

## Labyrinth – fragments

### Robert Morris and his installation for ms<sup>2</sup> Łódź 2010

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#### Abstract

The installation by Robert Morris called *Labyrinth*, accompanying his monographic exhibition at the Museum of Art in Łódź, was one of his numerous works based on this theme. Besides the labyrinth itself, which belongs to forms most pregnant with meanings, at least two issues seem intriguing. The first is the dialogue of Minimalism with art of all eras, of which Morris is a brilliant exponent. The other issue is connected to the concept of site-specific art, developed by him in the 1960s and assuming a comprehensive analysis of a place, its history, its social, cultural and political environment, which justifies and anchors the work. The Łódź context forced the artist to change his strategy, but the work based on the (very rare in art history) pattern of a triangular labyrinth may be interpreted as an important element of Morris's *Threading through a labyrinth*. Tracing the changes in the Minimalist discourse of the recent decades I focus on a few interpretative lines, connected with the functioning of the "labyrinth" as a structure, I find some analogies between pattern repetitions by writers from the Oulipo group and the activities of Robert Morris.

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- [1] I visited Lucca last summer for the second time, reminding myself of this incredible city's walls structure and the people who had disappeared inside ... a little bit like Italo Calvino's characters. Day after day the labyrinth of streets seemed to be getting more and more familiar. Lucca, a medieval town with Roman roots, can be perceived as a kind of labyrinth; the arena, now piazza, as the labyrinth's centre, and the town walls as the first path. It is incredible, but the walls are still fully intact today (as the walls lost their military importance, they became a pedestrian promenade which encircled the old town, although they were used for a number of years in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for racing cars).<sup>1</sup> Walking the path on top of the town walls you can take a good look at the city and its maze-like structure. During the walk the streets seen from above reveal a more complicated street layout, a second maze with another centre becomes visible. Walking there, I begun to think about another labyrinth, prepared by Robert Morris for his exhibition *Notes on Sculpture* at the exhibition space ms<sup>2</sup> of the Museum of Art in Łódź<sup>2</sup> some months earlier, realised in June 2010. Asked on the opening night to take part in the session and panel discussion connected with the show's finisage, I did not choose the subject for my paper until a sunny afternoon in Lucca, where I decided to concentrate in

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.luccaterre.it/index.php?lang=enrris> (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *Robert Morris – Notes on Sculpture. Objects, Installations, Films*, Museum of Art in Łódź, ms<sup>2</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> June-24<sup>th</sup> October 2010, curated by Suzanne Titz, Clemens Krümmel, Katarzyna Słoboda, co-production Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach.

my paper on mazes, and on knowing how to make the most of every opportunity. It is presumably not by chance that I had chosen Lucca for a short vacation.



1 Lucca seen with Calvino on my mind (photograph provided by the author)

- [2] The feeling of mysterious unease came before the labyrinth. On St. Martin's cathedral façade. The Lucca Cathedral dates from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, but little remains of this phase of the church. The cathedral acquired its present appearance after interventions in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which were completed in 1204, adding the portico to the façade, with three large arches and the "loggias" with multiform columns. The sculptures of the left portal are the work of Nicola Pisano (today a copy is displayed), but a no less attractive element of the façade is a labyrinth on the right marble panel inside the right loggia of the portico, on the outermost pillar, which is characteristically two-coloured (fig. 2). The portico is constructed according to laws no less rigorous than those for building a medieval church. The space inside the portico used to have its own hierarchies. Now its rhetoric collapsed, for us first of all it is a place between the sacred and the profane. The intaglio placed on the side wall on the viewer's eyes height seemed to ask to be touched. Most church visitors put their hands on the cold, worn marble – to communicate with the 'ages', history's infinity, in a simple gesture of repetition. A longer examination, if it is possible in a crowded tourist city,<sup>3</sup> could give an impression of undifferentiated potency. It could

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<sup>3</sup> The discourse on tourism, both academic and lay, consists in the criticism of tourism as an inauthentic activity. Both the tourist and a more heroic figure contrasting with him, namely a traveller in search for culturally authentic values, used to fall into a trap. Jonathan Culler explained the paradox: *The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself and hence not authentic in the sense of unspoiled* (Jonathan Culler, "The Semiotics of Tourism," in: *Framing the Sign. Criticism and its Institutions*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Oxford 1988, 164). In his brilliant essay, Culler explored not only the processes of seeing every detail of a cultural monument, but also touching objects as crucial for the experience.

even reveal that the maze, with its twelve paths, could be classified as a Chartres type. Very few people try to read the ancient description on the right side of the diagram.<sup>4</sup>



2 Labyrinth on the portico of St. Martin's Cathedral in Lucca  
(photograph provided by the author)

[3] It is presumably not by chance that virtually all French labyrinths have 12 concentric circles, possibly alluding to the zodiac (within those constraints the world only seems to be confusingly labyrinthine), like in Pavia and Cologne.<sup>5</sup> The attempt to reconstruct Calvino's unreconstructable tracery of patterns gives rise to a number of questions. Sometimes you can perceive a town as very close to an impermanent structure of a polyphonic playground or labyrinth, condensation of any space, available and forbidden. Calvino – absent and present – with his catalogue of issues could guide us, but instead he has proposed a dilemma:

What if everyone waits for something to happen?

