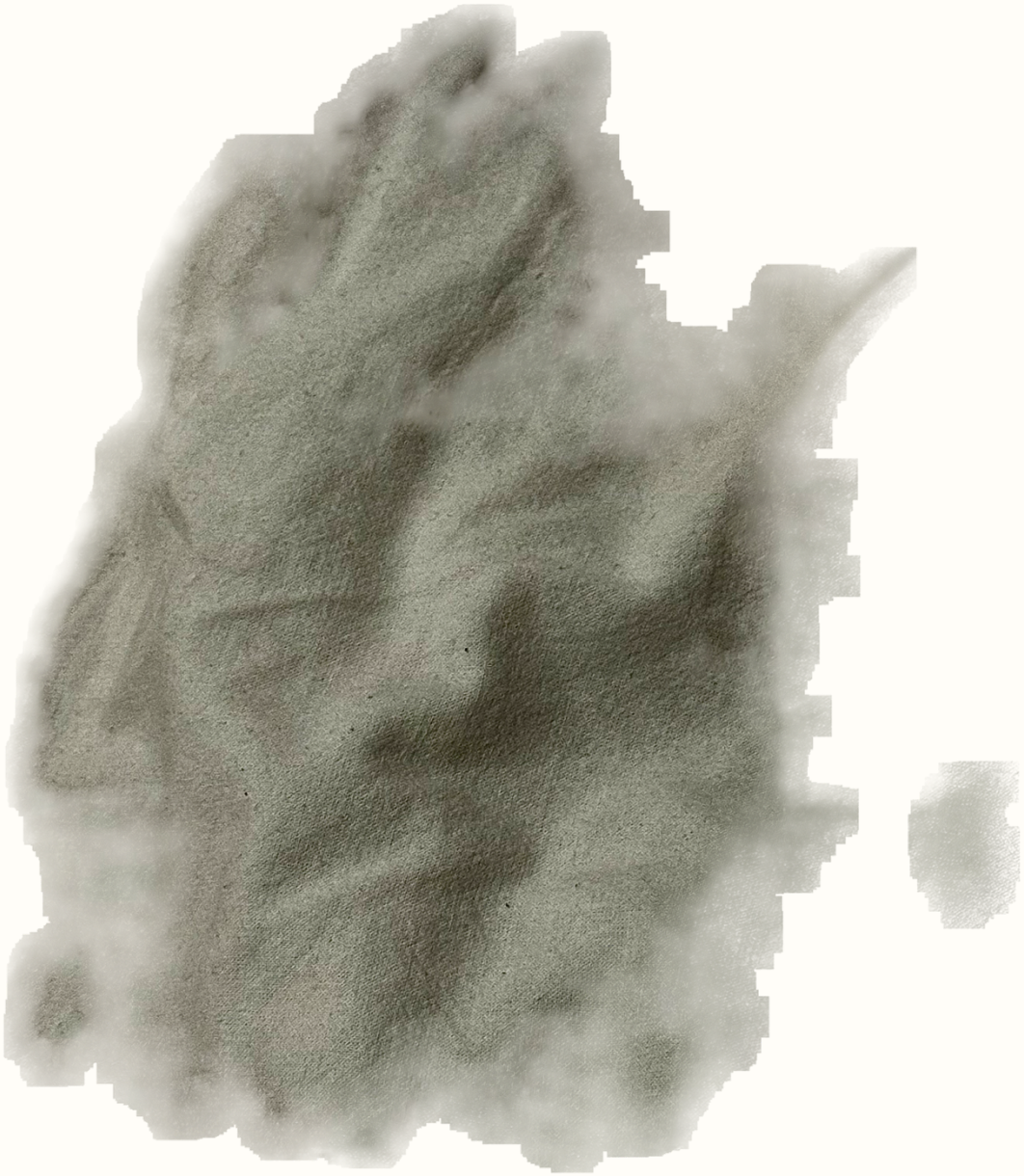
Transformative Storytelling: Crafting St

Designing Deliverance: Trauma, Power, and the Transformative Pathway of Christ in an Immersive Maze



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Abstract

This paper reflects on the conceptual and creative process behind an immersive maze installation that examines mental health diagnostics, intergenerational trauma, and the lingering effects of colonial history through the lens of narrative medicine and theological inquiry. Rather than presenting a definitive argument or advocating a fixed position, the writing adopts a reflective and exploratory approach, guided by the evolving questions that surfaced throughout the project's development. Drawing from texts introduced at the beginning of the course, it investigates the intersection of storytelling, spatial design, and ancestral memory. Central to the project is the positioning of Christ's redemptive sacrifice as a counter-narrative to both inherited psychological affliction and the colonial distortion of spiritual identity. In doing so, the work reimagines diagnostic space not as a site of clinical categorization, but as a sacred, immersive path toward liberation. This paper functions both as a documentation of the process and a philosophical inquiry into the unresolved questions that continue to inform and shape the project's trajectory.

