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(Dis)locating the Subject, Moving the Image and Reasoning with History

Sudeep Dasgupta

AUTHOR BIO

Sudeep Dasgupta is Associate Professor in the Department of Media Studies, and Director of the Research Master's Program at the University of Amsterdam. His publications focus on the aesthetics and politics of displacement in visual culture, from the disciplinary perspectives of Critical Theory, postcolonial and globalization studies, political philosophy, and feminist and queer theory. Publications include "The Aesthetics of Indirection: Intermittent Adjacencies and Subaltern Presences at the Borders of Europe," *Cinéma et Cie* 17:28 (2017), the co-edited volume (with Mireille Rosello) *What's Queer about Europe ?* (Fordham University Press, 2014), and *Constellations of the Transnational: Modernity, Culture, Critique* (Rodopi, 2007).

ABSTRACT

"Idealism," unlike realism and materialism has not featured much in philosophical engagements with film. Representation, redemption, construction – these terms, among others, marked philosophical debates on the image's relation to reality (Bazin, Hansen). A Deleuzian perspective, on the other hand, focused on the reality *of* the image, while the focus on "affect", the "body" and "feelings" reframed the image in "materialist" terms (Deleuze, Sobchack, Marks, Massumi, Ngai). The philosophical complexity of idealism's conceptualization of the subject, I argue, got lost in this bifurcation. Both the referential focus of the realism debates and the reduction of the spectator to the body in the "materialist" turn, to varying degrees, sidelined the *reasoning* subject's dialectical relation to both its own reality and the place of the moving image in it. A dialectical understanding of the reasoning subject's shifting relation to a moving object in historical reality, I argue, enriches a philosophy of the moving image by productively developing the contradictions implicit in the realism debates while avoiding the reductive materialism avowed by ahistorical theorizations of affect, the body and the senses. Analyzing Bianca Stigter's *Three Minutes: A Lengthening* (2021), the essay produces an encounter between the dislocated subject reasoning with history through the moving image. Extending the post-Hegelian critique of Kant's idealism developed by Theodor Adorno, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, Gillian Rose, Todd McGowan and others, my argument elaborates the *tension* between the embodied subject's power of reasoning and the moving object's negativity as the register through which reality is both thought and experienced. The point is not to avoid the image-reality relationship but to understand reality as intrinsically part of *and* transformed by an unstable subject's encounter with the forms of the moving image.

KEYWORDS

negative dialectics, aesthetic theory, spectatorship, moving image, Adorno, Hegel.

Idealism in philosophy and film theory is generally framed around the relationship between subject and object, and spectator and screen/image. Writing on the influence of Kantian idealism on documentary filmmaker John Grierson, Ian Aitken notes that the subject/spectator apprehends an "organic totality" by subsuming "particulars within general laws in order to construct a system of interrelated rules" which generate stable meanings (247). The coherence of the phenomenal world is constructed by the subject/spectator's powers of systematically ordering representations into a stable, non-contradictory totality. The argument of coherence as the end-result of exposure to the world/image, however, simplifies a far-more complicated relationship between the subject and object, the spectator, and the screen.

Through a close reading of Bianca Stigter's documentary *Three Minutes: A Lengthening* (2021), I argue that both the subject and the object are set into motion along multiple trajectories of reasoning, speculating, and interrogating. Rather than an idealist subject controlling its experience of representations and fixing them into a totality, the cinematic experience actualizes a destabilizing experience for the viewing subject who is forced to reckon with thinking as a continual, contingent, and unstable process. Further, the sound/image is not passive raw material transformed into a stable text with a clear meaning. Rather, the moving image constructed by Stigter literally provokes thought to meander across multiple pathways in different directions. By setting thought into motion, the image provokes an interrogation of how we reason with history and make sense of it. This strategy has particular significance since documentary makes far more emphatic connections to the real world it draws from. In effect, viewing and hearing the film forces the spectator to speculate on the historical meaning and significance of the images it is exposed to. What is history? How can it be framed? Whose history do we encounter? Are there "general laws" which help give coherence to what we see and hear?

