Julio Cortázar and Michelangelo Antonioni: Words, Images, and the Limits of Verbal and Visual Representation

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What I wish to analyze is not a certain side of society but existence itself, where love —any kind of love— unveils us to reveal our inner nakedness, our own misery, our own helplessness, our nothingness.
Michelangelo Antonioni

My writing falls into the category of eccentricity. I write by default and dislocation.
Julio Cortázar

To verbalize what is seen and to visualize what is said: in saying what one sees one brings forth an object to the possibilities of the gaze and an inter-relational field of objectivity/subjectivity to the possibilities of discourse. This essay is premised on the idea that the intersections and confrontations of the visual and verbal domains of semiosis — especially in experiences of non-coincidence (or "misfitting" and "maladjustment") between

words and images— may operate as generative devices, that is, as sources of narrative motivation and construction in literary and cinematographic fiction. Our analyses study the connections between the visual and the verbal fields of meaning in the texts of "Blow-Up" (1959), Julio Cortázar's short story, and Blow-Up (1966), Michelangelo Antonioni's film. Through close textual readings, we examine some of the main functions and complex artistic and philosophical dimensions pertaining to the relations between the symbolic and the iconic orders in Cortázar's and Antonioni's works. Specifically, we examine how boundaries between the visible and the verbal domains of representation are created and blurred in each text. Particular attention is devoted to concrete formal strategies that enable certain perceptual boundaries to function as both exclusionary and inclusionary categories of demarcation, as well as to the effects that such strategies have on the discursive constitution of the subject in the two authors' work. Underlying our analysis, a critical discussion of some fundamental issues in contemporary semiotics, narratology, and epistemology is involved as these points are raised in "Blow-Up" and Blow-Up. In this context, the focus of our study revolves around the formal topics of self-referentiality, anti-mimesis, metafiction, and the intransitivity of writing. We argue that the coincidences, disparities, and mutual exclusions between the distinct domains of the graphic (iconic) and verbal (symbolic) sign-systems are presented and used in the short story and film textualities in order to unveil and examine deeper relations of meaning, as well as to unconceal the "blind" and "mute" ideological operations of a dominant order of rationality. We examine how Cortázar and Antonioni deconstruct established narrative structures in literature and film, respectively, in the context of pictorial and linguistic conventions of the realist paradigm. Our approach involves a discussion of the particular themes and meaning-making strategies that relate to the unstable nature of representational processes in each text.

Though achieved by different means and media, the aesthetic and epistemological topic of cognitive inconstancy is explored in each text through a number of significant experiences of disorder and chaos—such as confusion, bewilderment, mistrust, and radical doubt—leading to a profound experience of loss of control. Consequently, we feel that the category and principles of instability should be related to the deconstruction and unconcealment of the ideology of certainty or "fixedness" –that is, the established belief that unchanging order and invariable truths can be recovered and determined in human visual perception, cognition,

language, and discourse. In this context, we will show that <u>instability</u> is deeply connected with <u>indeterminacy</u> in human experiences of world and self, as the latter category is the residual, pervasive state that is left after a crisis related to the collapse of cognitive assumptions of certainty. In fact, the subjective lives of both central characters –Roberto Michel in "Blow-Up" and Thomas in <u>Blow Up</u>— are radically changed by such collapse, as their unquestioned relations with people, objects, and events crumbles after witnessing and photographing a seemingly straightforward, self-evident and simple scene of seduction. To the breakdown represented in the content of each work there corresponds a breakdown in the forms of representation of those contents, thus generating a major point of coincidence between both texts as well as indicating pervasive, shared modes of self-referential and metafictional narration.

Taking Cortázar's short story as our initial point of reference, our premise is that the deeper meaning issuing from a number of structural coincidences between the story and the film can best be grasped at the conflictive points of intersection of the *verbal* and the *visual* spheres of experience, or between words and discourse, on one hand, and images and ocular perception, on the other. By examining different semiotic strategies, we trace in both works a common ground of particular devices aimed at unsettling represented, taken-for-granted, naturalized verbal and visual forms of language. Our main purpose is to analyze the framed construction of meaning as such construction is both artfully displayed and deeply embedded in each of the two texts. Our claim is that both Cortázar's and Antonioni's works seek to reveal the "silent" and "invisible" textual frameworks (or "mute" and "blind" spots) which inform and set limits to the weave of discursive voices and visual perspectives, respectively. Hence, our study does not seek to simply illustrate or exemplify the similarities and dissimilarities between the two works, but rather to examine some points of structural correlation, thematic links, and epistemological affinities between the story and the film narratives as generated from within each text.

