EMPTY GARDEN

A LIMINOID JOURNEY TO NOWHERE IN SOMEWHERE

Abstract

This practice-led thesis offers interconnected reflections on the liminal space called a garden—the boundary space between nature and the man-made—and the liminoid experience found there. It explores various sensory experiences a person might have while walking through an East Asian garden and its possible equivalent, a contemporary art installation.

In terms of the form of my thesis, I chose the scroll, and scrolling, to present various forms of writing that can reflect the complex experience of an East Asian garden, in the hope that in wandering through my writings a complex and disconnected liminal and liminoid experience might unfold. The term 'liminoid' is defined by anthropologist Victor Turner as having characteristics of the liminal experience, but as optional, temporary and not inevitably involving the resolution of a personal crisis. If liminal is ritual, liminoid is leisure.

The Chinese landscape painting style *Shan Sui* is not a depiction of nature with one vanishing point, but a conceptual idea involving multiple, shifting perspectives. It seeks to capture the essence of nature and to draw out an ideal world. Similarly, the garden in East Asia is not conceived as a re-creation of nature, but as a combination of symbols pursuing a thoroughly ideological world. The fifteenth-century Korean painting, which appears at the beginning of my scroll, implies this kind of ideal through a space designated as a 'peach garden'. The conceptual pursuit of an ideal space of nature resulted in the extreme aesthetic garden practice called *Ui-won*, an imaginary garden made in eighteenth-century Korea.

These precedents have allowed me to rethink the meaning of creating a 'garden' in relation to certain forms of contemporary practice. Lois Weinberger understands artificially transferred plants as immigrants who have been separated from their home. He suggests that 'letting go' rather than cultivation makes the best garden. Haegue Yang articulates the loneliness and fear of immigrants, marginal people living in the era of speed. Through installations of vulnerable combinations of artificial objects, she explores the causes of the longing that has arrived with the digital age. Tomoko Takahashi's installations allow the viewer to reflect on sensory experience within an urban 'landscape' of excessive technological growth.

By reflecting on the liminal and liminoid experience of the garden, I attempt to articulate the conceptual disorientation felt in stone garden spaces and their contemporary urban equivalents. This thesis, comprising of both writing and installation works, explores the experience of liminal space informed by particular ideals evident in *Shan Sui* and *Ui-won* and manifest in East Asian gardens and in some works of contemporary art.

Jinjoon Lee

DPhil Fine Art
The Ruskin School of Art
St. Hugh's College
The University of Oxford

