

# STEP IN TWICE

Master of fine arts thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

During my studies in Fine Arts at the Royal Institute of Arts in Stockholm, I have found I juggle two very different approaches to art. On one hand, I'm making digital art pieces where the imagery comes into play in the virtual context. Due its indirectness, this approach to art stands in sharp contrast to the making of actual objects. Many of these objects and installations in real space appropriate my digital art pieces as source material, treating them as works in progress, and raw material to be examined.

For my final show I immediately knew I wanted to design an actual serious game which would consist of a series of interactive installations. For the first time, I didn't want to use any digital equipment for the show. I wanted to develop a concept that leads the audience into the realm of imagination. My purpose was to design a site-specific game in which participants could experience a spiritual journey engaged with questions about ego and egolessness and the fragility of existence and presence.

The whole project is about one piece, Step in Twice, which by itself contains four main levels that in collaboration with each other create an interactive journey within the context of Mysticism.

I found the transition from virtual to actual space to be a significant conversion. In my point of view, the "process" of developing an art piece is more valuable than the artwork itself. To me, creating objects in the process of developing this game had a performative aspect: researching, planning, improvising, making objects, finding their relations with the context, each other and the gallery, and finally installing them. I believe performance has the ability to alter the performer's consciousness during the process. My final solo show had a great impact on me and the way I relate to objects.

## GLOSSARY

<p>The Self that is found there is a superior Self, The state of losing the part of the mind that mediates between the conscious and the unconscious and is responsible for reality testing and a sense of personal identity.</p>	<b>Egolessness</b>
<p>The world of the Image; A world as ontologically real as the world of the senses; the intermediate world between the empirical reality and the pure intelligible world. The imaginal world provides the link between the pure spirit and the material body. It is the world that contains the reality called material.</p>	<b>Mundus imaginalis, the imaginal world</b>
<p>The Eighth Climate; the imaginal world possesses extension and dimensions, forms and colors. It is fully objective and real, and everything existing in the sensory world has its analogue there.</p>	<b>Na-koja-abad, the “Land of No-where”</b>
<p>The house of ruins, also the place where wine was served, in the Jewish or Zoroastrian quarters, which was in the worst part of town. In mysticism, it is the school where you learn.</p>	<b>Kharabat , The tavern of ruin</b>
<p>A state of temporary egolessness.</p>	<b>Drunk</b>
<p>A state of permanent egolessness.</p>	<b>Insane</b>

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The participants' input to the game was limited to this vague dialogue on the exhibition poster:

*-There is no-where you can step in twice.*

*-Then why arrange to meet in the middle of no-where?*

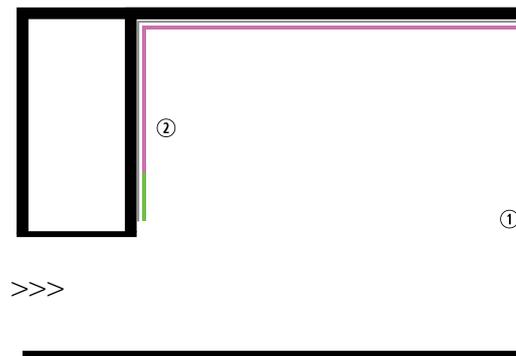
*-You might enter a hole portal in the vertiginous symmetries; and voila, it's the labyrinth.*

The entrance of the gallery was swapped to the left door of the building instead of the main entrance located at the center of the building.

A map of the exhibition and an A5 booklet which titled “**Step in Twice**” was provided for each participant. The booklet contained seven pages giving a proper background to the whole exhibition concept.

The introduction piece was an interactive language piece, titled “**In the Middle of No-Where**”. It was installed with a considerable distance from the entrance door on the front wall. A few meters distance made the text looks inaccurate, “there are no-where you can step in twice”. Participant can notice a scroller between the two words “no” and “where”, they might have a curiosity to check it later.

