4. Happy Imprisonment: Labyrinths

Scripted spaces rely on shocks or surprises to make us feel light-headed, anesthetized—cheerfully disoriented. I say *cheerfully*, because we know the confusion is intended. If there are blind turns, they feel precision-tooled, whether in a Baroque garden, or inside the memory of a slot machine. But for the "shocks" to work on cue, the script must be at the right temperature, like air-conditioning, not too much, just enough to make the player feel comfortable—awed, faintly lost, but enchanted. Too much visible surveillance is good for some spaces, bad for others. Avoid tensions about social class, keep the mood genteel, the "happiest place on earth." Instead of buildings, study the 'bottom twenty feet," as architect Jon Jerde used to say.[1]

In nineties popular games like *SimCity*, *Doom*, *Red Alert*, the *Seventh Guest*, the player spent hours learning how to navigate from one level to another—perhaps four hours to get full hand motor coordination, and another fifteen hours to get to the climax. Then what? The script took an interesting turn, if it had potential as a cult item, what the designers of *SimCity* called "the chaos variable." ("Chaos is, in effect, your opponent.").[2]

Computer game fans still call these "cheat codes." Secret codes[3] are buried inside the program—not too many, just enough. A password or a hot spot releases them.[4] Suddenly, you pass through levels like a phantom."[5] A thousand simoleons[6] are credited to your account.

In 1995, programmers updating *SimCity 2000* made the phrase *imacheat* release 500,000 dollars more into the sim account.[7] Alert game fans contacted each other on the Internet, discussed them at sites like Computer Underground (or at cheatsource.com). The fun is to cheat a little, find glitches in the program, tilt the table.

Imagine pilgrims trapped and lost, but feeling right at home, even giddy. Why? Their level of fright has been set at just the right temperature, like bathwater. They cannot get enough "happy imprisonment." Clearly, horror films

and amusement park rides operate more or less in that way. The pilgrims pretend to visit their own funeral. They pay to have someone bury them alive, but in their most comfortable suit, with a sumptuous lunch basket in an oversized coffin, more like a hotel suite than a coffin.

For that sort of gilded trap, the best model might be Le Nôtre's Labyrinth of Versailles, set up in 1662. Inside a welter of hedges, courtiers found what Charles Perrault called "an infinity of little alleys so placed one beside the other, that it is practically impossible to make your escape."[8] However, before they felt too anxious, or too overheated, a fountain presented itself. At its base, words were carved: poetry from the fables of La Fontaine. Then, at various twists ahead, other fountains emerged, each with more from La Fontaine.[9] The courtier was expected to memorize all these fables, remember the sequence they presented, to find not simply a way out of the labyrinth, but the correct moral path. For nobility, that path led to "*gloire*," while for the bourgeois, it made for the "*honnête homme*."[10] But most of all, for the couple engaged in sexual intrigues inside the labyrinth, it involved something of neither.

How well this kind of scripted space—the labyrinth—suited what Louis XIV preferred for his Court, that courtiers should be given an unctuous sense of self-importance, be too glutted with pleasure to revolt. It was a walk-through dialogue about power delivered in a labyrinth, on a platter, by the prince. Noblesse oblige[11] (the obligations of aristocrats) was redefined. Games like these, false intrigues, ritualized seductions at court, became an interactive theater about losing self-control, under the gentle guidance (even prodding) of the king.

Indeed, losing self-control in an ennobling way was a guiding principle inside the gardens at Versailles. Excess and vanity were worn to be shorn, like the penitent who can't wait to strip for punishment. It was a scripted space for a light spanking, for just a little breaking of the commandments. While pretending to be practicing *gloire* and noblesse oblige, many courtiers would sneak into seductions. But who were they cheating precisely? There were no peasants or indigents asking for alms. In fact, the king encouraged the courtiers to "cheat," simply to keep them close at hand, make them easier to control. He wanted them to pretend to be rogues inside the gardens, but find on the sly only what he left for them. This is happy imprisonment indeed, and well worth the price of admission, the thrill of the game.

