Ethnographic translation is an alternative way of translating. Costume's tendency is to be as realistic to its source as possible with minimum alteration. In practice, how distorting or reconstructing the historical arrangement into something that is non-linear, in the way in which the visual language results in historical non-specificity. This raises the questions

of whether a mirrored-reality portrait is itself a magical realism or can it instead be sought through a poetic translation? If an obscurity is portrayed with realism, how is it considered as obscure? This draws a comparison to the practice of fashion and the conclusion that is in sync with the themes of the real and unreal as an imagined landscape of historical references reimagined. Specifically, how Chinese historical references can be translated in ways that do not appear too historically referential.

An example of translation with a symbolic means is John Galliano's debut collection for Dior in 1997. The collection featured kimono-style jackets, cropped sleeves, mandarin collars and pearl trims, accessorised with Chinese lacquered umbrellas.



Whether this was pure Chiniserie theatricality, in essence an 'Eastern Dream', a cross-cultural referencing occurred which bared little sensibility to anything relating to cultural relevance.

Seen today, it would be considered as cultural appropriation, a territory that would err on the side of caution rather than be embraced as forward-thinking and cerebral ingenuity. It was a fetishisation of what the West perceived to be the East, a vision of colonial Shanghai lingering on unwanted stereotypes. In other ways it was a moment of theatricality, a way of looking that is not strictly policing a translation rule whether (in)appropriately or not. It was both the fictional and fantasm of Chineseness.

Through an Ethnographic translation a distortion, or transmutation, occurred. The distortion is both a fantasm and a fiction. Cultural representation perceived in another gaze. Yet not all fetishised gazes result in 'something other' by perception. Perception shifts in subjectivity by offering an accumulation of experiences, whether physical or immaterial. Cross-cultural translation should not be read through a singular gaze resulting in a post-colonial gaze. It is a concept which goes beyond its existence, the human desire of the fantastic brilliance of something other, stimuli occurs to fancy, fancy of fictions, fictions of imagined imagery.

Ethnographical translation results in realism, a state of fancy isn't prioritised by being authentic to its history, considering the contextual background. The realism can only be an interpretation to a closeness as if it is not here or there but somewhere to arriving close to completion, yet never the same as authenticity.

A replica is a replica, it is never the same as the original, almost there but never there. It arrives at the moment where it is almost complete but can advance no further. It cannot be justifiably culturally relevant to the cultural origins and integrity from which it was inspired by.

Dramaturgically curated, the visual language used selectively in subtlety, in comprehension to the state of achieving a harmonious undertone, obscurity can only lay beneath the surface, not for literal seeking.

Figs 22-23
Christian Dior Haute Couture 1997
Design by John Galliano



Through the Looking Glass

John Galliano portrays the East with a rather fantastic poetic gaze, alluring the audience into witnessing a mystic folklore with his romance, accompanied with flamboyant brilliancy as embroideries, as the powdery lipstick, as rouge lush on the cheek, as the head piece, as a luring glance, all comes together possessed by spirit of 'John's Orient'.

There is no doubt that, John's Orient, aching in romanticism, seized the spectacular through a fantasised dream. It is not a narrative, or a reading. It is an exuberant erotic dance with Oriental Jazz, it is an affair with a flirtatious exotic manner. It is about the looking-ness and reinventing.

The ethnography is vulnerable when it encounters fantasy. As John states, he plays with the art of seduction.

Chinoiserie motifs have been a frequently revisited element through his artistic work both at Dior and his eponymous label, for the work is not about representing a sense of cultural accuracy from the East, it is rather a dream-like reinterpretation dancing to allure the audience through imagination.

If John uses Chinoiserie only on a level of undertone for the 1997 collection, the couture collection in 2003 is transient to a more theatrical representation. The silhouettes from 97's being rather fitted and mold-on-body bias cuts, whereas 03's becomes sculptural spheres that live around and expand beyond the physical body in abstract forms. The theatricality of 2003 becomes apparent rather than allurement of simply the characters of 1997. The garment that becomes the body.

Figs 24-25
Christian Dior Haute Couture 2003
Design by John Galliano

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It is through the gaze of entering the garden, transcending to invoke a feeling of obscure melancholia, the uncanny feeling of encountering something familiar which is not. Reencountering this familiarity leads to a strangeness, a lingering of the last encounter becomes the melancholy of the present. The immediacy of encountering is delayed and sudden in reencountering.

The garden is an allegory, a garden of illusion, the illusion of desire amongst the conflicting morality of the Confucian's notion of confinement. There is an unattainable centre for the real and unreal within confinement, the confinement being the construction of oppression. The dream landscape appears in endless movement, moving finitely toward infinitude.

The dream-in-dream stretches beyond its subjects, an encounter of the world inseparable from both the dreamer and the dream.

Ying Yang Real Unreal Balance One Truth Untruth Circle Illusion Cycle Dream Reality Imagined

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