The close reading of *Three Minutes* is framed and interwoven with the writings of philosophers, Adorno in particular, who emphasize the contingent relation between subject and object, the activity of thinking and the resistance the object of thought provokes for the thinker. Theorists including Adorno, Todd McGowan, Gillian Rose, and Jacques Rancière share precisely this attention to the potential of the image to provoke and destabilize thought rather than confirm thought's power to capture the object/image into a "system." In specific ways, they engage with the post-Hegelian tradition of (negative) dialectics in which the relationship between a stable subject and a passive object is converted into a *process* of destabilization intrinsic to thought by which both the subject and object are set into motion. The negativity of the object, its potential to destabilize the subject's desire for coherence, is actualized by Stigter through her construction of *Three Minutes*. The film reformulates the subject-object relationship in idealism. It becomes the site for thinking about thinking, about history and the potential of the moving image to make us experience the process of thinking. My argument

elaborates the *tension* between the embodied subject's power of reasoning and the moving object's negativity as the register through which reality is both thought and experienced. The point is not to avoid the image-reality relationship but to understand reality as intrinsically part of *and* transformed by an unstable subject's encounter with the forms of the moving image.

The Tripod and the Train

How might the unstable subject be understood? And what is its relation to reality as it appears to the subject? J.M. Bernstein writes "Kant's domain of empirical reality" involves a "historical nature – the nature whose *appearing* to us is conditioned by our belonging *to it*" (191). Since the subject is part of the very changing nature it encounters, the subject's position is not fixed but moves through the "contingent and historically conditioned practices" which play a "constitutive role in thought" (191). The viewing, experiencing subject cannot thus deploy "an ideally conceptually closed system" through which it reduces stimuli to "law-governed substances" (191). The spectator is produced by contingent historical practices it is exposed to which destabilize how it thinks, feels and makes sense of aesthetic experiences. "Aesthetic agency" describes "art's capacity to make available uniquely valuable modes of experience that . . . challenge the primacy of Enlightenment norms of rationality" through which thinking operates within a closed conceptual system" (Maharaj 2). An apocryphal example from early film history exemplifies this philosophical argument.

Revisiting accounts of the 1895 screening of *Arrival of a Train at the Station* by the Lumière Brothers, Tom Gunning's acute analysis debunked theorizations of the "naïve spectator" it generated in film theory. Describing the technologically-mediated forms through which the moving image appeared, Gunning states "The movement from still to moving image accented [both] the unbelievable and extraordinary nature of the apparatus itself . . . [while] it also undid any naïve belief in the reality of the image (129). For the spectators, the "thrill of transformation into motion depended on its *presentation* as a contrived illusion" (129). The simultaneity of disbelief caused by the illusion of movement and the emphatic presentation of its technological simulation split the spectator's cognitive stability by combining belief and its simultaneous negation. The still/moving object and dislocated subject in front of the screen produced an "(in)credulous spectator." The brackets adjectivizing the spectator of the moving image produces a parenthetical subject whose consistency is contingently dependent on the contradictions through which objects both mediate and configure the experience of modernity.

Aesthetic experience is the paradoxical experience of registering with the senses an image's power to both reveal the meaning of reality and call into question its temporal and spatial stability. *Three Minutes* produces precisely this paradoxical experience of sensing a historical reality and forcing the spectator to muse on the relation between the image, thought and reality. To muse is to be moved, to be caught between the desire to know and the doubt

which the Muses deliberately invite when they sing "we know how to tell many lies that sound like truth, but we know to sing reality when we will" (Hesiod 26-28). The Muses, carrying their mother Mnemosyne's vocation of memory forward, entangle *our* encounter with the past through a configuration where certainty and doubt, knowing and speculating coincide. *Three Minutes* is a form of musing in this sense, employing "a particular quality with respect to which things *otherwise different* may be deemed functionally equal or equivalent" (Heiden 155). In our situation of an "abundance of images," Stigter describes her film as "an experiment in scarcity as the quality" through which a plurality of meanings configures multiple meanings out of history and memory. The film is an experiment in exploring how just three minutes of found footage can have the "capacity to move" the spectator by provoking musings on the moving image through unanticipated trajectories inside and outside the frame, beyond the image and into the world it is a part of (166, 4).

