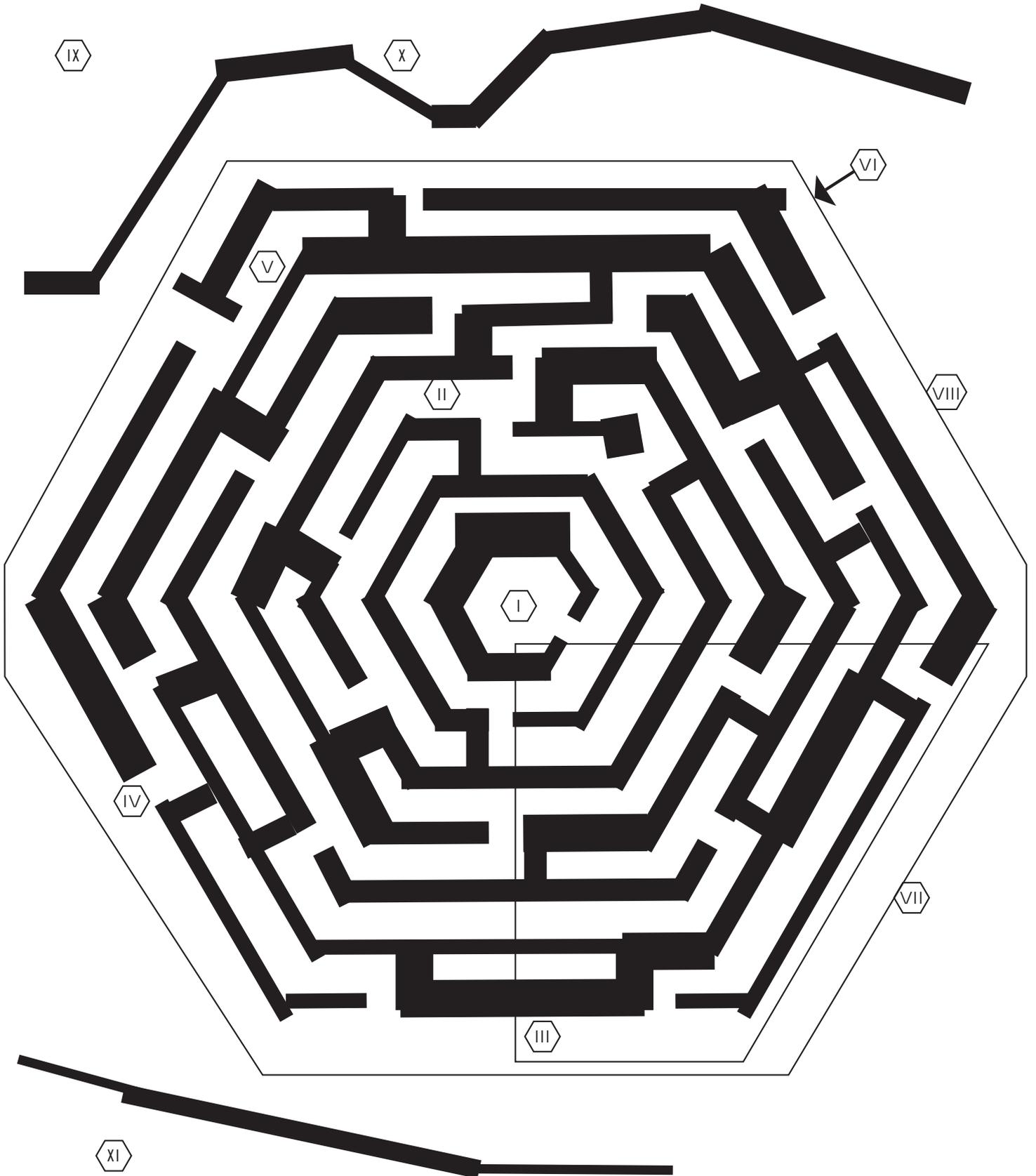


The labyrinth of material past, present and futures is an experimental fiction written by Roo Dhissou in response to Emii Alrai's *The Courtship of Giants*. The following subsections can be read in any order, can be reordered according to the readers' arrival and departure to the text. The fiction sits alongside a map of a Labyrinth constructed based on conversations between Roo and Emii. The text explores museums, archaeology, diaspora, preservation, war, colonialism, death and romanticism.

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| I Memory Palace | IV Diggers Hole | VII Lovers Hill | X The Abyss |
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Upon **Lovers Hill** we sit and reflect, we project out onto the vast landscape and romanticise potential futures, forgotten pasts. We cannot see directly below us, so we look ahead and above to the skies. We seek answers or build our own without ever really feeling the hill beneath us. Instead of grounding we float and feel ourselves soaring in the skies high up with what appears to be a clear picture of the entire landscape below. The landscape is skewed, the perspective is altered. Is it the bigger picture, or just a birds eye view where we squint and build the rest with imagined realities? The only place that seems, clear from here is the **Monument Village** where Humbaba, the Elgin and Lamassu stand tall.

