

placing the unknown
image: the intervention

Bryce Goebel

It'll never be known how this has to be told, in the first person or in the second, using the third person plural or continually inventing modes that will serve for nothing. If one might say: I will see the moon rose, or: we hurt me at the back of my eyes, and especially: you the blond woman was the clouds that race before my your his our yours their faces. What the hell. (Cortázar, 114)

Fragments of Julio Cortázar's short story "Blow-Up"¹ are dripping within and between other words throughout what follows. They are developing right now: each fragment, each block quotation from Cortázar appearing in this paper hangs as a photograph coming into view on a wall or on a line in a darkroom; or, in this paper, images develop within a procession of words making up a line of writing; they are images capturing the process of something resembling itself – even if this something remains unknown, even if this something becomes a particular thing different for each individual observer. This something is a tension that reveals placement. (Reader, please imagine these quotations as images; this something will slowly reveal itself.) "Blow-Up" images the unknown beautifully, providing me with a frame to reach you from a here position to a then as a now.

Positioning in Cortázar's short story is layered, as noted in the quotation, the image, from Cortázar above, which opens "Blow-Up" (a beginning to the story and a constant rupturing) and intervenes with the progression of the telling, transferring the reader in different directions simultaneously. As a basic outline to the story, and I will attempt to put it as succinctly as possible while *capturing* intervention in the process, the subject in "Blow-Up," Roberto Michel, a translator by profession and amateur photographer in his spare time, revisits a past event – via a capturing, an image, a photograph he took one day in Paris while taking a break from a translating assignment – in the present and contemplates what might have transpired in the future of that event – had he not intervened, had he not been witnessed taking the photograph – long after the event would have taken place. Cortázar's subject is and becomes, like myself, and like you, a social observer, a translator. He tries to grasp what it is that he sees, did not see, what he could not possibly see, but... he images, he resides prior to, within and beyond images.

Roberto intervenes in the lives of three other characters by taking an image of them. And, the image continuously intervenes in his life long after the image took place. Telling the story is difficult.

The contemplation of image by Cortázar's subject echoes words spoken by Harvey Keitel's character Auggie Wren in the film *Smoke*. Auggie informs the regular patrons in his cigar shop of how Paul Benjamin (William Hurt) – a writer – has “run out of luck”: Paul's wife Ellen was shot just outside Auggie's cigar shop a few years prior; since the shooting in which Paul lost his wife and his un-born child, Paul has had difficulty adjusting. After informing the gallery of Paul's “luck,” Auggie wonders that if somehow he could have kept Ellen in the shop a little longer (“maybe if she wouldn't have given me exact change that day... or if the store would have been a little more crowded...”), as she was stocking up on cigars for Paul, then tragedy may have been avoided. This story, like Cortázar's, revisits a past event via an image – the telling and most likely retelling of a story – in the present only to contemplate what might have happened in the future of that event. Different from Cortázar's story, however, Auggie wishes that he had made a greater intervention in order to prevent the happening of the eventual event that at the time he had no idea was about to happen.

This paper images the observational event and is taken by those images in perspective shifts: interventions. The film *Smoke* (directed by Wayne Wang and written by Paul Auster) revolves around the main character Auggie Wren and his corner: 3rd Street and 7th Avenue in Brooklyn, New York. Everything that happens in this film can be traced to the corner: it is the place of the cigar shop in which he works and it is the corner that Auggie captures via a photograph each morning at eight o'clock. His “life's work” lies in several albums of photographs. Auggie informs us that there are over 4,000 photographs in the albums, each taken from the exact same spot at the exact same time every day: “more than 4,000 pictures of the same place... the corner of 3rd Street and 7th Avenue at eight o'clock in the morning. 4,000 straight days in all kinds of weather... that's why I can never take a vacation... I gotta be in my spot every morning at the same time – every morning in the same spot at the same time.” In terms of perspectives, *Smoke* captures Auggie readying himself to take a photograph of “his corner” (perspective from the writer/director position). His vision of the corner prior to taking the photograph is another perspective (narrator position in terms of setting the story). The third perspective is the image the camera produces of that corner (subject position). There are three perspectives operating simultaneously within the very movement of the text: writer (and/or director), narrator, and subject. Of course this is arguable of all films; in this particular film, however, the corner is the absolute centre of

the story (the film) and what is most distant, fading into the background. The corner is present in every single scene, as it brings all the characters in the film together, but it is also what is seemingly absent. The corner is the narrator.

