

# Walking and staying in constructed imagination: three liminal experiences in history of walking in the landscape

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## Abstract

*Walking treads not only on the palpable site but also through the stroller's imaginary territory. This dual nature of walking is frequently illustrated in historical literature and pictures. These two forms of walking create a liminal and absorptive movement between the palpable and imaginary landscapes through the body-mind as a living medium. The essay examines this subject in three folds: first, discerning three modes of liminal experiences in a range of selected historical materials: namely, approaching, lingering, and wandering in reverie, following an increasing extent in the scale of absorption; second, presenting the three effects of absorption and their agencies and media; third, assessing how these effects were received by the historical walkers. Overall, this cross-cultural reading shows that walking in imagination is not a theoretical idea but an empirical form of absorptive experience that involves both external and internal media. The essay further implies that, with adequate studies on this subject, we could rethink the rapport between materials and their meanings and associations in Landscape Architecture and envision a humanistic landscape of constructed imagination that not only appeals to the senses but also touches our soul and mind.*

## Keywords

*History of walking, walking in imagination, walking in the landscape, tourist gaze, landscape reception, imaginary landscape, absorption, reverie.*

### **Introduction: the dual nature of walking in the landscape**

Walking in the landscape is never a bodily engagement alone. In his essay, Leslie Stephen (1902) gives the title of “true walker” to those who value the “cerebration” stimulated by the muscular effort. Stephen’s empiricist coupling of walking with the variety of “musings and imaginings” echoes what the German philosopher Karl Gottlob Schelle (1802) propounded a century earlier in his *Die Spaziergänge oder die Kunst spazieren zu gehen* (The Promenade or the Art of Walking). Rooted in Kantian and Romantic aesthetics, Schelle ([1802] 1996, p.31-34) establishes the essential link between the corporeal and intellectual movement in leisurely walking and suggests that its pleasure relies on the relaxing and spontaneously wandering mind that responds to the stimulations from the surrounding landscape. Such free mind of *promeneurs* would be bound by intentions of the travelers to the Lake District in searching after picturesque beauty (Gilpin, [1792] 2019), to whom the appreciation of nature is more a shared and cultured ideal than merely a personal encounter. Nevertheless, all three theses imply an imaginary landscape generated or procured during the walk on a site.

In August 1802, the same year Schelle published his thesis on walking, Samuel Taylor Coleridge took a week-long solitary walk in the Cumbrian mountains.

Coleridge kept a notebook to record his immediate thoughts of the landscape he experienced, depicting a multilayered landscape received by the poet’s drifting mind as much as by his feet: straying from a scene associated with Salvator Rosa’s landscape to the country folklores and the genius loci appearing in his dream (Coleridge, 1957, 1207-1228) (Fig. 1). Despite detailed recording of the components and topographic forms, the landscape of fells captured by Coleridge is more of an impressionistic mental map than a survey of material reality.

The historical account of stomping ground is surely not restricted to only sublime landscapes. The response from the stroller’s imaginary journey can be sometimes unpleasant as the *flâneur* in cities would challenge the authorship by Romantic minds. The eighteenth-century London walker in John Gay’s *Trivia* (1716) is not a carefree wanderer as he struggles in evading lurking danger, sanitary repulsion, and physical contact with the crowd (Fig. 2). The poet unfolds a “kinetic geography” forever in motion and a poetic composite of both imaginary constructs alluding to classical epics and satirical response to the chaotic urban reality (Brant et al., 2009, pp. 62-73, 149-166).

This dual nature of walking in the landscape leads to a preliminary point on this subject: walking treads not only on the palpable site but also the imagination.



fig.1 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Sketch map & notes of the Lake District from *Notebook* (Vol. II), from his walking tour in August 1802 (photo credit: British Library).

The two forms of walking create a liminal movement through the body-mind, which provides delicate faculty of hosting the imaginary landscape and the agency of responding to the palpable reality. For strollers, the movement through the imaginary territory offers not only a personal communion with the landscape but also provides a cognitive reading of reality with an affectingly stronger presence – as John Dixon Hunt (2004, p.36-37) calls, a “virtual reality”. This liminal experience is typical when strolling, particularly when strollers slow down and get absorbed to an extent that the mind now sets out the journey. Yet this entrance into an imaginary walk has not received enough attention in contemporary landscape design practice.

Partly because it has too broad a range of agencies and nuanced subjective responses to generalize a universal formula for effective implementation; and more pragmatically, the quality control process would find no jurisdiction over this ‘imaginary territory’ beyond its readily available material specifications and safety regulations.

Could today’s design practice recover this tradition in landscape architecture from a time where the lack of material abundance (in construction options) and technological advancement urged both design construction and reception to find effective media to enhance and amplify the pleasure of walking? With rich historical resources on this subject, including theses, visitation accounts, and pictorial ev-



fig.2  
Edward Penny, *A City Shower*, 1764, depicts a maid splashing passersby as she wrings her mop  
(photo credit: Museum of London).

idence, a study into a range of different media and effects of the imaginary stroll will bring forth the give and take between the material and the imaginary territories through walking. How and to what extent can the material landscape enthrall a stroller? In what form is the imaginary landscape configured, and what can influence the composition? How does the stroller respond? These concerns suggest a stroller's gaze behind the encounter, and it is not bound by the material site. Therefore, this essay has a twofold purpose: first, through a series of selected historical walks to demonstrate the nuances in the effects of absorption through different media, and how the strollers have received their journeys in immediate circumstances and cultural matrix; second, to imply how further adequate studies on this subject can tap into the practice in Landscape Architecture.

### **Walking in imagination: an empirical form of absorption**

Before diving into the historical journeys, we have some premises to clarify about the approach and the selection of materials in this essay. First, walking in imagination is considered not a theoretical idea in this research. Although we have seen attempts to 'theorize' this subject, its empirical nature is rooted in the act of walking (in immediate experience or one's memory). We are naturally inclined to this imaginational affinity of walking where the 'landscape' is presented in pictorial media or even ekphrastic writing. One of the earliest records offered by Vitruvius (*De arch.* 7.5.2) acclaims the ancient Greek frescoes along their porticoes or sheltered walks (*ambulatio*), where the naturalistic landscape backdrop hosts Homeric *dramatis personae* and their journeys – Odyssey as a remarkable example noted by the author. Vitruvius' account of painted walks and the recent classical studies show how an interpretive landscape takes an empirical form (decorated along the walk and only to be affectively received in motion) to fa-

cilitate a double journey – walking in the *ambulatio* and walking in the painting<sup>1</sup> (O'Sullivan, 2007). Besides the animating effects caused by the walking body, Vitruvius's (*De arch.* 7.5.3-4) argument for painting with verisimilitude at the theatre walk elicits an empirical perspective on absorptive effects: by drawing a convincing mental image from the media, the stroller is simultaneously drawn into the imaginary landscape.