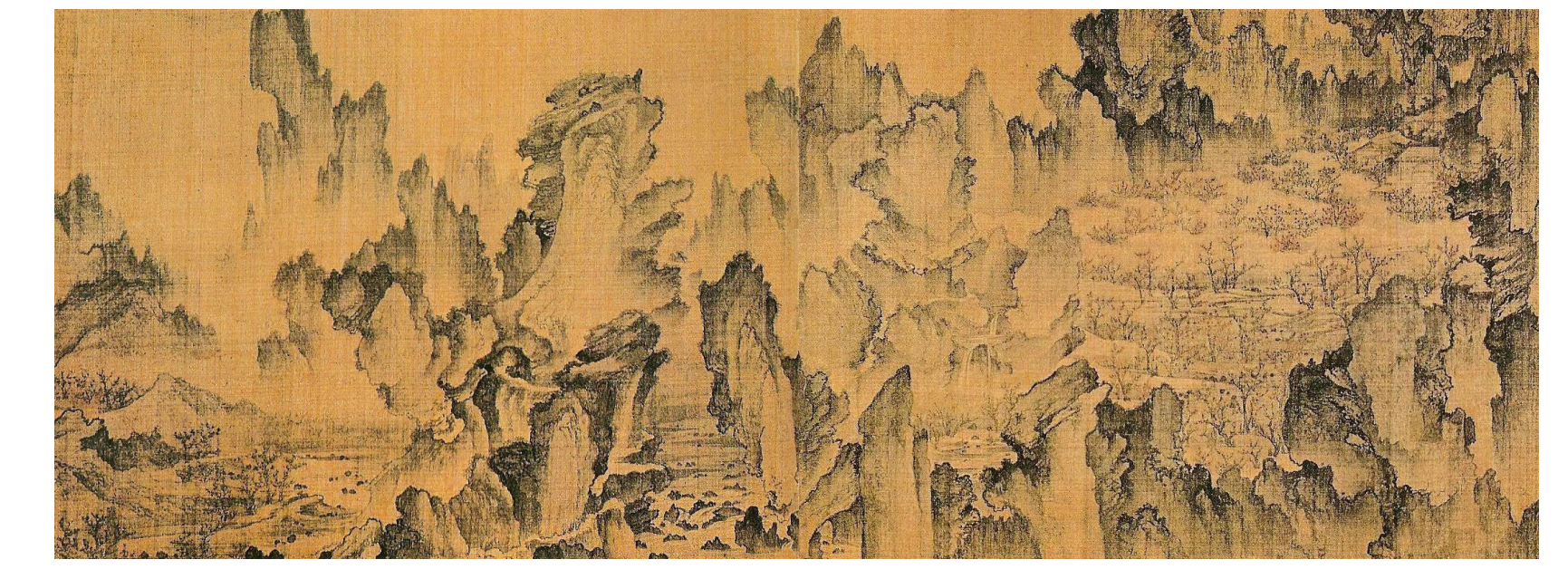

Fig. 1 **Gyeon Ahn, *Dream of Strolling in a Peach Garden* (夢遊桃源圖),** Ink and light colour on silk, 38.6 x 106.2 cm, Tenri University Central Library, Japan, 1447.

In the fifteenth century, Prince Ahn-pyung (1418–1453), the third son of King Sejong of the Joseon dynasty, requested that the greatest painter of the time, Gyeon Ahn (1418–1452) create a painting based on a utopian land (Dream of Strolling in a Peach Garden) that he had seen in a dream.
In Asian Shan shui paintings, the picture often starts on the right and ends on the left, but this picture is spread along the diagonal line from the bottom left to the top right.
The real world is depicted as low hills on the left, while an ideal world surrounded by strange and magnificent mountains is located on the right.

Dream of Strolling in a Peach Garden
(桃源 Dowon)

Prince Ahn-pyung (1418–1453)

"Hung Myon year (1447), On the night of April 20, when I was about to fall asleep, my mind suddenly became dim and fell into a deep sleep and soon began to dream. As a result, I came to the bottom of a mountain with my friend Insu, where the peaks rose and the valleys were deep and the mountains were rugged. There are dozens of peach trees, with trails between them, at the edge of the forest, a crossroads. I did not know which way to go, but I met a man wearing a robe. He politely bowed and said to me, "If you go along the path into the northern valley, you will come to Dowon." I scoured the horse with Insu, the cliffs were sheer, the bushes were dense and lush, the streams were meandering, and the road was twisted a hundred times and I might not know which way to go.

When I entered the valley, Eastern-sky was open and appeared to be two or three yards wide. Surrounded by mountains, clouds and fog were present, and in the distance, near the peach tree forest, sunlight was shining and the sunset was like smoke. In the bamboo grove, there is a bandage house. The private door is half open, and the clay stone made of soil is almost crumbling, and there are no chickens, dogs, cattle, or horses. In the stream that flows in front of the village, only one boat was rocking to the waves, so that lonely scene seemed to be a place where transcendent xian lived. I wondered and said to Insu, "Wouldn't this be the case when we weave a pillar in a rock and a house through a valley? Yes, this is Dowon." At the end, there were a few people who followed, and we wrote a poem together.

In time, I woke up from my dream while looking back and left and tied my shoes. Oh!, a large city, is a place where the well-known officials roam, and deep valleys with sheer cliffs are home to those who live quietly. For this reason, those who wear colorfully bright clothes cannot walk in the forests of the mountains, and those who clear their minds by watching the water flowing over the rocks do not think of the great house and golden chambers even in their dreams. This is the reason why quietness and noise are different. The old man "dreams at night what he did during the day."

Text taken from original image, translated by the author.

意園 *Ui-won* is an imaginary garden depicted in the mind. In fact, instead of making a material garden, one enjoys it solely through mind. Why would it have been so? The answer can be found in the inevitable limitations that exist in the world and in humans. There are fundamental flaws in the world, and reality is full of contradictions and adversities. Human life with its limits of life and body is harsh. Dreaming in such a situation can be a pathway to finding hope and alleviating pain. Ui-won is a method of pursuing freedom, used by scholars in the late Joseon Dynasty to aspire towards a special life beyond the boundaries of reality (see Sung, 2015).