1. In the middle of NO-WHERE
2. Vertiginous Symmetries
  - Hand with Transparent Sphere
  - Glass Balls (the drunks)
  - The Mirror #1
  - Heated Drawing on roll #1
  - the mirror #2
3. Consciousness in the Holes
4. Traces of Shadows



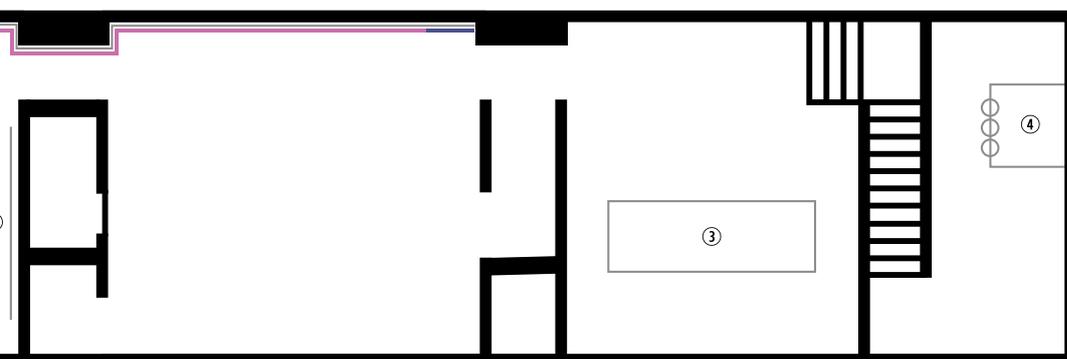
The show was arranged in a way so to lead the participants to the left of the entrance door, where the “**Vertiginous Symmetries**” has been installed.

This level of the game included three parts

- Hand with transparent sphere  
(7 glass balls (the drunks) installed in front of the mirror #1)
- Heated drawings on roll paper #1
- The mirror #2

The viewers are free to pick up a glass ball which is installed in front of “the mirror #1” and carry it all the way across the exhibition. By this act the participant is persuaded to be part of a ritual experience. As it shows on the map, “Heated drawings on roll paper #1” connected the left and main rooms. After passing the center room, the viewer walks toward the third piece which is placed inside the right room, “**Consciousness in the holes**”, and play with the drunken ball inside the labyrinth. Walking up the stairs, he will confront the last piece, “**Traces of the Shadows**”, an interactive installation made of three lights installed on tripods. Each light has an automatic on and off control with some time intervals. The viewer can stand between the lights and the wall and trace his own shadows on the wall by using a B2 pencil.

Since the entrance and exit was the same, the participants had to walk the same route back and face “In the Middle of No-Where” a second time. If they then had a closer look, they would maybe realize that on the scroll paper, between “No” and Where”, there are words written, referring to different places, and that they can scroll up and down between them. They can read the text in two ways. As an illustration, “There are No rivers where you can step in twice”. Since those words on the scroll paper were located in the middle of “no-where”, there was an opposing reading; “there are rivers in the middle of nowhere you can step in twice”.



## CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

During the past three years, the lack of permanent housing and unsettled lifestyle was my main concern and challenge: Home, as a sign of safety and peace of mind. I then realized it was absurd to seek home out of myself. The more I tried, the more I got lost. Searching a way back home led me to the silent solitude journey of mysticism and passing through the state of egolessness to experience the imaginal world. Being drunk is the primary step on that road.

The best explanation of the concept can be found in the Divan of Rumi:

*(Rumi)* I'm drunk and you're insane, who's going to lead us home?

*(Shams)* How many times did I say, "Drink just a little, only two or three at most?" *(Shams is blaming him. Rumi should keep silent if he has a vision, since the vision belongs to him, not anyone else)*

*(Rumi is inside the Nakoja-Abad)* In this city no one I see is conscious; one is worse off than the next, frenzied and insane.