Design question

How might an immersive maze environment be designed to examine diagnostic methodologies in both mental health and the revision of historical narratives, by making visible that which remains obscured in plain sight, particularly through the frameworks of ancestral memory, intergenerational trauma, and the enduring effects of colonialism—while concurrently positioning the redemptive sacrifice of Christ as a transformative pathway toward liberation from inherited psychological and spiritual afflictions?

Project Description

This immersive maze installation critically explores diagnostic processes within both mental health discourse and historical revisionism, engaging the thematic construct of visibility and concealment, specifically, the phenomenon of what remains hidden in plain sight. Anchored in the artist's ancestral lineage, the project interrogates how inherited behavioral patterns and the lingering structures of colonial domination often obfuscate the pursuit of root causes for psychological and generational trauma. Each room within the maze embodies both a familial figure and a specific sin that has bound that figure and, by extension, the broader lineage. Through this structure, the installation examines not only personal and spiritual entrapment and the systemic transmission of moral and psychological affliction across generations. Sculptures and visual artifacts act as perceptual thresholds—objects that represent realities invisible to most, yet hyper-visible to the artist. These artifacts evoke altered states of recognition, drawing attention to unseen spiritual burdens and emotional

architectures. Central to the work is a theological and political proposition: the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus Christ is positioned not as a tool of colonial control, but as the ultimate act of liberation from sin and structural oppression. In doing so, the project actively refutes the historical misrepresentation of Christ as a “white man’s God,” instead presenting Him as the defender, deliverer, and redeemer of African peoples and all those globally enslaved by both spiritual and sociopolitical sin. The work invites viewers into a process of confrontation and reflection on inherited trauma, on the complicity of history in systems of concealment, and on the transformative potential of faith as a radical force for both personal healing and historical veracity.

What is their function?

i) Photographic sculptures

During the prototype at the Lincoln Center, I found myself describing the meaning behind each image, until one participant noted that they would prefer if the images could speak for themselves. This observation was particularly compelling, as it underscored a critical point in the development of the work, namely, the potential role of sound. Much like musical composition in cinema, the creation of soundscapes here could function not merely as accompaniment but as a primary narrative voice. If, for example, an image is positioned as the wall of a maze, might the sound instead emerge from the floor? What would it communicate, a dull thudding, perhaps? The spatial placement and acoustic texture of sound thus become a means of semiotic expression, allowing the image to be interpreted sonically rather than verbally.

ii) The Maze

The core intention of this project is to guide the participant through a maze as though embodying my perspective, experiencing torment in response to the visual stimuli, and ultimately seeking a route of escape. The pathways function as narrative devices, marking a chronological journey through various sins I encountered. However, this linearity is intentionally disrupted by the presence of escape rooms within the maze. Each room holds a family member symbolically trapped by a specific sin, with the path leading to them shaped as an interpretation of that sin. Importantly, this architecture resists traditional positivist models of causality. As

Gregory Bateson[1] critiques, positivist science tends to possess a reductive approach to linear cause and effect in that A causes B.

Conversely, to resist this reductive model, the architectural logic of the immersion is interwoven with colonial history, offering it as the broader context from which these sins originate. The term "sin," often associated with moral failure or condemnation, is up for reconsideration here. Instead of postulating that those who were exploited were somehow culpable for their oppression, following Bateson's notion of "part-for-whole coding," I propose that these sins are patterns of experience understood through inherited interpretive frameworks, what he terms 'maps', shaped by colonial legacy. This echoes in Exodus 1:9, where the Egyptians express fear of the Israelites' strength and seek to suppress their growth. The resulting enslavement becomes a metaphor for sin itself— "to be bound"—introducing the idea that one can be caught in sin not by individual action, but through ancestral transference. As written in Exodus 34:7, iniquity may be visited "upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." Thus, the burden of colonialism is not to be shifted onto the victims, but rather understood as a collective inheritance, one ultimately borne by Christ for the liberation of those in bondage.