If the garden is assumed as a space that embodies dreams and ideals, Ui-won can been seen as an incomplete garden. However, most scholars who enjoyed Ui-won did not emphasize the embodiment of the garden in a reality. Kyung-jong Yu thought that drawing a perfect garden that satisfies all the ideals in his mind is more desirable than a real garden with its inconvenience and imperfections (see Ahn, 2004). Although the garden may be real, it is not pleasant to the mind. Ui-won would have been a practical and reasonable way to enjoy leisure that was economically and temporally suitable for a busy urban life, both then and now.

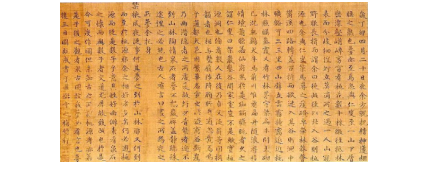

Fig. 2 **Prince Ahn-pyung, *Dream of Strolling in a Peach Garden* (夢遊桃源圖).** Ink on silk, Tenri University Central Library, Japan, 1447.

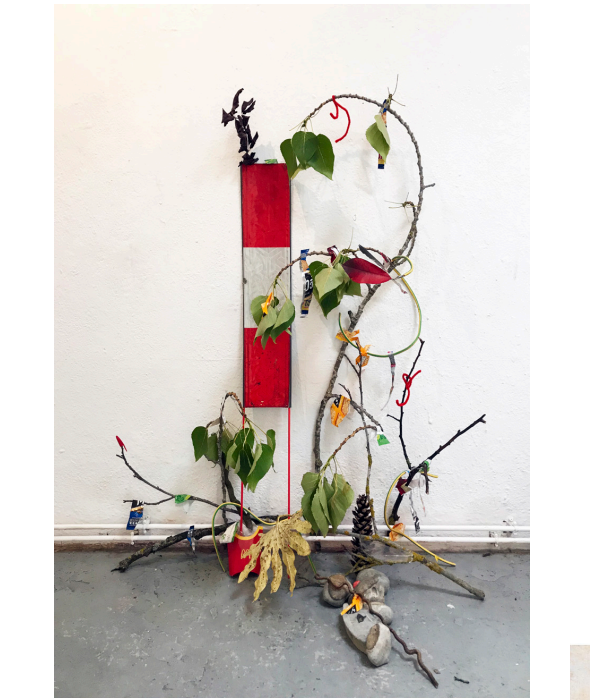

Fig. 3 **Jinjoon Lee, Empty Garden,** Installation, Collected materials from the street, Dolphin Gallery at St John's College, 2019.

A late-Joseon dynasty scholar named Kyung- jong Yu (1714–1784) explained the reason why he wrote <意園誌 Ui-won-ji>.

意園 Ui-won is a garden made in the mind. Is there any reason to create an imaginary garden, instead of building it in the real world? Once conceived inside the mind, a Ui-won seems to appear vividly in front of my very eyes. Even if one owns a garden, he cannot be said to have one in his mind. Similarly, another may be said to have made a garden through his mind without actually owning one in reality. Both cases are problematic, thus it may as well be better to have a garden in the mind without one in reality.

Dae-hoe Ahn, "18-19세기 주거문화와 상상의 정원," 진단학보 ["Housing Culture of 18–19 Centuries and Garden of Imagination", *The Journal of Jindan-hakbo*], 97 (2004): 111-138p.

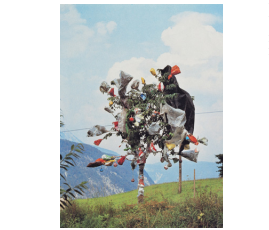

Fig. 4 **Lois Weinberger, Tree Celebration,** Cherry trees, plastic sacks and foil, Courtesy Salle Principale, Paris, 1977.

"Victor Turner (1987: 29) suggests that the liminoid is the "successor of the liminal in complex large-scale societies, where individuality and optation have in theory supplanted collective and obligatory ritual performances". Thus, the liminoid represents, in some ways, a looser, more open and less structured space for individual movement. The liminoid is not always ritualistic, like the liminal, but offers opportunities for critical engagement, subversion of normative ways of being, and the trying out of non-dominant values and systems within public, albeit less rigid and proscriptive, spaces."

Jayne Caudwell and Robert E. Rinehart. "Liminoidal Spaces and the Moving Body: Emotional Turns", *Emotion, Space and Society* 12 (2014): 1–3p.

