IMAGE AS METAPHOR
METAPHOR AS MEANING
MEANING AS EXISTANCE

A Thesis

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by

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INTRODUCTION

First and foremost I am a painter. The essays presented here were written after the paintings -- and I mean that in at least three respects. First, of course, I mean after in terms of time. The ideas presented here, coalesced after the fact -- in response to the paintings.

I am also considering after in terms of "about" or "in the spirit of". The following text is written in the metaphorical and associative manner in which I work, dealing with thoughts that the paintings generate. The paintings themselves, however (like everything which exists), remain indifferent to any sort of meanings which I, or anyone else, might ascribe to them. The paintings do not need these essays -- these essays need them. They are about them.

Finally I am thinking of after in terms of chasing or following. I have attempted to identify and elaborate on some of the questions posed by my work, but by no means have I exhausted the problems and possibilities they present. These essays do not capture the paintings -- they simply run after them, closing the distance here, lagging painfully behind there, but always trying to keep them in sight.

The contradictory elements and forces which go into the creation of art are often just that -- contra diction, against speech. A painting, simultaneously an object and an event, operates on many levels of discourse at the same time. It is the simultaneity of the visual event which makes translating it into prose so difficult. Unlike speech or writing which communicates in linear and accumulative manner, paintings present
themselves all over, all at once, compressing their discourse into an instant. The significance of the discursive contents, however, play and replay in the mind of the viewer, (even if the viewer is the artist himself!), eliciting a potentially limitless stream of connections, analyses and interpretations. Reality, which is conceptually constituted, is collapsed into an instant which infinitely unfolds itself.

In the following essays I have attempted to illuminate how this phenomenon is inextricably linked with the notions of polysemy, ambiguity, and metaphor; as well as how the inter-relatedness of these concepts have provided a base for my rather homespun and admittedly clumsy existentialism. But its awkwardness is somehow refreshing. After all, I'm not a philosopher, first and foremost I'm a painter.
PLATE I, *INTERIOR VACATION*

12/88 Oil & Latex on Canvas, 72" x 78"
A VACATION FROM ARISTOTLE

The theme of isolation is certainly nothing new in painting. The desocializing tendencies of modern industrial and post-industrial societies has been thoroughly explored in 20th century art. The most blatant and despicable of these: race, gender and class discrimination, have been the focus of many socially oriented artists. But willful acts of isolation and separation do not always manifest themselves so obviously or in such a negative light. Segregation and separation are often the unconscious motivations for seemingly harmless social habits where they are perceived as being positive, even pleasurable -- and what could be more pleasurable than a vacation? It is a chance to separate ourselves from the pressures and constraints of work-a-day existence. It is that all-too-short, once a year opportunity to really enjoy ourselves. To run off to the country or bake on the beach. Underneath it all, however, it's a separation, a chance to distance ourselves from the rest of humanity, or at least from our own everyday routine.

Vacations are supposed to be those precious moments set aside with one goal in mind -- to seek pleasure. So why in 1988 (during spring vacation, I might add) did I complete a painting that elicits anything but pleasurable response, and entitle it Interior Vacation? This two-panel painting contains four touristry figures: two facing us, two facing away; two adults and two children, one of which is brandishing that piece of ever-present vacation equipment -- a camera. These figures are locked together, static and timeless, as if captives of my own Kodak moment.
It's a rather innocuous, almost cliche scene, exuding a superficial aura of innocence. There is no hint of impending doom, no sour expressions. Not even any of the grotesque facial contortions caused by squinting into the sun. All is perfectly normal -- or so it seems. So why this knowing malaise? Why all the unpleasantness in a seemingly pleasant scene?

For an answer perhaps an analysis should take two tacts in the search for a conclusion. I am a representational artist utilizing recognizable images, so there is always the question of what is being depicted. In this particular instance this information would include the description listed above. However, there is also another question, equally as important, how it's depicted. It is this question that needs attention here.

The figures have been painted monochromatically in white latex and tar, the color and flush of life literally drained from their bodies. They stand frozen, isolated, immobile, more like statues than living beings. Their manner of representation is cold, analytical, and, well, rather uninteresting. So where should interest be focused if not on the figures?

As much as the figures are part of what is being depicted, so too are the ways in which these same figures relate to one another and to their painted environment. The lack of interest in the handling of the figures themselves allows the viewer to concentrate on their interaction -- or in this case, lack of it.

These four figures exist in a rather confined space. This fact alone would seem to make some sort of interaction between them probable, if not inevitable. Yet there they stand, mute and immobile. Even eye contact has been denied them. Close scrutiny reveals that although certain figures face each other, they do not look at one another, they look past one another. The matronly figure in the left panel focuses her sight
above and to the left of the child. On the right canvas the adult stares beyond the boy towards the horizon. Only the two lads in the striped shirts seem to make contact, (through the lens of the instamatic). But is it really *external* contact? These two present a special problem.