Upon close inspection there are wounds, deep, brutal, wounds. Pain glorified by bronze seeping, oozing amputees, re-stitched, assembled, hacked together. Preservation Station lurks in the background, a deep stench of formaldehyde and ethanol creep into the village. The **Monuments** that once stood tall, now seem small and lose their power. Trapped, caught, and hung out on show. An invisible trail of the fumes wraps and envelops the village, tracing all those that walk by. Their horror is then masked with awe and intelligence, they leave the village with a new found pompous-ness, drunk on intellect. The amputees entertain the inebriated.

A landscape of golden hues is laid out before us as we enter **Diggers Hole**. Harsh sunlight glows within the grains of sand. Within the torrid heat **Diggers** dig, dig, dig and dig. Wiping sweat away from their brow, whilst their lips are simultaneously cracked from dehydration. As they dig, their holes refill with more sand. There is a heavy silence, while the sand gently slips back into the unearthed ground, the holes no deeper than when they began. Each of them in pursuit of a treasure, sand falls and covers their tracks. They toil in repetitive meditation, digging by day, resting by night.

The **Memory Palace** is grounded in cold marble. Giant, grandiose, towering ornate columns draw us into the cold beauty of the building. Memories exist here, yet without warmth, collected rather than collective. There is no intimacy within the space other than the claustrophobia of staging, plinths into absurdity. Armatures jut from marble walls, pillars clasp treasures, artefacts are encased, whilst the palace guards patrol the labyrinthine halls. As they man their posts, our bodies feel cold within the space. All is kept in stasis, preserved in the cold. The grand Romanesque palace, sits like a monumental medieval castle – a nostalgia of nothing. Visitors breathe their presences outwards in the chilled air. A memory palace with no memory of its own.

A hazy mirage floats in the distance as we approach **Myth Makers Quarter**. Entranced by the possibilities we too float, towards it. Overlooking a break-taking stream of water is a cloud of mist. A perfect contrast to the sweltering heat, strong aromas and heavy stone monuments. It lures us in, the promise of fresh spring water, refreshing and light. As we get closer, the misty cloud seems to dissipate. The mist a mere conjurers illusion masking the forging of histories, the rising cloud, a miasma of misinformation rising from a collection of cauldrons tended to by the myth makers.

Lurking in The Abyss is **Barbaroi's Lair**. The baron, dusty, war torn, neglected landscape is filled with detritus and waste. A ghetto, where voices of angry mobs echo. Yet nothing is romanticised here, there is no entrapment, no ensnarement, charm or nostalgia. It is clear that the beast's lair lies empty, voided of its once proud, brutish, stomping Giants. The Giants are dead. Their homes destroyed, their spaces invaded, colonised and burgled. Their treasures withdrawn and amputated from their land. Whilst the lair has no charm, it seems the only place conveying a true history, a sensory, embodied history. Lean against the walls, embrace the dusty floor with bare feet, caress the sands, inhale the scents, feel the loss, horror, trauma.

"The word barbarian is derived from the Greek term 'barbaroi' – or one who cannot speak Greek. As the Greeks believed that language was the tool of reason, non-Greek speakers, therefore, were considered devoid of the facility to reason or to act according to logic."¹

"Trauma by nature drives us to the edge of comprehension, cutting us off from language based on common experience or an imaginable past."²

Upon **The Warrior Mound**, where sparse flowers grow nourished by the composted dead, rotting bodies mulch into mass graves. It is a contorted mound from which to look back on **Lovers Hill**. What remains of these reluctant warriors, the people of the places belonging to the abyss, lies in the warrior mound. No monuments stand here, merely piles of people.

Lurking behind **Monument Village** is **The Preservation Station**,

it is smelt before it is seen. The foul odours of chemicals and preserving vinegars fill the air. There seems to be a stark contrast between what enters and what leaves this place. Beings and objects are altered, robbed and scrubbed of their places, their future histories destined for the **Memory Palace**. Vases emptied out of their contents, smashed pieces stored. Bloodied arrows in chemical baths, made pristine once again. Limbs are neatly stitched back together emptied of their substance and their cavities stuffed. The clinical production line never stops, the strip lights illuminate into the night with their hazy halos.

The white stone walls of **The labyrinth library** seem to glow from within, the doors entwined with willow whose tendrils call us inward.

Beyond the threshold halls of shelves crammed with books move out in a maze of concentric hexagons. Alcoves host scribes obsessively studying, re-ordering, ripping, and writing. Holding up pages to the torchlight, burning them out of existence. The tomes stacked high move towards a seemingly limitless ceiling. The intellects proclaim sentences aloud, annotating, adding leaves and notes, creating new editions to the new futures.

Books of high prestige sit beyond human reach. The new histories of Giants being written, with no Giants in sight.