An Abbreviated Labyrinth History

There is no fixed date when labyrinths began, only where they began for our civilization. So we skip past Minoan legend, let the Minotaur wait in his lair. As Greco-Egyptian etymology, *labyrinth* refers to one ax being crossed with another—two axes that meander. The empty space between them becomes a confusing road. This road could lead in two directions. First, it might lead nowhere, into bewilderment. Second, it simply meandered, in a meditative, unicursal spiral, like a zen.

Of course, there are many subsets of labyrinth. Umberto Eco mentions three,[12] Pliny cites four.[13] Hermann Kern's exhaustive survey adds lovers labyrinth, many differences between labyrinths and maze, folding back on itself, filling, acentered and centered labyrinths, labyrinths in various media and spaces.[14] Other surveys list dozens of variations[15]. But generally labyrinth histories circle around two designs most of all: Either the labyrinth is *multi* or *uni* cursal (many dead ends or a single path). Either it collapses on you, or it meanders ahead. In both cases, your goal as a pilgrim or gamer is much the same. You must study your entrapment very deeply in order to find "your" way; that is, to find your unique system, your story. After all, you are the central character, you are the one trapped for three hours in the maze.

Thus, uni- or multi-labyrinths mirrored much the same process. To solve your puzzle—and find your way—you give up your freedom, but cheerfully. Like Lot more than his wife, you agree to not look back, to play ahead. Those are the rules of the script, delivered from on high. You submit to them as if to an agent of God—to the Program. Thus, labyrinths are a story about losing power in order to find redemption. No wonder they were identified so often as a holy journey.

Traditionally, the labyrinth was designed as a trackless path of blind alleys (often to test your blind faith, your willingness to get lost). But again, as with our garners and courtiers, it could be very pleasant to be trapped inside. Rest stops might be provided: the nineteen fountains at Versailles; or simply a bench. Then, slowly, the blindness cleared, like moral improvements on a pilgrim's progress. In stages, the path revealed its secrets. You walked through a moral allegory; its secrets brought *revelation*.

That was essentially the role of labyrinths built for the church during the Middle Ages,[16] and for the nobility of Europe as late as the eighteenth century—hedges, drawings, sculpture, broken circles for walking, Troy games and infernal puzzles. Medieval ruins of old labyrinths still exist at Chartres,[17] in

Lucca, Rheims: they were condensed pilgrimages, with very straightforward rules, to make the passage enlightening—intellectual challenges, not merely theatricalized walks. Often, the hedges were barely ankle high, or not at all, easy to map with the eye. Some labyrinths were mosaics to trace with your feet on the floor; or a unicursal rutted turf for walking. The "sojourner" would learn whether there were single or multiple entrances, or how the helixes might operate; also what form of revelation could be achieved, usually to justify the social order as a moral good. Therefore, being able to abstract in your mind how the overhead might look—the map—helped you walk faster. But the map was only a guide. The path was not designed as the mystery itself. The story, after all, was yours. One had to navigate to find mystery, what the Germans called *bildung*: the journey as discovery; in this case a very compact journey, more like walking through edited moments. Like an abbreviated kingdom tiny enough to slip into your pocket, the labyrinth was a compressed version of a vast pilgrimage. It was a kit, a pocket reliquary; a bag of relics for armchair tourists.

This precise architectural tradition of labyrinth is what the Renaissance inherited; and later, in turn, was passed down to us through Romantic imagery,[18] into cinema,[19] consumer planning, computer games, psychoanalytical theory. The labyrinth was an interactive journey with subplots, but all of it could be condensed into a single room, on a single sheet of paper, or on less than an acre.

Piranesi

By the eighteenth century, there are clear signals that the script for labyrinths had shifted. In Baroque labyrinths, the spectator is often sent into a fictional space where the exit[20] is hidden, or missing altogether. Imagine it simply as the Freudian[21] model of condensation in the dream, one space collapsed into the other. I prefer to call this condensed design a *labyrinth effect*. That is the easiest place to begin our history of labyrinths, where it leads to our moment the most directly. The artist Piranesi (1720–1778)[22] becomes an ideal point of entry—the fantasist and architectural theorist. He built sight lines of "wonder" far beyond even Le Nôtre's mazes.