Henry Wotton (1624, pp. 109-110) describes the absorption in an Italian garden with a theatrical analogy, where the "beholder" was "conveyed" by undulating topographies to "various entertainments of his scent, and sight" and "that every one of these diversities was as if he had been magically transported into a new garden".

In *Encyclopédie méthodique: Beaux Arts*, under the term *ordonnance* (arrangement or organization of elements in artistic creations), the editor offers another example of absorption:

"Moreover, the subject and the form of the picture can sometimes lead one to follow it: yet the critics do not seem to be wrong when they wish to be able to walk in imagination around the groups, and for there to be air between them as there is in nature."<sup>2</sup> (Watelet et al., 1788, p.575).

Here, the art critics pursue an effect that is close to the experience suggested in Vitruvius' *ambulatio*, while without a bodily movement in parallel. This purely mental walk requires the stroller (now a spectator) to be enthralled by the pictorial media, with the body staying still while the mind sets out a journey within the spaciousness (*air*) of the imaginary domain. This form of what we may call 'wandering in reverie' has a resemblance to the theatre in a designed landscape, where walkers could repose at, say, an exedra or a grotto, and continue to wander their gaze over a framed prospect or a live performance (Fig. 3).

This form of absorption within the exchange between garden and theatre was exhaustively ex-



**fig.3**  
Giovanni Guerra, Parnassus and 'theatre' design for Pratinolo,  
drawing circa 1598  
(photo credit: Albertina, Wien).

plored in the Italian Renaissance until it evolved into a new form of engagement in the eighteenth-century French picturesque gardening, a response to the so-called *jardin anglais* which had been recently introduced. In his influential *Essai sur les jardins*, Claude-Henri Watelet (1774, p.57-58) underscores the quintessence of liberal arts to evoke movement appreciably and explains how a static image in landscape painting should impart an impression to trigger the motion and sound in imagination. Nevertheless, Watelet (1774, p.56) also points out how the effect of receiving a landscape painting is different from a stroll in a picturesque park, referring the latter to “theatrical scenes” without personage. This theatrical *paragone* with designed landscapes suggests that the strollers are not just theatre audiences but potentially actors themselves in the land-

scape (Fig. 4). Walking in imagination thus takes a performative form in strolling in public parks.

Arguably, it is following this theatrical hint that Watelet ([1774] 2003, P.50) summarizes his ‘picturesque plot’ for the ‘performers’:

“The first principle behind the layout of any promenades or gardens is the following: to combine constantly elements that arouse our curiosity and compel us to move about with elements that fix our attention and invite us to linger.”

It is crucial to note that Watelet highlights the negotiation between the designed landscape and the stroller’s mind. The change of body location in space is only the consequence; what initiates the motion is the extent of attention and absorption, i.e., the empirical form of walking in imagination.



fig.4

A design for a fan, anonymous, Austrian, from the eighteenth century, displays the visitors involved in the various entertainments during a park stroll, to be received as a 'performance' (photo credit: The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1949).

All these excerpts rove around the effects of absorption in walking delivered by different media and in distinct forms. We also find different extent of absorption in these materials, which can provide an approach to examine the various effects. Given rich historical literature on this subject, studies would have to confront situations of a great variety. The essay only examines three discernible liminal experiences: approaching, lingering, and wandering in reverie, following an increasing extent in the scale of absorption in walking (Fig. 5).

The following sections will show more nuances in each experience, primarily focusing on the eighteenth-century English and French examples; a few early Chinese materials are also introduced to offer a cross-cultural perspective on this subject.

### Approaching: a choreography of attention

Wotton's (1624) experience of being "magically transported" in the garden stroll suggests that he was approaching without noticing his attention being seized until he was enveloped in a new presence of the landscape. The effect is clear, but questions remain on how this absorption occurs and what prompts the mind and makes the feet follow to get close to a setting. Below we will revisit a few strolls in the gardens at Stowe in the mid-eighteenth century, which reflect different mental responses to the experience of approaching.

By 1749, after nearly five decades of improvements under Viscount Cobham and his architects and garden designers, including William Kent and 'Capability' Brown<sup>3</sup>, the gardens at Stowe had already gained its national reputation and attracted domestic and foreign visitors. Hosting plenty of Italianate and Gothic architectural insertions (*fabriques*) within an English country estate of *la belle nature*, the gardens laid out a rich iconological territory that fascinated

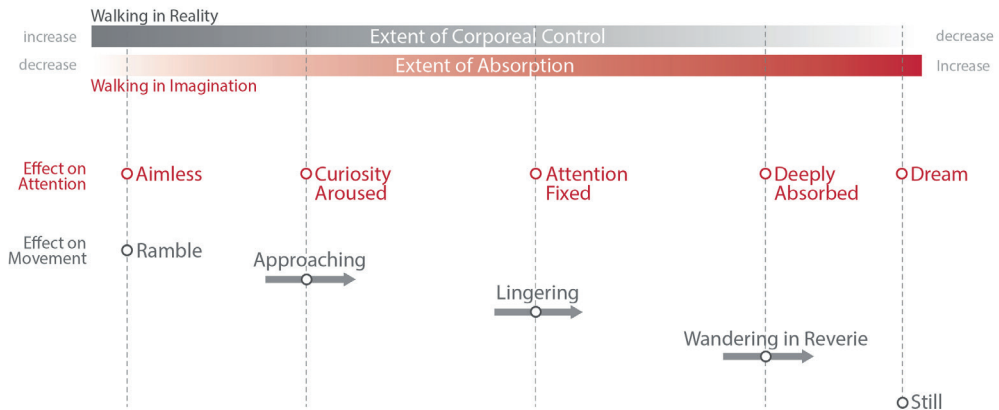


fig.5

The dual nature of walking and where the three liminal experiences are placed at a scale of absorption in walking (illustrated by the author).

numerous poets to express their imaginations from the tours. Cobham's nephew, Gilbert West (1732), devotes his 'animated' reception in verses chiefly to the *fabriques* and their classical allusions, leaving the walks in-between with only typical 'filler' passages: "windings of the mazy wood", "shift now the closer scene", or "forsaking now the covert of the maze/ along the broader walk's more open space".<sup>4</sup> This omission of approach from one feature to another would be suggested by the garden guidebooks in the next decade (available at the local inns since 1744), as we see in Benton Seeley's (1750) plates, where the "views" are indeed vignettes of insertions cropped from their contextual landscape, with features in the vicinity juxtaposed against each other (Fig. 6).

