

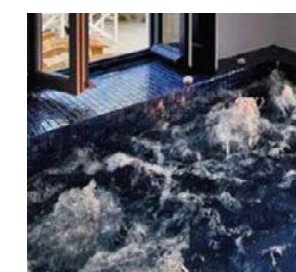
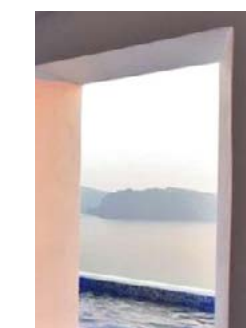
1. the plan of the site, the map of the project

The Making of Immobilien & its alternative:

A semiological adventure of a mythological production



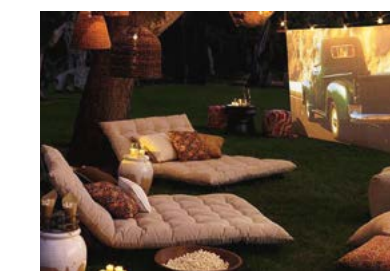
2. a spa room looking into some kind of water body like the Mediterranean Sea in Greece



6. fragmentation of elements in Figure 2



4. a Chinese pagoda in a Chinese garden



5. a lawn of colourful pillows in front of a screen



6. an outdoor sand courtyard with candle lights

What is Immobilien¹, today? I intend to give at the outset a direct answer through the title: Immobilien is *a type of myth*.²

I do not intend to render Immobilien as a social phenomenon, an economic apparatus nor a category of built forms; but as a form of production. Immobilien could be grasped easily as properties which are driven by the market force and has its programmatic characteristics; it could be devised into such types: private housing, retail shops, department stores, and supermarkets – a typological analysis based on spatial usage. Yet such classification does not enter a framework of which the making of Immobilien takes place. In order to define the essence of Immobilien, that is, the thing in itself, establishing a system of classification is fundamental. What could guide me through this process? I begin with my own encounter towards Immobilien production through an actual project, a book from Roland Barthes on Mythologies, a book from Michael Fried on the theatricality of Painting, and a book from Tong Jun³ on Chinese garden. These will be the initial corpus through such semiological adventure.

A signified brief

The encounter begins with a brief. The initial written brief from the client was to design a resort that aims to open to the 'public' (a group of people signifies consumer power). It should have at least 12 resort houses, with facilities such as archery, horse riding track, Karaoke bar, barbecue ground, restaurant, lawn for outdoor cinema, a multi-purpose hall for wedding and other occasions. In terms of 'aesthetic style' (the way the client calls it), he asked for half of the resort houses to be 'Chinese style' and half 'Western style' (which he refers to the images he sent). Despite the site is near the Yellow River, which is historically the original habitat of early native Chinese, the shore has turn into a touristic spot for boat-ride-dining and horse-riding activities. The site seems almost irrelevant to the project, what initiated the project is its locality in association with its seemingly increasing consumer demand.

The images form the other half of the brief: a spa room looking into some kind of water body like the Mediterranean Sea in Greece, a Chinese pagoda in a Chinese garden, a lawn of colourful pillows in front of a screen, an outdoor sand courtyard with candle lights (see Figures 2 to 6). These are what the images depict, but not what they signify.

Immobilien as a semiological system

I began the analysis by using one of these images for such a signification reversal (a spa room looking into some kind of water body like the Mediterranean Sea in Greece): blue and white = Greece? = water as Mediterranean Sea? ; bubbly water indoor = spa! = sensual exploitation?; the room overlooks the overwhelming water body outside = visual exploitation? = double sensuality? = double the luxury?; no human figure in the spa = you(the viewer) can be there? = desire for it?

Although these images are signifiers, in which, the signification process could be reversed to reveal what these images ‘signified’, but only part of it, never complete. These significations are never accurate, always exist in doubts, because they are made to expand but not to close the signification zone. They do not need to be real, just realistic, close to real, plausible. What is the semi-ological function of these signifiers? They are produced to reflect, to expand, to multiply, to distort. As Barthes calls it, ‘myth is a stolen language.’⁴

Why is it a stolen language? The images of immobilien production lure the desire of the views to its pictorial participation. But how is it different from a photo which you make by yourself of the exact same view and content? It is to do with the level of modification to the signification; imagine the moment when the elements of the view being captured by a camera and being objectified as a production of image (reproduction of the view), that is the first layer of signification; the image-object signifies the things.