*(Shams)* Dear one, come to the tavern of ruin and experience the pleasures of the soul.

What happiness can there be apart from this intimate conversation with the Beloved, the Soul of souls?

*(Rumi)* In every corner there are drunkards, arm in arm, while the Server pours the wine from a royal decanter to every particle of being.

*(Shams)* You belong to the tavern: your income is wine, and wine is all you ever buy.

Don't give even a second away to the concerns of the merely sober.

*(Rumi)* O lute player, are you more drunk, or am I?

In the presence of one as drunk as you, my magic is but a myth.

*(Rumi, describing visiting Shams)* When I went outside the house, some drunk approached me, and in his eyes I saw hundreds of hidden gardens and sanctuaries.

Like a ship without an anchor, he rocked this way and that.  
 Hundreds of intellectuals and wise men could die from a taste of this yearning.  
 I asked, "Where are you from?" He laughed and said, "O soul,  
 half of me is from Turkestan and half from Farghana.  
 Half of me is water and mud, half heart and half soul;  
 half of me is the ocean's shore, half is all pearl.

*(Rumi is asking Shams)* "Be my friend," I pleaded. "I'm one of your family."

*(Shams answered)* "I don't know the difference between family and outsiders."

*(Rumi)* I've neither a heart nor a turban, and here in this house of hangovers  
 My chest is filled with unspoken words. Shall I try to explain or not.

*(Rumi)* Have I lived among the lame for so long that I've begun to limp myself?

*(Rumi called himself a lame, since he was a scholar)*

And yet no slap of pain could disturb a drunkenness like this.

Listen, can you hear a wail arising from the pillar of grief?

Shams al-Haqq of Tabriz, where are you now, after all the mischief you've  
 stirred in our hearts?<sup>1</sup>

1. Rumi, Jelaluddin . The Rumi Collection. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2005.

## “HERE IS OUR SCHOOL, WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF OUR FLESHY SELVES”<sup>1</sup>

1. Modarres sadeghi, Jafar. *discourses of shams-i tabrīzī*. Tehran: Markaz Publication, 1998.

2. Shahāb ad-Dīn Yahya ibn Habash as-Suhrawardī was a Kurdish Persian philosopher, a Sufi and founder of the Illuminationist philosophy, an important school in Islamic mysticism that drew upon Zoroastrian and Platonic ideas.

3. Corbin, Henri . “Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal.” Accessed February 20, 2014.

*‘Na-koja-Abad’ does not occur in any Persian dictionary, and it was coined, as far as I know, by Sobravardī<sup>2</sup> himself. [---] It signifies the city, the country or land (abad) of Nowhere (Na-koja).*

*[---] That is, the transition of the physical cosmos to what constitutes the first level of the spiritual universe. [---] Sobravardī states precisely that this region begins ‘on the convex surface’ of the Ninth Sphere, the Sphere of Spheres, or the Sphere that includes the whole of the cosmos. This means that it begins at the exact moment when one leaves the supreme Sphere, which defines all possible orientation in our world (or on this side of the world), the ‘Sphere’ to which the celestial cardinal points refer. It is evident that once this boundary is crossed, the question ‘where?’ (koja) loses its meaning, at least the meaning in which it is asked in the space of our sensory experience. Thus the name Na-koja-Abad: a place outside of place, a ‘place’ that is not contained in a place [...].*

*It surely cannot relate to a change of local position, a physical transfer from one place to another place, as though it involved places contained in a single homogeneous space [...] it is a matter of entering, passing into the interior and, in passing into the interior, of finding oneself, paradoxically outside, or, in the language of our authors, ‘on the convex surface’ of the Ninth Sphere in other words. [---] This step is made in order for the Stranger, the gnostic, to return home or at least to lead to that return.*