Cortázar's "Blow-Up" centres on a photograph, an image; yet, perspective is more explicit in the writing itself: "it had never occurred to me that when we look at a photo from the front, the eyes reproduce exactly the position and the vision of the lens" (Cortázar, 126-127). The main character offers these words while contemplating an image – the image – that he has taken. This image takes him away from a translation assignment he is attempting to complete. Stories are built around this image, imaginings of what was likely happening before the image was taken and what might have taken place after the taking of the image – had it not been taken. In reading the short story, the reader reproduces the exact same space the subject experiences (and reproduces) as told by the narrator (which we sense is the subject as well), and as given by the writer (the writer could be both the narrator and subject). Interestingly, the image may be the most convincing narrator – both the centre and periphery to the story. This image "takes" the subject away from his position as narrator.

and I'm alive, I'm not trying to fool anybody, you'll see when we get to the moment, because I have to begin some way and I've begun with this period, the last one back, the one at the beginning, which in the end is the best of the periods when you want to tell something. (Cortázar, 115)

Words in this paper place and interrupt an experience of the very thing I am trying to describe within the space of such description: I am a social observer and I want you, the reader, to sense you are observing *something*, contemplating the difficulty of translating social observations, and not merely reading words. A perspective shift is at play here concerning my observations; and, there may be a further shift concerning the reading of this paper. In writing of my social observations I am placing myself (writing myself) in both narrator and main subject positions and, hopefully, reproducing that same space, or perspective, for you to experience in reading. Importantly, each perspective (writer, narrator, subject) may play the role of the narrator (social observer) occupying a void place, interval, or what I am calling the unknown image within the writing (or what is being observed); or, and this is where the picture may come into view, what is normally considered the subject or object of investigation may turn out to be the unknown image itself – central or proximate in terms of housing the story *and* distant in terms of being veiled by the identities of characters within the story (fading into the background

as it unfolds but always in a place of unveiling). Initially, the social observer occupies the interval between an objective reality – what is being told – and the multiple subjectivities of those within the telling, including the social observer herself. But, in this temporary occupation, in the attempt to translate what is being observed, the observation replaces the observer.

As another point of entry, I feel that the “reader” of any text is similar to the social observer in terms of initial positioning: at any given point the social observer is writer, narrator, or subject occupying the place of the unknown image. In reading, though, the text begins to write or read the reader.² That is, when we get inside our reading (or writing for that matter) – whether a specific written text or the subject/object of our social inquiries – the “reading” takes us over, even to the point of such readings speaking for us. What social observers look at becomes the narrator that tells them, positions them. Thus, the corner becomes the narrator in *Smoke*, the photograph develops to be the narrator in “Blow-Up,” and, as will be imaged regarding my personal accounts as social observer, the very subjects I observe place me at my corner and tell me from that corner. These unknown images, unknown because they are difficult to sense and thus imaged as narrator, intervene in the placements of social observers, capturing place.³

An important aspect often neglected in the documentation of any social observing is to take account of how this intervention changes the observer: the changes in the observer as a result of observing and thus being observed: how a social observer is processed in their very processing. Observers may be able to learn more about what it is being observed by highlighting how the observed observes the observer to the point of changing the notions and practices of the observer – the process of living – from being observed. In other words, I am advocating the importance of noting the intervention, the change, the process – development, if one considers a photograph coming into view in a darkroom – of the becoming-observed-observer (the observation becoming narrator for the story of the observer). This paper is an image taking itself: an intervention. It has placed me here before you now placing you.