One of the central generative devices common to both works is the shared mimetic core of the narrative: a witnessed and photographed scene of seduction that eventually reveals its hidden layers, thus triggering numerous narrative possibilities. A comparison of the Cortázar and Antonioni texts shows certain fundamental coincidences that implicitly point to

significant philosophical preoccupations. Both begin with signs of the chaos brought about by the breakdown of conventionally ordered, established modes of verbal and visual narrative languages. In each work, a disruption of the habitual patterns and practices of perception causes the crisis of the subject's relation with his deepest personal sense of understanding and orientation in his physical and mental world. Furthermore, this overwhelming collapse brings about the loss of the subject's unreflective reliance on his material and mental instruments of representation. In the case of "Blow-Up," this crisis is staged and displayed in the language of the very first paragraph of the narrative:

Nunca se sabrá cómo hay que contar esto, si en primera persona o en segunda, usando la tercera del plural o inventando continuamente formas que no servirán de nada. Si se pudiera decir: yo vieron subir la luna, o: nos me duele el fondo de los ojos, y sobre todo así: tú la mujer rubia eran las nubes que siguen corriendo delante de mis tus sus nuestros vuestros sus rostros. Qué diablos (Cortázar 123)

In this story the reader finds a narrative about an event that cannot be told by means of regular, conventional forms of storytelling. It all starts with disorder—of routine, of the foreseen, and of language and discourse; even the beginning of the narration is disrupted. Discursive representation turns back onto itself as the very rules and patterns of grammar, syntax, and word choice are radically disrupted and questioned. Thus, the textual forms of construction display and stage the limits of their own strategies and devices for the configuration of meaning. "Blow-up" may be read as a story about the frustrated attempt to (and discovering the impossibility of) telling a story – i.e., it is a verbal text about language, discourse, and reference. Language is distorted by the shifting, quasi chaotic sentence structure at the onset of the narration of the story, which is subsequently told in incomplete retrospective, as marked by the alternating use of the time shifters "now," "a moment ago," "at first," and "at the beginning," as well as by the incongruent and ungrammatical combination of verb tenses. Most importantly, discourse is radically disrupted here by the incoherent use of pronouns and possessive adjectives that grammatically function as shifters and indices, and which determine the status of subject and person in verbal narratives and speech acts in general.

As Cortázar explores the nature of actual, "directly lived" experience, he blurs the lines between different modes and instruments of perception and representation, thus creating an ambiguous situation in which the reader's expectations are thwarted. At the end of the story, for example, the fixed perspective of a photograph becomes not only a moving picture, but one that transcends linear time and generates both the simultaneity and the flowing chronology of the writing process: "[I]n some way I have begun at this end, the one in the back, the one at the start, which after all is the best of both ends when one wants to recount something" (115). The present of the act of writing, however, is indeterminate, and its time location, its "present," remains uncertain, so that "start" and "end" become practically indistinguishable, as stated in one of the many parenthetical interjections that interrupt the narration: "Right now (what a word, <u>now</u>, what a dumb lie)" (118). In a similar manner, the fragmented language and repeated interruptions used by Roberto Michel, the narrator, emphasize the multiple levels and aspects involved in a narrative. He questions discursive voice (or voices) intradiegetically, as well as his own shifting point of view, and the plot itself moves from one that is hardly intelligible to a seemingly straightforward, sequential account of events. However, the narrator's own memory and understanding of witnessed events becomes confused, and his own hesitations and radical doubts make it unclear at the end of the story whether the recounting agent is insane or dead or actually experiencing the uncanny mutation of an enlarged photograph whose components begin moving within the image:

En ese momento no sabía por qué la miraba, por qué había fijado la ampliación en la pared; quizá ocurra así con todos los actos fatales, y sea ésa la condición de su cumplimiento. […] Cuando vi la mano de la mujer que empezaba a cerrarse despacio, dedo por dedo, de mí no quedó nada, una frase en francés que jamás habrá de terminarse, una máquina de escribir que cae al suelo, una silla que chirría y tiembla, una niebla (Cortázar 136).