Though Piranesi put up only one building, he left over a thousand engravings. Most of all, he produced hundreds of *capriccios* (imaginary views, imaginary *vedute*)[23] of a Rome that never was. For over two centuries, these imaginary spaces were exploited by painters, writers, set designers, filmmakers, archi-

tects, and now computer animators. Architects at Columbia University built a computer-aided design (CAD) of the *Carceri* (imaginary prisons), entitled "The Architecture of Decay" (1996).[24] A software company sells Piranesi Effects,[25] to add moody hachure to architectural drawings, add some class. Many more examples: dozens of gothic movies, more recently Spielberg's *Minority Report*;[26] TV shows like *Beauty and the Beast* 1974);[27] also practically every architectural abime imagined since 1780, from the cabinet of curiosities by architect John Soane (who met Piranesi), to Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," to diaries by Oscar Wilde,[28] even the Piranesian tenement alleys of Dickens's London.[29]

Each associates Piranesi with a disintegrated state of mind, but a precisely designed disintegration—particularly in the famous description by Thomas De Quincey. In 1822, De Quincey takes us through the first time he saw Piranesi's *Carceri*. The engravings reminded him of movement inside a dream, particularly opium dreams.[30] In his mind's eye, at first, he climbed "the vast Gothic halls." On the first floor, he saw "all sorts of machinery wheels, cables, pulleys, catapults … expressive of enormous power put forth and resistance overcome." Then he mounted a stairway that came abruptly to a blank wall, but somehow grew another flight of stairs, which, in turn, vanishes as well. However, he continued upward "until the unfinished stairs and Piranesi both [were] lost in the upper gloom of the hall."[31]

This, in turn, awoke in him other architecture that seemed to be enflamed by opium. He compared Piranesi to a dream of wandering through hallucinatory lakes. The lakes, in turn, reminded him of an imaginary city described by Wordsworth, "a wilderness of building, sinking far and self-withdrawn into a wondrous depth … without end."[32] To which he added: "With the same power of endless growth and self-reproduction did my architecture proceed in dreams."

Endless growth without any end—De Quincey is describing a very precise architectonic effect. It is essentially the model of the labyrinth inherited from the Baroque—remembered by Romantics[33]—and applied today in special effects environments. Cyber-art critic Roberto Sanesi called this Piranesi's "labyrinth of intimacy and totality."[34] Like a dream it is loss without pain. Walking through the labyrinth is safe, yet haunting, indeed like a dream—an imaginary frontier where ultimately no action is completed. Instead, only endless choice exists. It is a maze that pretends to be a search for identity, but is fundamentally only a theatrical descent—a lingering moment of wonder, more like a theatrical machine invading our own memory.

Similarly, more than a century later, filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein remembers the first time he saw Piranesi's engravings. He calls them "unexpectedly

harmless, with little feeling. Unecstatic"—and therefore haunting.[35] Even in the final years of his life, inside his imploded little apartment, Eisenstein always keeps a Piranesi etching on the wall; he even imagines how to enhance its visual impact, 'to a state of ecstasy … brought out of itself."

Like De Quincey, Eisenstein is trying to design a specific hallucination, another part of the scripting of a labyrinth effect: a space with immersive winding paths, and no exits. He compares the engravings essentially to a montage of attractions,[36] and seems to visualize a camera moving inside them. He studies Piranesi's imaginary Roman roads, then suggests, with a touch of irony, that "ten explosions will be enough to transform" their clutter.

However, explosions also would destroy "the great fascination this etching holds for me." It would lose its "sense of dissolution." By that he seems to mean the dark corners of labyrinth—the imploded, hieratic[37] quality. Perhaps it reminded him of safe boundaries lost, the darkness of a theater meeting the black edge of the screen. Certainly, it was a blur that is strangely gratifying, a safe madness. He even sketched a scene inside the main hallway in Piranesi's *Carceri*, as if he planned to shoot it.[38]

Similarly, in 1980, the postmodern architect Manfredo Tafuri compares this Piranesian effect to a labyrinth. He explains how the exterior and interior meet simultaneously in these engravings. "We now realize that the observer himself is immersed in the structure."[39] Whenever I use Tafuri's quote during interviews with computer game designers or casino architects, they nod and immediately discuss how labyrinths work in their industry. Another phrase that catches their attention is from De Quincey on the labyrinth: "enormous power put forth and resistance overcome." Many understand the noir side of labyrinth very well, as the spice for a ride or even a scripted space in Disneyland.

