



hills snyder *boogie man (Theory of The Hollow Earth)*, 2002,
acrylic sheet on birch support 1.5 x 57.25 x 57.25 in.

This work is from my 2002 exhibition, *Yesferatu*, in which a number of images were gathered around the historical period correspondent to post Gilded Age America. *Boogie Man* is derived from Mondrian's "Composition 2", which he painted in 1922 (the same year filmmaker F. W. Murnau released *Nosferatu*). "Composition 2" was Mondrian's first painting in which the center was left blank. This emptiness is also a key element of my metaphor, which engages narratives circled about a void.

The Theory of the Hollow Earth asserts that we live inside a hollow rock that contains the sky and extends to infinity. We walk about this concave landscape believing it to be the outer surface of the planet. This concept is said to be part of a cluster of mysticisms embraced by the Nazi party, and like Mondrian's Theosophical beliefs, was part of early twentieth century Spiritualism. This, in turn is akin to the Fundamentalism of today in that it is yet another of the ongoing reactions to the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

The unfinished outer edge of *Boogie Man* is correspondent to Mondrian's practice of not framing his work in order to let the universal horizontals and verticals of his paintings extend to infinity. However, the inner edges of the smiley mouth and eyes, which penetrate the borrowed composition, are finished, functioning as an inside-out picture frame, which reverses the location of infinity to within. This flips the psychotic vision of the hollow earth into an affirmation of inner ecstasy and also serves as an anchor for the term *Yes*.

The humor of the work acknowledges the difficulty of practicing an ecstatic life, especially when sometimes it's more fun just to be paranoid.

— Hills Snyder

☞ Can you supply an image of something that will be in the show at Cactus Bra?

HS: None are available. I usually only start about a month before the opening date so that whatever I'm working with continues to accumulate right up to that moment. It's more like digging up bodies than working on a body of work. I like the model of the strange attractor. Information coming together on the lip of a gathering fall. That freshness is important. Something I hear on the radio on the way to the opening might insinuate itself before the evening's over. Or maybe I'll be up all night installing, and trip over something that's exactly the missing piece.

☞ We want to give the reader some context about the work. Who you are reading or looking at? Maybe a passage from a writer or critic who has inspired you?

HS: The context is pretty clear in the *Son of Samson* text, but here's a headline for you: Haircut Hero Blinded, Smashes Temple.
<http://www.envf.port.ac.uk/illustration/images/vlsh/dbpc.htm>

☞ Also an image from an artist who has inspired you.



☞ Do you have a text that gives the reader the conceptual underpinnings of your show?

Dear Sam,
I think I heard that you were going to do something with *The Double*? Is that for real? I can still remember when you did that thing with *The One and The Many*. Wasn't that at *Three Walls*, right next door to *Cactus Bra*? Anyway, you are a Titan if there ever was one.
And something is going to happen at 8:30, right?
Would it be weird if I showed up?
Love,
D.

☞ Is "The Double" a reference to the Double Bind in the web address you attached?

HS: I supplied that link because it relates to the gap between what is, what is seen and what is said. This has been a constant concern.

There are many doubles. As with *The One and The Many*, *The Double* is a basic component of existence. It's fascinating, amazing, absurd that this is so. My view is that it's all here, we only need notice it. I've used the word *Gloville* in reference to this before. I see the world as a place that we alternately awaken to and take for granted, almost as if we have an on / off switch. So this is a kind of double, as distinct from the double that is a duplicate. Fuzzy logic blurs this distinction. In this there are more than two positions. So *The Double* and *The One and The Many* modify each other.

The Double Bind relates to game theory, too, as in Nash's realization that you don't have to start with an "I win / you lose" proposition. The book (*A Beautiful Mind*) is really interesting, but some of the dramatizations in the film are good, too. The scene in the bar is pertinent, when he sees that there is a choice, or rather a way of choosing, that's good for everybody (without winners and losers).

A few specifically relevant doubles: particle/wave; eater/eaten; hemoglobin/chlorophyll; princess/pea. Also paranoia/ecstasy. I've been thinking about these two words for three decades. At the root one means "outside yourself" while the other means "beside yourself".

☞ Are you extending the research done on schizophrenia to the art world, applying the terminology to relationships within it?

HS: Schizophrenia is a very serious subject and a very serious condition for those who live with it or around it. I do not pretend to know anything about it. The term was coined in the early twentieth century and means "split mind". This has led to a popular confusion that schizophrenia is a state of split personality, when really it's more about split or compartmentalized

functions. In addition to this misconception, there are a lot of unknowns and shifting opinions regarding the condition and how to treat it.