These ex-centric disfigurations inscribe the inextricable themes of the ultimate inaccessibility of "the real" and the utter futility of human communication denoted by "continually inventing forms that will serve for nothing," a thematic duet that runs through several axes of meaning in the textual weave. The events in the story make possible the configuration of a multiple, dispersed identity. Roberto Michel is both a photographer and a translator, and

the duality of his skills is mirrored in the combination of his names and their reference to Hispanic ("Roberto") and French ("Michel") languages and cultures, respectively. Furthermore, this duality is echoed in the opening paragraphs of the story:

Uno de nosotros tiene que escribir, si es que esto va a ser contado. Mejor que sea yo que estoy menos comprometido que el resto, yo que estoy muerto *y vivo, no se trata de engañar a nadie, ya se verá cuando llegue el momento). […] (Cortázar 124).

The conventional limits and limitations of perspective in the story have been exceeded; therefore, identity which is based upon or experienced through perception becomes indeterminable. As the narrator states:

[…] porque éramos fotógrafos, soy fotógrafo). Ya sé que lo más difícil va a ser contarlo. Va a ser difícil porque nadie sabe bien quién es el que verdaderamente está contando, si soy yo o eso que ha ocurrido, o lo que estoy viendo (Cortázar 125).

On a symbolic level, the story speaks of what lies beneath the surface of perception and the misrepresentation of reality by human means of communication. Judging from the photo, for example, the interaction between the boy and the woman is at first glance sweet and clear. However, when investigated further, the circumstances of the depicted scene are far from innocent. In "Blow Up" meaning hinges on the contrast and antithetical counterpoint between the representation of actual life events and the framed objects –words and images-- that purport to capture and seize those events through various machines. The fact that the narrator shapes the perceptions that shape him by means of different instruments, using the camera or the typewriter, generates a reflexive extension of identity which is further dispersed and/or focused through a concrete object. As Roberto Michel describes the way in which the typewriter –an iconic trope for the language system—may function as an extension of his identity, he also refers to the use of a camera as a device that alters one's primary perceptions: "Michel sabía que el fotógrafo opera siempre como una permutación de su manera personal de ver el mundo por otra que la cámara le impone insidiosa (Cortázar126-127).

He consciously changes the way in which he looks at his surroundings when he is preparing to take a picture. Hence, the camera influences his way of looking even when he is not actually shooting. Furthermore, the fixed nature of a photograph can change the way in which a memory is perceived through both the limitation of the instantly captured image and the permanence of the picture.

In "Blow Up," however, the originally fixed image alters the photographer's and the reader's perception through the subsequent movement of its visual components. Here the photograph replays and extends events, ultimately incorporating Roberto Michel himself. At the start of the text, the narrator elaborates upon this question of identity when he refers to his typewriter as an extension of himself that, in a sense, could be autonomous. As he states:

Si se pudiera ir a beber un bock por ahí y que la máquina siguiera sola, sería la perfección. La perfección, sí, porque aquí el agujero que hay que contra es también una máquina (de otra especie, una Cóntax 1.1.2) y a lo mejor puede ser que una máquina sepa más de otra máquina que yo, tú, ella – la mujer rubia – y las nubes (Cortázar 123-124).

As metonymic extensions of the narrating subject, therefore, both the camera and the typewriter constitute generative objects that allude to perceptive and cognitive limitations, as apparatuses that modulate and mediate the human links with the experienced (real) world of phenomena. Furthermore, the theme of misrepresentation of "reality" by human instruments and artifacts is laced with Roberto Michel's lucid work as a translator and his quasi-incoherent musings about writing the story of the photograph.