What if everyone waits for someone to take over?

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<sup>4</sup> A labyrinth at Lucca Cathedral showed Theseus and Minotaur at the center; the inscription stated that no one could leave the labyrinth except Theseus with Ariadne's aid. Though not explicitly Christian, in an ecclesiastical context this inscription could well suggest Christian truth foreshadowed by pagan myth (Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth, from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London 1992, 127-128): HIC QUEM CRETICUS EDIT DEDALUS EST LABERINTHUS DE QUO NULLUS VADERE QUIVIT QUI FUIT INTUS NI THESEUS GRATIS ADRIANAE [sic?] STAMINE JUTUS, as my friend-librarian Aleksander Siemaszko found that description at Paolo Santarcangeli, *Księga labiryntu*, Warszawa 1982, 272 (Italian original: Paolo Santarcangeli, *Il libro dei labirinti*, Vallecchi, Florence 1967; a new edition is available online at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/52920468/Paolo-Santarcangeli-Il-libro-dei-labirinti-2005>, access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Penelope Reed Doob identified the reasons for placing labyrinths in medieval churches as a sign of the enclosing cathedral's magnificence and the architects genius, and as a sign of hell made extricable through the labors and unicursal footsteps of Christ – Theseus – a sign of redemption as well as a warning of those who will not follow Christian doctrine (Reed Doob, *The Idea*, 128). The connection between Lucca, Pavia and Piacenza labyrinths was researched by Hermann Kern in his book *Labyrinthe. Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen: 5000 Jahre Gegenwart eines Urbilds*, Prestel, München 1982, 230-234.

What if the system / boss takes over?

What if the boss has left for an eternal holiday?

What if we no longer know what goes on?

What if life just sucks and stinks to hell?

- [4] Watching Lucca's treasures obviously gave me no answers to Calvino's dilemma, but gave me, as a traveller, some clues to understanding a medieval labyrinth as a significant form – still active even in its tourist edition; it also suggested to me the concept of a city as a metaphorical labyrinth. Both as it is understood in modern and postmodern times, it reminds us that

*as much recent visual art and theory has underlined, the artist (as the first viewer of the work) and subsequent viewers / interpreters are caught up within the complex fraught operation of representation – entangled in intersubjective spaces of desire, projection, and identification. As classed, raced, sexed, and gendered (fully socialized and embodied) subjects, both artists and interpreter are implicated within any potential determination of meaning. The notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a process rather than an act with a final goal, and acknowledges the ways in which circuits of desire and pleasure are at play in the complex web of relations among artists, patrons, collectors, and both specialized and non-specialized viewers.<sup>6</sup>*



3 Robert Morris, *Untitled (Philadelphia Labyrinth)*, 1974. Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York, Panza Collection (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Reprod. from: Robert Morris, *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., London, New York 1995, 299)

- [5] How do all those fragments fit with Robert Morris and his labyrinths? Back in Krakow I was searching for the answer in the libraries, which sometimes are, by the way, seen as another labyrinth (not only by Umberto Eco). At my own library I studied the presence /

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<sup>6</sup> A. Jones and A. Stephenson, "Introduction," in: *Performing the Body / Performing the Text*, ed. A. Jones and A. Stephenson, Routledge, London, New York 1999, 1.



absence of this in Robert Morris's art and writing. Remembering how important the reciprocity of verbal and visual in his art is, I would like to select appropriate fragments from extensive materials on the labyrinth for my 'fragments'<sup>7</sup>. Probably the first material, a three-dimensional oeuvre, was the work *Untitled (Philadelphia Labyrinth)* from 1974 (fig. 3),<sup>8</sup> drawn earlier by the artist (even now some drawings are available in the net). The artist describes the relations between the 3D work and the drawings:

*Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Minimalism was that it was the only art of objects (aside from the obvious example of architecture) that ever attempted to mediate between the notational knowledge of flat concerns (systems, the diagrammatic, the logically constructed and placed, the preconceived) and the concerns of objects (the relativity of perception in depth). But mediation is a delicate and frequently brief state of affairs.*<sup>9</sup>

[6] It was easier for him to formulate these reflections just after the Nazca experiences, where

*[i]n the domain of real space the subject-object dilemma can never be resolved. The problem of solipsism and autism hang in the air. Here the labyrinth form is perhaps a metonym of the search for the self, for it demands a continuous wandering, a relinquishing of the knowledge of where one is. A labyrinth is comprehensible only when seen from above, in plan view, when it is reduced to flatness and we are outside its spatial coil.*<sup>10</sup>

[7] But these coiled forms fascinated him, he used to draw them frequently and years later he would ask rhetorically, *How many labyrinths have I done?* Some of them stem from the experiences with earthworks, allowing for interaction between the work in progress and the perceiver. Jack Burnham has suggested: Since 1966 Morris's interests have included designs for low relief earth sculptures consisting of abutments, hedges, and sodded mounds, visible from the air and not unlike Indian burial mounds.<sup>11</sup> Other drawings are really close to labyrinth diagrams present in the visual art tradition from Antiquity, and Chartres could be seen as a highlight.