*But an odd happens: once this transition is accomplished, it turns out that henceforth this reality, previously internal and hidden, is revealed to be enveloping, surrounding, containing what was first of all external and visible, since by means of interiorization, one has departed from that external reality. Henceforth, it is spiritual reality that envelops, surrounds, contains the reality called material. That is why spiritual reality is not “in the where.” It is the ‘where’ that is in it. Or, rather, it is itself the “where” of all things; it is, therefore, not itself in a place, it does not fall under the question ‘where?’<sup>3</sup>*

Every performance must, by necessity, be new, and revealing the energies of that particular moment in time. All through the project there is a crucial relation between cinematography and the game assets. Mirrors as constant flowing image frames, heated drawings which consist of 54 frames, the labyrinth which is installed on a camera tripod and installed 800W lights on tripods are cinematic gesture. Its a circular narrative piece.

Capturing a moment will happen each time when a glass ball fall into a hole and break.

*Like the (up-rising) bubble, up I cast my cap with joy,  
If a reflection of thy face into the glass of our falleth.<sup>1</sup>*

1. shirazi, Hafez. The Divan of Hafez.  
Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication,  
1969.

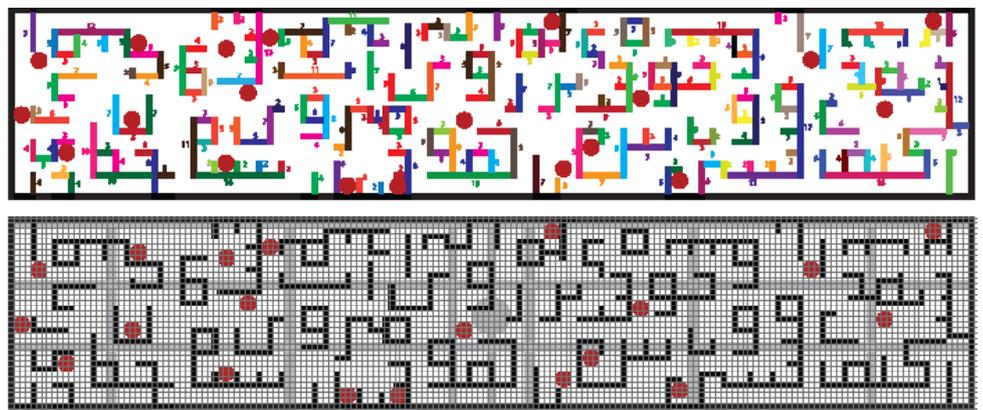
## PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

The whole idea of the piece is about a solitude journey. The first phase of developing the concept was designing the labyrinth. In my opinion, the labyrinth is a symbol of life in an existentialistic standpoint. The labyrinth motif is a text which has a spiral composition, a brief rewording of an essay of Shams. The concept of the essay is about being in the state of egolessness, like a dead body on the sea waves:

*“Now be drunk to be conscious.”*

*“When one falls into the sea, if he flounders, the sea will squash him, even if he is extremely strong. It is the sea groove to sink him till he is alive unless he pretends as a dead. Since he drowns, the sea will float him and be the carrier. Hence, from the first moment, he should pretend as a dead to pleasantly float over the waves.”*

Initially I designed a typeface based on Bannai’i (or Moagheli) style of Persian typography. Moagheli means hard to understand. Moagheli script derived from architectural adaptations. Architects used to create geometric patterns by alternating glazed tiles and plain bricks. If the brickwork design is in relief then it is referred to as HazarBaf (from Persian Hazar “thousand” and Baf “weavings”, referring to the complex woven appearance of the bricks). Also the Persian word for labyrinth is HazarTo (Hazar “thousand” and To “inside” referring to a complicated pattern of a labyrinth).