And from this onwards, the mode of signification changes to a form of selection, a form of speech. As Roland Barthes describes the myths of modern Bourgeoisie, he argues that, ‘Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.’⁵ Now imagine two sets of image sequence derived from the first studied image (Figure 2): one is this image with yourself in it, a photo of your family with facial expression captured, a photo of your family and a table full of Mediterranean food; the other is the sequence of images demonstrated in the brief. The second sequence is based on the some kind of memory from the first sequence, either from yourself or as description of others (e.g. travel programmes on television which shapes the memories of a place which you have never been). Here, we entered a framework of pictorial syntax, in the production of immobilien (precisely why the main form of advertisement is motion picture). While one is to do with capturing the memories, the other is to utilize these memories to provoke the desire of participation; it robs the first language of signification.

Barthes describes it precisely as, ‘two semiological systems, one of which is staggered in relation to the other: a linguistic system, the language, which I shall call the language-object, because it is the language which myth gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which shall call metalanguage, because it is a second language, in which one speak about the first.’⁶ In another words, the mythical language operates on top of ‘natural’ language. It is a speech that has been spoken twice, paraphrased. I have noticed that, when I tried to analyse the first image, I was analysing the image from the position of a consumer exposed to the immobilien project (an uninterested one probably), but not as a metalinguist of second production of signification (maybe I refuse to?). This second layer is primarily where immobilien production operates.



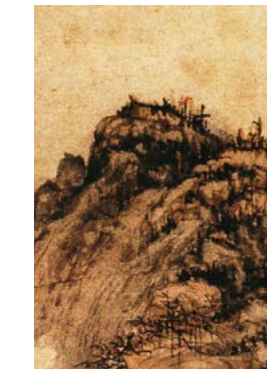
7. panoramic view of the site



8. the shore of Yellow River, a Touristic ground



9. a Chinese painting from Qing Dynasty, ‘the painting of the green and rise-high mountain’ the by Kūn cǎn: 苍翠凌天图 鬃残



10. fragmentation of spaces in Figure 9

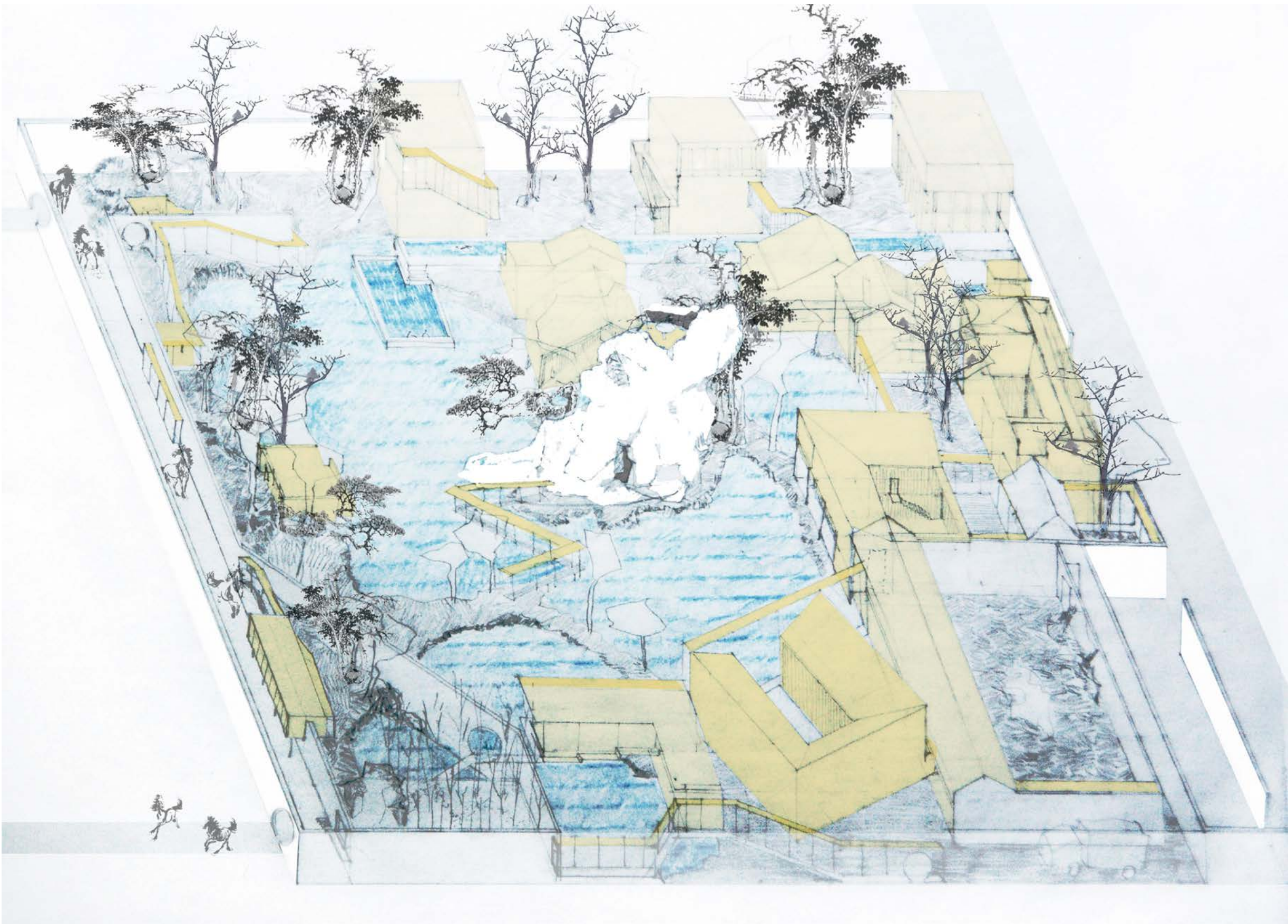
Images as an apparatus in immobilien production