[8] Penelope Reed Doob, who researched the purposes and symbolism of the labyrinth from classical antiquity to the middle ages, gave us such a characteristic:

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<sup>7</sup> The crucial texts by Morris on the subject include, among many others: Robert Morris, *From Mnemosyne to Clio: The Mirror to the Labyrinth*, exh.cat., Skira, Milano 2000; Robert Morris, "Threading the Labyrinth," *October* 96 (Spring 2001), 61-70; Robert Morris, "Lawirowanie przez labirynt," transl. Katarzyna Słoboda, in: *Robert Morris. Uwagi o rzeźbie. Teksty*, Museum of Art in Łódź, Łódź 2010; Robert Morris, *Have I Reasons. Work and Writings, 1993-2007*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009; Robert Morris, "The Labyrinth and the Urinal," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 1 (2009), 76-99, and other works cited. Cf. also Maurice Berger, *Labyrinths: Robert Morris, Minimalism, and the 1960s*, Harper & Row, New York 1989.

<sup>8</sup> The installation was prepared for the Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, now at Guggenheim Museum as part of the Panza Collection. <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/about-the-collection/new-york/panza-collection/1649> (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Morris, "Aligned with Nazca (1975)," in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, London, New York 1995, 169.

<sup>10</sup> Morris, "Aligned with Nazca," 165-166.

<sup>11</sup> Jack Burnham, "Systems Aesthetics," in: *Great Western Salt Works. Essays on the meaning of post-formalist art*, G. Brazziller, New York 1974, 20.

*They are full of ambiguity, their circuitous design prescribes a constant doubling back, and they fall into two distinct but related structural categories. They presume a double perspective: maze-treaders, whose vision ahead and behind is severely constricted and fragmented, suffer confusion, whereas maze-viewers who see the pattern whole, from above or in a diagram, are dazzled by its complex artistry. What you see depends on where you stand, and thus, at one and the same time, labyrinths are single (there is one physical structure) and double: they simultaneously incorporate order and disorder, clarity and confusion, unity and multiplicity, artistry and chaos. They may be perceived as path (a linear but circuitous passage to a goal) or as pattern (a complete symmetrical design). They are dynamic form from a maze-walker's perspective and static from a privileged onlooker's point of view.<sup>12</sup>*

- [9] Morris's diagram offered a simplification of the Chartres pattern, reducing the number of paths to seven (the original twelve refers to astrological meanings). His circular structure could be touched and viewed while walking, feeling some discomfort provoked – probably – by the gallery's dimensions. But did he intend such references as the idea of a planned chaos, a symbol of a difficult process, or just proposed a specific site for the viewer's body? Morris's comparison of the diagram to the labyrinth was based on the mid-70s art experience with "The Present Tense of Space"<sup>13</sup>, *a single individual's limit in examining, testing and ultimately shaping the interior space of the self, what effected [s]pace itself [to] come to have another meaning.*<sup>14</sup> It could have happened – as Rosalind Krauss has proved<sup>15</sup> – that the kind of theatricality offered by the works of Morris and some others reformulated the sculptural enterprise: what the object is, how we know it, and what it means to know it.
- [10] Seen from the point of view from the late 1970s, the first labyrinth bore special references to the work of a number of artists (Alice Aycock, Robert Smithson, Brian O'Doherty, Allan Kaprow) involved with earthworks and creating mazes. Some, like Robert Smithson, were obsessed with what occurs when language comes to occupy the centre. The texts about language are also about the notion of the centre, and specifically, the dialectical relationship between the centre and circumference to which Smithson's nonsites were also addressed.<sup>16</sup> Alice Aycock thought of the maze as a sequence of body / eye movements from position to position. The whole cannot be comprehended at once. It can only be remembered as a sequence,<sup>17</sup> but it is enhanced by comments, notes mixed with memories; very personal and connected with sightseeing of ancient monuments. She

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<sup>12</sup> Reed Doob, *The Idea*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> As the title of another of his essays reads. Robert Morris, "The Present Tense of Space," in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, 167-209.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, "Aligned with Nazca," 173.

<sup>15</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *Passages in Modern Sculpture*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachusetts and London, 1977.

<sup>16</sup> Craig Owens, "Earthwords," in: *Beyond Recognition. Representation, Power, and Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1992, 40.