I chose plywood for the game board of the labyrinth for two reasons, one aesthetical and one conceptual: the wood grain is visible in plywood, and it is a composite material made of several layers of wood veneer glued together. For the walls of labyrinth I used pine. Using wood helped me to create a sound effect like waves of the sea when the drunken balls were bowling through the labyrinth. When the ball collided with the walls of the labyrinth, it made a sound resembling waves breaking along the shore. The whole structure needed a mechanical function for moving smoothly up and down and rotate around 360 degree. Technically it was the most complicated part of the project. I tested several solutions, and found in the end the best to be using a sturdy camera tripod with a handmade metal ball head for panoramic rotation. Also I installed a wood box below the labyrinth to limit the movement to 20 degrees vertically and horizontally..



For making the glass balls, I used the hot glass blowing technique which brought the opportunity of having a series of glass balls with anchors which make them bowling not straight but zigzag, like a drunken man. Moreover, the technique allowed me to store a breath, a presence, inside the glass balls, and in some of them I inhaled a rose aroma. I had 7 balls per day for seven participants.



I had decided to use the whole space of the exhibition space, Gallery Mejan. My intention for this level was to make a space and atmosphere that participants could experience this spiritual journey, reminding their “self” and then forgetting it. For such a purpose I used the drawing medium.

**Heated drawing on roll paper #1** is a long drawing on a sensitive, special fine paper that is coated with a chemical substance which develops the black color when exposed to heat. Over time, heat-activated or “thermal” paper fades as the paper’s chemical coating reacts to other chemicals, UV, water and even different types of oils, Skin oil for example, might accelerate the fading process. The fading of these will simply mean leaving the acquired black nature and going back to the original white color of the paper. I provided a version of Heated drawing on roll paper #1 by faxing it to another roll fax machine as part of my thesis.



Firstly, I set a time limitation for 30 days, divided in three periods. The goal of this initial phase of this research was to define myself again by remembering

1. Autobiographical memory relates to things we remember during the course of our lifetime. It can be divided up into lifetime periods, general events and event-specific knowledge. All information contained within this type of memory relates to ourselves including knowledge of the kind of person we were, are and will be.

2. Kierkegaard, Soren. *Works of Love*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009.

3. "Projective test." Accessed February 20, 2014. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Projective\\_test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Projective_test).

things from the past. In other words, it was a process of collecting memories that were ghostly existing in my unconscious. Memories were ghostly existing in my unconscious. It was a kind of autobiographical memory<sup>1</sup> retrieval. The result of this 5 days process was a collection of drawings on paper, photographs, and captured frames of some movies. I arrange them chronologically and put them in a mind map. I also found a smell, a vague smell like an old fashion rose fragrance which is popular among elderly women. In the following next 5 days, I tried to obliterate myself from those pictures by framing, stylizing, thresholding and symmetrizing them. Furthermore, I removed some pictures and arranged them randomly. The outcome was a prototype of the final scroll drawing.

As a proper tool for constantly producing heat for drawing on the thermal paper, I used a modified soldering iron. By shaping a series of different sizes of iron rods and attaching them on the soldering iron, I successfully managed to make a vast variety of qualities and sizes for drawing lines and surfaces. The thermal paper quality is similar to Polaroid "zero-ink" papers, by using heat on the thermal paper chemically develops the black ink which is invisible on the surface. Third phase involved 20 days drawing on the thermal paper by using modified soldering iron. The drawings work like a projective tests in psychology. The drawings worked like drawings in psychological projective tests, and so I tried to portray a vague narration that could ultimately be used as context for the game.

*"Most people are subjective toward themselves and objective toward all others, frightfully objective sometimes but the task is precisely to be objective toward oneself and subjective toward all others."*<sup>2</sup>

*A projective test is a personality test designed to let a person respond to ambiguous stimuli, presumably revealing hidden emotions and internal conflicts. This is sometimes contrasted with a so-called "objective test". The responses to projective tests are content analyzed for meaning rather than being based on presuppositions about meaning, as is the case with objective tests.*<sup>3</sup>

**Heated drawing on roll paper #1** worked as projective test which tried to encourage the participant to enter a flow between a subjective and an objective understanding of the Self. . For me as the artist, the drawing was an effort to remember the personal memories, drain them of any personal trace and

express them in an impersonal way.