I know that the most difficult thing is going to be finding a way to tell it, and I'm not afraid of repeating myself. It's going to be difficult because nobody really knows who it is telling it, if I am I or what actually occurred or what I'm seeing (clouds, and once in a while a pigeon) or if, simply, I'm telling a truth which is only my truth, and then is the truth only for my stomach, for this impulse to go running out and to finish up in some manner with, this, whatever it is. (Cortázar, 116)

developing images (personal accounts as social observer)

Social observers are forever trying to close the (infinite) distance between themselves as both an observer and a participant within their observations and between themselves as observers and the subjects/objects of this observing. In a sense, the social observer is akin to Maurice Blanchot's narrator (the neuter): the outside centre or void in the sense that the narrator occupies a distinct position in any story – closeness in the ability to reveal the story but always from a concealed place (rarely does the narrator reveal their placement). This infinite distance, this non-place place, however, is also an extreme proximity.⁴ The tension between proximity and distance centres the unknown image in observation.

I think that I know how to look, if it's something I know, and also that every looking oozes with mendacity, because it's that which expels us furthest outside ourselves... In any case, if the likely inaccuracy can be seen beforehand, it becomes possible again to look; perhaps it suffices to choose between looking and the reality looked at, to strip things of all their unnecessary clothing.
(Cortázar, 119)

I live in Toronto. Here we define placement by distance from nearest major corner or intersection. Near Queen Street and Spadina Avenue and just south of Chinatown, my apartment building lies nestled between other similar buildings. Throes of blank-faced people walk past my building daily en route to the corner of Spadina and Queen, while others engage in jovial dialogue – their faces offering a multitude of expressions, images. At times my placement in the city is troublesome, as people crowd noisily (my thoughts, my personal space, my energy, my time). On other days that same crowd ignites me, filling me with boundless energy, endless time, and I realize that I could not live anywhere else. The street light at the corner turns from amber to red. People wait to cross the street.

I raised the camera, pretended to study a focus which did not include them, and waited and watched closely, sure that I would finally catch the revealing expression, one that would sum it all up, life that is rhythmized by movement but which a stiff image destroys, taking time in cross section, if we do not choose the essential imperceptible fraction of it. (Cortázar, 123)

4 December⁵

I am facing a brick wall wondering what it might be like to be the mortar in-between the bricks. My thoughts crowd the wall or the wall crowds my thoughts.

People were passing me, as I stood and stared at a brick wall at the corner. Foundations, buildings, constructions, possibilities formulate. I don't know how long I stood gazing at the wall, but it must have been a while – my body was quite cold when I finally decided to cross the street. Why do I find myself enthralled with intersections, intervals, the in-between? Why is the cohesion of my interest cohesion itself – the coalescence of things? In a way, I guess I could write that the in-between coalesces and by imagining myself as mortar I continue to be.

I got it all into the viewfinder (with the tree, the railing, the eleven-o'clock sun) and took the shot. In time to realise that they both had noticed and stood there looking at me, the boy surprised and as though questioning, but she was irritated, her face and body flat-footedly hostile, feeling robbed, ignominiously recorded on a small chemical image. (Cortázar, 124)

10 December

Today while walking southbound on Spadina Avenue in Toronto and approaching the fairly lively intersection at Spadina and Queen, an idea struck my vision: the unknown crowd. The turning signal or flashing arrow was directing cars heading north and south, allowing those in the far left lanes to turn either west or east onto Queen Street. Because the turning signal was on, the four pedestrian signals displayed similar readings: the red, "halting" hand. All the pedestrian pathways were temporarily halted. This is one of the few moments where pedestrian traffic does not flow; it actually stops. Immediately the pedestrian corners became flooded with people waiting for their turn to cross the street. It was the formation of an instant crowd of people. Returning to the idea striking me, I began to wonder if this is an unknown crowd. I relive the moment: I witness the instantaneity of the crowd formulating with my vision, I can hear individual voices being drowned by the proliferation of voices increasing in volume – several voices become one; I can sense the tightening of bodies surrounding me (density), and the concrete disappears under me as bodies vie for positioning at the corner. Time seems to stop, space seems to disappear. People wait.