Three Minutes: A Lengthening, the film, opens with the three minutes of David Kurtz's found-footage shot in Nasielsk, and closes with the same three minutes, this time run backwards to the opening image. The twice repeated and reversed three minutes function like the two panels of a diptych, which when opened reveal a web-like mediated world whose threads spread in all directions as we follow the multiple trajectories they trace into a past approached through multiple presents. The film begins with the "screening" of approximately three minutes of moving images, mainly in black and white, accompanied by the non-diegetic sound of a projector. A square in a town, crowds of children gesticulating in front of the camera, trees moving in the wind, people entering and leaving a large building, silhouettes of people dancing in a café – these among other images, obviously recorded as moving snapshots rather than a carefully edited narrative, signify to the spectator the genre of amateur footage. The flow of images comes to a sudden stop to the sound of a click, a freeze-frame over which an unseen narrator (Helena Bonham Carter) explains "These three minutes of life were taken out of the flow of time by David Kurtz in 1938. His grandson Glenn Kurtz discovered them in 2009 in a closet in Palm Beach Garden, Florida." As the narration continues, the film rapidly rewinds back and freezes at a new image we have not seen of his grandparents and three friends emerging out of the darkened entrance of a grand building, identified through the slow and discreet appearance of the words "Grand Hotel National Luzern." Kurtz describes the trip his grandfather and friends took through Holland, Belgium, Switzerland, France and England, to state their "extraordinary detour" into Poland. But where? At this point, Kurtz's voice is interrupted by the narrator who asks, in her clipped English accent "Where did he go? What do we see? Is it possible to locate a place from looking? They say one picture is worth a thousand words, but for that phrase to make sense you do need to know what you are looking at." Between his accented American voice and her English one, an aural play is set up, one describing what the other starts questioning through a reflection on sensing through seeing and making sense through thinking.

"Clarity" describes the quality of knowledge formed by closing the gap between seeing and knowing. However, Theodor Adorno argues "clarity can be demanded of all knowledge only when it has been determined that the objects under investigation are free of all dynamic qualities that would cause them to *elude the gaze* that tries to capture and hole them unambiguously" (*Hegel* 98, emphasis added). Musing on history takes place in the gap between seeing and knowing the past, blurring the certainty both seek. Like the train arriving at La Ciotat, "the object of its [the subject's] philosophizing not only runs right over the knower as though on some vehicle but is inherently in motion" (98-99). Moreover, the subject is not naïve, immobile in its incredulity. The parenthetical subject split between belief and disbelief confirms Adorno's claim that "the subject too is not static like a camera on a tripod: rather, the subject itself also moves, by virtue of its relationship to the object that is inherently in motion" (99). Rather than generating an archivally-derived past and fixing its meaning for the future, the film actively engages in what Gil Z. Hochberg calls the "archival imagination" (15). The moving images that lengthen three minutes of found footage counter the "archival drive to preserve, collect, store and document." Instead, the film "cites, recites and revisits" (16) the past, provoking the imagination by using sight and sound, image and voice to "displace, manipulate, and radically alter" how *we* are mediated by the images that mediate the past (16). Reasoning with history dislocates the subject as it moves the image which moves us.

Multiple mediations themselves marked Stigter's own encounter with the footage she will go on to pluralize. She first learnt of the footage through a Facebook post about Glenn Kurtz's book *Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a Family Film of 1938*, and viewed the film archived on the website of the United States Memorial Museum of the Holocaust. Stigter's film emerged through her collaboration with Kurtz, who recounts his mediated encounters with those survivors and their family through recordings, telephone conversations and email correspondence. The film calls attention to the "medium promiscuity" that forms it through the multi-mediated process of its own construction across a vast network of times, places, voices, archives, and technologies (Gunning, "Cinematic Realism" 33).

Stigter invites us to "circle [around] the same moments again and again, convinced that they will give us a different meaning each time. The film starts and ends with the same unedited found footage, but the second time you will look at it quite differently" (4). *Three Minutes* exploits the philosophical paradox of clearly saying what one can only see through elusive fragments, setting the subject's desire to know into motion by speculating on the deceptive clarity of images and transforming their presences into occasions for experiencing the spiraling movement of history. Stigter transforms the found footage to experiment with "scarcity" in order to produce what she calls "a tense fusion between past and present." Stigter exposes the viewer to those three minutes while dilating the time of viewing them to a sixty-eight minute configuration of still/moving images, multiple voices and sounds. By turning this brief window into the past into an extended time of viewing and

speculating, the film transforms the only images of the village of Nasielsk (Poland) and the predominantly Jewish people who fill the frame in 1938 into an affectively complex and meaning-dispersed experience for us and our present's relation to the past.

