



Losing it

Description

Location technologies and smartphones help you find your way. But for some of the time, some of us don't only want to *find* our way â?? but *lose* it.

Loss goes with forgetting, regret, and grief as in the art work *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper â?? a single red ceramic poppy in the moat of the Tower of London for each of the 888,246 recruits who lost their lives in WWI.



Loss is also associated with losing control, departing from rationality, and misunderstanding. But people also get lost in thought, in wonder, in play, a role, in someone's embrace. That's abandoning a sense of self, at least for a time, and has something to do with engagement, absorption, immersion and meditation. In a visit to Venice years ago I aimed to get lost in its labyrinthine streets. I think lots of tourists do that. To be lost in a town, park, or the countryside is to allow yourself to be engulfed in the atmosphere of a place.

I've just visited the Hampton Court Maze. According to the accompanying [fact sheet](#), a maze was a 'wilderness' in miniature, a part of a formal garden in which the garden visitor could *wander* freely. It presents a highly formalised and safe wilderness experience.

On the one hand a maze provides a puzzle to be solved: reaching the centre and getting out again. On the other hand the objective is to lose yourself. Like a lot of games, if it's over too soon then there's no challenge. In other words visitors want to be lost – to wander. A maze is also a sociable experience and an unusual way of encountering strangers – and friends.

The wanderlust was only evident in remnant form on an Autumn weekend at Hampton Court. You could hear excited maze wanderers issue directions through the hedges: keep going, the other way, excuse me, I'm going to run round, this way, I'm in the centre, we are going round in circles, it looks the same – it might be different, this way, come back, you've got to go right, go go go go, we were nearly in the middle, we'll go back out now, so close!

I'm reminded of something Rousseau said about the voices of children calling out across the fields to their parents.

Children scattered about the fields at a distance from their fathers, mothers and other children, gain practice in making themselves heard at a distance, and in adapting the loudness of the voice to the distance which separates them from those to whom they want to speak. (191)

Here's what the Hampton Court Maze sounds like.

<https://richardcoyne.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/hampton-court-maze.mp3>



Reference

- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1957. *The Emile of Jean Jacques Rousseau*. Trans. W. Boyd. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University. First published in French in 1762.

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