This, in turn, is similar to Eco's description of Disneyland (1987), borrowing the phrase *degenerate utopia* from Louis Marin.[40] And certainly, casino architects understand how the "maze" performs its magic. The sum of all these is that labyrinth implies a narrative conflict in a space condensed like a dream, where the viewer engages in an imaginary power struggle. The struggle is as precise as a theater designed as a scripted space; however, the space has a pathological dimension, filled with endless sculpture, cornices, flutes, and no way out.

Internet as Labyrinth: Warlord Capitalism

By 1993, labyrinths had gathered yet another meaning, as trackless wonderment on the Internet—a very optimistic meaning. The maze of new software, the emerging telematic anarchy did not make for blur, but revelation.[41] By 1996 though, only three years later, messianic chats about democracy as cyber-chaos began to sound increasingly naive; or like a promo for software companies. Yet, then not so finally, order was brought to the Web during the boom of 1996, by investors and commercial designers. And then chaos with the e-commerce collapse by 1999–2000. Chaos came at last, but like warlord capitalism riding through a tent city.

Now we increasingly think of the computer—even lovingly—as a sump of chaos, like the slob we married. It is fun noir, and glamour, and fast money. However, in the early nineties, in the bewildering early stages, it seemed that the Internet might restore a mystery to data that the industrial sense of order had destroyed, a trackless maze without exit. This chaos looked much more enclosed, and exotic. A French critic wrote in 1995: "The Internet resembles more the *labyrinth* of a medieval city, without a real architecture, than the beautiful arrangement of a highway."[42] By then, various Web projects with the name labyrinth had begun: in game design, in Troy games,[43] in digital game companies, as medieval research at Georgetown University[44] in hypertext technology,[45] as well as sites for building mazes, or dancing in labyrinths as revelation,[46] even as cyclotrons.[47] Fans of the movie Labyrinth (1986) set up sites, as did fans of the Fox TV series *V.R.5* (1995) and other labyrinthine effects shows.

Labyrinth went through a utopian overhaul as well, with Borges as its 1996 poster child, in hundreds of sites about "dark Borgesian labyrinths,"[48] about "indefinite or infinite number of hexagonal galleries.[49] And about Borges's Romantic "abime": "To be inside a (Borgesian) *labyrinth* is rather like being caught in a fog or a cloud-enveloped landscape … (In such) a labyrinth … the mist of imagination or language can form a self-constructed prison."[50] All of that seems far away now. Many of the sites haven't been updated for years. The faith healing has mostly stopped, the holistic nonsense taken less seriously than the flow of investment capital seemed more obvious; the Web more like an insurance salesman's handshake, like spam.

By now we are getting used to chaotic cyber-capitalism, even in its fifteenth-century form. By 2002, a virtual Muhammad—Osama bin Laden—faced off against a mediated faux Roosevelt George W. Bush, like two accidental part-

ners in the same perverse erasure. Then came Iraq, and whatever chaos that has brought by now.

The current crisis makes it easier to make more omelets out of virtuality, now that American media have made Baghdad a virtual community. My job becomes easier. I can simply return to discussing architectural labyrinths, knowing that their darker ironies suggest the Web as well. While labyrinths "taught" revelation, they also taught political humility, how to bow obediently when noblemen passed. The story ended when you achieved balance, could render unto Caesar, and keep your identity. For example—to repeat—in the garden labyrinth at Versailles (1667), paths through the maze were preassigned according to social rank.[51] For the nobility, the allegory led to gloire, a military myth that honored feudal rank. For the middle class, a separate route taught honesty to know your place on behalf of the greater order.

Labyrinths are ideological stories, where you fall in the embrace of the power that delivers the spectacle. You feel initiated; that sense of becoming an insider reappears constantly in games, however trackless.

I also see labyrinths as an aesthetic evasion. We need to build really leaky labyrinths. Because under all the disembodied marvels, all the fluff, lay our *actual* future, as real as a car hurtling downhill without brakes. We call the manufacturer to complain. No brakes, they ask? The easy-listening voice reminds us that our radio and CD player are digital, state of the art. They won't fail us. The wall is at least ten minutes away. There's bound to be new software to fix brakes by then. Look on the bright side.