**Vertiginous symmetries** consists of 3 parts:

- 1- Hand with transparent sphere (which consist of seven glass balls (the drunks) and The mirror #1)
- 2- Heated drawing on roll paper #1
- 3- The mirror #2



I wanted to have a self-portrait of each participant before and after the **Heated drawing on roll paper #1**.

**Hand with transparent sphere** refers to the famous self portrait of M. C. Escher (17 June 1898 – 27 March 1972), Hand with reflecting sphere or Self-Portrait in Spherical Mirror. The self-portrait in the spherical mirror has a phenomenal quality, no matter where the mirror might have been placed in relation to the artist, there is really no escaping the phenomenon from being at the center of a spherical mirror when looking into it. Moreover it exaggerates the proportions and deforms the shapes. According to my main idea, I changed it to an installation of seven balls in front of a flat mirror which is installed next to the scroll drawing with the same height. If a participant took a glass ball, he could notice his self-portrait with the transparent ball in the mirror.



Making mirrors by implementing silver nitrate resembles of the developing negative films that keeps the result flowing. It means everything changes constantly and nothing remains stationary. After putting silver nitrate on top of a regular glass, the transparent surface becomes blurry, fuggy surface then step by step fogs disappeared and converted to a magical reflective surface. For me, as an artist, the process of making a mirror was a magical one, like alchemy, full of mystery.

At the end of **Vertiginous Symmetries**, after the **Mirror #2**, the participant would stand before a map of Gallery Mejan as an introduction to the next room and the next piece, **Consciousness in the Holes**. The map looks like labyrinth. Proportionally, the Mejan gallery and the labyrinth piece are the same.

Last piece which I made for the show was **Traces of Shadows** which were an interactive installation consisting of three installed lights on tripods. As already mentioned, Each light had an automatic on|off control with some time intervals. Intervals were based on minutes and blinking process was slow. The viewer can stand in the middle of the lights and the wall and trace his own shadows on the wall by using a pencil.

At the entrance of the space, participant could get a map and a booklet. The booklet consisted of seven quotes from Rumi and Shams. The booklet content is here included in the appendix.



for Making the “In the middle of No-Where” piece, I used cutter/plotter. By using the same thermal papers, I made another scroll with a series of words on it.

Throughtout the time of the exhibition I took part in the piece. Dressed in black-and-wite I'll talked to the audience, mostly after the journey.

## APPENDIX

### A. STEP IN TWICE *booklet (size: A5)*

1. “When everyone is trying to be something, be nothing. Range with emptiness. Humans should be like a pot. As the pot is hold by its emptiness inside, human is hold by the awareness of his nothingness.”

2. Rumi was sitting near a garden pool with a few books when for the first time Shams arrived and asked, “What’s this?”

Rumi replied, “These are called debates, but you needn’t bother with them.” Shams touched them and threw them in the water. Rumi got upset at the ruin of these rare and precious books. Shams reached in the water and retrieved them one by one. Rumi saw that there was no trace of water damage on them. “What secret is this?” he asked. Shams replied, “This is spiritual inclination and entrancement, what would you know of it?”

3. “All travelers whether they want or not are changed.”

4. It is the thought that brings us. The thought of a garden brings us to the garden. However, within these thoughts is a secret deception. Have you never gone to a certain place thinking it would be good, only to find disappointment? These thoughts then are like a shroud, and within that shroud someone is hidden. The day reality draws you and the shroud of thought disappears, there will be no disappointment. Then you will see reality as it is, and nothing more. “Upon that day when the secrets are tried.” So, what reason is there for me to speak? In reality that which draws is a single thing, but it appears to be many. We are possessed by a hundred different desires. ” We name these one by one, but the root of the matter is a single thing: the root is hunger. Don’t you see how, once we have our fill of but one thing, we say, “Nothing else is necessary?” Therefore, it was not ten or a hundred things, but one thing that drew us.

