

The Child's Labyrinth

When I was a child I owned a labyrinth puzzle. It absorbed all of my spare time for months. Basically it consisted of a wooden box covered by a platform that could be tilted around its longitudinal or its lateral axis by means of two turning knobs. There were delicate wooden structures glued to this platform that served both as guides and fence-like side supports for a metal ball marble the player had to guide past 60 holes along the way. My first attempts never went beyond hole number one. However, before frustration could crop up, I overcame the first hole and made it as far as the second. Yes, that was really me. I felt as if I was that metal marble, I actually turned into that marble. I can still remember exactly which sections were the trickiest. There was so little clearance between the marble and the hole in those sections that the danger of falling was imminent at any time. After several weeks of training, however, I was able to guide the metal marble through the maze at will, almost blindly, and I would guide it past the last hole, number 60, let it hit the buffer stop and even guide it all the way back - for hours on end. Later I turned myself - the metal marble - into a Ski World Cup slalom racer. That is, I did not create one ski racer only, but several of them. I headed down the mogul runs of the labyrinth puzzle being David Zwilling, Alfred Matt, Christian Neureuther, Edmund Bruggmann and many others I don't even recall. Whenever I dropped into a hole, this meant I had straddled a gate. I even kept an account of the results, created entire World Cup seasons and I was surprised at the winner I could be.

The labyrinth was odourless.

The Labyrinth of Fear

In Stanley Kubrick's film "The Shining" a labyrinth garden belonging to the premises of the Overlook Hotel plays a key role. At the end of the tourist season, with the last summer guests leaving the remote mountain hotel, Jack Torrance moves in with his wife and son - and we all know the horror that is to follow. At first, however, things look perfectly beautiful and in the crisp autumn air, Jack's wife Wendy and their son Danny set out to explore the hotel's huge

hedge maze with its paths corresponding to the hotel hallways, using a trial-and-error method. At the end of the film the hedge maze turns into the setting of a horrifying chase, as the father - now caught in a frenzy - pursues his wife and child, obviously trying to slay and mutilate them. Why else would he carry an axe just like Nosferatu who carries his coffin? When I was a student, I used to work as a film projectionist as part of a travelling cinema. Together with a friend of mine, I would supply even remote communities with motion pictures, with community centers and restaurant ballrooms serving as venues. We would travel around with two film projectors in the back of our R4 panel van which were antiquated even then and, depending on the length of the film, there would also be six to eight film reels - being an overlength film, "The Shining" consisted of seven reels - and a genuine big screen to be assembled on site. Once, in winter, we put on an open-air cinema show to present "The Shining" in a friend's backyard at midnight. There we were - ten friends sitting on ten chairs. It was freezing cold and it was snowing slightly. The snow flakes swirling in the light beam became one with those on the screen and it became harder and harder to separate reality from illusion. The clouds of our breath mingled with the breath of those hurrying through the hedge maze, forming a mist that turned into a transport medium for the driving and - in a way - equally labyrinthine soundtrack by Béla Bartók, so that the sound reaching our ears was crystal-clear.

The entire night tasted of snow.

The Labyrinth of Scent

When I visited Ursula Groser's labyrinth, there was this scent - a scent of grass or hay, in any case a summerly scent. The grass labyrinth had already dried up a little, as, according to what the gallery operator told me, problems had occurred when watering it. The scent was a delightfully melancholy one, as it immediately reminded me of my childhood. Not of the labyrinth puzzle, that is, but of the summers spent in Mehrn near Brixlegg, Tyrol, which was our regular summer retreat. Being a city boy, I had a chance to turn into a farmer's child there. No, I actually was the farmer himself. Together with real farmer's children I would pretend and



Rauminstallation, Gras, 2009 *installation, grass, 2009*

turn into the farmer. I got to groom the cows, clean out the stable and make hay in the field. We used the raked hay to form walls and piles lacking all geometry, but providing us with labyrinthine paths in which we would pretend to be cows. We would moo loudly and even chew a blade of hay every now and then. The olfactory impression of Ursula Groser's labyrinth reached me even before I had a visual impression. I would have loved to crawl along the grassy serpent and follow its scent with my eyes closed, guided by a memory, instead of looking at it. Sure enough I would have diverted the labyrinth from its intended use, but at the same time I would have added a new purpose. It would have been a different kind of "transition". The scent would have carried me towards the sounds emanating from the room where the "Transition" video was presented. I would have opened my eyes there. Actually, I would only have squinted my eyes, creating tiny openings of the eyelids just large enough for individual eyelashes to mingle with the flickering images of the increasingly dense crowd and the fading bright spots between the individuals. I would not have had the impression of squinting at a large screen, but rather at a pond with the sunlight sparkling on its surface, as more and more clouds moved in, or at the leafy crown of the tree above me, caressed by a breeze.

A summer day.

Georg Payr