The boys, separated by the gap between panels, seem to be identical in all respects. The split dividing them, the vertical shift of the right panel, and the compositional correspondence between panels (the groupings appear to be the same figures viewed from the opposite direction), all imply a *temporal* rather then simply a spacial shift. These two boys are actually the same person presented at two moments in time. The interaction is actually an internal act of self-analysis or self-apprehension, thus it remains as contained and isolated as the other figures. This isolation is further enhanced by the mediating presence of the camera which serves to distance the self even from itself.

Here, at last, is the source of uneasiness. Despite the pleasure invoking promise of a "vacation" implied by the title, in spite of the optimism evoked by the dominant colors (quite literally "rosey"), despite the frivolity of cotton candy clouds, what remains are the sensations of isolation and separation as the overriding themes of the painting.

Isolation and separation cannot be denied as prevalent attributes of our society, however, as a painter, I am not interested in simply documenting my culture. I am primarily concerned with how all facets of the cultural or social are rooted in individual behavior and cognition. This view has been shared by many, some as notable as Sartre, Nietzsche, Heiddigger, and Weber. These men have largely based their readings of morality, religion, history and group dynamics -- all social manifestations -- upon *psychological* characteristics.
For me, painting is primarily an act of psychological analysis. It is less an act of documentation, (although arguably all acts are documentary in nature) then it is an act of explanation and exploration. It is a personal quest for truths, (although arguably a Quixotean quest at best) not pragmatic truths, but rather an attempt to come to some understanding of existence.

If my artistic activity is indeed a search for understanding, then it must be realized that there are two very different meanings associated with the word. The first entails coming into intimate contact with that which is to be understood, such as when a professional athlete "becomes one with the ball" or a therapist "understands" a patient by identifying and reasoning like them, quite literally "getting inside their head". It is an empathetic surrendering of the boundaries between observer and observed.

The second meaning of the word understanding stands in opposition to the first. It involves a separation of the knower from the known, tending to make an object of the known distinguished from the subject, the knower. This conception of understanding, seeks to increase the distance between knower and known, thus decreasing the risk of the knower becoming contaminated, of being unduly influenced or deceived by the known. It is in this way that "understanding" becomes "objective". By some strange paradox, a decrease in the familiarity with the known, leads to an increase of "truthful understanding".

Since Aristotle the thrust of Western thought has been to base its quest for knowledge upon this second conception of understanding, upon the cognitive acts of splitting, isolating, reducing, and deducing. Aristotle's philosophy made split the distinction of A from not A, its distinguishing mark. This method of understanding precipitated Descart's mind-body split, and allowed Freud to further distinguish mind
as id, ego, and superego. The Hellenistic legacy polarized the world and made Hegelian dialectics a "reality".

Since the Greeks man has steadily learned to apprehend even the simplest conceptions only in contrast to its opposite, envisioning all as separate and isolated. It is precisely this tendency of our minds to make varieties of separations that psychologist Alfred Korzybski in "Science and Sanity" saw as directly related to the major psychological difficulties of our time, allowing us to erect artificial barriers isolating man from world, man from man, and man even from himself.

It is here that Aristotle, father of Western scientific inquiry, settles in amongst the cast of Interior Vacation to reside silently, yet forcefully in the gaps between figures. It is he, or rather his inheritance, that is evident in this painting. In order for me to even conceive of my vacationers and the world I've created for them (an environment that is both "inside" and "outside", "personal" and "social") as a whole, I must isolate and polarize. The painting has been severed. The figures are segregated from each other. Inside is set apart from outside. The boy is even detached from himself, becoming both observed and observer. It is only through these acts of separation that I can conceive of the whole.

To hold this whole together, I must drain all the life from my poor vacationers. Their reality can only be preserved by denying them life. Separations only exist so long as there is stasis and immobility. There can be no crossing of boundaries. To give these figures life is to invite disaster, for living beings are constantly changing, constantly becoming, thereby destroying the separations and categorizations which have allowed us to conceive of them -- which have permitted them to exist at all.