5. It is good to feel helpless every moment, seeing yourself helpless in success, just as in failure. For above your capacity there is a greater Capacity and your will is subject to that greater Will in every case. You are not divided into two halves, now capable, now helpless. You are always helpless, only sometimes remembering, sometimes forgetting. When you remember, then



the heart of that moment becomes visible, and the way opens up before you.

6. “For a mirror shows no image of itself. Any image it reflects is the image of another.”

7. If you prostrate yourself a hundred times in front of a mirror, it never moves from its place. If any ugliness has appeared in the mirror, know that it is your own; do not despise the mirror. Hide the fault that you see on his face from him, because he is my friend. With the tongue of the heart, he says, “Surely, this is not possible.”

Now, O friend, you say, “Place the mirror into my hand so that I may look at it!” Yet I cannot find a pretext for this, nor can I deny your request; but I say in my own heart, “Let me find some pretext not to give you the mirror, because if I say that there is something wrong with your face, perhaps you will not accept it; and if you say that the mirror is defective, this will be worse for you.” Yet love does not allow me to find a pretext. Now I say, “Let me give you the mirror, but if you see some fault on its face, do not blame the mirror, but something reflected onto the mirror. Know that it is your own image; find the fault in yourself! At least don’t look into the mirror while you are near me. The only condition is that you do not find fault with the mirror. If you are unable to find the fault in yourself, at least find fault with me, as I am the owner of the mirror. Don’t say the mirror is defective.”

“I accept the condition. I promise, I cannot wait any longer!” And yet his heart does not accept it.

“O Master,” he said, “Again, let me find a pretext to avoid this situation.” The point about the mirror is a subtle one. The love between us did not allow this. “Now let us remember the condition once again,” he said, and he gave the following advice: “The condition and the agreement is this: Every time you see your fault, you shall put the mirror down, you shall not destroy its jewel-like essence. Even if its essence cannot be broken, you shall not do this.”

he said, “I would never do such a thing. I would never even think of it.”

“Now let me have the mirror so that I can prove to you my good manners and earn your trust.”

“But if you break it, its essence is this much, and it cost this much.” And he brought witnesses and evidence for its cost.

But finally, after all these words, when he was given the mirror, he, himself, just ran away. The one who had offered the mirror was left speaking to himself, “If this mirror were so valuable, why did he leave it behind and run away? As soon as he had beheld his own face, and it was ugly, he wanted to throw it to the ground and break it. But he couldn’t do it. Because of that he said, “My lungs have filled with blood.” He recalled his agreement, the bill of sale, the witnesses, and the money he would have to pay for the crime of destroying the mirror. “I wish there had been no conditions, no witnesses, no financial penalties. Then I could make my heart happy and show him what needs to be done.” As he was saying all this, the mirror was rebuking him with the tongue of its own heart: You see? What did I tell you? And what are you doing to me? You love yourself and find fault with the mirror. Because the one who loves his or her own ego respects only the ego, while the one who loves the mirror, gives up both ego and mirror.

The mirror is the Truth, Itself. He thinks the mirror is someone other than himself. The mirror answers anyone who addresses It. Due to the inclination of the mirror, he also has an inclination toward the mirror. If he, on the other hand, had broken the mirror, he would have broken me too. Hasn’t it been said, “I am near to those whose hearts have been broken”? In short, it is impossible for the mirror to bow down and honor itself. It is like a touchstone or a balance; it always inclines toward the Truth.

If you try to tell it, “O Balance, this weight is not very much: You’re not sitting right, show it correctly!” It only shows the Truth. You can try for two hundred years to trick it, you can prostrate yourself in front of it two hundred times, and it would be futile.





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Henri Corbin

Creativity, madness and civilization

Richard Pine

Works of Love

Soren Kierkegaard

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David C. Funder

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