<sup>17</sup> Alice Aycock, "Maze (1975)," in: Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz, eds., *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1996, 560.

came to her maze from her MA thesis on the motorway system<sup>18</sup> and constructed a work with twelve-sided wooden panels on a farm in Pennsylvania. The structure referred to an Indian fortification. Morris did it in a different way; fascinated by the monumentality of the Nazca culture and other prehistoric prototypes, he has translated this experience into a very contemporary one, in the physical sphere through the technologies used and in the symbolic sphere through placing the work within the realm of an art institution. The labyrinth known only from one photography referred to a 'white cube' space and to a 3D model of the Chartres type. This ephemeral work for the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia announced Morris's intention to reveal not the soul of the artist, but the nature of his materials.

- [11] Specific materials, which proved that *much work is made outside the studio*<sup>19</sup> by an artist who had launched a new understanding of the studio model, closer to the conception of a designer workshop. At that time many of his works were produced in the industrial plant Lippincott, Inc.,<sup>20</sup> and the effect of this collaboration, for example, on the exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American art in New York in 1970 was read as a performative critique of alienated labour and auratic authorship.<sup>21</sup> The labyrinth, painted on grey plywood, masonite (96' x 360'), typical for this phase, looks different because of its soft curves. Narrow passages between the walls – we don't know the exact measures of the work (just eight-foot high), and the dimensions and proportions of the gallery – suggest claustrophobic space and were contrasted by Alessandra Acocella<sup>22</sup> with another early photograph showing Morris's *Passageway* (1961) in Yoko Ono's loft. But it was Aycock who insisted: *I had hoped to create a moment of absolute panic – when the only thing that mattered was to get out.*<sup>23</sup> Morris draws on this phenomenological notion of the body (which, in phenomenological terms, is also understood as the self) as a modality of reflexivity to propose the interpretive relation as a reflexive exchange.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent

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<sup>18</sup> Alice Aycock, lecture in Cranbrook Academy of Art, in 1978, quotation in: Stuart Morgan, *What the Butler Saw. Selected Writings by Stuart Morgan*, Durian publication Ltd., London 1996, 76.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Morris, "Notes on Sculpture, Part 3: Notes and Nonsequitue," *Artforum* 10 (June 1967), 26; Robert Morris, "Some Notes on Phenomenology of Making: The Search for the Motivated," *Artforum* 8 (June 1970), 66.

<sup>20</sup> Established in 1966, the firm billed itself as the country's only industrial producer dedicated to sculpture and counted Oldenburg, Morris, Newman, Kelly, Robert Murray, Louise Nevelson, Lucas Samaras among its regulars. The firm acquired facility with plastics, fiberglass, and ceramics. By 1970 it moved into a thousand-square-foot work space with a field to showcase sculptures for sale and offered *the whole package of services that take a piece as smoothly as possible from the stage of conception through to the final installation* (Michelle Kuo, "Industrial Revolution," *Artforum* 46 (October 2007), 306-314, 396).

<sup>21</sup> Kuo, "Industrial Revolution," 313. Julia Bryan-Wilson had reinterpreted Morris exhibition at Whitney from the very current perspective (Julia Bryan-Wilson, "Hard Hats and Art Strikes: Robert Morris in 1970," *Art Bulletin* 89, no. 2 (Summer 2007), 333-359).

<sup>22</sup> Alessandra Acocella, "Spazi Dedalici. I labirinti di Robert Morris tra realta ideale e realta fisica," <http://www.architetturadi Pietra.it/wp/?p=1977> (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>23</sup> Aycock, "Maze (1975)," 559.

<sup>24</sup> Amelia Jones, "Art History / Art Criticism: Performing Meaning," in: *Performing the Body*, 47.

fate of the Labyrinth project was extraordinary and meaningful; as part of Count Panza di Biumo's collection it was rewritten to suit Panza's taste for the metaphysical – as Rosalind Krauss has proved,<sup>25</sup> searching for the collectors' effect on the historical perception of Minimalism. From the end of the 90s the collection, as part of the Guggenheim Museum, it went back into the public realm, but this episode had a strong bearing on subsequent interpretations of his work.

- [12] In his own paragone from the beginning of the 1990s Morris is uncertain if his own intentions and aspirations from the 1960s were a success or failure, if they were not dominated by his authoritarian desires. His last pronouncements on the little word "labyrinth" were:

*'Originless, fetishistic, fascistic, real, imaginary, mnemonic, antiarchitectural, claustrophobic, metaphorical, metonymic, disorienting, Minotaurless, Baroque, spatial; Minimal, linear, neurological, intestinal, threadless, appropriated, timeless, textual, iconophobic, illegal, expensive, temporal, graffiti prone ...' Enough, Ignatz, it's getting us nowhere.*<sup>26</sup>

- [13] With Morris's writing in mind, Doob's discussion on the medieval labyrinth may provide us with some other important links to contemporary theory. She realised that

*since labyrinth is a model simultaneously for artistic intention (the architect's plan), the integrity of a text (the labyrinth as artifact), and the experience of the reader (the well- or ill-informed choices of the maze-treader within the parameters set by the builders), it suggests some possible ways of dealing with the often conflicting claims of authorial intention versus reception in critical discourse.*<sup>27</sup>