More specifically, labyrinth is the journey itself—not the architecture—more like a mood of passivity. It's the ergonomic pleasure of feeling trapped. Or to have remote control, originally called "Lazy Bones" (Zenith, 1950).[52] Nothing is on, but you persist in consumer Calvinism: the myth of free will in a world of absolute predestination. You "mute" and "jump." Somewhere you imagine that you are subverting the programming. You give in to the safety of the technology.

I have to underline *safety*. For example, as a child in Coney Island, I used to watch relatives decide on which ride to take. There was the Cyclone, roller coaster, and next door, the bobsled. However, rumors persisted that every so often, on the bobsled, someone fell off and died. Or did they simply wound up paralyzed. No one knew for certain. Getting hurt on these rides was a very rare event, one in 10,000, if not 100,000.

My uncle would suggest riding the Cyclone. Everyone smiled broadly, looked up at the Cyclone roaring from the peak. Then, in a whisper, my cousin

suggested the bobsled. That always dampened the mood. An existential chill would take over. After all, the Cyclone only "simulated" death, but that was because you never died. You were statistically immortal. Bobsleds were not scripted well enough. There was not enough oversight, not enough surveillance. In the parlance of the fifties, where was Big Brother when you needed him?

Labyrinths are like arm wrestling with a parent—or Jacob wrestling with the angel while God watched: carefully controlled, not open-ended really. It is almost a theological replay of childhood. The parent is the program itself, the apparatus that gives you the magic. So no matter how cute the script—a hug from Goofy, a wink from Barney—it is fundamentally a picaresque about a godlike apparatus, a mountain god that cannot be violated (always stays encrypted).

Borges has a magnificent description of the mood inside a labyrinth, what Tafuri calls the "solitude that engulfs the subject who recognizes the relativity of his own actions."[53] From Borges:[54]

> The Library is unlimited and cyclical. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, after centuries he would see that the same volumes were repeated in the same disorder (which, thus repeated, would be an order: The Order). My solitude is gladdened by this elegant hope.

Labyrinths are a profoundly corrupt game. I would like to see more labyrinth games about the corruption itself; but then again, they already exist.

Literary Labyrinths: Blindness, Crowds, and Madness

From an anonymous German parable:[55]

> Her labyrinth could be compared to shocks while groping in the dark. In her blindness,[56] she kicked something. That awakened a machine nearby. Gears hummed and meshed. Suddenly, a wall caved in. Then, just as suddenly, it retracted. But somehow, the jolt was pleasant. Not too much blood drained from her face. She felt light-headed, anesthetized. Gradually, her eyes adjusted.[57]

On film, the flat screen—labyrinths look much grimmer than in scripted spaces (casinos, malls, computer games, remote controls). They turn into zones of death or dead ends, for car chases or eccentric shootouts, like *The French Connection* or *Die Hard*, in 10,000 action films. And through gothic chambers, and the hives of monsters in another thousand horror franchises. Or as rising water levels and depleting oxygen in disaster movies—in the fight to stay above water inside the *Titanic*. They suffocate and explode, and defy readable maps.

These cine-labyrinths are the result of intercutting—trails spliced by the camera while the monster chases the beautiful teenagers. Instead of comfort zones, there is no escape. Secondary characters run too slowly, or hide badly. Their path is cursed. The alien can smell them. "It" glides like seepage through the ventilation ducts. Clearly, the secondary characters do not stand a chance. They are blood sacrifice for the second act. Eventually (in the final ten minutes) the star will get to kill the alien. But meanwhile, the camera follows "It" slithering through a labyrinth of streets, rooms, crowds, or simply in darkness.

Horror: Needless to say, labyrinths as horror would never do for resort hotels in Las Vegas. And when your computer behaves with a blind vengeance, you feel like taking out a contract to kill your software provider.

But in Kubrick's *The Shining*, arguably the classic cinematic labyrinth, a hedge maze is infected by psychotic ghosts who roam the hotel rooms, and fester inside a writer's brain—a bad father. This double helix of mazes, inside and outside the hotel, is a special-effects construction of the mind more than space. His mind is animated by haunted thoughts, like labyrinths in literature, descriptions in novels of labyrinthine streets, tainted memories—even like the "introspection" of the printed page itself. Print brings blind vision. The mind of the character is attacked by ghosts that readers must conjure up out of written descriptions.