Just as Cortázar's short story entails a radical questioning of certain assumptions concerning the order of language and discourse, the focus of Antonioni's <u>Blow-Up</u> falls on images and manipulations of visual experiences. In this film, the cinematographic text is structured as a spectacle within a spectacle: the camera's fictitious "given" is constructed less by objects and events denoted as "real" than by various actions and processes involved in the graphic configuration of a visual system of images purporting to reference such real objects and events. The unconventional nature of both works –each one in its own aesthetic medium-- must be emphasized here. By means of graphic and verbal images, the texts incorporate

functional objects such as props, wardrobes, cameras, typewriters, and enlarged photographic prints into the narrative, and they combine fictional sequences with a "realistic" or mimetic plot. Both authors directly and indirectly focus on objects, process, and the language of verbal and visual art forms; in other words, both incorporate symbolic and iconic strategies of metafiction as they "explore a theory of fiction through the practice of creating fiction" (Waugh 2).

The viewer sees Thomas's glances aimed at the surfaces of the world and observes him scanning and examining certain iconic objects. The camera follows the photographer as he tries above all to reach the level of "the truth" underneath appearances by reconstructing the sequencing and directionality of the events experienced in the park through the concrete establishment of a temporal and logical order in the disposition of his photographic enlargements on the walls of his studio. Just as Cortázar uses literary signs to both chaotically construct a diegetic narrative and deconstruct even the denotative assumptions of his discourse, so does Antonioni use specific cinematic devices that seem to imply standard connections of visual narrative elements while simultaneously superseding the ocular assumptions that operate within his superficially "clear" images. Both authors explore the spontaneity of random events and their determinative consequences. For example, one can mention the chance time/space simultaneity of the presence of the couple and the photographer as a central device in the film and the story. The bringing together of a seduction scene and a photographic camera within the sphere of a fortuitous meeting generates the narrative process in both works. By means of these strategies deployed in each text, the expressive "doubling" performed by the metatextual staging functions as an "unfolding", i.e., as the insertion of a critical distance which questions the contents, assumptions, and ideological bases of the discourses and technologies activated within the story and the film themselves.

As previously indicated, Cortázar's "Blow-up" is a story about the attempt and (im)possibility of telling a story, i.e., it is a verbal text about language; and Antonioni's Blow-Up may be seen as a visual text concerned with images and visual experiences. Hence, both works share a specific form of self-reference to their respective medium's inherent structures of meaning-making. As Katherine Hayles has pointed out,

self-reference or self-reflection is a recursive process whose emphasis is on the mutually constitutive interactions between the components of a [semiotic] system rather than on message, signal, or information […] Whereas a mimetic text creates the illusion that it is transmitting information about the world, a metafictional text reveals the world's constructed nature (Hayles 11, 21-22).

This self-reference provides a further approach to both works, suggesting the idea that, by focusing on the complex concept, themes, and strategies of <u>representation</u>, it becomes possible to reveal, define, and specify an important though "concealed," un-apparent cluster of established notions which subtend the relationship between "fiction," "truth" and "reality" within a particular discursive order in the two works, thus disclosing the functioning of that order.

In <u>Blow-Up</u> there are several major scenes where visual detail is of the essence for the construction of meaning. The first one is configured by the opening intercut locations where we first encounter the jubilant clowns and Thomas, the upscale photographer and yet-to-be clarified protagonist. Even before Antonioni's alternating disruptive and subdued opening shots of the clowns and Thomas, the audience is faced with another form of disorder with the film's beginning credits. The words are superimposed onto a desaturated green meadow seen from above (a location which will prove very significant as the film evolves) but they also reveal action occurring on a plane behind their foregrounded display. This provides an active sense of color against the drab grassy background but also offers confusion as to what action is occurring behind these seemingly neutral linguistic signifiers. From this ambiguous sequence of opening credits, the film cuts directly to shots that actively incorporate further signifiers of chaos, although now the confusion simply comes from the frantic activity of the film's first characters and their unknown motivations. An open jeep containing at least a dozen young adults, some in clown or mime makeup and costume-like clothing, drives through an empty city plaza, with the ambiguous but joyful noises from these revelers in stark contrast to the quiet, empty city around them. They spill out of the jeep, running down a stairway into the street below where they pass by quiet and virtually oblivious pedestrians, breaking the silence of what seems to be a morning commute, although the scene is

relatively empty except for their herd-like dash through it. Silence is re-established as the camera cuts to a group of scruffy men exiting what appears to be a gated vagabond shelter, their group movements into the street in noticeable contrast to the joyful cacophony previously shown. Thomas is among them, but his identity is barely hinted at except when he is briefly set in center frame as the group exits their nocturnal respite and wanders back into a world that likely has little use for them.