4 Wire netting – the kind of material used by Morris as a kind of 'ready-made' (photograph by Marcin Stepień)

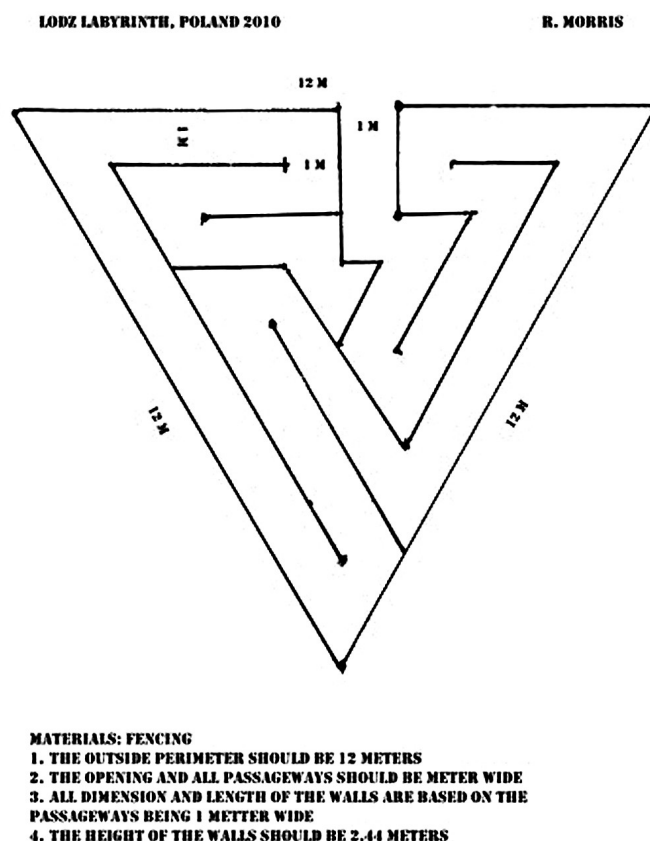
<sup>25</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Overcoming the Limits of Matter: On Revising Minimalism," in: *American Art of the 1960s, Studies in Modern Art One*, ed. J. Elderfield, The Museum of Modern Art, New York 1991, 123-141.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Morris, "Robert Morris Replies to Roger Denson (Or Is That a Mouse in My Paragone?)," in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, London, New York 1995, 301.

<sup>27</sup> Reed Doob, *The Idea*, 9.



- [14] And now another fragment – Morris's last version, which took place at the Łódź Museum, specifically at the "Manufaktura", a shopping mall courtyard, close to the museum's entrance: *Labyrinth* – a site-specific work constructed by Artmet<sup>28</sup> according to Morris's design,<sup>29</sup> and his other mazes on a triangular plan (figs. 5, 6, 10).



5 Robert Morris, Sketch for *Łódź Labyrinth*, 2010 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Image kindly provided by Ryan Roa)

- [15] He decided on a kind of wire fence elements, most common for the place (in a general sense, not for fancy mall space), and construction dimensions (walls should be 2,44 m high<sup>30</sup>). The irresistible temptation to compare the first and the last of Morris's mazes could be too obvious; first of all location written as place: white cube versus commercial space with local industrial background; winding stabile wooden grey structure / transparent walls of wire; narrow passage effect / prisoner view on the world outside; claustrophobia – nothing outside versus a busy commercial courtyard. What do they have in common? The rules of participation, almost every beholder's move determined by the pattern of the paths, with the author's / constructor's vision and signature behind. Who the participant was / could be like? If the first maze was first of all for gallery goers, and

<sup>28</sup> <http://artmet.org.pl>.

<sup>29</sup> Katarzyna Słoboda, co-curator, informed me that Morris only accepted the design drawn by his assistant Ryan Roa, and chose ready-made elements.

<sup>30</sup> The other dimensions depended on the mall regulations, written on the drawing presented.

could be seen 'as important part of the disillusion process of white cube neutrality', the second one played with the new institution, located in a specific city in Central / Eastern Europe (where the artist had never been). And in Poland, with its contemporary history, wire mesh is naturally perceived as an allegory for the martial law.<sup>31</sup> A museum conscious of its own history connected with industry, is participating in a discourse on new institutionalism, and very close to commerce in its location. For sure the maze was more for mall visitors than for museum public, but on the other hand we can see it as an important part of institutional policy to enlarge the audience. Provocative in its totally inartistic look, it could be seen as a subversive invitation to the exhibition of 'one of the greatest American artists'. But it could be also seen as a continuation of tradition, in which

*[t]he labyrinth-as-prison is a process of ambages from which one cannot, or thinks one cannot, escape; but there is also a labyrinth with a happy ending, a metaphorical labyrinth-as-progress, carefully shaped by a master architect to direct the worthy wanderer to a profitable end [...].<sup>32</sup>*