Modern thought, and its reality, has been molded and tutored by this method of reasoning. Science, either theoretical or empirical (empiricism, being based upon
measurement, is simply a means of quantifying separation) knows no actual change or plurality. Change only exists as a reshuffling of polarities and categorizations. Our observations of the world reach a "crisis point" where our separations and castes break down. So we erect new boundaries and divisions, categories, sub-categories, classes, distinctions, ad infinitum on the rubble of the old system. These, needless to say, will remain timeless "truths" until the next crisis. My vacationer's world of isolation is our world. We are always on vacation, distancing ourselves from the mutable, the ephemeral and the sublime -- sequestering ourselves from life.
PLATE II, DOUBLE SELF-PORTRAIT WITH ARTISTIC DEVICES

5/89 Mixed Media on Canvas, 48" x 56"
DISAPPEARING OVER THE HORIZON

As the subject of painting, few themes are as recurrent as the self-portrait. It has appeared in every art historical period since the Renaissance. Even if the ostensive theme was religious or political in nature, the artist's visage often materializes in the sidelines, more frequently then not, staring straight out at the viewer. This penetrating look, a unitary gaze shared between artist and viewer, is evident in the vast majority of self-portraits. From Durer to Rembrandt, Van Goh to Miró, artists create and reveal themselves under the watchful eye of the spectator.

It is a dialectic of the look, an artist/spectator conspiracy in which the existence of the artist is established by the gaze of the viewer, whose own identity is reinforced by the reciprocity of the artist's stare. With this circularity of vision, each gives testimony to the other's existence. It is their own reflection they see in the eye of the other - a look which unveils the viewer unveiling.

The circularity of vision as a means of revealing personal existence is a theme which has infiltrated and informed much of my work. This idea has threaded itself through my paintings. It knits them to one another, and to myself, in a sort of loose weave which creates a rather drafty, but not ill-fitting garment. I have usually been content to expose myself in this patchwork fashion, so literal self-portraits appear only infrequently in my work. However, close examination of one, Double Self Portrait With Artistic Devices, might be a useful way to discover how the reciprocity of vision creates self-image.
*Devices* deals with two personifications of the author (myself) and the interrelationship between them. I have eschewed the normal scheme of the self-portrait by relegating the viewer to the role of passive spectator. His gaze is no longer essential to complete the cycle. The action is wholly contained. The right hand figure dominates three-fourths of the pictorial space. It is the more literal of my two portraits, however it is still a far cry from realism. It is a highly idealized, waist-length profile, a noble looking, yet oddly vacant figure. Its spectral visage recalls the neoclassical males of David in its deportment, coldness of handling, and emphasis on line.

The figure is embedded in, or emerging from, a loosely painted yellow field which obscures all but the head, hand and part of an alizarine mantle. I have portrayed myself with arm extended, pointing towards the right third of the canvas. This arm provides the only breach in the division which isolates the two personifications of myself from each other. This connective gesture seems alternately: 1. defensive; 2. accusatory (literally "pointing the finger"); and 3. creative (mirroring the hand of God from Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*). The object of this multifaceted gesture is the second incarnation of myself, a figure which has been dematerialized into two disembodied arms and a lower case "i". These float in front of a sky blue rectangle which opens up the space, implying a simplified landscape, whose horizon falls directly in the line of sight of the first figure. While one of the detached arms meekishly slinks off with a cup of coffee, the other, balled into a fist, threatens my idealized portrait with a sharp slap on the wrist.

Let's pause for just a moment to recall the little boy from *Interior Vacation* who attempted to capture an image of himself with a camera. Memory is the mental camera with which we picture ourselves. By recalling past actions and thoughts and evaluating them internally, we develop self-image. Identity is essentially backwards-looking,
erecting the present conception of self upon the mental projections of past selves. It is a seance where the individual consults with the ghosts of himself in order to divine how he should act now, in the present. It is just such a ghost that materializes from the picture plane on the right side of *Self Portrait With Artistic Devices*. It is the idealized, unreal, phantom self of memory who peers, empty-eyed, toward the horizon. It is he who points the creating/admonishing finger. A. J. Ayer has noted that one cannot point at an object without describing it. Description, however is not as passive as it may seem. If someone describes an object which is unfamiliar to me, he essentially *recreates* it in his own mind meanwhile *creating* it in mine.

But what is it this idealized portrait, this past self creates? It is the "i", an I with balled fist on any empty blue horizon. It is the I in the present tense -- me. The self of the present has been depicted as a diagram of action. The form has dematerialized, conspicuous only in its absence. Unlike the past self which has a face, (Albeit a face idealized or otherwise distorted by memory), the identity of the present self can only be imagined. It can only take the form of a disembodied, abstract idea -- a hypothesis.

The individual cannot apprehend himself at the moment of his own becoming. It would be like using a yardstick to measure its own length. It can only yield the same reflexive answer -- one yard. Only by comparison to the spectral self of remembrance can any judgments or observations be made. The interaction between them creates individual identity. As a person’s past shapes the present, so it is the present which conjures and analyzes the past.

In *Devices* the pointing finger of the past self creates while the balled fist of the present self destroys; the finger accuses, the fist shapes. They act one upon the other.