"To interpret a text," Roland Barthes writes, "is not to give it a . . . meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it" (Barthes, *S/Z* 5). The film folds the past into our present only to open the text up to a plurality of competing meanings and affects by dilating the short three-minute film exposure of the people of a small Polish town into a speculative aesthetic experience of the qualitative density of historical experience. The spectator is limited to roam within the image-world of three recorded minutes. Yet the lengthening produces a plurality of worlds borne by sounds, voices and images within images which continually dislocate the spectator's reasoning and affective stability through the play between thinking and knowing, knowing and feeling, seeing and speculating. This dense interplay of knowing, thinking, feeling, and seeing structures the spectator's mediated experience of history. The desire to fix the history of the places in Nasielsk and the people in it, and ascribe the whole text a clear historical meaning is countered by the film's emphatic rearranging of the relationship between seeing and knowing. Instead of reducing cinematic experience to an example of a stable idealist relation between controlling spectator and static image, the film exposes us to "content that Kant wanted to banish from their sphere as contingent and merely empirical" (Adorno, *Hegel* 66). Rather than produce a stable experience of knowing, the film complicates the *process* of knowing. It "break[s] epistemology by rejecting the way Kant 'anchored' philosophy in synthetic a priori judgements" and transforming the unstable contents of historical experience mediated by film into provocations for thinking thought itself (66). Stigter precisely exposes this contingency that the reality of the past opens up because the spectator's mediated encounter with the past can only be given contingent form through the complexity empirical reality generates.

I insist on the moving image rather than film, because Stigter's syncretic extension of "three minutes" expands the perspective on the image beyond film by combining the grainy texture of a faded photograph, the split-screen of a Windows computer, the device-manipulated fast-forward and rewind experience of television viewing, among other forms of spectatorial experience. Movement here means two things: not just the fact that the components within the frame set the image in motion, but that this image-movement provokes and is itself recursively reframed by the subject/ spectator whose affectively-freighted capacities for thought are provoked, displaced and set in motion. The film's production of still images by freezing movement in the film frame, zooming in on barely recognizable details, and fragmenting a scene into a series of tableaux before setting images into movement again across time and space confound the temporal distinctions that have grounded claims of medium-specificity. The film configures stillness and movement, our time and theirs, of spectators now and the survivors/inhabitants of Nasielsk together, to open up a gap between seeing and knowing, between thought and affect. The film employs objects and

bodies as "a way of inscribing signs on a white surface . . . a way of filling space with forms and movements, which are no longer the expression of definite feelings" or signposts toward arriving at definite meanings (Rancière, *Aesthesis* 193).

That is why Stigter insists that the "fusion of past and present" can only be "tense" because the present continuous tense of viewing the images in the here and now cannot stabilize the lost world in them and around the frames enclosing them. As an artistic construction, *Three Minutes* produce the "'movements' of cinema . . . as they transform distances and modes of perception, forms of development, and the very feeling of time" (193). Musing and speculating with the moving image is to be moved affectively as we reason with the effects the image produces on the mind and body of the spectator. That is also why Adorno insisted that historical understanding is not affixing a time-stamp on a moment in the past from the certainty of the present but a form of musing, of speculating on the "qualitative, not chronological understanding [of the time] of modernity (*Minima Moralia* 218).

Kurtz begins his speculation on the past through a desire to locate an image, saying "I did not know where the film was taken and asked my father and my aunt. They thought it was my grandmother's hometown, Berezne, near the border with the Ukraine." The image of the square on screen pictures this town whose three thousand Jews were murdered in August 1942. As the affect this fact carries barely sinks in Kurtz interjects "it took me six months to find a survivor, a man in Florida and within a second of looking at this film he says 'it is not my town'." The uncertainty and affective charge generated by the image-voice nexus gets displaced further when the narrator's voice immediately shifts our focus to the material form of mediat-ion: "Like any recording device, film preserves details without necessarily conveying knowledge." The meta-commentary on the frozen image express-es the inability of a mnemonic device to release a definitive meaning, abruptly countering our affective response to an account of mass murder and provoking doubt instead.