Hence, the form of the immobilien is not the built form, but the very image of it. In many cases, apartments from the immobilien market are sold prior to the buildings being built. These immobilien products are sold solely through images and information. Although this may not be applicable to all immobilien projects, but the possibility of such demonstrates how immobilien projects specifically operates on images. What I am trying to single out here is the form of immobilien production. On the metalanguage level, an immobilien project produces a form of spectacles. What are the properties of the pictorial manifestation in immobilien production? They are flat, theatrical, frozen, empty yet full.

1. Flat: It goes on top of things. The physical project reproduces what the images anticipate. It is designed (yes it is designed, under a precise mechanism) to create a glare, a shiny image, to stun you, to draw you out from your body and mind, and make you immerse in the mirage of its pictorial existence. Despite the concept of ‘spectacles’ are constantly associated in opposition with the ‘real’, it manifested the seemingly contradicting qualities of the two. It is the physical objectification (that it is real, spectacular images exist as substance) of the desire of the unreal – an existence embodies the quality of ideology, which is a kind of flatness. Such flatness of the spectacle transcends the realm of ‘virtual’ and ‘real’.

2. Theatrical: From transcendental quality of ‘entering’ the flat spectacles, with Michael Fried’s critical observation in contemporary photography, we might get a clear idea of how it operates – images determine ways to experience them. The relationship between the artwork and its beholder has been the central focus of Fried’s criticism. For him, a work of art must be finite in itself and not dependant on the viewer’s subjective response. The moment art depends on subjective response it becomes ‘theatre’, loses its integrity, and inter-ferees with the everyday experience of the beholder.⁷ In-situ Perspective images place the audience in the middle of the theatricality of the image. It invites the viewers to interact in the spectacular production. From this Perspective (as an illusionary construct), the excessive rhetorical play of the elements depicted in combination (the way how it is spoken within the image) makes the representation becomes one with its subjective experience.

3. Frozen: This aspect of the immobilien production is spoken through the excessive use of its images. Unlike images, words have the possibility to expand, to fictionalize itself. Like ‘The Form of Space’ by Italo Calvino, which the trajectory of path travelled by the protagonists follow three parallel lines to the lines of the written scribbles where they intercept.⁸ When the flatness and the theatrical effect superimpose each other, it creates something – opposite to words – images capture, freeze. ‘We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature. We now understand why, in the eyes of the myth-consumer, the intention, the adomination of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the matter: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is



11. the project, the garden of forking paths

immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.’⁹

4. **Empty yet full:** Natural in the sense of which, mythical images are constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things. As Barthes describes it, ‘the function of myth is to empty realityThe signifier of myth presents itself in an ambiguous way: it is at the same time meaning and form, which full on one side and empty on the other’.¹⁰ The form of the image distorts itself from the historical depiction into the signification of ideas. It performs a deformation of meaning, while the meaning is already complete; it postulates a kind of knowledge, a desire, a comparative order of ideas. This makes immobilien a function as a mechanism, a production and a discourse. It studies ideas-in-form, that it is both of semiology inasmuch as it is a formal science, of ideology inasmuch as of historical science.¹¹ It enters the field of ‘common sense’; the very concept of immobilien production corresponds to a production of a psychoanalytic function, a tendency. This tendency replaces the logic which the consumers operate prior to the exposure of the image. It is empty in order for such subjective participation, yet full of deformative tendency: it never says ‘I want you to...’, but it makes you say ‘I want to...’