he tacked up the enlargement on one wall of the room, and the first day he spent some time looking at it and remembering, that gloomy operation of comparing the memory with the gone reality; a frozen memory, like any photo, where nothing is missing, not even, and especially nothingness, the true solidifier of the scene. [...] it had never occurred to me that when we look at a photo from the front, the eyes reproduce exactly the position and the vision of the lens; it's these things that are taken for granted and it never occurs to anyone to think about them. (Cortázar, 126-127)

18 December (*at the northwest corner of Spadina and Queen*)

... milk and bread. I really should eat better but the market⁶ and people ... not today. "I'm looking for that outdoor, adventure, clothing, and equipment store... I think it's called Mountain something... do you know where it is?"⁷ "Yeah... it's not far... just continue southbound on this street until you hit King, turn left and walk until you reach it." "Thanks." "No worries." I should have asked him whether or not he is a member... I don't think you can purchase anything unless.... Ah, he'll find out. "... and then she asked me whether or not I liked him... can you believe it?" "Shit. What a bitch!" "easing my way into..." "No!" "...nearest that other place..." "Can you spare some change? Have a good day." "...making a big deal out of nothing." "It doesn't matter what..." "HA HA HA... that's too funny! How did you res..." (*I find myself at the corner in a crowd – voices are everywhere and I record their places.*)

I can feel my body tightening up, closing in, breathing is difficult. I find myself in a crowd. I will be patient, I tell myself... I must capture their voices; I must hear what they utter; I must pay attention; I must experience this piecemeal conversation. Is this placement? I am standing at the northwest corner of Spadina and Queen. I am standing at the northeast corner of Spadina and Queen. I am standing at the northwest corner of Queen and John. I am standing on the southwest corner of Queen and John. I am standing on the northwest corner of Dundas and University. I am standing at the southwest corner of Dundas and Yonge. I am standing at the southwest corner of Bloor and Yonge. I am standing at the southeast corner of Bloor and Spadina. I am standing at the northeast corner of Queen and Bathurst.⁸ I am standing on the corner and staring at the unknown crowd.

I understood, if that was to understand, what had to happen now, what had to have happened then, what would have to happen at that moment, among these people, just where I had poked my nose in to upset an established order, interfering innocently in that which had not happened, but which was not going to happen, now was going to be fulfilled. (Cortázar, 129)

9 January

I am standing in a doorway four feet from the corner of Spadina and Queen. A crowd formulates before me awaiting the white "walking" man to signal their progression. I hear snippets of conversation; a man attempts to pass paper advertisements to the people in their halting (is he similar to myself – watching crowds formulate?); a woman asks for enough change for a coffee – her partner is across the street asking the same question to a different grouping of people⁹; the wind is blocked momentarily from reaching

my face as the congregation grows; some of the people stand motionless while others shift their weight from foot to foot; one man hops up and down three times; I witness an instant, an unknown crowd. Seconds later the wind beats my face again, as the pedestrians make their way across the street. The crowd is gone but I am still standing in the doorway. Did they notice me? I took three (digital) images.

I was never a part of this instant crowd, as I provided myself with a necessary distance from the crowd, but I couldn't help but feel connected to / touched by this crowd. The red hand is flashing.

Standing there I began to ask myself whether or not this momentary grouping of people make up a crowd. I mean, it seems crowded at this street corner when people are waiting for the light to change, but is this crowding a crowd? Would these people define their placements via this crowd? Do people making up this potential crowd feel as though they are a part of a crowd, or at least a part of something, a placement? I am tempted to say yes since I feel myself connecting to these fleeting gatherings of people. I feel a certain sense of place.

In reflecting on the instant or unknown crowd and their placement, I begin to wonder if I am focussing on the groupings themselves or if such groupings become an image I replay to myself. Are these groupings merely images of the first grouping of people I noticed? Or, are they distinct from each other? Are their placements distinct?