6 Robert Morris, *Łódź Labyrinth*, 2010 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011).  
Photograph by Marcin Stepień

- [16] The artist had created several labyrinths, mostly in the late 1990s and 2000s. Some are architectural, other landscape oriented. Mostly they are about the 'presence' informed by the contextual thinking of the Minimalist discourse of the 1960s (but exemplifying a difficult process as well). These works could be placed in a huge site-specific art context, but using Miwon Kwon's typology, we may try to examine their place in more recent site-oriented projects. The border *among many others, the site of art is again redefined, often extending beyond familiar art contexts to more 'public' realms.*<sup>33</sup> The question is, did Robert Morris, with those labyrinths, involve himself in a redefinition of site?

<sup>31</sup> Alongside many visual examples, the last one: the exhibition "Generation 80s" in the National Museum in Krakow – 01.12.2010-16.01.2011 used wire enclosures as the most powerful element.

<sup>32</sup> Reed Doob, *The Idea*, 56.

- [17] Let us choose and examine some other labyrinth fragments, perhaps those realised in Italy. Among several sculpture parks, Fattoria di Celle at Tuscany is the most seriously engaged in art.<sup>34</sup> According to them,

*[t]he idea of site-specificity is fundamental for all the projects carried out at Celle. The artist, once invited, chooses the place where he will develop his project, specifically for the characteristics of the site. So he carefully analyzes all the elements that can condition the place (climate, light, vegetation, to name just a few). Moreover he must also take into account the spirit of Romanticism that connotes the park. For many artists this has been a chance to find ties between their own work and the history and culture of Tuscany. In fact many works have originated as homages to figures like Leonardo and Galileo or to the artistic and monumental patrimony of this region.*<sup>35</sup>

- [18] Morris's *Labyrinth* from 1982 (fig. 7) demonstrates 'found ties' with local historical architecture, by using horizontal stripes, white stone (from the Serpento area) and dark-green stone (from Trani), in regular intervals, very typical for Pistoia churches (fig. 8).<sup>36</sup>



7 Robert Morris, *Labyrinth*, 1982. Fattoria di Celle, Archivio Fattoria di Celle, Aurelio Amendoli (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011. Reprod. from: Matilde Marzotto Caotorta, *Arte Open Air. Guida ai parchi d'arte contemporanea in Italia*, Alessandro Rocca, Milano 2007, 107)

<sup>33</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another, Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2004, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Matilde Marzotto Caotorta, *Arte Open Air. Guida ai parchi d'arte contemporanea in Italia*, Alessandro Rocca, Milano 2007.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.sculpture.org/documents/parksdir/p&g/gori/gori.shtml> (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Alessandra Acocella shows two examples, one of them being San Giovanni Fuorcivitas Battistero di San Zeno in Pistoia, but such an alternation of stripes could be interpreted as a typical Tasmanian motive as well (Acocella, "Spazi Dedalici").



8 Typical motive from a medieval Tuscan church (reprod. from: Alessandra Acocella, "Spazi Dedalici. I labirinti di Robert Morris tra realtà ideale e realtà fisica," <http://www.architetturadi Pietra.it/wp/?p=2010> (access: 9 Nov 2011))

- [19] The bird's eye view – beside a strong triangular structure – discloses the third active colour, the azure of the sky reflected from the top surface symbolising Italy. But the first view for a newcomer to the park offers a high striped wall, the search for an invisible gate depends on his/her assumptions and expectations. These materials are used in order to represent the site and to embody a distillation of his/her experience of Tuscany, Pistoia, Celle. This labyrinth was modelled on the universal type, like Classical and medieval mazes, which begin where they end and end where they begin. The formal implication of each model is how its characteristic features imply metaphorical potential; the presence of true and false paths in a multicursal maze may suggest the importance of a correct moral or intellectual choice in the world. The single path of the unicursal type argues that the path prescribed by God leads to the appropriate destination. But all that we need is just a glimpse of the thread running along the half-buried passageway of the labyrinth.<sup>37</sup> The labyrinth installed in a romantic park – but at Tuscany – has a triangular plan and there is no chance of finding the prototype earlier than in Baroque, and only among models for gardens.<sup>38</sup> Natural scenery had become a less valuable commodity in the sense of a framework. The work's dimensions, evidently too big for that place, disqualified it. That uncomfortable situation – with its evident minimalistic origins – changes the visitors' expectations for a beautiful scenery easy to take snapshots of. Its triangular plan, so proper here inside the garden, will be applied by the artist several times in such various contexts as a museum (Lyon) and "Manufaktura". His current works are constructed according to the rules sometimes obvious to art history

<sup>37</sup> Morris, "Threading the Labyrinth," 69.