This is a vital distinction. Cinematic labyrinths rarely borrow from architectural scripted spaces. Historically, they resemble introspection in literature much more. And in Part III—on cinema—we will be entering various interiorized, montaged labyrinths. Thus, I should briefly review their literary parallels, for use later on, and for added nuance to the broader question: What happens mentally when labyrinths are not scripted for comfort? What happens when you truly cannot remember where you parked, and wander the parking structure as if you just parachuted in from another continent?

Literary Labyrinths: The Virtues of Moral Decay. Inversion of the Senses

> So true did all this phantasmagoria from books appear in his mind that he accounted no history in the world more authentic.
> —Cervantes, *Don Quixote*[58]

In literature, the labyrinth effect translates often into metaphors about sensory disintegration, a literary reading of trompe l'oeil, as the terror of blindness. Either the character has fallen into a place with too many paths or been squashed into a corner. This sensation is hardly as comforting as an architectural labyrinth, with benches by the fountain. Instead, we imagine a blinded Polyphemus wandering on his island. Every rock is suddenly foreign to his touch. He stumbles gruesomely through the labyrinth of utter darkness.

Almost all references to labyrinth in literature suggest a world that has thrown us into blindness of one kind or another. The other senses try to compensate because vision (mapping, pathways) has failed. We feel frantic. We accidentally run past too many trees on a starless night. We feel our way past them. Their barks feel miraculous, like sentries in armor.

We "see" the tree by its absence. That is essentially how literature generates the mood of labyrinth. It evokes by removing sight, because a well-written story relies on your not seeing except in your mind's eye.

There are literally thousands of ways to evoke this metaphor of labyrinth, of compensating for blindness, of the terror of black space. For example, historian Martin Jay cites Lacan (labyrinth of language), Bataille (stomach as labyrinth), Irigaray (the labia as labyrinth), even Dante (meandering down to hell), among others.[59] To Jay, labyrinth became "a powerful image in the anti-ocularistic discourse … (where) temporal deferral replace(s) timeless spatiality and unmediated presence."[60] Simplified as postscript for a chapter on Baroque special effects, Jay's argument suggests that many twentieth-century writers reinvoked the Baroque heritage as "anti-ocularistic." Jay identifies this process as "transparency," when the spectator "effaces" the role of voyeur … difference between actor and spectator.[61] He describes the self invaded by the public sphere in the industrial city, leading to further introspection, mazes teeming with paradox.

Cities as Labyrinths

Consider Baudelaire's classic paradox, that he liked to mix his solitude with crowds of people.[62] Suppose that solitude and crowd were both labyrinths, each eroding the other. In phrasing that was standard by 1850, "the labyrinth of the world" mixes with "labyrinths of the mind."[63] The paradox was unresolvable, at least psychologically. One person's mazy—solitary drift is caught inside the osmotic power of a *crowd*.[64]

Baudelaire describes labyrinth as poems he never got to write. In his mind's eye, he sees buildings outside collapse upon his symptoms inside:[65]

> Vast Pelasgic buildings, one on top of the other.
> Apartments, rooms, temples, galleries, stairways,
> caeca, belvederes, lanterns, fountains, statues—
> Fissures and cracks. Dampness resulting from a reservoir
> situated near the sky … High up a column cracks and its
> two ends shift. Nothing has collapsed as yet. I can
> no longer find a way out. I go down, then climb back up.
> A tower.—*Labyrinth*. I never succeeded in leaving.
> I live forever in a building on the point of collapsing,
> a building undermined by a strange malady … a
> prodigious mass of stones, marble blocks, statues and
> walls, which are about to collide with one another,
> will be greatly sullied by that multitude of brains,
> human flesh, and shattered bones.

Labyrinth is the writer preparing. "The labyrinth (as literary research) is a typical form of the nightmare," Barthes said."[66] Baudelaire compares this to tossing and turning in a bad sleep. You find no way out, simply exhaustion wearing you down, while the morning light begins.