In thinking about the instant or unknown crowd, their images and their placements, I can't help but think that these instant groupings are distinct; they are unique, even if they present similar patterns in their developments. But, importantly, I must ask myself if my feelings of connection to this unknown crowd are via the groupings themselves, as I stand there observing, or the images I am taking of such groupings. That is, am I sensing, observing the crowd or its image? Or, are they observing me? Where is my place?

My strength had been a photograph, that, there, where they were taking their revenge on me, demonstrating clearly what was going to happen. The photo had been taken, the time had run out, gone; we were so far from one another, the abusive act had certainly already taken place, the tears already shed, and the rest conjecture and sorrow. All at once the order was inverted, they were alive, moving, they were deciding and had decided, they were going to their future; and I on this side, prisoner of another time, in a room on the fifth floor, to not know who they were, that woman, that man, and that boy, to be only the lens of my camera, something fixed, rigid, incapable of interventions. (Cortázar, 129-130)

3 April

Today I brought my digital camcorder to the corner instead of my digital camera. I wasn't sure how I was going to capture the movements, the sounds, the sensations of Queen and Spadina. It seems that every attempt I make to steal moments falls flat – from the “objective” position. What is missing in the attempted capturing is the experience of capturing; it doesn't translate well into images. Thus, I wanted to try something different; I need to be in the crowd without the crowd sensing my presence; I need to flow in the movement. My decision is to have the DV camcorder at hip or waist level recording without knowing what it is that I am capturing; and, at times, I will point the camcorder towards my face in hopes of capturing the act of observing.

Well, I tried what I wanted to try. For the most part, no one suspected anything. I moved from corner to corner to corner to corner; I went around the entire corner, like a merry-go-round; I even changed direction capturing movements both ways. Only once was I really noticed; only once did I feel the eyes of being observed – but it moved me. At one corner, late in my travels from corner to corner to corner, a car was held by the red light immediately before the crosswalk. In the back seat of the car a little girl was sitting on the lap of an adult. The girl looked directly at me and immediately noticed what it was that I was holding (I should note that my digital camcorder is quite small – my hand can almost conceal it when held at hip or waist level). She looked at me, she looked at the adult holding her, and she looked back at me and waved her arm sheepishly. The girl knew exactly what I was doing; she read my position at the corner; she read my placement in a fleeting moment; she observed my observing and at that moment she was telling my story.

to “Blow-Up” *Smoke*¹⁰

Although *Smoke* and “Blow-Up” are considered fiction, both teach observers / readers about the space, place and sense of observing and being participants within this observing – observers begin to observe themselves in becoming observed. They force readers to look, to see, to sense from a place of identification. They teach the importance of how to revel in this observing: how observing takes over – how it intervenes and begins to tell. Through an analysis of both *Smoke* and “Blow-Up,” or the telling of tellings, translation, intervention, and placement will be developed. The intention of this section is to display how the interworkings of each of these tellings – *Smoke*, “Blow-Up,” and indirectly, my personal observations – form an unknown image that takes the space and place of social observing. Observers are told, identified, via their places.

Translation (social observer):

Auggie's images are more than merely diary passages addressed only to him; the images become a point of departure for the stories Auggie shares in his daily life – he tracks differences in lighting, temperature, clothing, people coming in and out of the neighbourhood: “you've got your bright mornings and your dark mornings, you got your summer light and your autumn light, you got your weekdays and your weekends, you got your people in overcoats and galoshes and you got your people in T-shirts and shorts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. Sometimes the different ones become the same... and the same ones disappear. The earth revolves around the sun and every day the light from the sun hits the earth at a different angle.” Translation is a form of image capturing, which will be addressed in more detail with “Blow-Up.” But, as an unknown or unspecified observer, in that most people do not witness Auggie observing them, Auggie translates what he sees occurring in everyday life – through two different lenses (his eyes and the camera) – into stories he shares. His experiences as social observer are translations. Auggie's corner, his life's work, materializing in volumes of photo albums, begins to tell the story of him: it takes his place of narrator of his story. It is the unknown image.