The two arms of these figures provide the transition from who I was to who I am and vice-versa. They form the equal sign in the equation of identity. Like all equations,
movement across the equal sign is reversible, so long as the two sides are in accordance, 
(2 + 2 = 4 is the same as 4 = 2 + 2). However, a change on one side of the equation creates an imbalance. In an attempt to restore balance, the other side must be altered. This, in turn, necessitates a reassessment of the previous side. This reappraisal is continuous, adjusting and readjusting memory to contingency, contingency to memory. The equal sign does not imply status, it demands endless movement.

This perpetual motion across the equal sign is self consciousness, an awareness which must reconcile the potential of the present moment to the determining factors of all past moments. My identity must neither be a slave to my past nor detached from it. Devices is a self-portrait which looks at myself looking at myself looking. (Whew!).

In Rhyzome we find a literal equal sign painted boldly over the left side of the canvas. This sign of accordance equates the imagined reality of the painting to the contingent reality in which it exists (i.e., the "Real" world). Mirroring the individual's tireless dialectical reconciliation of their essentially internal awareness with the external world of appearances. Identity arises from the endless pursuit of a ceaselessly fleeting object -- self. This metaphysical motion is perpetual and therefore circular. In continual flight, man chases his own reflection around the equal sign of self-consciousness, separated from, yet forever joined to his image by the sign of accordance. The subject (himself) is only a dimension of the object (also himself). The experiment and experimenter become one in the look which reveals itself revealing. Imperfection is built into man's ability to know himself. However, this defect must not discourage us. For it is enough to see one's self on the limit of one's own horizon... the circularity of vision gives testimony to one's existence.
PLATE III, LISTENING FOR DISTANCE

12/89 Tar, Wood, Oil & Latex on Canvas, 78" x 66"
THE ROUND TRIP

The metaphor most commonly used for the process of self-analysis has been that of archeology. The archeologist digs deeply in order to unearth long-locked secrets and obscure origins just as a 'soul searcher' fathoms the depths of his psyche for that essence which makes him unique. Psychoanalysis has helped to strengthen this model, as is evidenced by its terminology. Words such as "super ego", "projection" and "subconscious" all have spacial undertones. Largely because of Freud man has come to visualize the self in terms of strata which once removed, will reveal a core, the quintessence of who he is.

In the painting Listening For Distance I employed just such a layered visualization of self in order to expose this model's shortcomings. The top of the image is the surface, the world of appearances, symbolically delineated as a yellow plank on which two feet firmly stand. To the left of this, three wavy bands of tar pass downwards, penetrating through the various levels and barriers of this painted cross-section. At this point however the similarity to the archeological metaphor is eschewed. In place of the core that one would expect to find buried at the center, I have depicted instead a reflection in a blue pool. It is not passive and inert, but rather an active, searching, visage. Waves emanate from its ear like sonar scanning the ocean floor. But for what does it listen? The waves seem to expand continuously. The reflection is listening for its own limits -- it is listening for distance.

This is the auditory equivalent of the horizon line, that boundary which limits what we can see. This limit of perception and comprehension is precisely that which defines
who I am. Every man's limits are different, and constantly expanding. He cannot see over his own horizon, but the same perspective lines which carry him up to the vanishing point also race back towards him. They encompass him, defining his position, establishing him as the center of his world. Self knowledge is not archeology, it's a round trip.

A man sets out on journey. A philosophical or scientific excursion to find out what is real, what is true, so that he may place himself concretely in his world. However this explorer soon finds that all roads to knowledge, as winding and lengthy as they may be, ultimately lead back to himself. Man is, in the end, the measure. But upon returning home from his expedition, the explorer soon discovers that the journey has changed him. Nothing quite looks the same. Astonished, he sets out again curious as to what fresh insights his new perspective has to offer. All knowledge is round trip.

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In Roman mythology Janus, the two-faced deity, was the god of journeys. He presided over doorways where all trips began and ended. Temporally speaking, he was Januarius, the threshold where the old year passed into the new. He faced two directions because every passage implied two paces -- where you were going and where you happened to be.

As a portal Janus personifies that place where hither meets thither, separating them, yet at the same time, unifying them. Terms such as 'outside' and 'inside' are of only relative usefulness. It all depends on where you're standing. For Janus, however, these concepts are meaningless. This revolving door of a god can only be aware of continuous movement across his threshold. It is for this reason that Aurthur Koestler dubbed him the 'God of Hinges' and utilized him as the model for his metaphysical concept of the Holon. Holons are units (either conceptual or physical) which display a dual tendency
PLATE IV, EL DOUBLYU

9/89 Oil on Canvas, 68" x 96"
to behave as independent wholes, asserting their individualities, but at the same time form only a part of larger wholes in the multi-leveled hierarchies of existence. Janus is the quintessential pivot point, a screen door which unites opposites and yet provides the boundary that makes opposition possible.