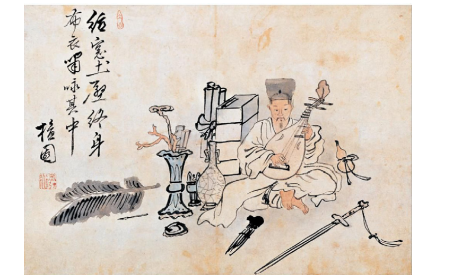

Fig. 5 **Hong-do Kim, *Painting of humble scholar with taste for the arts*, (布衣風流圖),** Ink and colour on silk. Collection unknown, 18C.

A self-portrait of Hong-do Kim, a middle-class painter, enjoying leisure activities of a poor but honest scholar. Here, we see the everyday life and cultural tastes of the artist, including music, calligraphy, reading and collecting books, flowers, ceramics, etc.

"At documenta 1997, I planted a disused train track of 100 meters with neophytes from southern and southeastern Europe, which was intended as a metaphor for the migration processes of our time, with its poetic references, was to point beyond it, and in this sense is still very present, as I notice in the unbroken interest in my own work. Dealing with the foreign, the notion of territory, and nationalism is implicit in my work."

Interview for ANTENNAE: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture, London 2010
Philippe Van Cauteren, Tom Trevor and Martin Engler, *Lois Weinberger*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013. 57p.

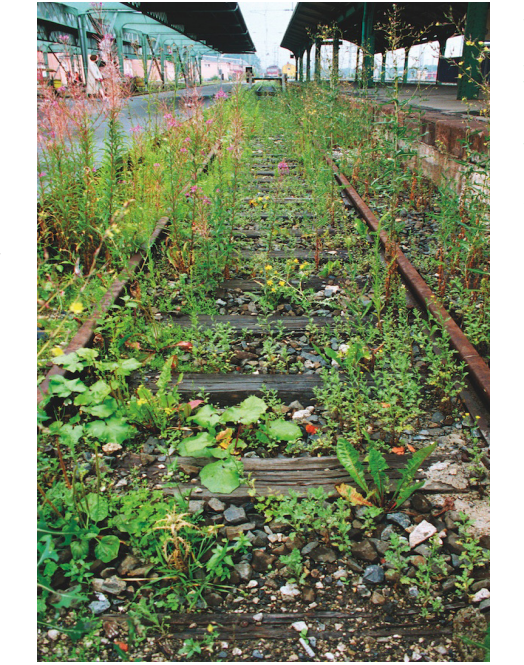

Fig. 6 **Lois Weinberger, What is beyond plants is at one with them,** Sculpture, miscellaneous, railway track, planting with indigenous plants and neophytes, Track 1, 10,000cm, Kulturbahnhof, 1997

"What changes must now occur, in our way of looking at things, in our notions! Even the elementary concepts of time and space have begun to vacillate. Space is killed by the railways, and we are left with time alone ... Now you can travel to Orleans in four and a half hours, and it takes no longer to get to Rouen. Just imagine what will happen when the lines to Belgium and Germany are completed and connected up with their railways! I feel as if the mountains and forests of all countries were advancing on Paris. Even now, I can smell the German linden trees; the North Sea's breakers are rolling against my door."

- Heinrich Heine

Wolfgang Schivelbusch, "Railroad Space and Railroad Time." *New German Critique*, no. 14 (1978): 34p.

#Letter 1

I just got on the train to Oxford.
My journey to Marylebone was not exactly easy. In typical London fashion, it started raining arriving from nowhere, you see. It seems that Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter all exist together, in the space of a single day. This morning, it was 13°C outside. By afternoon it had climbed to 16. But once the day was ending, the rain poured down and the temperature dropped to 12. They can manufacture an artificial heart these days, but I guess the weather is still hard to predict. I wonder if we'll be able to control the weather, too, someday. Either way, for me the unpredictability of the weather adds a sort of freshness to my life—so I don't really check weather reports. Of course, today's sudden rain has left me soaking. The unpredictable changes in the climate here do add an element of uncertainty to life, but sometimes they gift you with unplanned moments of leisure. Like when you're walking down Jongno 3-ga road, and a sudden rain shower forces you into the nearest teashop for a cup of coffee. In the midst of our restless walking from place to place, especially in the city, if something doesn't force us to stop and look, I don't think we ever see where we are living. In the cities where I've spent most of my life—Seoul, Tokyo, London—I can't even tell you how fast the days pass. How many times do you think we glance at the sky in a day? When I was a child, I used to stop and stare at the clouds, imagination buzzing. I saw rabbits there, and fish and white flowers. And mushrooms. Nowadays, the sky is out of the question as my eyes stay focused mainly on the ground. It's become a habit to walk around with my shoulders bent and my head bowed, staring downward as I move. Instead of daydreaming I have found myself wandering around in a maze of soaring city walls, trapped in the prison of reality as I gaze at the floor. The wads of gum cemented on the ground spread before me like planets in a galaxy. I suppose it's lucky that every now and then I see a weed fighting to grow in the spaces between the gum wads, impressing me with its determination for life. A Persian garden. More and more, people who share that weed-like resilience are gathering in great cities. Weaker men and women disappear into the cracks and crevices as the fighters move in. In this giant city, no matter how hard you work you end up feeling like you're moving in circles.