The inability of the image frozen before us to convey knowledge is quickly followed, by another image, an image we will paradoxically not see – a photograph of the synagogue in Nasielsk Glenn Kurtz stumbles on as he starts speculating that the town might be his grandfather's rather than his grandmother's. The image on screen now gets a meaning through another image which we cannot see, since our gaze is strictly limited to the found footage. The absent presence of the photograph of Nasielsk's synagogue extends the link between seeing and speculation by moving us not just outside the frame to a visually-absent historical location but also to its mediation by images kept outside our visual reach. The film reconfigures Kurtz's textual "discovery" into an aesthetic experience of the moving image by staging the process of identification through the dilatory experience of a stop/search, retrace-and-restart process that sets the spectator wandering across time and space through configurations of voice and body. The film exposes the intrinsic contingency of thought's relationship to uncertain mediations of reality by setting thoughts and affects into motion precipitating

affective intensity around historical trauma, meta-reflections on mediated truth and musings on the significance of absent images.

The film manifests what Adorno calls the "perfidiousness of the object" ("Punctuation Marks" 97), which sets in motion formal thought's temptation to bring thinking "to a standstill and the object assimilated to it from above, without negotiation" (95). The objective perfidy of the image is produced in the form movement takes between one frozen image of a town and an unseen photograph of a synagogue that sets the former in motion. The voice accompanying the image leads the spectator to a traumatic event and location (Berezne) only to dislocate it through another unseen voice (a survivor) whose anonymity gives presence to the location *outside* the frame while prefiguring its traumatic significance for the image/site *in* the frame. This production of spectatorial and auditory errancy is not limited to the configurational dynamic of space and time of empirical history and its contingently sensed appearances. The film will go on to colour our experience of that historical moment by explicitly connecting the modernity of filming technology and the technology of memory and mass murder through a microscopic analysis of the grain of the image.

"The self-identity of thought with itself" Todd McGowan argues, must reckon with "the failure of what Hegel calls formal thinking" (39, 50). The stability of the reasoning subject's identity founders precisely because "identity is incapable of being identity without introducing some form of otherness that reveals the lack of perfect self-identity" (50). This is what the instability of the spectating subject means – the encounter with forms of otherness which the film continually produces by offering knowledge and then retracting it. The spectator's identity is destabilized by encountering contradiction as it thinks the meaning of the image. Hegel insists the encounter with "contradiction [*Wiederspruch*] cannot be thought . . . Formal thought does think it, only it at once looks away from it" (Hegel 745). Refusing to look away, the film emphatically places the spectator before images whose significance, truth and power to convey meaning are continually set into motion. The spectating subject becomes a speculating subject borne along with images which travel in too many directions to constitute a fixed meaning or central theme. These images and voices interrupt what Gillian Rose describes as a "particular kind of identity thinking." They call into question the "the priority of subjectivity" whose "abstracting procedures . . . fail to capture empirical or contingent history" by moving "beyond subject and object, beyond concept and entity" into a history that reconfigures their possible relations (*The Melancholy Science* 71). The "selfhood" of the spectator as knowing subject, Rose argues, "takes place" and time precisely "in the interaction with . . . the other [the moving image] . . . in the formation of our contingent and unstable identities" (*Mourning Becomes the Law* 7).

Mediating History through Fragments

"Shrunk, curled up and fused." This is how the narrator describes the degraded film footage Glenn Kurtz found in 2008. The 16 mm Kodachrome film footage, introduced in 1935, was sent to a special effects company which restored what could be saved after which Kurtz donated it to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Mediated through the passage from 16 mm celluloid to digital code and circulated through a website, the film brought to life a face made present only through a voice two years after it was circulated on the museum's website.

A woman's voice excitedly recounts "My Dad said to my mum, that is your father!" as the image moves left and right, swaying over the faces of excited children jumping up and down to get in front of David Kurtz's camera. The temporal gap between a voice in the present pointing to a moving image of the past gets condensed into a still photograph when the image freezes suddenly on the smiling face of a boy in the animated crowd. An unseen male voice now interjects "I have a yeshiva cap which I took off. My father saw it and told my mom." This sequence is preceded by Glenn Kurtz recounting an email he received from a woman in Detroit who had seen the film online and recognized her grandfather. The male voice identified much later as Maurice Chandler continues, describing the strictness of the dress code in his religious family: "It is crazy, this is what they are like, they *live* their religion." Chandler's sartorial disobedience of the rules of the Jewish community is further intensified when we see another boy's face near him wearing a different kind of cap. Chandler explains the social significance of the different cap, saying "he was not in my circle, my parents would not allow me to associate with him." Kurtz's voice breaks in, commenting on "how mixed up the community became as a result of my grandfather's presence and the fact of the movie camera having [sic] scrambled up the social hierarchy." The split in the historical presentation of a community is extended immediately to the community's disruption through the disturbance introduced by picturing it through recording technology. The mediation of history exposes both the tensions and contradictions of social reality and the disruption recording media itself produce in that reality.