Roberto, the main character in “Blow-Up,” is a professional translator; he exists by translating other lives (works). As translator he occupies the space of the narrator initially; in translating a Spanish treatise into French he is giving life to a work by presenting it to a new audience. But, importantly, the story perpetually addresses the difficult challenge of this translation and the necessarily made-up nature of its development: in translating the treatise, he must make words in another language express; in terms of his photographic image, in making an image (producing), in making an image larger, he blows up perspectives in the process of translating what it is that he sees. The process is largely indeterminate in that he must find words to finish a potential story (not unlike the translation of the treatise). His translation of the photographic image develops, enlarges his life, his story. This constant translation of images intervenes in taking over his initial position of narrator – it is the unknown image translating his story.

Intervention:

Auggie's images become a general intervention in Paul's life in the sense of leading Paul to hear Auggie's advice to slow down (“You'll never get it if you don't slow down my friend”). The images, particularly the individual image of Paul's deceased wife Ellen, jar Paul out of his anonymous existence, his being in general (“Jesus! Look... it's Ellen [...] Ah ... it's Ellen... look at her... look at my sweet darling”). At a late point in the film, when Auggie is “giving”

Paul a Christmas story, the viewer hears of and witnesses another image intervention – the three photographs of Robert Goodwin. These photographs prevent Auggie from calling the police in order to press charges against Robert for theft. (Auggie witnessed Robert stealing magazines from the cigar shop and tried to apprehend Robert. Robert fled and in the process dropped his wallet. Auggie gave up chasing Robert but picked up the wallet and in the wallet there were three photographs of Robert.) The three photographs intervene to motivate Auggie to seek out Robert in order to return his wallet and are the basis for the final story of the film. For Auggie, the corner tells his life's work, not the images he takes of or from the corner. This corner intervenes daily: it exposes new stories, new developments, new ways of looking. The corner exposes Auggie in all his tellings.

The main theme in “Blow-Up” is intervention. Roberto intervenes in the life of the man, the boy, and the woman in the story. Whatever was going to happen changed as a result of his intervention: taking the photograph and being witnessed taking the photograph. The image, the photograph, intervenes in Roberto's life by taking him away from his translation work – which may also be an intervention in the sense of Roberto's choice of words being an intervention between Spanish and French. The use of time in the story is an intervention through its play of “then,” “now” (what he sees in the present of the story's telling – clouds, pigeons, etc.¹¹), and future possible happenings. The future possible happenings before and after the image capture (the photograph) pose as emotional and moral interventions in his own life: he imagines what may be taking place between the woman and the boy before he takes the photograph, and he imagines what may have taken place between the woman, the boy, and the man after he takes the photograph. Here, intervention disrupts the possibility of what may have happened to the boy and becomes a constant intervention for Roberto. He intervenes by speaking for the boy in the story – giving a voice to the boy who does not “tell” when something might be wrong (“when something weird happens, when you find a spider in your shoe or if you take a breath and reel like a broken window, then you have to tell what's happening, tell it to the guys at the office or to the doctor. Oh, doctor, every time I take a breath... Always tell it, always get rid of that tickle in the stomach that bothers you” (Cortázar, 115-116). He constantly intervenes in his own telling of the story – shifting from first to third person perspectives, addressing what he is seeing right now from the first person and documenting what Roberto sees in third person. He intervenes in his own translation only to “translate” a different image. His translation becomes image; the image becomes unknown in its intervention and begins to translate him.

Placement (and perspective):

Auggie occupies two different perspectives. Behind the camera, Auggie is third person but he is placed in first person on the corner, as if he was the main subject in his own narrative told from his personal perspective (as possible narrator). When he tells his stories to other people, he situates himself from both the first and third person perspective: observer and participant within his observations; for the most part he places himself within the space of his own stories and thus occupies both perspectives simultaneously. His life's work ("it's my corner after all") captures his corner (where he works, lives, tells stories, his existence), from the space of his corner (behind the camera as social observer and his story telling as social observer). And the space and place of this corner is an unknown image. The unknown image places him and intervenes constantly.