My early paintings were preoccupied with opposites, even to the point of limiting my pallet to black and white. Slowly (almost painfully so), the insistence on opposition softened over the two years of my graduate study and I began to concentrate more and more on fusion and similarities rather then separation and differences. It seems I gradually became a devotee of Janus without even realizing it. The large canvas *El Doublyu* provides an excellent opportunity to explore how this two-faced god infiltrated my ideas and my paintings.

*El Doublyu* was my first foray into the technicolor world of high intensity, full range hue. Stretched over a deep, cerulean background hangs a patchwork curtaia of yellow and crimson diamonds arranged into harlequin pattern. An immense hand has been pushed through an oval rent in this curtain. The form of the harlequin backdrop and its tear have been echoed by a pseudo-scientific graph system onto which an ellipse has been charted. The significance of its quasi-empirical findings are obscure at best. but it does seem to delineate some sort of shaky cartesian scaffold on which the hand is tentatively supported.

On the hand’s first digit is the bloated, mâché head of a child’s clown finger puppet. Mutely, it stares unflinchingly off into space, seemingly unaffected by the contemptuous staredown initiated by the stern elderly head hovering above it. This critical
countenance is a spectral transformation of the pinky finger. The hand serves as the common body for this odd pair of siamese twins, binding them together while affording them a large degree of independence.

As I was engaged in the planning and execution of El Doublyu I envisioned these two personages in the oppositional manner to which I was accustomed. Each symbolized one of the two antithetical poles characteristic of existential dualisms, be it Descart's mind/body split, Freud's eros and thanatos, or Sartre's *en-soi*/*pour-soi*. More specifically, I was thinking in terms of Nietzsche's apollonian/dionysian dyad. In Nietzsche's system, the apollonian signified all that was rational and logical in man's nature. He used the term 'dionysian' in reference to men's alogical emotions and their enigmatic 'spirit'. Thus I interpreted the finger puppet as the dionysian and the pinkie as the apollonian. This interpretation also explains their interaction. The apollonian (rational) aspect presides over the emotions, scrutinizing and passing judgments, while the dionysian (illogical), the larger of the two, remains fairly unaffected by its criticisms.

What this preliminary interpretation failed to deal with was the role played by hand in the composition. If, deistically speaking, the pinkie is Apollo and the puppet is Dionysus, then the hand may be understood as being Janus, the nexus where these two meet and yet are held at a distance from each other. The hand is also symbolic of human action or praxis. The praxis of each living individual gives rise to his apollonian and dionysian aspects. Likewise, as the individual encounters the contingencies of the

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1 A quick aside: The pinky finger is of dubious usefulness in the performance of everyday activity. It is the most expendable finger (keep in mind an amputee is writing here). We have more cause to pause and contemplate what parts of the body are more easily done away with). But while the pinky is the least useful, it is commonly realized by martial artists that control of the pinky (i.e., bending it backwards) gives one total control over one's opponent. In this way it directly corresponds to self consciousness: 1. it is of little value in terms of *activity*, 2. it is the most vulnerable, 3. it can inflict a disproportionate effect and control over the individual.
world, the appollonian/dionysian dyad determines what form the individual's praxis might take. The person's actions establish the dialogue between the appollonian and dionysian. This dialogue, in turn, shapes the subsequent actions of the individual. The cause and effect relationship is necessarily reversible or Janus-faced. Human action is the ambiguous fusion of opposites. Praxis is ambiguous because there is no clear, linear cause and effect relationship. Every action is both cause and effect.

It should also be observed that the hand in *El Dublyu* is also where the harlequin patterned curtain meets the cartesian graph. The curtain (dionysian) conceals, camouflages and keeps secret. The graph (appollonian) is a tool of the scientist whose goal is to reveal disclose and expose. The hand (Janus or human praxis) is the hinge which allows the door to knowledge to simultaneously open and close. Enigma and understanding are two side of the same coin. Which actually reveals or conceals which? Aristotle's knowledge of an earth-centered universe concealed the sun-centered system proposed a century before him by certain presocratic philosophers. It took the Enigma of certain inexplicable planetary motions (especially that of Mars, whose 'corkscrew' orbit baffled astronomers) to reveal to Copernicus and Kepler a solar system in which the planets do indeed revolve around the sun in elliptical orbits.

It does not seem insignificant that in *El Dublyu* I chose to plot an ellipse on the graph. Perhaps it was just habit. Ellipses have served as major compositional elements in nearly every painting I've done in the past two years, such as *Flesh Magnet, Stalk* or *Herself Naked in Them*. Why the preoccupation with this shape, and why should I impose it on the graph in *El Dublyu*?