But how do these iconological insertions at Stowe prompt the visitors without classical knowledge or interest? The complexity in verbal inscriptions and rhetorical figures may bring fancies for visitors like West, but not all visitors appreciate 'footnotes' to supervise their reading and direct their attention.

On this concern, the *Dialogue upon the Gardens ... at Stow* by William Gilpin (1748), based on his visit in 1747, provides another perspective, suggesting an expressive visual arrangement of the *fabriques* could effectively bring them to the fore. Gilpin sets the *Dialogue* between two characters with different mentalities: *Callophilus* favors the artistry in the gardens and quickly communicates with the iconographies, while *Polyphthon* is more intuitively curious and inclined to natural expressions. Thus, we have two often contrasting responses to the same address. When the two fellows approach the Temple of Ancient Virtue at the Elysian Fields, *Polyphthon* blurts out his immediate impression:

"Pray, what building is that before us? I cannot say I dislike the taste it is designed in. It seems an antique." (Gilpin, 1748, p. 19).

For *Polyphthon*, who is less familiar with the emblematic meaning in the feature, an exotic visual prompt could quickly grasp his curiosity.



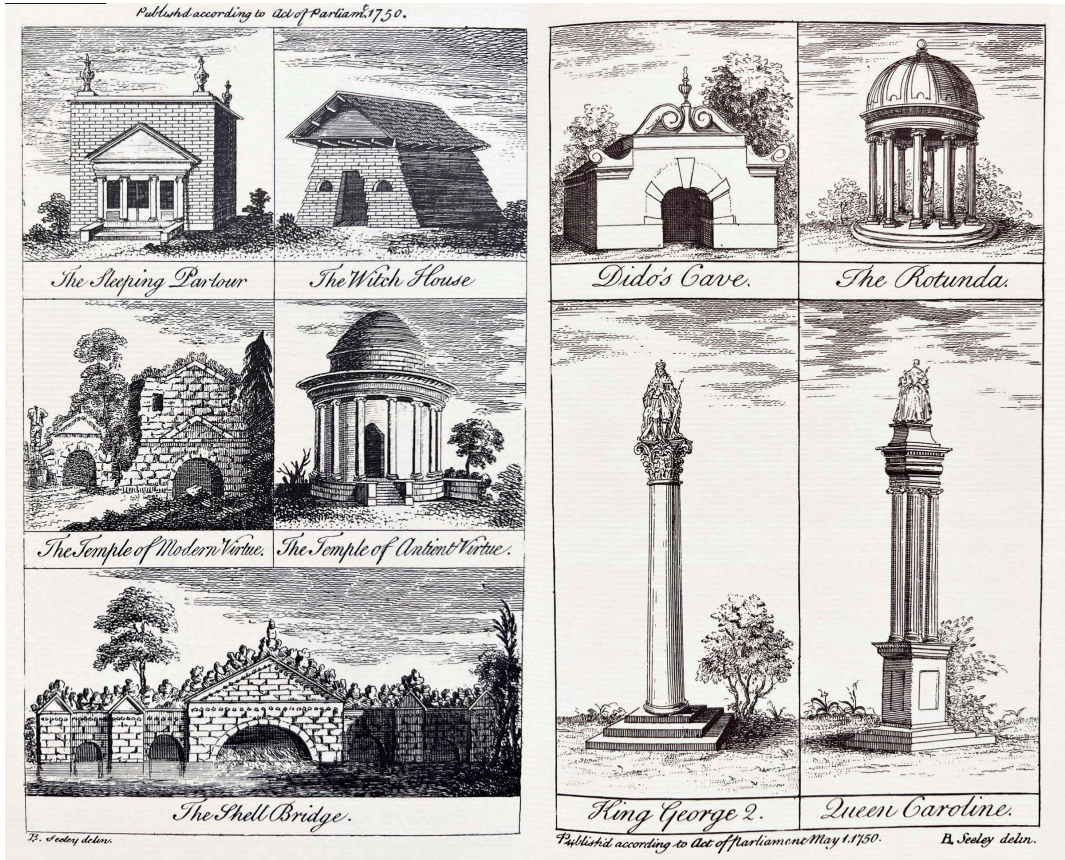


fig.6

Plates from Benton Seeley's *Views of the Temples and other Ornamental Buildings in the Gardens at Stowe*, 1750.

After listening to the 'pedantic' *Callophilus* explaining the meanings, his attention is again seized by another feature with a contrasting style – a ruin (Fig. 6, Fig. 7):

*Calloph.* Yes, Sir, it is intended to contrast with it not only in the landskip, but likewise in its name and design. Walk a little nearer, and you will see its intention.

*Polyptth.* I can see nothing here to let me into its design..."

(Gilpin, 1748, p. 20-21)

By placing "name and design" against *landskip*, *Callophilus* distinguishes the visual prompt from the verbal in involving one's imagination. With

*Callophilus* appreciating the emblems, the slow *Polyptth* still blunders with his deciphering, although he has swiftly noticed the visual contrast. In other words, it is the literal figure instead of the rhetorical one that captures *Polyptth*'s attention and makes him approach. It seems that the emblematical address is more affective in detaining the stroller in close proximity than drawing their attention from a distance.