To further confuse the viewers as to what relation these two groups have to each other or what we are to make of their unconnected actions, Antonioni cuts back to the wild motion of the clowns, then back again to a small group of the destitute men with their backs to the camera. Now, as the others move away from Thomas, we get a sense of him as a focused figure. He then runs away down another monochromatic, rain-soaked street, giving him a sense of parallel action and place to the clowns as he and they offer the only real sense of life the viewer has yet encountered in this vision of the city as mausoleum. The disruptions caused by the clowns continues in the next cut as they run past two nuns in white habits, as well as an incongruous, formally-uniformed British soldier seemingly keeping guard of a random street. Finally a sense of cohesion develops out of the narrative mystery as the clowns converge on Thomas, now driving along in an expensive convertible clearly displaying the air of someone who has no need to spend his nights in a homeless shelter. We learn visually that what the clowns intend was to secure donations for whatever cause they represent, as Thomas cheerfully gives them some cash before driving away. Some sense of order and clarity has been implied for now, but chaos will soon reign again in the ensuing scenes from Antonioni's restructured narrative of the "Blow-Up" story.

In the second of these cinema-for-cinema's-sake presentations, in which the audiovisual elements go beyond narrative necessities to provide additional yet subtle understandings of the hidden persuasions of the cinematic process, we find Thomas early in the film showing his skills as a commanding fashion photographer. As he returns to his elaborate studio from his overnight clandestine pose as a homeless man, which has enabled him to sneak powerful photos of London's downtrodden, Thomas immediately embarks upon a contrastingly elegant shooting session with a barely-clad, sensuous model. This scene displays his well-honed ability to capture flashy images of a conventionally glamorous person, although the

resulting photographs are never shown. Instead, the audience sees wide-angle shots (in the cinematic format of 1.85:1) that incorporate more of Thomas' studio than would likely be displayed in his images of the model, given that we constantly see him close up on her against dark grey photo paper. As we witness their encounter in context, we observe not only the characters but also wide-frame compositions with the colorful arrangements of feathers in the studio, props that apparently never enter Thomas' photos but are vital to Antonioni's images in order to give the audience the impression of artfully arranged fashion shots just as we observe Thomas constructing a parallel vision that depends only on the allure of the female model.

This conceit of arousal is continued through the overt act of Thomas, still in his soiled, seemingly proletarian clothes, "mounting" the elegantly-dressed model Varushka as he virtually "penetrates" her with his telephoto lens, only to fall exhausted on his couch after the encounter. What Thomas sees through his viewfinder is never revealed to the film audience. Instead, Antonioni constructs a visual metaphor of the elegant imagery of fashion photography and a staging of the implied sexual tension-and-release that such photography intends to stimulate in the mind of an implicit viewer. He thus imposes a further subliminal attraction to the obvious sensual nature of the already "enticing" subject matter, allowing spectators to more fully experience what is only hinted at in the unseen fashion photos that Thomas has shot. He will later discard the "tramp" clothes as he leaves his studio, indicating how temporary this persona was for him just to achieve the photos he needed in the homeless shelter with no lingering emotional investment in the juxtaposed yet disconnected events.

In the next scene chosen for analysis, as Thomas and Ron, his publisher, look over the images for a proposed book, we see nothing of the fashion shots that Thomas so securely commanded but instead are confronted with the grim realities of life that he observed while under cover in sordid locations. The two men just flip through the grim pictures while in the midst of eating, drinking, and (Thomas) making rude comments about a passing woman. For the film audience, however, these individual black and white still photos stand out stylistically against the muted color tones of the film as well as stand out conceptually as captured moments of lives in peril seen from a distance by the well-dressed publisher who

glances over them as he casually consumes his lunch, by Thomas who wants to be rich enough to escape his trendy profession and be embraced as an artist, and by the viewer who understands from the destitute people in these photos how removed those lost lives are from virtually anything else that we see in the well-appointed world of this film or in the actual lives of most of those paying for show tickets to peer into the action of "swinging London." The individual images of these haunted souls each have a pitiful story to tell and each exists in a well-composed, gripping frame, yet they fly by us like so much human flotsam and jetsam ready for merchandising to those whose lives are far removed from such tragedies.