<sup>38</sup> Kern, *Labyrinthe*. In the chapter "Garten – Labyrinthe und Irrgärten" there are very few triangle diagrams; one of Georg Andreas Böckler's (Strasbourg c. 1644-1698), fig. 502, p. 368, and others from *Les Thresor De Parte De L'Universe* (Geneva 1629), figs. 479 and 480, p. 363.



narratives. Speaking about utility he is very sceptical, because all we need is just a glimpse of the thread running along half-buried in a passageway of the labyrinth.<sup>39</sup> But maybe this labyrinth has a special value by dint of provoking the maze-walker to follow Calvino's tracery of patterns. We may touch Morris's work, see its high wall passages and feel its massiveness, but also realise that there are metaphorical labyrinths, the idea of planned chaos, a symbol of a difficult process.

[20] Like everything in Morris's art, this work proved that he played games with art history and very contemporary site theories. His Earth Art background not only raises questions about the position of the spectator, but it is also dissolving the distance between viewer and art object, provoking new perceptual experiences, which is seen by Malcolm Andrews as a key relation for a range of diverse artists.<sup>40</sup> Morris's outdoor works touch upon 'place art' problems, and if we agree with Lucy Lippard that a place ethics demands a respect for a place that is rooted more deeply than an aesthetic version of the 'tourist gaze' provided by imported artists whose real interests lie elsewhere,<sup>41</sup> we may concentrate on the processes the Fattoria di Celle organization offers. The Gori collection idea is based on site-specific art: *It is a sculpture park where each artist has been specially commissioned to create his or her work as an integral part of the surroundings.*<sup>42</sup> The opportunity of a several months-long residency in a Tuscany villa and in-depth research was very significant.

[21] As a pioneer of depriving space of its 'innocence', in his 1980s and 1990s art Morris continues the expansion of works that transcend their status as object, consequently undermining the understanding of a place through its history and spiritual hollowness. The results, as this *Labyrinth* in Celle, cannot be subjected to the test of a 'tourist gaze', it is unique as undergoing a different verification, because its audience is relatively limited in size and economic clout, mostly confined to the most sophisticated cultural tourist. The artist is sceptical about public art – he has seen the entire concept of the cultural industry emerge recently, while for him *[a]rt is a social activity; communicating – exhibiting – is part of it.*<sup>43</sup> But his disillusionment did not eliminate relationships with *[m]ass culture: the Guggenheim is making a scarf with a "Labyrinth" drawing on it, as well as that T-shirt. That's two relationships to mass culture right there.*<sup>44</sup> *Labyrinth* inside the "Manufaktura" courtyard created some more relationships when confronted

<sup>39</sup> Morris, "Threading the Labyrinth," 69.

<sup>40</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 1999, 221.

<sup>41</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local. Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, The New Press, New York 1997, 278.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.italiaplease.com/eng/megazine/notebook/celle> (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>43</sup> Robert Morris interviewed by W. J. T. Mitchell, in: W. J. T. Mitchell, "Golden Memories – Interview with Sculptor Robert Morris," *Artforum* 32, no. 8 (April 1994), 133. [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0268/is\\_n8\\_v32/ai\\_16109620](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n8_v32/ai_16109620) (access: 9 Nov 2011).

<sup>44</sup> Robert Morris interviewed by W. J. T. Mitchell, in: Mitchell, "Golden Memories", 87.

with the complexities of place: above all commercial, widely open for mass culture. An ephemeral, quasi-transparent object placed close to the ms<sup>2</sup> entrance a little bit between two spaces, suggests its high art identity, which could be seen as a subversion by museum goers, and could not be evident to the shopping mall public. The former, if engaged in negotiation and dispute on 'the public', could identify a 'patronizing aesthetic' as environmental pollution – to use Krzysztof Wodiczko's phrase.<sup>45</sup> For others, in the sense of larger-than-usual art audience, there was no such denominator meaning. Beside such extreme readings, without in-depth research we can only suspect a third possibility: people asking themselves, what am I looking at? And some, not only kids, are stepping in. Some people familiar with Robert Morris's art could even deny Reed Doob's generalization (based generally on mazes in popular culture): The very contemporary idea of a labyrinth is curiously limited. It holds that they are intended to confuse and frustrate.<sup>46</sup> I have in mind the *Mirror Maze with 12 Signs of Depression* (2002) from Documenta11 in Kassel (fig. 9), where the Vancouver based artist Ken Lum made a reference to Morris by using mirrors, but not only to Morris: based on 19<sup>th</sup> century entertainment and alluding to crystalline expressionist architecture, the shopping mall, the fun house, and the famous climatic shoot-out in the mirrored room in classic film-noir *The Lady from Shanghai*.<sup>47</sup>



9 Ken Lum, *Mirror Maze with 12 Signs of Depression*, 2002, presented at Documenta11 in Kassel (© Ken Lum. Reprod. from: <http://www.artthrob.co.za/02sept/reviews/documenta.html> (access: 9 Nov 2011))

<sup>45</sup> Krzysztof Wodiczko, quoted by Lippard, *The Lure of the Local*, 272.