The Ellipse is a continuous shape which, unlike a circle, must be defined by two points. It is a closed loop requiring two bodies, separated at a distance, to create a continuous movement around them. The points are insulated (never becoming part of
the shape) and isolated (never actually directly relating to one another) and yet they are
unified and encompassed by the endless, reversible motion which their presence defines.
It is the euclidean model of the Janus principle! Or, if I may be allowed to revert to a
previous metaphor, the ellipse is the sign of accordance. The two points serve as the
two sides of the equation. The reversible motion across the equal sign corresponds to
the circular motion about the two points, a motion which forever unifies them, yet
demands their separation.

_El Doublyu_, as the name itself implies, is concerned with unity and plurality, division
and wholeness. It marks that point in my work in which I became as equally concerned
with fusion as I was with bifurcation. It seems perfectly natural that I should extend the
principle of 'unity in diversity', a concept central to the aesthetics of painting, into a
metaphysical aesthetic which accommodates individual existence. I should not omit here
that Janus was the only god in the Roman pantheon that did not have a Greek
equivalent. It is odd that the culture that first developed aesthetic theory should not
embrace a Janus-like god to serve as a link between separation and unity. Perhaps the
over-riding Hellenistic desire for clarity could not allow the Greeks to even imagine such
an ambiguous persona let alone elevate such a fence-sitter to the level of godhood. But
if clarity is next to godliness then godliness is next to impossible. For we mortals life
is, at best, ambiguous, a fusion of opposites.
PLATE V, STALK

7/89 Oil & Latex on Canvas, 54" x 40"
ON WAVING

This Janus does indeed seem to be the most ambiguous of characters. He is paradox's patron saint, a most perplexing god who presents and denies his own edicts in the same breath. Perhaps the god of journeys has traveled too far from Mt. Olympus and has become mortal. He does not seem to observe as a god observes -- from above, on the outside looking in -- but as a man. For men there is no outside. He can only see as far as the horizon which is present no matter how far he travels or which way he looks. Knowledge flows from him, its light exposing the world. The source of the light, however, is obscured by the glare produced by its illumination. Man, because of his brilliance, remains a darkened doorstep.

Accordingly, Man may be understood to be the threshold and the horizon. Poised in the doorway of the present, the individual is the point where past meets potentiality, where here meets there. Locked forever at this departure point/vanishing point, the question is not where the person stands. The question is rather, "Is he waving hello or goodbye?".

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Waving is a most curious human ceremony. We utilize the same side-to-side hand motion regardless of whether we are arriving or departing. If I were to come across this friendly exchange at the very instant of its occurrence, it would be unclear as to whether I was witnessing a salutation or a parting. I would be equally unsure who was coming and who was going. The only thing I could be sure of would be my confusion and fascination with this ambiguous gesture. Just such an interest in gestural 'double
entendre' became the focus of *Stalk*, a painting which evolved around such a pivotal action. *Stalk* consists of a black, cavernous interior space contained on three sides by a white border. Crouching within this darkened space is a decapitated female figure (gender is indicated only by the shoes) approaching somewhat cautiously from the right. Before her is a large hole or shadow into which she seems about to stumble. Supported by four spidery poles, an elliptical, ocher form looms overhead. This shape is not easily categorized. It reminds me of a large rock or cartoon 'thought bubble'. When I was actually painting it, I envisioned it as a potato, (it was not necessarily meant to be humorous, although in retrospect, I am quite pleased that it is stupidly non-sequitur).²

Within this 'potato' two arms have materialized. The left is the more fully modeled of the two. It reaches out almost to its full length, fingers and thumb extended. The right arm is in a more transient stage, not quite fully formed. It hangs back from its mate, palm forward, fingers together.

The pose is not unlike the opening, defensive position adopted by the nameless stars of "Kung Fu Theatre". However it just as strongly suggests the hocus-pocus, spell binding postures that Dr. Strange or Professor Mesmer utilized so effectively to call their hapless victims forth. It is a gesture which simultaneously beckons and repulses. Like the wave, the gesture in is wholly ambiguous, and the viewer arriving at the frozen instant of its occurrence cannot categorically define it as one or the other. The viewer's

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² At the time the potato seemed like a perfectly acceptable model for the human mind (it still does actually) it is a rhyzome which branches laterally beneath the surface, sending out tendrils from which other rhizomes or nodes develop. These, in turn, develope and bud further. Each node sends up a shoot which breaks the topsoil to see the light of day, but the majority of the plant and its 'energy supply' remain beneath the surface. To be honest, though, I don’t feel that the painting gains a whole heluvalot by this literal potato analogy. Reading it as a 'rock' or 'thought bubble' or 'amorphous blob' does just as well without overburdening the point.
predicament mirrors that of *Stalk*’s faceless protagonist who feels her way through the inscape.