The smooth continuity of images gets fragmented, stopping and freezing on close-ups of faces, and extending their meanings across reflections on community, religion, and the chemistry of film. "And there is the woman from the *shul* again," Chandler says as the image freezes on a woman in the crowd. The narrator suddenly enters this non-dialogue between Kurtz and Chandler: "This one? Would she be the mother of the girl with the brown braids?", the question she poses implying Chandler as its addressee. Instead, Kurtz interjects: "The girl appears frequently in the film, moving with my grandfather's lens to remain on camera. I wonder if Morry would recognize the girl." "No, it is beyond my scope" replies Chandler answering the narrator *through* Kurtz's interjection, fragmenting the to-and-fro between voices in this quasi-dialogue where interlocutors keep switching places. Kurtz comments, "another thing not allowed," as Chandler reminds us that looking at women is frowned upon in his religious milieu. This strangely discontin-

uous sequence of voices in a quasi-dialogue fragments our experience of listening while moving between a desire to identify (the girl), reflect on social tensions (gender norms) and underline the process of mediation (the lens).

The word "brown" whose function was to identify an unknown face will now lead the spectator on a zigzagging trajectory along which Stigter intersects historical trauma with the chemistry of film recording. The narrator had earlier explained that the Ciné-Kodak magazine can be loaded with both colour and black-and-white 16 mm film stock, and we realize now that the black and white images we have been seeing were originally in colour. "All colours fade, but the colour red fades the slowest," the narrator observes over an extreme close-up of a grainy reddish image. Red fades last, after black and white, we are told, to which the voice adds that red was the first colour to be named and in some languages it "is the same word for 'blood'." Hearing the word "blood" now is coloured by another word "Berezne," the town mistakenly identified earlier by Kurtz and the history of extermination it brought up. The affective weight now attached to "red" is suddenly redirected as the narrator explain how film emulsion's exposure to colour is a chemical process "involving silver, plastic and cellulose," adding "film emulsion is made of gelatin, the same gelatin we eat, made of the skin and bones of cattle." The word "red" becomes the vehicle whose tenor combines the chemical process of fading colour, the ingestion of skin and bones and the distant but insistent presence of historical trauma – all provoked by the reddish patina of an unidentified girl's hair.

About fifteen minutes *later*, extreme close-up images of greyish patterns through which are threaded lines of reddish brown gives way to a portrait of a group of women standing in the town square. The narrator observes "Dresses on the women and girls are the most colourful things on show." Now, the thoughts provoked by the colour red are extended through a temporal gap to colour providing yet another excursus through social history. A voice speaking in German, unaccompanied by subtitles, speaks over the images, only to be interrupted by the narrator stating that an article in the German press in 1931 reported on the high quality of textiles produced in the region of Zichenau. As we (non-German speaking) auditors can now situate the incomprehensible voice heard earlier, it is suddenly replaced by a German-accented English-speaking voice reading the text of the article. Why a German accent instead of subtitles? Why not an English voice, like the narrator's? These strange combinations of accent and voices emphasize our mediated access to information about images which themselves are barely discernible, while the information being read out now and scripted in 1931 takes on an ominous tone. The German article praises the quality of textiles produced in the Zichenau region of Poland while simultaneously expressing disgust at the "primitive standards of hygiene" to be found there. The phobic framing of a region's textile industry gets visually arrested by an extreme close-up on a round object. To the sound of a clicking camera, a series of buttons on the dresses of the women we saw earlier now appear on screen, as a voice-over begins elaborating the history of a button factory in Nasielsk, whose Jewish owner, Mr. Filar lost possession of it (and his life), when the German army invaded Poland.