At one level this filmic device is clearly part of the necessary flow of the narrative as it reveals more about Thomas' controlling nature --even to the way he interrupts the publisher's meal with the latest photos, as if his affirmation needs are all that matter-- yet the visual juxtaposition of the alarming photographs against the quiet spaces and subdued chromes of the restaurant also show us the power of pictures to command the imagination and set the stage for the film's primary exploration of what lies beneath the surface of even the most seemingly obvious visual depiction. In Blow-Up, the compelling nature of images reveals an emphasis on ideology and cultural practices expressed in objects --or the objectification of people, bodies, events and images that have become commodities for a specific market. Antonioni reveals the patterns of contemporary consumerism and its inherent ideology, as depicted in fashion photography and "art pictures" of human misery. He thus shows the mercantile effects and implications of constructing and reproducing certain "high" icons of mass culture.

Thomas' later journey takes him, firstly, to what he calls a "very peaceful, very still" park where he stumbles upon a seductive flirtation scene between a man and a woman which he captures with his camera; and, secondly, to his studio where his inquisitive scrutiny of the couple's photos shows him and the audience how "fabricated" the pictures really are --after increasing generations of enlargements reveal the shadowy profile of a gunman ready to literally "shoot" one of the discovered lovers. Viewers are encouraged from the start to assume that the male is the intended victim, as it is the woman, Jane --played by Vanessa Redgrave-- who approaches Thomas and is aggressively insistent on recovering the pictures

he has just taken. Thomas is gleeful that once again he (like Roberto Michel in the short story) has imposed himself on a situation and controlled its outcome because he feels sure that he has thwarted the crime. However, after that joy is further capped off by his romp with the teenage would-be models, he begins to realize that there are further depths to his world and his work that have more to show to him and to his watchers --both the unseen stalker who later ransacks his studio, eliminating his investigative evidence, and we in the audience who are vicariously stalking the now-shaken "image master," Thomas.

Antonioni brilliantly builds up the famous photographic inquisition process at the beginning of the "blow-up" sequence by surrendering objective spatial location in the photographer's studio in favor of the large, fixed images of the photo enlargements that dominate the screen. The restricted, rendered sights of earlier reality in the park take over our perceptual field just as did the shocking images of the destitute men in the previously-described scene. Through the moving lens of the camera, we have cinematic cuts from extreme long shots to close-ups of the lovers, followed by a camera pan from an enlarged image of Jane tracing her eye line, over to the extremely magnified rendering of what seems to be a man with a gun hidden in the bushes behind a fence near the couple, followed by other close-ups of the two as they realize they have been spotted by Thomas and so pull away from each other and look toward him. Thus, the normally "invisible" process of editing one shot to another to propel the flow of a filmic narrative is replaced with cuts and a pan of still frames as Antonioni blatantly illustrates the subtle montage process of cinema, substituting Thomas' subjective eye on the individual shots for the audience's usually unaware observation of this transition from one image to another. He further calls attention to the analysis of this process by the use of a camera movement rather than a series of cuts to link the content of one still image to another in a meta-cinematic manner of revealing the normally hidden implications of relationships between any shot and the ones that precede and follow. Through this display the viewer is led to understand that the metonymic flow of still-frame signifiers configures the chrono/logic of film meaning.

Yet, with all of the astute complexity that accompanies this revelatory scene there is further depth in its follow-up when Thomas realizes that there is even more to be found in his enlargements. He notices that in the photo of Jane standing alone at the end of the clearing

there seems to be something at her feet after all. A further enlargement reveals a very grainy implication of a prone human body (which Thomas will verify as Jane's lover laying dead in the park that night in the next scene). Antonioni ends this revelation with a simple shot that conveys more than all we have been presented with previously as, in a wide framing, Thomas looks into the grainy photograph of the body (which faces away from the viewer) while behind him we see the full collection of the various enlargements that have revealed the crime occurring, undetected right in front of him and us. Everything now revealed in these still frame enlargements was in place far in the distance in the original park scene, although we couldn't make out details because of the extensive space being depicted from Thomas' point of view as he took the photographs. At this time we also become aware of non-diegetic wind sounds in the studio that clearly are the same ones previously used diegetically in the park. Such a subtle but noticeable use of aural enhancement quietly implies the mysterious nature of this deceptively peaceful park and serves to foreshadow the further mysteries and difficulties that will compound for the photographer (and us, if we are seeking the usual narrative answers for the questions raised at this point in the film).