She doesn’t know whether she is being commanded forward or encouraged to turn back. She cannot even be sure if what lies in front of her is a bottomless void or her only escape. A third alternative is that it is both. The dark patch confronting her may just be the shadow of that which urges her on. A shadow is not identical to the object which creates it, but it is inseparable from it. It is a "nothing" projected by the object.

The headless figure is provoked to action (either beckoned or repulsed) by the hands which confront her. The ambiguous gesture is a projection of herself, her self-consciousness. These hands are a concretization of her perpetual drive towards a coincidence with herself, a meeting which is never given. She stalks her own shadow in a never ending chase. Her identity always veers toward a state which is not present, that is, a nothing -- potentiality. In this way the shadow, *her* shadow, is both a bottomless pit, always looming before her, and her only escape.

The oddly inviting yet forbidding gesture found in *Stalk* urges the figure forward into the darkness of an unknown future while at the same time cautioning it to turn back and satisfy itself by way of a known arrangement with the world, such as "role", "position", "class identification", "occupation", etc. The hands embody our complimentary nature to become and yet remain, thereby granting continuity while engendering mutability and change.

*Stalk* concerns itself with the endless quest for identity, a quest which is only resolved by one's death. But upon reaching this most final of endings, I think I, for one, will try and manage a wave. It seems a most befitting farewell. Beside, who knows, taking into account the reversibility of the gesture, it may, in fact, turn out to be a greeting.
PLATE VI, INHALE OUT EXHALE IN

3/90 Oil on Canvas, 84" x 66"
DEEPLY SACRED YET HIGHLY ACCURSED

In the previous essay I attempted to link the ambiguity of gesture to the inherent ambiguity of existence. Gesture is, of course, neither our primary means of communication, nor the most efficient. Language developed from man’s need for a more precise means to express himself. As his vision of the world became more focused, he continued to fine-tune language.

The triumphs of Hellenistic thought may be based in no small degree on the precision of Greek. The same may be said of the Roman and Egyptian cultures, whose achievements rivaled those of their Grecian neighbors. However, within the languages that these two societies developed to codify their thoughts and experiences, one can find remnants of the oppositional ambiguity exhibited by such gestures as the wave. In Egyptian there were such words as *Oldyoung* and *Famear* to describe the concepts of young and near respectively. Latin also has such words as *altus* which may be alternately translated as both high or deep. *Sacer* was commonly used to denote that which was either sacred or accursed. Only in context can one make a definitive translation (that is, of course, assuming one was actually intended. My suspicions lie along these lines).

Words such as these did not exhibit a dual or *polysemic* character in order to play a cruel, linguistic joke on the populace. Nor were they the results of some sort of clerical oversight. They represent accessible reflections of the ways in which these cultures viewed the world.
Altus, for instance, was concerned with a general concept, (vertical position in space) of which its two meanings 'high' and 'deep' are the two extremes. To have called the idea 'high' into play was to call upon the concept of 'deep' by implication. One is the cognitive shadow of the other, not identical to it, but inseparable from it. The polysemic nature of altus evidenced a Roman awareness that such characterizations were quantitatively relative (i.e., dependant on the level of the observer), and qualitatively equal. Hence, high was not more esteemed then deep (as opposed to 'low' which did have negative connotations). This qualitative equality is evidenced in a passage from Cicero, "Rhetoric should move the populace deeply, appealing to their highest virtues", (my italics).³

Polysemic words such as altus and sacer reflected an underlying unity that the Romans either consciously or unconsciously recognized as linking various specific manifestations (i.e., high and deep) to a common concept or phenomena (vertical position in space).

Man was only capable of apprehending even the simplest of conceptions in contrast to its opposite. He has gradually learned to separate the two sides of antithesis. The cognitive unity of altus has developed into the modern notions of 'high' and 'deep'. Currently, we may deal quite comfortably with isolated concepts without recourse to the underlying precept.

³ The implications of this went, of course, unnoticed. It is only in retrospect that we can read into these polysemic words their true impact when one follows their connotations to their logical extremes. The quantitative relativity of such words prefigures Einstein's General Theory in its emphasis on the role of the observer in respect to the observed. The qualitative 'leveling' of altus is echoed in Nietzsche's "Revaluation of All Values" and situational ethics. As clear as the connections are to me, is by no means to imply that some such ramifications were clear to the Romans or other subsequent users of Latin.
Earlier I proposed that the divisionary tactics of western (and more specifically my) thought could ultimately laid at the feet of Aristotle. Inspired by his example, man has generated a complex set of distinctions and qualifications, based upon particulars, with which to comprehend his environment, very often losing sight of any underpinning unity.