At the same time, Baudelaire is returning to a very standard definition of labyrinth, clearly present in the Spanish Baroque of the seventeenth century: the large plaza "pell mell," as Jose Maravall explains.[67] The crowd as labyrinth whirls down upon a single spot from the four corners of the kingdom as in a plaza, a festival, a scripted event, as well as market day, or a crowded inn). In a parallel sense, Shelley sees crowded Venice as "a peopled labyrinth of walls."[68]

By the late nineteenth century, this definition of crowd as labyrinth merges with the hallucinatory city: Sherlock Holmes traverses the labyrinth of London,[69] as does Dickens (note 29). Gautier smokes "Piranesian" hashish in a

whirligig Parisian apartment.[70] Octavio Paz visits the labyrinthine Mexican neighborhoods of Los Angeles.[71] Joyce dissolves Dublin into a linguistic labyrinth.[72] Alienation by the crowd sheers away one's identity, layer by layer: The Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov takes the walker on a thoughtful drift (derive), unraveling "the hidden wonders in urban spaces."[73]

Madness

> Piranesi who regards each new building with terror, who climbs, who walks, who arrives, near to ceding to the inexpressible sadness of never arriving at the end of his suffering.
> —Charles Nodier (1836)[74]

> [Nodier's promenade through Piranesi's engravings] is now operating wholly in the mind, reinforced the ambiguity between the real world and the dream … so as to undermine even the sense of security demanded by professional dreamers.
> —Anthony Vidler (1992)[75]

Finally, the labyrinth becomes a pathology; an endless circuit inside your own madness. Labyrinths are reimagined as the mob streaming into the self, from Ahab's *Pequod*[76] to Musil's Vienna, to Pynchon's Vineland, García Márquez's Macondo, Bruno Schulz's haunted street of crocodiles; and onward through a thousand fictional mazes, often male fantasies,[77] particularly in noir crime fiction.

Thus, the term *labyrinth* has evolved in two directions—toward a psychological dissolve (literature), or toward a cheerful imprisonment (architecture). I wonder if the cheerful imprisonment helps you ignore the mad dissolve inside? At any rate, as early as 1622, this linkage between madness, scripted spaces, optics, and the labyrinth already was in place, as Baroque allegory, in a brittle antique entitled *The Labyrinth of the World*.[78] Labyrinth is the city, its system of ethics, its political bad faith, and the devil inside people. Labyrinth seems even fiercer than simply a metaphor, more like a metonym. It stands in for a discourse on power, about architecture and governance—but with a dark twist. The special effects it generates (by way of scripted spaces and literary metaphor) point toward a war between the senses and the prince, a disintegration of the self on behalf of optical illusion.

Optical Illustions

The author of *The Labyrinth of the World*, Comenius, was a Moravian mystic who attacked Catholic special effects as a drift from grace. For him, optical illusions camouflaged sin. From that angle, Baroque moralism resembles movies like The Matrix recently: a labyrinth camouflages the evil that aliens have wrought.

Comenius begins his story with a pilgrim who is given mystic spectacles. But the lenses are cursed, ground by Illusion, rims hammered by Custom. Optical gimmicks were pervasive in many churches and theaters by 1622. Perspective could be accelerated or decelerated by tilting floors, narrowing walls, adding a deep focal point.[79] Special effects were featured on ceilings: trompe l'oeil, accelerated perspective, anamorphosis—to induce a moment of wonder—a "vertigo" when the lid of a building simply dissolved. To many, these phantasms were progress, practical advances. But to Comenius, they might be the serpent's eye.

Indeed in *Labyrinth of the World*, the spectacles distort God's nature. To quote Shakespeare, they are "almost the natural man … [but] Dishonour traffics with man's nature."[80] They are a prosthesis upon the eye, as McLuhan would say.[81]To Comenius, they are an evil, not a cheerful global village. They make true distances vanish; ugly turns beautiful; black becomes white. However, luckily for Comenius's pilgrim, these demonic spectacles do not fit properly. He can sneak looks below the rim, see the human labyrinth as it really is.[82] If this were film, I would call what the pilgrim finds beneath his spectacles Baroque noir, the town with no soul.

He enters a village market howling with cheats. In the bedroom, marriages turn into whorish disasters. Out in the fields, peasants are brutalized into lumpen stupidity. Universities, philosophers and scholars lie religiously, while alchemists prove as base as their metals. Doctors cure nothing, not even their greed. Lawyers are petty. Non-Christians are idolators; and Christians little better—carnal and barren. Government is crass, judges perverse. Knights love smut more than honor. Newsmongers—the writers—live only for scandal. And those without honors in this world, who must seek their fortune, collapse into despair.