This reframes the experience of sin not as individual moral failure but as a circumstantial entanglement—familial, spiritual, historical. Bateson's concept of maps and patterns affirms this framework. In *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (1979)[2], he writes: "What is important is the difference between things, not the things themselves. Meaning arises from pattern." The immersive nature of this project depends on such patterns, the *mise en abyme* of mental health, the framed narrative

[1] White, M, & Epston, D. (1990). Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends
[2] Bateson, Gregory. *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York: Dutton, 1979.

of trauma and healing, and the possibility of transformation through spiritual renewal. Within this frame, identity is not fixed but socially constructed, mutable along the pathways of lived experience and theological encounter. As Scripture suggests, “old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17), thus reiterating the redemptive power of Christ as the antidote to the enmeshment of bondage.

In its architectural manifestation, the pathways might include sensory elements: for example, a stinging sensation to mimic the pain I endured during moments of mental and emotional distress. The floor leading out of the anger room might radiate heat or simulate fire, symbolizing the purification power of the holy ghost. While one might contend that this conflation of colonial trauma and redemptive faith risks becoming a closed or overly didactic narrative, the experience is not meant to impose a single interpretation. Rather, it invites conviction, an internal stirring or realization, as the participant navigates the space. These provocations are not commands but invitations to feel, to recognize.

Furthermore, given that family members would be stationed, or rather, trapped, in different rooms, I considered the possible issue of speaking on their behalf and, in doing so, potentially revoking their authority to interpret and express their own experiences. In this framing, I would be presuming that they share the same narrative as I do, regarding where they stopped and where they began—their autonomy. However, I would argue that no one is privileged enough to preserve their narrative wholly intact when rendered within another's narration of their life. There is always an interpretive element present in my perspective toward the one being observed, much like viewing both present and past from a distance, with a rope of my understanding stretched between the two.

iii) The Escape Rooms

The conundrum arises as to whether, in framing the themes of the respective escape rooms as representations of sin, I am inadvertently making a broader claim about the nature of sin and those who are trapped within it. Do I imply that the only way out of sin is by entering it? Or that the answers to liberation can only be discovered while one is caught within its grasp? What, then, am I postulating when I describe their placement within the escape room? Would it be more appropriate to refer to these spaces not as escape rooms but as time stamps, a kind of *tableau vivant* in which one is shown the obstacle of sin that I encountered along the maze-like journey?

I have previously expanded on the definition of sin, but it is worth delving deeper into the notion of *difference*[3], particularly the idea that meaning is deferred and constructed through contrast with other terms, echoing *Lévi-Strauss's theory of binary opposition*[4]. This would suggest that the very mention of sin as the "bad" or the undesired life simultaneously opens up a contemplation of its opposite. In attempting to escape, one is necessarily moving toward that alternative, toward what is implied to be good or redemptive.

Gamified Trauma: Reimagining Power in Interactive Space

Foucault proposes that power and knowledge are inseparable, what he refers to as *pouvoir* and *savoir*[5], with knowledge being shaped by discourse, and power operating through the enforcement and production of truth. Within this framework,

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[3] Derrida, Jacques**.** *Margins of Philosophy*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1982.
[4]Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Raw and the Cooked*. Translated by John and Doreen Weightman, Harper & Row, 1969. (Original work *Le Cru et le Cuit*, published in 1964).
[5] Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan, Vintage Books, 1995. (Original work published 1975).

power is not simply top-down or authoritarian; rather, it is omnipresent, diffused through everyday relationships. It is not merely repressive but also productive, generating norms, truths, and structures of meaning. This raised a question for me concerning the depiction of trauma in the immersive piece: can trauma itself be understood as an institutional actor, something that enforces patterns and conditions of being?

This led me to consider the potential of depicting *strongholds* as part of the narrative structure of trauma. Drawing from *Ephesians 6:12*, where the battle is said to be "not against flesh and blood," but against "principalities and powers," the suggestion is that trauma may be rooted not in visible institutions but in unseen forces, systems, or structures with their own internal logics, almost kingdom-like in nature. This notion is echoed in *2 Corinthians 10:4*, which refers to the "divine power to destroy strongholds." I believe this concept has strong potential to be explored in a digital extension of the immersive project.

At the Lincoln Center prototype, I observed that most participants approached the experience as if it were a game, with rooms that featured obstacle courses requiring physical actions like jumping. This shifted the perception of the piece; it was no longer purely an exploration but became gamified. In contrast, a physical walk-through maze might evoke a more reflective, immersive engagement. This raises compelling questions: What would it mean to "take down" one of these strongholds? Would it involve the annihilation of the maze itself? A destruction of knowledge? And what psychological, emotional, or spiritual impact would such an event have on the participant?

To be continued… inconclusive… project still evolving…