Roberto is both the narrator and the subject initially, occupying both first and third person positions within the story. Or, we are led to believe that they are the same. Because of Roberto's (and the narrator's) constant flux, the perspective changes accordingly between first and third person perspective. This unvarying change in perspective, and the perpetual questioning of perspective in the story, makes it difficult for Roberto to tell the story, his story, his experience, the constant questioning of perspective; he is always translating others' works, lives, and for what is probably the first time he has felt the need to tell; he is attempting to "get rid of that tickle in the stomach" that bothers him. He senses the tickle. That tickle is his very place: the unknown place, the image as unknown image.

final perspectives

The place from which observers look places them, tells them as social observers over and above what it is they are trying to tell. It is well known that what is observed changes as a result of being observed: the very presence of social observers alters the dynamic of the social space itself. What is not so well known, or at least offered, is how the observation in turn observes the social observer and in a way becomes the narrator for the observer. In this transformation, a becoming-observed-observer, the social observer forfeits the role of narrator to their own story. This is not detrimental. Rather, it is part of the observing process; yet, this is precisely what is left behind in most research: how what is being observed changes the observer – their practices, values, mannerisms, etc. Observers do not document how their research changes them and thus becomes their perspective. This is extremely important.

The unknown image is *something*. But, this something is different for each social observer. In "Blow-Up," the image, the photograph Roberto

takes, is something that tells his positioning; it translates and re-translates his story with each change in perspective. For Auggie in *Smoke*, the corner is this something that tells his life story; it changes – albeit slowly – how he sees and is seen. For me and my corner, the crowd is something; the crowd is both a stimulating and paralysing event. Each sojourn to the corner tickles me excitedly and uncomfortably, telling me a little differently each time. And, finally, the writing of this paper documents my change in perspective by bringing to light the need to document changing perspectives.

What is your something, reader?

I live near Queen St. and Spadina Ave. The corner is crowded. This is my unknown image, my translation, my intervention, my placement. I am the narrator of this story... at least that is what it intervened to tell me.

Notes

- 1 Julio Cortázar, “Blow-Up,” *Blow-Up And Other Stories*, trans. Paul Blackburn (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 114-131.
- 2 Maurice Blanchot writes: “he perceived all the strangeness there was in being observed by a word as if by a living being, and not simply by one word, but by all the words that were in that word, by all those that went with it and in turn contained other words, like a procession of angles opening out into the infinite to the very eye of the absolute. Rather than withdraw from a text whose defences were so strong, he pitted all his strength in the will to seize it, obstinately refusing to withdraw his glance and still thinking himself a profound reader, even when the words were already taking hold of him and beginning to read him” (Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*, trans. Robert Lambertson, in *The Station Hill Blanchot Reader*, trans. Lydia Davis, Paul Auster and Robert Lambertson (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1999), 67-68).
- 3 To situate the unknown image and its telling or being told into a certain theoretical/philosophical discourse, it resembles, in terms of being resembling itself, the “there is” (il y a) for Emmanuel Levinas and the “neuter” for Maurice Blanchot. Although Levinas attempts to get beyond the “there is,” in terms of the subject’s identification in progress towards the full development of being-for-the-Other, Blanchot focuses on the importance of this space/place. Although I am not attempting to state that my position is either of these positions, I do wish to inform the reader of my influences. These influences inform my observations. For example, I believe the social observer escapes the “there is,” or being-in-general, only to find that they are positioned in another similar space – albeit directed, told, positioned by something else (another narrator and not [necessarily] another human being). Like a narrator, Maurice Blanchot and Emmanuel Levinas are physically absent on almost all of the pages that follow. Their work, however, has already begun to observe me: I am sensing myself “living from” these observations. They are as evident as Auggie’s corner in *Smoke* or Roberto’s image in Cortázar’s short story. I place these words in the background – in endnotes – to emulate the role, the positioning of the narrator.
- 4 “But what happens when what you see, although at a distance, seems to touch you with a gripping contact, when the manner of seeing is a kind of touch, when seeing is contact at a distance?” (Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock [Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1982], 32; *The Gaze of Orpheus*, trans. Lydia Davis [Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1981], 75).
- 5 The four dated entries that follow are fragments from my notebook – documentation of my experiences in Toronto.
- 6 This is a reference to the Kensington Market in Toronto. The Kensington Market, a Toronto landmark, is about a five to seven minute walk northeast from the corner of Queen and Spadina.
- 7 This is a reference to Mountain Equipment Co-op, a Canadian mountain equipment store based out of Vancouver, but has several stores across Canada. The store in Toronto is on King Street, in-between Spadina and University, southeast of where this altercation between a man and me is taking place.
- 8 All of these corners are major intersections downtown Toronto.