An Alternative: Spatializing the Images

Mythical images capture a singular vision, and its multiple signification overlaps on this very same singularity. While I contemplate on an alternative to resist the immobilien production, I propose a method to fragmentize the distortion mechanism, through two things: The illustrative representation of the network of signification (almost like a brain-storming cognitive map) and its spatial production. In another words, spatializing the images both in its form of representation and its physical built form .

What guides me was ‘The Garden of Forking Paths’, Jorge Luis Borges’ fictional writing of a garden which resembles a novel of forking time. “‘The garden of forking paths’” was the chaotic novel; the phrase “the various futures (not at all)” suggested to me the forking in time, not in space.....In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others; in the fiction of the almost inextricable Ts’ui Pen, he chooses – simultaneously – all of them.’¹² What the forking paths do is spatializing the pictorial confrontation, into a structure of paths, a map – a garden. As Barthes would have called it, the garden sets forth as the departure point for a third semiological chain.¹³ What the paths offer is the possibility of a constant change of viewing position.

In fact this is the very basics of how our contemporary poetic language works; ‘the essentialist ambitions of poetry, the conviction that it alone catches, the thing in itself, inasmuch, precisely, as it wants to be an anti-language.’¹⁴ it is a regressive semiological system. Whereas myth aims for an ultra-signification, at the amplification of a first system, poetry, on the contrary, attempts to

regain an infra-signification, a pre-semiological state of language: in short, it tries to transform the sign back into meaning¹⁵ : its ideal, ultimately, would be to reach not the meaning of words, but the meaning of things themselves. The forking paths simply multiply the effect of the anti-language. It is a mental exercise similar to walking around and through a city to build up your own idea of what the city is.

If the garden of forking paths is an enormous riddle or parable, whose theme is time; then I imagine a kind of illusionistic construct different to the Perspective; that is, Isometric. It beholds a wealth of details, information, from an isotopic point of view. In some cases, multiple points of view (as a mental participation) like Chinese mountainous painting. It is capable of decentralizing a focus, instead it made possible to render an integral, finite overall of an artefact. It describes every single detail of itself but not expanding beyond the frame.¹⁶

As the consumers participate in such a structure of paths, despite the spectacles they confront (does not matter how spectacular they are), they have a choice to change it or stay; but they have a choice. Once the consciousness grows out from the alienation of being in the labyrinths of the forking paths, the immobilien production nullified from being a theatrical production to a gamified field. In the garden, paths offer a kind of philosophical antidote, like a base of the Monopoly board game, but with a dignified set of choices. In the garden of forking paths, the view the paths offer is continuous yet unsettled, ephemeral yet holistically ambiguous.

Notes:

1. Despite the word ‘immobilien’ is German, but I intend to use this instead of the English term ‘real estate property’ throughout the writing. I do not intend to enter a philological discussion of the term .The word should be considered here simply as one of the signifiers which signifies the thing itself. In English, the word ‘real estate property’ does not directly translate to ‘immobilien’ in its idiomatic sense. While being persistent with etymology , ‘immobilien’, is rather similar to the idiom of the Japanese equivalent ‘不動産’ ,which literally means ‘immobile property’ – properties which is unable to move, immobile, permanent, and usually refer to the built properties on land that are driven by market force.
2. Other meanings of the word ‘immobilien’ can be cited against this. But I have tried to define things, not words.
3. Tong Jun, a Chinese architect who studies thoroughly on Chinese garden in the 1990s.
4. Roland Barthes, Mythology, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) ,135
5. Barthes, Mythology, 109
6. Barthes, Mythology, 115
7. Michael Fried, Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
8. Italo Calvino, “The Form of Space”, Cosmicomics, (New York: Harcourt Publishers Ltd, 1968)
9. Roland Barthes, Mythology, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) ,129
10. Barthes, Mythology, 143
11. Barthes, Mythology, 112
12. Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths”, Labyrinths, (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 51
13. Roland Barthes, Mythology, p135
14. Roland Barthes, Mythology, p133
15. meaning, which in Sartre’s use of the term, as a natural quality of things, situated outside a semiological system (Saint-Genet, p.283)
16. Michael Fried, Why Photography Matters As Art As Never Before (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2008).