Arnold Zweig has astutely observed that in the 17th century there began a new era in the observation of the universe and mankind,"... which has since expressed itself in that multiplicity of new disciplines, that wealth of sciences, whose stupendous body of material has divided, split, risen asunder, and confused human knowledge. The task they set us is precisely the ceaseless admonition to unify." This unity is precisely that which modern English no longer reflects because of the increasing emphasis on specificity and clarity.

The point I have been building towards is this: Ambiguity arises as a result of polysemy, which is itself a recognition of the underlying unity which connects seemingly disparate observations and conceptions to a common source. Ambiguity, which is now commonly held to obscure understanding, is rather a reflection of deeper understanding. Ambiguity arises as a result of a polysemic recognition of the underlying unity which connects seemingly incongruous observations to a common source. Polysemy accommodates a multiplicity of appearances while establishing continuity -- in other words, it allows change.

My paintings are about what it is to exist -- to be human, and to exist. What is more characteristically human then change? We see it, we do it. We fight it. We pray for it. We smell it coming or we float on it like a leaf in the breeze.

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4 Arnold Zweig, The Living Thoughts of Spinoza, 1959 p. 23.
The one thing we can't do is explain it. I'm the same guy I was last year, but.. well.. I'm different. Same but different. I'm polysemic. And so I believe is everything which exists. Painting is appealing because of its simultaneity. It is an object and an event, presenting its contents all at once. Time becomes compressed into an instant, which infinitely unfolds itself. The everyday becomes illuminated in the light of eternity, casting a shimmer and sparkle over common objects and events.

My work centers on this principal, and the painting *Inhale Out Exhale In* pointedly illustrates this. Positioned halfway up the picture plane a figure floats horizontally, half submerged in a murky, green pool. It grasps tightly to a hand whose disembodied arm rises above the pool and off the top of the painting.

This subtly modeled arm is mirrored in its basic form by a child-like scrawl arising from the prone figure, as if inflated by its breath. Perched on this 'breath bubble' are two naively scribbled figures, one upright, the other inverted.

The composition is dominated by the spectral visage of a young boy, whose head merges with that of the horizontal figure. He is blowing on two large apples suspended on strings, performing a 19th century parlor trick commonly used to demonstrate the influence of atmospheric pressure: The harder one attempts to blow the suspended apples apart, the closer they cleave together.

The painting's content is built upon this metaphor -- as is its *structure*. The entire composition had evolved around the apple form: an oval with a vertical 'stem'. The pool and the arm creates one 'apple' while the merger of heads forms the other with the 'breathe bubble' as its stem. I have termed these shape similarities visual homonyms. They are images which share a common form but dissimilar (specific) significations.

Visual homonyms are to painting what polysemic words like *altus* and *sacer* are to Latin. They allow the various manifestations of an object/event to be embodied by a
single signifier. Visual homonyms serve as pivot points from which multiple views or frames of reference may be swung into focus.

A boy tries to blow two apples apart and yet they are drawn together. This same boy’s head in conjunction with the face of the floating figure and its ‘breath bubble’ takes on the form of an apple. These, in turn, are enclosed in a larger ‘apple’ formed by the pool and the arm. Each successive manifestation of the apple is equated with the others due to their shape similarities. They are the same. Only the scale of the view has changed, like those Czechoslovakian dolls which are encased by ever-increasing replicas, each one enclosing another. The boy’s action unfolds itself in ever widening spheres of influence. He, himself is another manifestation of the parlor trick he is performing, not just a metaphor for it. Eternity implodes into the instant, just as high and deep collapse into altus.

As a living being capable of change, every moment of my life the instant collides with eternity. The contingencies of the ‘now’ are united to the infinite possibilities to act and to create meaning. My inertia to remain as I am is overcome by my uncontrollable movement towards what I am not. I am the boy in Inhale Out Exhale In, whose every living breath creates a vacuum, a “nothing” which joins all that I have been to all that I will be. I am also the floating figure, half submerged in the pool of the past, and half exposed to the stratospheric expanse of potentiality. My prone, buoyant form is the horizon line, the limit to my vision. I lie, Janus-faced, scrutinizing the past and yet turned towards the future, unable to see over the horizon which I form.

The present self, man in the process of becoming, is a polysemic and necessarily ambiguous creature. Knowledge and enigma meet on the threshold of the human mind. The person, while alive is engaged in a constant process of self-creation, as much an effect of his actions as a cause. At every point in the person’s life, he encounters a
built-in limitation to his knowledge -- himself. But there is no limit on the desire to understand. This craving to know produces science and history, poetry and art. This hunger to become makes man unique. However, it is an appetite which consumes all, and yet is never satisfied. Man is truly sacer, both sacred and accursed.
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