Like a lot of teenage misfits with a narcissistic or creative bent, I was attracted to books about madness when I was about seventeen. I read *I Never Promised You A Rose Garden, Madness and Civilization, On Aggression*. Soon after high school I got into Gregory Bateson, who came up with the Double Bind Theory mentioned in the link. Many of the books I was into back then are on Fuller Torrey's list of the fifteen worst books about schizophrenia. In the mid seventies I read *The Eden Express* by Mark Vonnegut, which detailed his descent through psychedelics into orthomolecular therapy. There is another more recent book, *Welcome to My Country*, in which the author dives through her own vulnerability to try and bring down the edifice of insanity.

There are probably a lot of theories about the overlap of disturbed behaviors and creativity. Then there is the notion that psychoactive substances can produce temporary effects that are similar to the symptoms of schizophrenia. Some call these experiences pharmacological phenocopies. *Son of Samson* is about copies, doubles, replicants, shadows. The name Samson means "son of the sun".

☛ *Can you tell me more about The One and the Many and its relationship to the current show?*

HS: That project was called *Tea For One*. Five components. One, "Stairway to Heaven", was based on dividing the height of the room by three, making three square drawings of that dimension (32" x 32") and installing them under 1/8" Plexiglas on a wall into a corner. One in the corner, one to the side, one on top, combining to create a diagonal zigzag formed by the top and one side of each of the two outside drawings. A stair with two steps. Then a row of three more half that size added to the top and sides of those. Now the stair has five steps. Then, a row of six half that size again. Then twelve. Then a row of twenty-four (now 2" x 2"), so that the whole configuration forms a staircase to the top of the wall. This is derived from Zeno's Paradox, which implies that you can never get where you are going because at any given moment the remaining distance can always be halved.

The final row of forty-eight, now only one inch square, was not mounted on the wall, but stacked on the floor. This reached about six inches high ("Empire"). All ninety-six drawings featured a penciled "smiley cross" (as Arend Zwartjes has dubbed that image) in the center.

Another piece stacked on the floor was made of sixty-four 1/8" Plexiglas profiles of life-scaled teacups. Eight colors: pink, red, orange, yellow, ochre, blue, black and white ("Cup").

Outside the door of Three Walls, across the hall, tangent to the exit sign, a wall-mounted transparent purple Plexiglas umbrella ("Misgiven").

The central piece of the show involved a white shelf mounted on the wall. This supported a transparent, urine-yellow profile of a teapot ("Diagnosis"). I finished the installation at 3:00 a.m. the night before the opening. The shelf was mounted, patched, spackled, repainted and the wall behind the teapot sanded flat, mimicking its shape. When I stepped back to look at it, I realized I had mounted it too high. It's all fussed over and finished and it's mounted forty inches off the floor and I'm sleep deprived, ready to crash. I was so close to it I didn't see that it should have been table height. Then I stumble onto the funky bar stool in the next room that fits the shelf height perfectly. A tea bar for one person. So the anchor piece for the project happened largely by accident. I didn't understand what the work was about until that moment (previous to this incident, *Tea For One* was already the title of the show).

☛ *I like this quote from the web page: "Could the applied use of images by one who recognizes what is happening, in effect a therapeutic double bind, promote understanding in the non-emerged, and how could this be guaranteed against being abusive?"*

Also: "It is hoped that images will remain a neutral ground whereby the user discovers for themselves, through self recognition, what their innermost thoughts and feelings are."

We could apply these to the case of the black dog in the image that you supplied.

H.S. Well, it's interesting that you've found a way to substitute that psychological term, "non-emerged", for the viewer, extending this analogy we've been discussing. My thing is to put the participant in the position of responsibility.

Willie Nelson once said that when he's on stage, he finds one person in the audience who is paying attention and plays the whole set to that person. That's a good parallel to the way I work. I play to the viewer who is really going to put themselves there. I give you everything you need, but I'll let you walk right past it if that's what you are going to do. I offer not a punch line, but a richness, an associative sea of experience that you can share because we are both human. I say that it's not abusive, that I'm not pulling your leg, but you have to trust that and invest effort.

I'm not trying to deliver a message. I'm interested in how the mind works, how the viewer's mind works, but there is such a thing as completely subjective association that I have no interest in stimulating. If the stuffed dog reminds you of your grandma's house, I don't care. On the other hand, there are specific associations that the context of what I'm providing will give you if you can get past your personal stuff out into the shared culture, or what passes for it.

By the way, it's not personal for me either. Or it might be for both of us on some level of self-nourishment, but not just for psychic souvenir hunting. Either way, through negotiation, we make it what it is and that continues to accrue. ☛

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