Later in his *Observations on Modern Gardening*, Thomas Whately (1770) gives an extensive discourse on the effects between emblematical and expressive characters in landscape. Although his insistence on not using engravings to complement

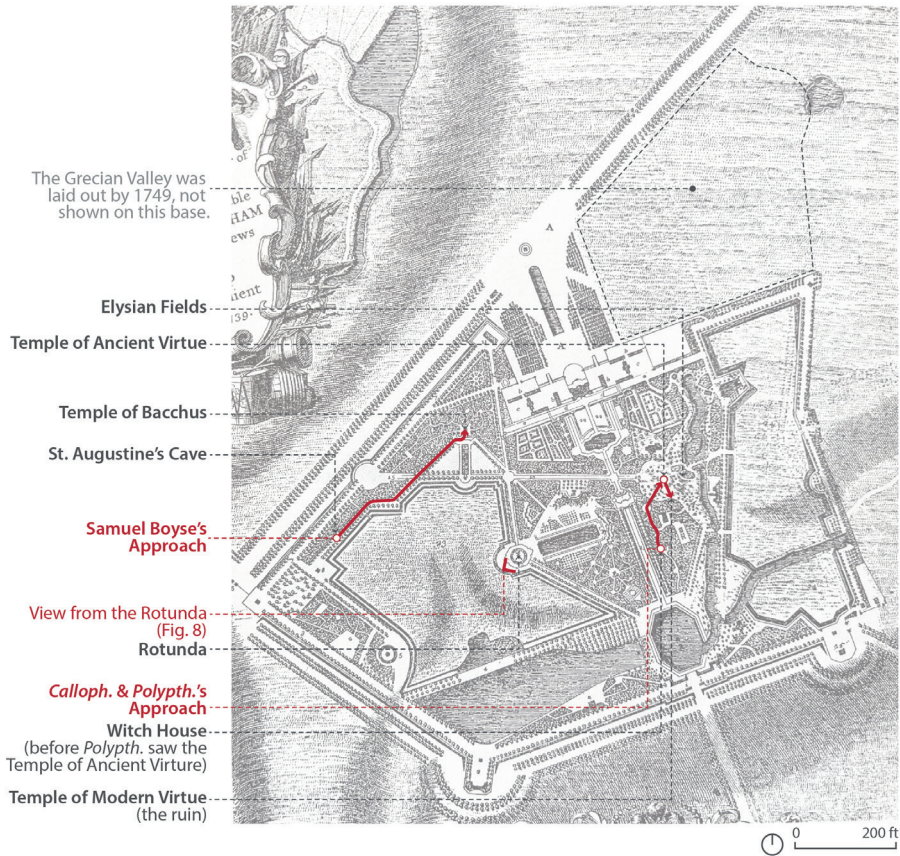


fig.7  
A map that highlights the fabriques, views, and approaches at Stowe gardens mentioned in this essay (base map: detail of Sarah Bridgeman's 1739 plan; annotated by the author).

his “illustrated descriptions” indicates his preference for verbal responses to the landscape (Hunt, 2016, p. 62-73), Whately (1770, p.151) privileges natural and expressive prompts over the emblematical, for the latter “makes no immediate impression” and “must be examined, compared, perhaps explained”. Whately would probably sympathize with *Polyphthon* for his laborious search for detailed allegory at Stowe. From this standing, Whately (1770, p.155-156) argues how an effective visual arrangement could ‘convey’ the stroller in a ‘magical transportation’:

“In a prospect...the attention is caught at first by the circumstances...but the cheerfulness which

these infuse into the mind, expands afterwards to other objects than those immediately presented to the eye; ...even without the assistance of buildings; ... the mind is elevated, depressed, or composed... and we soon lose sight of the means by which the character is formed; we forget the particular objects it presents; and giving way to their effects, without recurring to the cause, we follow the track they have begun, to any extent, ... the scenes of nature have a power to affect our imagination and sensibility.”

Whately’s appreciation of using the continuous prospects and successive scenes to choreograph the stroller’s attention leads to a further argument upon the relationship between the imaginary walk and the physical site:

**fig.8**

Jacques Rigaud, *View from the Rotunda*, drawing from 1733, commissioned by Charles Bridgeman and published in albums in 1739 (photo credit: Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1942).

“The walk is then a communication, not between points of view, ... but between the several parts of a garden, ... the eye and the mind are not always confined to one tract; they expatiate at times, and have been relieved before they return to it.” (Whately, 1770, p. 209).

With this claim, another poet-stroller Samuel Boyse (1742, 120) would concur when he approaches from the thatched St. Augustine’s Cave to the brick Temple of Bacchus at Stowe (Fig. 7):

“So just the contrast—and the point so true,  
Tis all that nature—all that art can do!  
In sweet delusion is the fancy lost,  
Nor knows attention where to settle most!  
Thus from the cave through the receding green,  
Thy temple, son of Semele was seen.”

Boyse describes the release and return of attention as the stroller’s mind wanders astray before a contrasting scene reseizes him. However, this unrelenting emphasis on high visibility in the de-

signed landscape can also have a counter-effect. Jemima, Marchioness Grey (1748) wrote her genuine criticisms towards Stowe after a four-hour walk in July 1748:

“There is scarcely anything concealed in it, or any object you come upon without having seen it a mile off and in fifty different views in your journey of five miles round the enclosure... the garden...is so crowded with buildings that as you see them at a distance seem almost at top of one another that each loses its effect.”

The competing effects and the overwhelming artistry of the *fabriques* gave Grey an impression of “the least variety and surprise” in the landscape, which tired her curiosity to approach<sup>5</sup>. Whately (1770, p. 216) also noticed this counter-effect at the view from the Rotunda, where most of the objects are visible but “want both connection and contrast”, in consequence “all blended together... without meaning” (Fig. 7, Fig. 8).

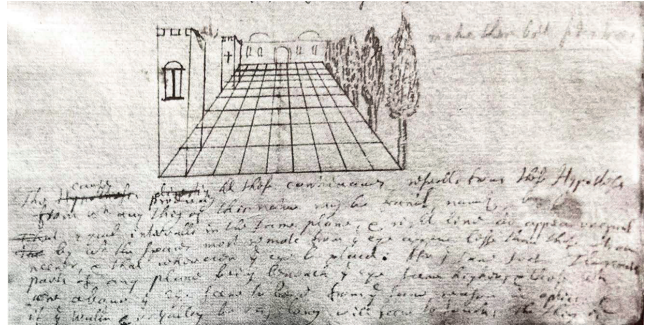
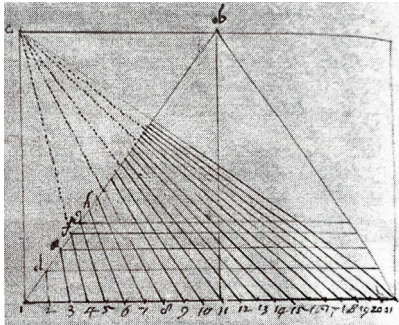


fig.9

John Evelyn, sketch of perspective grid for the trompe-l'oeil (left) and an illustration of a mural at the termination, from his manuscript of *Elysium Britannicum, or the Royal Gardens* at page 161-162, circa 1660 (photo from its first publication in 2000).