Like Quixote testing his sweet madness—or poor *Simplicissimus*[83] inside war, or the nihilism forced upon *Candide* or *Rasselas*—another innocent pilgrim navigates through the labyrinth of *Human Folly*.[84] (As social critique in the seventeenth century, labyrinth was "the reign of false appearances and disorder.")[85]

After many trials, the pilgrim finds hope at a palace governed exclusively by women, who seem free of phallo-sadism at least. To help them through an Estates General, King Solomon arrives, brings his retinue of brilliant advisers. But very soon, the labyrinth of bad faith wins. Solomon is disgusted by the folly of the Estates and leaves. Hundreds of beautiful women are sent to find him. They seduce him, destroy his faith. Then, while he slips into idolatry, his retinue, like the crew of Odysseus (another pilgrim in a labyrinth), are tracked like wild boar and horribly massacred.

That does it for the pilgrim. He has no hope left, is stricken with grief. He fumbles at the blind edges of the labyrinth. There he finds a room peeling with faded images of Prudence, Humility, Purity, and Temperance. At his feet, rubbish has been piled like a shipwreck, what remains of the machine of state. Ladders lay shattered, ropes torn, pulleys and docks smashed, cylinders dented. And yet, while stricken, on his last legs, he begins to discover Christ, finds his way to salvation. Protestant saints give him new spectacles, lenses ground by the Holy Spirit, rims inscribed with God's Word. He begins again, fully loaded now with "true" optics. He finds the invisible church and eternal light. He learns that God will be his shield, but only if he covets no property, is free of the labyrinth of human greed (folly).

Conclusion: Labyrinths as Folly

> …All actions of mankind are but a Labyrinth, or maze, so let your Dances be entwined … Make haste, make haste, for this the Labyrinth of Beauty is.
> —Ben Jonson[86]

Let us conclude by trying to synthesize this literary model with labyrinths as scripted spaces. Historically, in literature from 1600 to 1850, the word labyrinth often stood in for crowded human folly (with its pain); and special effects for political camouflage. Where do these links leave us today, when we enter labyrinths inside computer screens? Have the demonic glasses of Comenius gone digital? Or are computers the hopes of Baroque optics realized? The philosopher Deleuze left us one answer in his influential study, *Le Pli* (*The Fold*),[87] a look into Baroque erosion (or introversion). Deleuze describes a

public and private culture mutually folded like blankets into each other, like the drapery on a Bernini statue. The large sculpture is condensed. Even the shocks from war and urban misery are twisted into tiny, microprocessed, organic universes, folded into spirochetes like Leibniz's monads.

Thus, the sum effect of this Baroque inversion is harmony—filled with ironic mixes, but harmony nonetheless. For a Nietzschean nihilist[88] like Deleuze, that passes for optimism (a splendid book). I am less optimistic, more a happy hostage about special-effects culture, trying to be a little hopeful—at least for the next few decades. However, from beneath the folds of our micro-data, I see fiscal disaster at almost every statehouse, an agonized class structure, Pax Americana as perhaps a Thirty Years' War, and an imperial presidency turning into monarchy. The software honeymoon has ended. What follows may not yet look as darkly obvious as Comenius's world during the Thirty Years' War, but then again, is that thirty years in Web time?

In short, across media (architecture, literature, cinema, computers) Baroque special effects are a political grammar as well. They are labyrinths that somewhere in their navigational meandering tell us how the hierarchy of power must be obeyed. *Today, the Baroque heritage (including the special-effects world) supports transnational power under the cloak of entertainment, particularly on the computer*. But let us not turn this into a cyberpunk nightmare. As I often say to students, evil wears a white hat and gives good lunch. We should be alert to its subtleties, not what it expects us to hate: the institutionally invented enemies, the cheap shots. But meanwhile, the erosion continues, as many novels and films remind us—of blurring matrixes and snowcrashes.

> A Lab'rinth wild and obscure, to lose one's sense, A *Wilderness* of thick Impertinence.
> —Jane Barker (1723)[89]