- 9 Many people define their territory by major intersections.
- 10 *Smoke* (Dir. Wayne Wang, 1995; written by Paul Auster) The following is the complete dialogue of a six minute and thirty-eight second section of the film between Paul Benjamin (PB) and Auggie Wren (AW) that I wish to focus on: (11'30") in Brooklyn Cigar Co.:
- PB: *Look's like someone forgot a camera.*
- AW: *Yeah, I did.*
- PB: *It's yours?*
- AW: *It's mine all right. I've owned that sucker for a long time.*
- PB: *I didn't know you took pictures?*
- AW: *I guess you could call it a hobby... it only takes me five minutes a day to do it but I do it everyday... rain or shine, sleet or snow... sort of like the postman.*
- PB: *So you're not just a guy who pushes coins across the counter.*
- AW: *Well, that's what people see... but, that ain't necessarily what I am.*
- Cut to album (Auggie and Paul inside Auggie's apartment)
- PB: *They're all the same.*
- AW: *That's right... more than 4,000 pictures of the same place... the corner of 3rd Street and 7th Avenue at eight o'clock in the morning. 4,000 straight days in all kinds of weather... that's why I can never take a vacation... I gotta be in my spot every morning at the same time— every morning in the same spot at the same time.*
- PB: *I've never seen anything like this.*
- AW: *That's my project... what you'd call my life's work.*
- PB: *This is amazing. I'm not sure I get it though; I mean... what was it that gave you the idea to do this... project?*
- AW: *I don't know... it just came to me... It's my corner after all. I mean it's just one little part of the world but things take place there too just like everywhere else... it's a record of my little spot.*
- PB: *It's kind of overwhelming.*
- AW: *You'll never get it if you don't slow down my friend.*
- PB: *What do you mean?*
- AW: *I mean you're going too fast, you're hardly even looking at the pictures.*
- PB: *But... they're all the same?*
- AW: *They're all the same, but each one is different from every other one... you've got your bright mornings and your dark mornings, you got your summer light and you autumn light, you got your weekdays and your weekends, you got your people in overcoats and goulashes and you got your people in T-shirts and shorts. Sometimes the same people, sometimes different ones. Sometimes the different ones become the same... and the same ones disappear. The earth revolves around the sun and every day the light from the sun hits the earth at a different angle.*
- PB: *Slow down, huh?*
- AW: *That's what I'd recommend. You know how it is: tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow... time creeps on at its petty pace.*
- PB: *Jesus! Look... it's Ellen.*
- AW: *Yeah, that's her all right. She's in quite a few from that year... must've been on her way to work.*
- PB: *Ah ... it's Ellen... look at her... look at my sweet darling. (17'38")*
- 11 Remarkably, clouds are for the most part anything but stable; they are like smoke: allusive, ephemeral, transient... nothing. Pigeons are, if you live in a big city, always there lurking. This is one thing I had to get used to when I moved to Toronto – all the pigeons.