<sup>46</sup> Reed Doob, *The Idea*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Documenta11 – Platform5: Ausstellung / Exhibition Kurzfürher / Short Guide*, 148.

- [22] As the image of self endlessly replicates (on twelve mirrors – as meaningful and rooted in history) and space dissolves in a reflective surface, the viewer loses his coordinates as he sees himself as if in the multifaceted eye of an insect.
- [23] In one of his American lectures, called "Transparency", Italo Calvino<sup>48</sup> was discussing the idea of imagination. He located this idea in the history of the ability to imagine, as it was described by such writers as Jean Starobinsky in *L'empire de l'imaginaire*, who placed the roots of imagination, seen as possibility to communicate with the universe, inside Renaissance magic, strongly influenced by neo-Platonic philosophy, taken over by Romanticism and Surrealism. As we know, the imagination could be seen as the opposite of knowledge, but for some contemporary 'pomo' thinkers Freud's and Jung's theories eliminate that dilemma. Calvino believed that his own imagination belonged to both fields. Perhaps it is worth remembering, as Georges Perec, a close friend of Calvino's, has written, that for himself – and probably for his friends – 'collage' is like a huge fantastic net – a promise and a prerequisite *sine qua non*. A kind of gift, the moment to initiate his own literary memory.<sup>49</sup> Using a pattern makes an artwork more akin to a puzzle. And helps us to perceive in such works strategies activating the beholder, that is, strategies very similar to those employed by the Minimalists. Morris combines rational thinking with sensitivity, using well-known patterns, based on the memory of the community.
- [24] In *Gödel, Escher, Bach* Douglas Hofstadter insisted:

*Think, for instance, of a writer who is trying to convey certain ideas which to him are contained in mental images. He isn't quite sure how those images fit together in his mind, and he experiments around, expressing things first one way and then another, and finally settles on some version. But does he know where it all comes from? Only in a vague sense. Much of the source, like an iceberg, is deep underwater, unseen – and he knows that.*<sup>50</sup>

- [25] Art history as a pathological discipline is nothing other than a history of art capable of assuming the disturbing paradox that comes over the subject of knowledge when confronted with phenomena indicative of the symptom. One cannot know the symptom – the pathos of antiquity, the unconscious gesture of the nymph – without comprehending it. To comprehend means to take with as Didi-Huberman noticed, commenting on a text by Aby Warburg.<sup>51</sup> In his 'continuous' discussion with art history Robert Morris used the

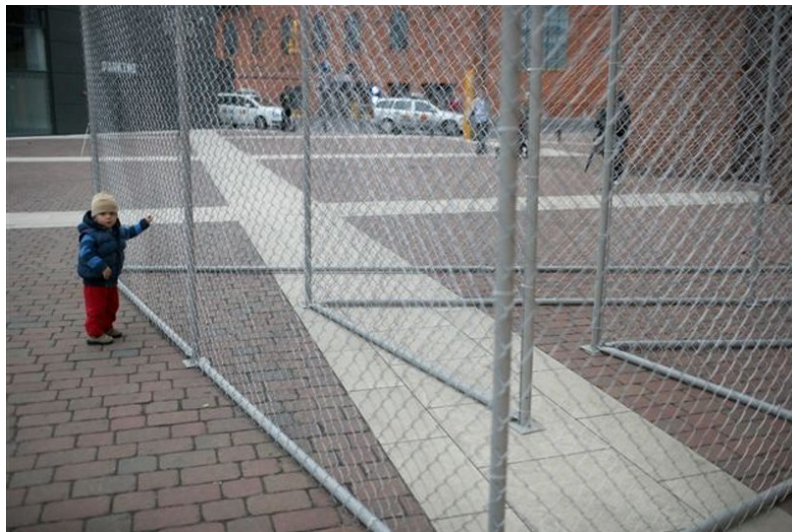
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<sup>48</sup> He was a member of OULIPO: *ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, roughly translated as "workshop of potential literature," a loose gathering of (mainly) French-speaking writers (Raymond Queneau, Jacques Roubaud and the mathematicians) with its most famous writer – Georges Perec. In his writing collage was understood as "The seeking of new structures and patterns which may be used by writers in any way they enjoy." They use mathematics as a basis for composition, specialising in anagrams, palindromes and other mathematical word games. In their projects the collages could be seen as the favorite technique.

<sup>49</sup> Harry Mathews, "Georges Perec, That Ephemeral Thing," in: *Immeasurable Distances*, Lapis Press, Venice, CA, 1991 (quoted in: *Literatura na Świecie* 11/12 (1995), 317).

<sup>50</sup> Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid*, Vintage Books, New York 1980, 713.

labyrinth in many senses, but seemed to be particularly familiar with the labyrinth as a sign of a difficult process.



10 Robert Morris, *Łódź Labyrinth*, 2010 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2011.  
Photograph by Marcin Stepień)

[<top>](#)

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<sup>51</sup> Georges Didi-Huberman, "Foreword," in: Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image In Motion*, Zone Books, New York 2007, 18.