We shall not ignore the growth of woods along with Earl Temple's later alterations to Stowe gardens would soften and conceal the *fabriques* to some extent and would add the variety to the walks in-between.

### Lingering: negotiation between the site and the imagination

We will examine a lingering experience different from the curious excursion or the confusion and fear of going astray that usually link to the labyrinthian walk. This lingering mode follows strollers' approach to a scene that has previously aroused their curiosity and will now fix the attention and slow down or stop the steps. Here comes an uneven movement where the body moves slower than the wandering mind, a liminal stage between walking and staying. We will revisit a few historical examples of such imaginary movements that all confront a common challenge in landscape architecture—the termination of walks, with materials from John Evelyn's late-seventeenth-century unfinished *Elysium Britannicum, or The Royal Gardens*, and the eighteenth-century so-called English landscape gardening.

Every landscape designer must face the termination of walks when the circulation design meets site constraints: reaching the limit of territory or simply having a dead wall at the end. This spatial confine-

ment challenges designers to operate upon strollers' imagination and rethink the perceptive relationship between the site and its larger landscape.

The Renaissance garden designers turned to the perspectives (optical scenes), which, at the time, already had its successful technical applications in theatre and scenography<sup>6</sup> (Hewitt, 2011). Evelyn (2000, p. 215) acclaims the “extraordinary effects” of perspective “as it relates to gardens...for the amplifying of contracted and straitened places” and,

“...for upon such an obstacle, *perspective* ... can do wonders, and is able to give the eye a {lyncean} passage [even] through a stone wall; by seemingly protracting the walk *à perte de vue* {and to loss of object}....”<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 9).

Evelyn (2000, p. 215) goes on to offer an exemplar of how this trompe l'oeil technique affects the strollers at the garden termination:

“... having nothing but a dead wall ... at the end of the entry of his little house which ... might be seen: caused a garden to be so rarely painted and dressed in perspective that everybody stopped as they passed by to look on it and divers considerable desire to go into his garden...”

The application of perspective at garden termination is an absorptive strategy of creating an illusory depth of space when there is little in reality. Faced

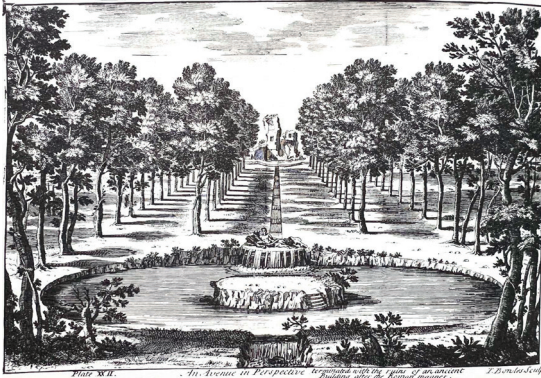


fig.10

Plates from Batty Langley's *New Principle of Gardening*, 1728, shows a perspective of avenue terminated with the ruins of a building after the Roman manner (above) and two closer views of Roman ruins for the termination of a walk.

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with these visual effects, strollers would slow down in front of the wall and wander “into his garden” as an imaginary extension to the otherwise bounded journey. This pictorial distortion to provoke an imaginary walk would evolve in eighteenth-century landscape gardening (as Alexander Pope put, “all gardening is landscape-painting”) (Spence, 1966, 606). According to Joseph Spence (1966, 610, 1130-1133), Pope and Philip Southcote both applied a series of perspectival techniques in gardening: “perspective” (looking under trees to distant object), “prospect” (a clear view of looking through trees), “distancing” (make an object look farther than it is), and “attracting” or “contracting” (foreshortening). However, we shall not think that these painting techniques only deceptively “help the eye to any more distant ... view” (Spence, 1966, 1136). When William Shenstone (1764, p. 126), the owner of the Leasowes, discusses the effects of placing a ruin at the termination of a garden walk, he demarcates visual and mental reception:

“Objects [at the termination] should indeed be less calculated to strike the immediate eye, than the judgment or well-formed imagination; as in painting.”

Evelyn (2000, p. 216) would agree with this associationist view on the imaginative effect (instead of the pictorial) from the ruined termination in garden stroll:

“where at the extreme of an garden [ample] walk, with stood a very high wall of stone; well painted on which was painted only a sky with clouds; before this wall was erected another wall of or screen of stone of equal height [and convenient distance] whereon the ruin of a Roman Antiquity was painted; which having several openings... as the spectators walked or changed their steps, represent the motions, or rack of the clouds, seeming to fly before the wind: as it we familiarly behold it ....”<sup>8</sup>

What Evelyn’s learned strollers would associate with (as they “familiarly behold it”) is the classical natural philosophy ‘painted’ in poems, as he goes on to quote Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* to provide a reference for the animating scene the strollers would see as they linger in front of a painted Roman ruin. Some visual evidence of this termination form can be found in Batty Langley’s (1728) plates for his *New Principles of Gardening* (Fig. 10). Interestingly, Langley advises his reader/spectator to behold the perspective only with one eye through a roll of paper to achieve similar effects from this ‘imaginary walk’.



fig.11

Louis Carrogis dit Carmontelle, *Vue du Moulin à eau et du Pont qui y conduit*, engraving from his publication of *Jardin de Monceau* in 1779 (Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France).

This absorptive strategy to turn the termination into an extension is not limited to murals and ruins. As the English country seats started opening their immediate gardens to the larger country landscape, strategies such as the distant eye-catcher<sup>9</sup> and bridge with a winding river<sup>10</sup> would enhance this particular repertoire. Nonetheless, they all allude to the original intent to make strollers linger with their imaginative powers at the disguised termination.

### Wandering in reverie: a cross-cultural reading

Now we come to the third mode of journey with the most absorbed attention to the imaginary domain: wandering in reverie. Reverie is not slumber, the latter is a lethargic effect like that envelops *Polyphthon* in the *Sleeping Parlour* at *Stowe* (Gilpin, 1748, p. 17-18). What interests us here is the situation where the media create a presence insomuch that it enralls strollers to wander within their imaginary domains.