After other events that leave Thomas shaken from his former mode of certainty, with no body to be found in the park but only the ever-present wind in the trees and just the grainy photo of the body left in the studio —a now indecipherable image lacking the previous visual context of all the other, now stolen graphic evidence— we find ourselves once more in early morning of the day following the beginning of the cinematic narrative, connected again with the revelers who opened the film as we have come full circle across a most unique sun cycle in Thomas' life. With all of the jubilant clowns now functioning as silent mimes, two of them begin their "tennis match" minus rackets and balls, but Antonioni increasingly uses editing to imply the missing signifying elements as shots become shorter, coverage of the two players actively alternates, and reaction shots of the mime crowd seems to follow a ball that the viewer objectively knows does not exist. But even these images can be justified in implying the seeming volleys and returns because of the gestures of the players and their spectators. Where Antonioni becomes most cinematically creative is in a simple device similar to the one he uses during the earlier photo enlargements scene: the tracking shot of the imaginary "ball" across the grass to Thomas. It is visibly clear that there is nothing there, but now the pan of the camera provides action, seemingly as a logical follow-up to what the

viewer has been encouraged to "observe" in the energetic shots of the "match." Just as Jane's photographic eye line implied a clear connection to the hidden gunman in the previous use of a pan shot, so does the ball now "naturally" seem to be there, even if in another dimension hidden from normal observational encounter. The mimes expect Thomas to see it and return it to them, just as Antonioni implies that the audience should see it as well because the camera has "followed" it.

Just as Cortázar juggled verbal language and still expected his readers to draw a sense of understanding (untraditional as it might be) from his unexpected presentation, so does Antonioni juggle cinematic devices but still expects his audience to find a sense of resolution out of chaos as well. We are helped in this decision to accept the presence of the "ball" by the again mysterious use of sound, this time of a ball hitting a racket as the game continues off screen. Certainly we in the audience hear this sound and, with the previously overwhelming use of diegetic sound throughout the film, we are encouraged to accept that Thomas and the mimes hear it as well, although there is no concrete evidence that the protagonist perceives the sounds of the tennis match any more than we assumed he heard the trees rustling in his studio as we saw him surrounded by the photographic evidence of the murder in this same park. Beyond that, we are given no clues as to what to think as he literally dissolves out of the final wide shot of the grassy expanse just before "The End" appears to shut off any further speculations. Has Thomas acquired a new perception of reality that physicists speculate may exist in additional hidden dimensions? Has he accepted his loss and given away his sense of continuous control, allowing himself to be swept away by his environment rather than trying to mold it to his will or his whim? Have we been given anything more tangible than what was offered by Cortázar in his equally strange tale of a series of events that changed the consciousness and priorities of his protagonist? Neither artist seems interested in providing answers to questions such as these because raising the questions intrigues them considerably more than simplifying the situation with concrete closure.

In Cortázar's "Blow-Up," words do not reflect "reality" but rather the creative process itself, as the story casts doubts on the veracity of events and people described. In *Blow-Up,* the iconography that Antonioni presents to the audience is readily recognizable; the images,

objects, characters, and events represented in the film may appear easily identifiable, but the process of representing them is not, and this process raises complex issues about perception, cognition, being, and understanding in the textures of iconic and symbolic language and discourse. Still, their semiotic manipulations do provide the semblance of narrative structures, implications of multiple interpretations, and fascinating points to ponder in these most unique of the artists' works, which may ultimately be more useful for us as readers and viewers of their unsettling creations. As Robert Morris has stated,

[A]rt is an activity of change, of disorientation and shift, of violent discontinuity and mutability, of the willingness for confusion even in the service of discovering new perceptual modes (Morris, quoted in Gotlieb, Beyond Modern Art 1).

This statement is perfectly applicable to Cortázar's "Blow-Up" and Antonioni's Blow-Up, as our study has aimed to show by embracing Morris' understanding of art as an unconventional and iconoclastic form of human practice and by analyzing major radical ways both the writer and the filmmaker use in order to assault the complacent reader or viewer into new ways of thinking and seeing.

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