The development of this divergently scaled and discontinuous social history then takes a deeply personal turn as Chandler recounts how the children in the town played games with stones, until he hit on the idea of replacing the stones by stealing buttons which were more valuable. Sneaking into the synagogue during sabbath service with his friend Leslie, the boys cut off all the buttons on the coats hanging in the vestibule, causing his enraged father to forbid him later from sitting at the sabbath meal. "It's like I had killed somebody!", Chandler exclaims, describing his father's anger. These fragmented presentations of private memories and social histories figured through an interplay of estranging voices perform at least two actions at once. Firstly, the closer "the proximity to the subject" of the object, the film's fragmentation of its resonances produces "an infinitude of thoughts and associations" (Adorno *Punctuation Marks* 94). Secondly, the two very differently situated voices concatenate history together with memory, rather than oppose the lies of official history to the truth of personal memory. Chandler does not counter the reality of the discourse of German anti-Semitism; instead, his quotidian memory provides a *counter-point of entry* into the reality of the same history.

Affect, History and Intermittent Temporalities

Roughly midway through the film, the sound of a projector accompanies the scene of people excitedly entering the synagogue. The camera itself seems to follow them into the dark entrance of the synagogue until the screen goes completely black. This visual void is filled out by a voice recounting the events of December 1939 when half the Jewish population of Nasielsk were evicted from their homes, later to be ransacked by the local *Volksdeutch*. Driven by blows, some were forced to walk to the train station with cries of "run, mud, sing!" while the rest were herded into the synagogue whose darkened doorway we spectators had been led into. The black screen taking on an eloquently traumatic significance through the words describing scenes without images. The narration of the events reproduce the transcription of the testimony of a Nasielsk resident to a fellow inmate of the Warsaw ghetto, now accessible in the Emmanuel Ringelblum archive in Warsaw.

Towards the end of the film, as we see the same sequence of images of people entering the synagogue, we hear Maurice Chandler trying to recall what the occasion was. "Maybe it is Moishe Koussevitzky coming," he speculates, the "top notch cantor." Archival records confirm his guess. As the image turns a grainy black, we hear a recording of Koussevitzky singing, and a voice explains "He is singing *Aneinu"* which in Hebrew means 'answer us'." Two black squares separated by thirty minutes configure one image with two sets of words, facts and affects. One image bore the soaring voice of a famous cantor whose voice sang words, the resonance of which not all the listeners on that sunny August day in 1938 would know. For spectators and the few survivors now, however, that selfsame image has been reconfigured through words describing the destruction of Nasielsk's Jewish population.

By figuring a plurality of coexisting but contradictory realities in the same space and time, the images gesture toward the fact that for the subject, as Butler puts it, the potential "that there is something that does not appear, but that is nevertheless crucial to any *given* appearance" (*Subjects of Desire* 27) must call the subject's desire for definitive knowledge into question. The film configures what Andrew Gibson describes as "a world given over to inter-mittencies . . . designating a specific temporality between events, lacking *in* events," by introducing a temporal gap between the same image to make it resonant with meanings indiscernible in our initial encounter with them (235, emphasis added). *Three Minutes* makes available to the senses a consciousness of the past's emphatically refracted, contradictory yet co-present forms of movement through affects that move us, precipitating a question about the self and its capacity to grasp the external reality it posits. The "force" of history, its meanings and affects take a refractory form precisely, as Judith Butler argues, because "movement, incessant and dialectical" destabilizes the "determinate objects of the spatiotemporal world, the *res extensa* of sensuous and perceptual reality" (*Subjects of Desire* 27). The lengthening of time becomes the space in which the spectator will remain unsure, now made aware that "reality is not coextensive with appearance" (27). That is why Butler emphasizes Hegel's point that "[t]he Understanding [*Vernunft*] mistakes stasis for truth, and can only understand movement as a series of discrete moments, not as the vital unity of moments that *imply* each other endlessly and do not appear simultaneously" (27).

The sounds configured by Koussevitzky's voice as he sings "Answer us" to an excited crowd enjoying "a world famous cantor," and the unheard cries "run, mud, sing!" shouted at Nasielsk's Jews, narrated by the Ringelblum archive witness report, are unreconcilable, giving voice together to "the formal law of a history that advances [here through film and images] only through contradiction and with unspeakable suffering" (Adorno, *Hegel* 82). The uncertain experience of temporality produces irreconcilable meanings and affects through temporal "development as discontinuity" instead of causally-developed linear certainty (82). The visual experience of aural presence and bodily absence the black screens configure produces an affective experience where "the history of an unreconciled epoch cannot be a history of harmonious development" (82). Describing neorealist cinema, Bazin explains that images give film "a meaning, but it is *a posteriori*, to the extent that it permits our awareness to move from one fact to another, from one fragment of reality to the next," rather than a neatly-arranged conceptualization of a stable object" ("In Defence of Rosselini" 99). The "provisional meaning and utility" of these images for the spectator parallel the contingent historical temporality of the subjects who disappeared into the void and the audiovisual experience of the spectators looking into it (99). The film produces the affective experience of speculation to configure contingent histories and their contradictions and refute "the mechanism of mere material and invariant categories" which absolute reason relies on (Adorno, "Essay as Form" 21).