The dream that Joseph Addison (1710) recorded of sauntering through his ideal 'English garden' (with a political undertone) is a close experience to wandering in reverie. As Addison took a nap on a bench during his walk, his imagination started blending his memory of a pleasant stroll he took in a country seat with his fresh impression from reading the *Tabula Cebetis*—an imaginary journey in an allegorical painting (Addison, 1710). This text provides an example of how the imaginary wander is composed of the stroller's memories, although not very helpful to address the designer's concern. The material place that lulls Addison to reverie has no direct connection to the place he wanders in his dream.

We may recall the theatrical effects in the thriving picturesque vogue in eighteenth-century France. Louis Carrogis dit Carmontelle (1779, p. 4) transposed the theatrical tradition in his design of the *Parc Monceau* for the Duc de Chartres between 1773



fig.12

Louis Carrogis dit Carmontelle, detail from a *transparent*, depicts a promenade in a park like Parc Monceau, circa 1783 (credit: digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program).

and 1774, in pursuit of creating a “*pays d’illusions*” (place of illusions) to “make [visitors] forget where they are”. Despite his contemporary critiques<sup>11</sup> (Morel, [1776] 1802, p. 207-208; de Brancion, 2003, p. 131-133), Carmontelle (1779, p.4) defended his intent to dramatize the experience of the picturesque stroll by deploying a variety of seventeen theatrical scenes and exotic folies to create a wandering voyage through “all the times and all the places” (Fig. 11). This theatrical reference in absorptive strategy is also found in Carmontelle’s later invention of *transparent*: a continuous promenade with figures and successive scenes well-painted on a long scroll of translucent Whatman paper mounted on a dark strip, only to be viewed in an adapted optical box with handles to scroll the *transparent* as if animating the walk (de Brancion, 2008, p. 33-34) (Fig. 12). A versatile *amuseur* to the upper societies, Carmontelle combined the salon spectacle with the illusionary wander in one portable device: placing the optical box in darkness against the only opened window and scrolling the painted promenade with narrative and music – only to immerse

the viewers in the virtual wander (de Brancion, 2003, p. 168-175). With little written evidence, we do not know how this entertainment was received by his audience ‘*promeneurs*’; yet the expected effect is arguably aligned with Carmontelle’s intent in Monceau gardens – to wander in other times and places.

Another experience of wandering in reverie appears in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s letter to Charlotte von Stein after his evening visit to Wörlitz on 14 May 1778, in which Goethe (1908, p. 240) calls the designed landscape “a dream” and describes his wandering as listening to a “fairy tale”:

“Yesterday evening, as we wandered through the lakes, canals, and woods, I was very moved how the gods allowed the Prince to create a dream around him. When one passes through, it feels like a fairy tale that one listens to, and it has fully the character of the Elysian Fields. In the softest manifold, one [feature] flows into the other, the eye is settling on no height, and there is no desire for a single point [to focus]; one just moves around without asking where one had come from and where one will go to.”<sup>12</sup>



We could well guess how a sentimental landscape like Wörlitz suited a Romantic soul like Goethe, but unfortunately, we have no more details from this visit. Only could we learn that the smooth transition of allegorical features (not the conspicuous and competing effects from the insertions at Stowe gardens before 1749) may have delivered this magic, as well as the infinitely changing surroundings with nowhere to settle his attention. This effect of the smooth transition and ever-changing successive scenes contrasts what we have seen in all the approaches from Stowe visitors. By generating a ‘constant roam’ for the body, the transition also creates a peaceful but not dull duration for the mind-wander.

The above interpretation leads to two considerations: first, “the softest manifold” (*der sachtsten Mannigfaltigkeit*) of allegorical scenes does not fully resolve Whately’s antinomy between the emblematic and the expressive access to the “character” (missing a further explanation, we could still assume the superlative form refers to the layers of vegetation and the positioning of the features); second, is a resonance between the bodily roam and mental wander

necessary to this liminal experience? We find a distant response to these questions from a Chinese literatus’ imaginary roams within a painting, which reflects fresh perspectives on both two concerns. The experience is recorded in the painting commentary “Shu Li Boshi Shanzhuangtu hou” 书李伯时山庄图后 (On Li Gonglin’s *Mountain Retreat Picture*) by the Song scholar Su Shi 苏轼 ([circa 1100] 2000, 2190):

“Someone said to me: ‘When the reclusive scholar [lay Buddhist] Li Gonglin 李公麟 made a painting of his *Mountain Retreat*, it enables the spectators who enter the mountains to trust their feet and wander, naturally finding their paths, as if they had seen them in a dream or from a previous life. Seeing the springs and rocks, the grasses and trees in the mountains, the strollers would know their names without asking; encountering the fishermen, woodcutters, and hermits, they would recognize each person without knowing his name. Is this owing to an excellent memory?’ I say: ‘No ... it is according to the natural instinct without forcing oneself to remember how. When Li [the painter] was in the mountains, his attention was not fixed on any single thing; hence his spirit communed with all things, his insight accessed to all arts.’”<sup>13</sup>





fig.13

Detail from a copy after Li Gonglin 李公麟, *Mountain Retreat Picture* 山庄图, circa 1100 (credit: courtesy of The Collection of National Palace Museum in Taipei).

This excerpt addresses both the reception and the creation of an affective absorption in *Mountain Retreat Picture* (a pictorial landscape of the painter's Mountain Retreat), which enables the spectator to wander in reverie—as the first spectator describes, walking “in a dream” or even recognizing the scenes from “a previous life”. From an ancient copy after the original *Mountain Retreat Picture* (missing a few original scenes), we see a continuous topography of successive scenes unfolding with mountains and streams, groves and forests, gardens and pavilions—all guided by a winding stroll with an unsettled focus that endlessly twists and turns, splits and converges, soars up and dives low (Fig. 10). The original painting was framed in handscroll, which would give spectators a limited scope of vision as they unroll the painting from one hand and reroll up from the other—hence an animating reception to simulate the movement of stroll, like what we see in Carmontelle's *transparentes*. Yet neither the painting composition nor the handscroll frame explains how it could draw the spectator into a mental wander insomuch as “in a dream”. To answer that, we must search beyond the material media and examine the body-mind as the medium of facilitating such an absorptive wander.

