

Flicker

by stephen hastings-king

He worked on the assembly line sawing small pieces of plywood from larger ones. His eyes were marbles floating over a void.

He said he lost his soul while searching for a way out of a place made from the sequence empty room corridor stairway repeated again and again.

He said that he could not recall how he got there. He accepted it. What surprised was the possibility that he passed through the same sequence empty room corridor stairway over and over even though he put one foot before the other and moved continuously forward, even though he descended each staircase into the next empty room.

He said: Space is a ribbon folded back on itself.

He said he left an object in one of the empty rooms, which became the starting point. Then he walked again through the sequence empty room corridor stairway, descending with each, down and down, until his descent brought him to the starting point.

He said that his decision to leave a second object with the first, and to add another each time afterward, upset some balance. After that, there no longer seemed any consistency to the distance he would walk before returning to the starting point. When he returned sometimes he encountered a single object; other times there was a pile.

He said there must have been a moment at which his soul slipped away but he could not remember it even though all day every day he retraced his movements through that space trying to locate a someplace to go back to or a something to undo.

And I understood him.

In those days I was an irregular automaton, not suited for making smaller pieces of plywood from larger ones. I was danger on a band saw because my mind would flicker and go out. When my mind went out durations vanished. When I began again I would be someplace

else doing something else with no idea what that something was or how I got there.

Every day we ate lunch together. He would tell me about his morning of walking the labyrinth while sawing pieces plywood on the line and I would listen and wonder about the moment his soul wandered away and whether he lost it while in the labyrinth or if he was in the labyrinth because he had already lost it until a spark in my skull would fail and my mind would flicker and go out.