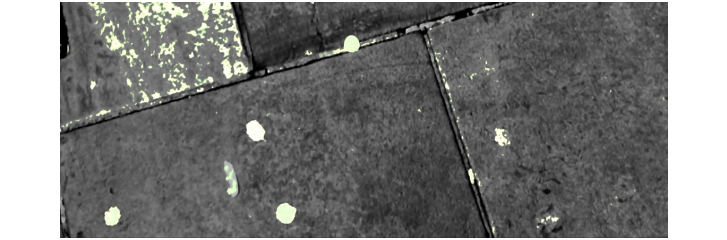

Fig. 7 **Jinjoon Lee, Chewing Gum in Oxford,** Single channel video, 15'54", Oxford, 2018.

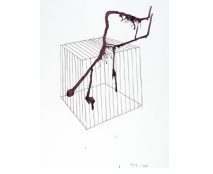

Fig. 8 **Lois Weinberger, Wild Cube,** Indian ink, watercolour on paper, 40 x 30 cm, 1991/2009.

Fig. 9 **Jinjoon Lee, Footpath image in Oxford,** Photograph, 21 x 29.7cm, Oxford, 2017.

Pulling the familiar into the unfamiliar by taking what we know and dislocating it, both object and sensorial experience, the artist draws from her own keen feelings of 'foreignness' and what we think and know as home.
Max Andrews, 'Haegue Yang', *Life on Mars: 55th Carnegie International*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, 2008, 348p.

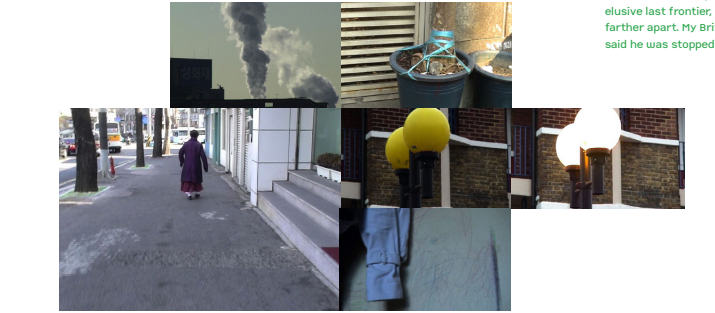

Fig. 10 **Haegue Yang, Unfolding Places,** Single channel DV-PAL, colour, sound, voice-over: Helen Cho (English), 18'15", London and Seoul, 2004.

"Perhaps one of the best examples of Yang's exploration of the nonplace and the resulting emotional dislocation is the video Unfolding Places (2004), which was shot in London and Seoul, among other locations. In the work, Yang narrates what she calls the 'pursuit of place'. Over images of deserted back-alleys, city streets and lights glazing off windshields, a female voice-over tells stories and offers thoughts and observations of her travels."

- Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson 'Chosen Loneliness'

Haegue Yang, et al., *Haegue Yang: Wild against Gravity*. Aspen Art Press, 2011.

Jessica Ullrich : You once said that a good gardener should abandon his garden.
What exactly do you mean by this?

Lois Weinberger : On top of that, I think that in the paradox the values can be found beneath the surface.
Being involved with nature and not being a garden artist: for me that's a good state of affairs.
Maybe the actual garden can be found beneath/ In the soil / one descends into it / only in so doing is it perceived – and above, partial results and remains. Fine that way, down and out.

Lois Weinberger: "Present Time Space – Hiriya Dump 1998."
Philippe Van Cauteren, Tom Trevor and Martin Engler, *Lois Weinberger*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2013.

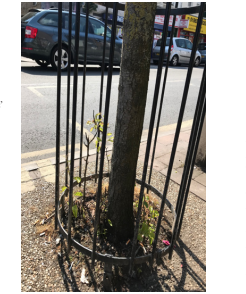

Fig. 11 **Jinjoon Lee, Street tree image in Oxford,** Photograph, 21 x 29.7cm, Oxford, 2018.