It is noteworthy to mention a cultural and philosophical context coherent with this subject. Imaginary roaming through painting came from the early spiritual tradition of *wo you* 卧游 (reclined wander), a Taoist meditative practice to commune with the Spirit of Nature (not “nature” in European conception, but the Way or *sponte sua*, with its nature of indefinite modification) without any external medium<sup>14</sup>. The reclined wander was later integrated into receiving of a landscape painting. In the earliest Chinese thesis on painting, *Shan Shui Hua Xu* 山水画序, Zong Bing 宗炳 explicitly links walking in the actual landscape to the illusionary wander in spiritual domain via the pictorial media, as they share the same purpose to “rejoice one's Spirit”<sup>15</sup> (Bush and Shih, 2012, p. 38). This painterly affinity for walking in the landscape would be established by Su Shi's contemporary painter Guo Xi 郭熙 in his *Lin Quan Gao Zhi* 林泉高致, where he argues a well-painted landscape shall be suitable for wandering and living as it is in “true” *shan-shui* (the ideal landscape), hence the spectator can “sit while [the mind can] go on an endless wander among [or exploration for] streams and valleys without leaving the room”<sup>16</sup>. Thus, we see how the Chinese landscape painting is inherently distinguished from its

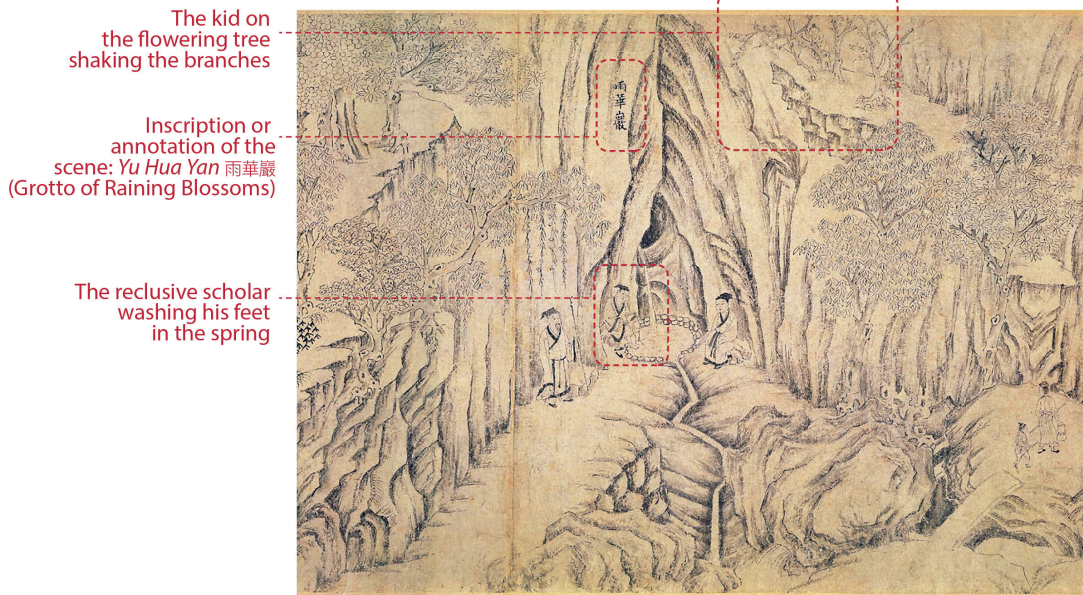


fig.14

The scene of Grotto of Raining Blossoms from a copy after Li Gonglin 李公麟, *Mountain Retreat Picture* 山庄图, circa 1100 (credit: courtesy of The Collection of National Palace Museum in Taipei; annotated by the author).

European counterpart as the mimesis of nature (considered as object); instead, both its creation and reception embody the spiritual activity that leads to the immanence of Nature (non-object) (Jullien, 2009, p.128-129).

With this cultural context, we can now revisit Su Shi (2000, 2190) and his fellow literati's wander in paintings, especially, the cultural meanings behind the "natural instinct", "unfixed attention", and "one's spirit communed with all things". It is essential to understand this experience in two folds: first, the painting is not a pictorial 're-presentation' of Li's Mountain Retreat, but a portal (a mental image) to access the owner/painter's ideal territory for a spiritual wander. In other words, the painting itself required the painter to bring forth his spiritual exploration in the mountains; second, the cultural mind offers a living medium to rehearse a bodiless wander within the painting. By eliminating the gap between the subject and the landscape, the tradition of reclined wander af-

firms for the spectator a landscape that is no longer an object to him, that the two would become mutual in the wandering mind.

This second fold about the peripatetic mind that wanders hither and yon in procuring poetic allusions and site scenery is not only the key to the wandering in painting, but also a fundamental concept to understand the first Chinese treatise on gardening: *Yuan ye* 园冶 (Ji, [1634] 1988).<sup>17</sup> Stanislaus Fung (2000, p. 134) argues that its last chapter "involves a meandering thinking that binds here and there, far and near, then and now, inner sentiment and external scene", which is not a logical mindset but "a metaphorical and historical thinking... in favor of the allusive language of concrete particulars". It is with this set of associative faculties that our literati get enthralled in the reverie. This association also provides an alternative view towards the debate between expressive and emblematic joint. A detail from *Mountain Retreat Picture* provides an example (Fig.14).

One of the scenes shows three reclusive scholars reposing near a cave, with one of them washing his feet in the spring. Above the cave, a kid climbs up on a flowering tree, from which fall the petals as he starts shaking the branches. One would notice the inscription (or the annotation of the scene) as well on the cliff: *Yu Hua Yan* 雨華巖 (Grotto of Raining Blossoms). Besides the frequently borrowed cultural image of “feet washing” in painting, as a classical allusion to a passage in *Mencius*, we see how the poetic form of fallen flowers (from the influential ancient fable *The Peach Blossom Spring* by Tao Yuanming 陶淵明) is translated into an expressively painted motion: rocking flowering branches above. This natural connection between the poetic emblem and its pictorial hint affirms Su Shi’s (2000, 2190) argument on “natural instinct” 天機 instead of “forced memory” 强记 in creating such an absorptive wander. Moreover, receivers familiar with *The Peach Blossom Spring* would understand this allusion opens another distant journey to an ethereal utopia (in a literary landscape).

The above analysis does not suggest that the traditional Chinese garden was historically received in the exact same way as ‘walking in painting’. Nevertheless, in the last chapter of *Yuan ye*, as Ji Cheng 计成 ([1634] 1988, p. 120) advises on “borrowing views” from the spring season, he gives an intrigu-

ing echo to what we have examined in the scene of Grotto of Raining Blossoms:

“Everywhere float drifting petals,  
And the drowsy threads of willows.  
If the cold still brings a slight chill,  
Hang up a high swing,  
You can enjoy yourself at leisure,  
And delight in the hills and ravines.  
Your thoughts will travel beyond the confines of this  
dusty world,  
And you will feel as though you were wandering  
within a painting.”<sup>18</sup>

### Conclusion

The narrow scope of this study inevitably leads to some biases. One apparent inclination is the primacy of sight over other senses. Another inadequacy lies in the limited authorship of the selected materials, hence the tendency to focus on the male gaze and their aristocratic perspectives. Indeed, the history of walking provides a plenitude of resources, of which this essay could only give a snapshot. Nonetheless, this glimpse starts outlining the assumptions and approaches to a subject that would require more adequate studies. First, the historical materials we reviewed support the initial premise: walking in imagination is not a theoretical idea but an empirical form of absorptive experience involving both external and internal media.

The strollers' previous experiences and memories will shape their anticipation and appreciation of the site. Therefore, it requires the researcher's attention shuttling between the palpable objectivity and the mental or bodily response from the addressee. Second, besides the interaction between the material landscape and the body-mind, the larger social context and cultural palimpsest play a significant role in addressing the absorptive effects. As we have seen from these examples, the underlying contexts resonate with a variety of ideas in cross-cultural history: the debate between artistry and nature in gardening, the emblematic and the expressive (or natural) joints in the landscape, and the cultural constructs of nature and landscape. This finding is also aligned with social studies on tourism, which argue the tourist gaze is constructed and reinforced by a variety of social practices (Urry, 1990). Lastly, historical reading on this subject would provide a nuanced perspective to 'construct' imagination in design practice. In Landscape Architecture, we should give the same weight to this imaginary domain as to material settings. Understanding walking in the landscape as embodying layers of connotation and imagination would challenge designers to rethink the mutual influence between the design intent and the stroller's reaction, the rapport between form and matter in their re-

ception (not to mention smartphones as important media nowadays), as well as the imaginative potency in both the site and the visitors.

To envision a landscape of constructed imaginations is to desire a humanistic milieu where we can dream and think from a leisurely stroll. It is a landscape that refuses congestion of senses and destitution of associations and meanings. As Watelet (1774, under 'Avant-propos') reminds us:

"We want not only that the materials and the uses of artistic creations please the senses, but also that the mind and soul should be touched and moved by the sentiments and impressions they experience."<sup>19</sup>

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Vitruvius gives another detailed account on the benefits and effects of walking in the chapter on colonnades and passages behind the theatre stage (*De arch.* 5.9.5)

<sup>2</sup>“au reste le sujet, et la forme du tableau peuvent quelquefois engager à la suivre: mais les critiques ne paraissent pas avoir tort quand ils veulent qu'on puisse se promener en imagination autour des groupes, et qu'il y ait de l'air entre eux comme il y en a dans la nature” (translated by the author).

<sup>3</sup>Brown was the head gardener since 1741 until Earl Temple inherited the estate in 1749 and took over the management in 1750.

<sup>4</sup>Only in one segment of the walk, West (1732, p.15-17) adapts a secret affair into the stroll, imagining of the fleeting maid leading the way.

<sup>5</sup>However, Grey offers one moment where she was struck by the “garden in miniature” from distance.

<sup>6</sup>Although there is no direct link between the stage painting and its appropriation in garden design, the symmetries between the two are visually evident, as we see in Sebastiano Serlio and Inigo Jones' stage designs with gardens or rural landscapes at backdrop. The participants at French and English court party were familiar with the scenic effects at the masque or *ballet de cour*.

<sup>7</sup>The quote from Evelyn's unfinished manuscript of *Elysium Britannicum* is faithfully reproduced from the original source under the editorial conventions in the transcription of *Elysium Britannicum*, except for spelling conversion (Evelyn, 2000, vii). Strikethrough is text lined through by Evelyn. Text in wavy brackets is interlineation by Evelyn. Text in italics is text underlined by Evelyn.

<sup>8</sup>Ditto.

<sup>9</sup>For instance, William Kent's Gothic eye-catcher at Rousham.

<sup>10</sup>Whately (1770, p.73-74) gives a detailed description on this strategy in his *Observations*.

<sup>11</sup>In his *Théorie des Jardins*, Jean-Marie Morel distinguishes the effects created by reality from those by the art, and calls the spreading of *fabriques* of all styles in garden as “*mélange bizarre*”. The critiques and Carmontelle's response on the issue of reality vs. imagination in garden design are recorded in *Correspondance Littéraire*, cited in *Carmontelle au Jardin des Illusions* (de Brancion, 2003, p. 131-133).

<sup>12</sup>I am indebted to Prof. Liliane Weissberg for this translation.

<sup>13</sup>Translated by the author.

<sup>14</sup>The early records of reclined wander are found in chapter “Jing cheng 精诚” in *Wenzi* 文子 (“闇若醇醪而甘臥以游其中”) and in chapter “Xiao yao you 逍遙游” in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (“若夫乘天地之正，而御六氣之辯，以游无穷者，彼且惡乎待哉”).

<sup>15</sup>“Thus, I live at leisure, regulating my vital breath, brandishing the wine-cup and sounding the lute. Unrolling paintings in solitude, I sit pondering the ends of the earth. Without resisting the multitude of natural promptings, alone I respond to uninhabited wilderness where grottoed peaks tower on high and cloudy forests mass in depth. ... What then should I do? I rejoice in my spirit, and that is all” (“於是闲居理气，拂觴鸣琴，披图幽对，坐究四荒，不违天励之藪，独应无人之野。峰岫崑崑，云林森眇，圣贤映於绝代，万趣融其神思，余复何为哉？畅神而已，神之所畅，孰有先焉”).

<sup>16</sup>“不下堂筵，坐穷泉壑” (translated by the author).

<sup>17</sup>Particularly, in the first and the last chapters as Ji Cheng discusses the “borrowing views”, this peripatetic mind underlies both the design skills and its reception, and even the writing itself (alas, lost in English translation).

<sup>18</sup>I have changed the format to match the original versified writing and slightly modified the translation.

<sup>19</sup>“C'est-à-dire, qu'on veut non seulement que les matériaux des ouvrages des Arts et l'emploi qu'on en fait, plaisent aux sens, mais aussi que l'esprit et l'âme éprouvent à leur occasion, des sentiments et des impressions qui les remuent et les attachent” (translated by the author).

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