"Perhaps you have noticed the quality of the footage varies" the narrator observes, addressing us explicitly. She continues "Does it make people look

more modern? More contemporary? Does it bring them closer to you?" The image on screen splits into two, with the face of a boy wearing a cap repeated twice, side by side, one partially sharper than the other. Before one can reflect on the questions posed, the narratorial voice shifts registers, stating "No other power on earth can do what a movie camera can do, boasted Kodak in an advertisement in 1938. You think your memory will hold it all but no, it slips away, it grows dim. Only a movie camera can bring it back to you, with all its freshness and thrill." Posing questions of memory, technology and mediated intimacy, the narrative voice's divergent tonalities are exacerbated further when the questions posed take on the form of an estranging performance of a quasi-dialogue between the narrator and Glenn Kurtz. The narrator states "We had a 3D model of the square in Nasielsk. Could this provide us with a new way to enter history? Or should we stay with the people in the film secured by David Kurtz?" as the screen fills with a vibrantly colourful 3D model, the only image *not* recorded by Kurtz's camera. The spectator's split-second excursion outside the three minutes is redirected back immediately by Kurtz who says these "images are tokens of a life they remember" while "for us it is the presence of these people." Splitting the spectatorial positions, Kurtz goes on "Yes, they [the survivors] see images but it is as if they see the world around the images." The film, however, has also created a world around the images for us non-survivors too, by giving form to history through reflections on recording technology, archival reports of the weather in the area in 1938, German army reports on the treatment of Jewish populations, and more. Spectators and survivors are both made witnesses to a history around the images, though not the same one.

The discontinuous articulation of a reality presented in fragments is also *voiced* through an estranging back-and-forth quasi-dialogue between the narrator and Kurtz as they reflect together on the power of recording images, history, and memory. Kurtz voices his "fear" that "in the years to come we will forget this absence" which the images make present, to which the narrator counters "*But* inevitably that is going to happen." Kurtz then submits to her with "Of course." The narrator continues: "The fact that the camera recorded them is evidence that these people have really existed," qualifying what she had just said, to only reframe the meaning of recording by saying "*At the same time* the pictures that show them so alive, forever young. You have an absence, in a way, in the presence." Time gives space for both the reality of a past to appear and the absences which constitute the field of appearances (Butler). The estranging quasi-dialogue registers "the fundamental contradiction" Bazin describes of an "aesthetic" confronted by an "unacceptable and necessary" choice between wanting to register reality "integrally" and cutting fragments out at the edges of which the presence of absent realities gather (Bazin, "Aesthetic of Reality" 26).

"'When *I think better*, more firmly, I think less for you, I think more for the truth'" is how Barthes renders the idealist subject's self-possession as it reasons ("Speech & Writing" 6). This disjointed "conversation" however, voices precisely reasoning's dependence on an other, a "you." The conversation takes time and space to grapple quasi-dialogically with the

affectively-loaded complexity of history and the subject encountering it through mediated memories. The film becomes "a tactical space of propositions . . . of *positions*" (6) due to the contradictory responses of the interlocutors. These contradictions disrupt the discourse (conversation) and make the meanings they produce uncertain: "Discontinuity as discourse keeps the final meaning from 'taking'" (Barthes, "Brecht and Discourse" 217). Kurtz's, and our, desire to make sense of an integral history by apprehending (taking) its meaning is rendered through "differences, displacements and condensations of intensities" (Rancière, *The Lost Thread* 17). Dana Polan describes the form of mediation and the subject's transformation succinctly when he writes "the text is an interplay, an interweaving, of voices rather than as the unmediated expression of themes" (41).

Early in the film, Glenn Kurtz expresses his desire to "piece together the fragments of what remains, to show their edges and their absences." Kodachrome film, digital images, animated forms – together, they expose the fact that the threat of "fading" memories, as the film stock company would have it, cannot be definitively overcome. But, as the film proves, the threat can be transformed into the opportunity for piecing fragments together differently, configuring new forms of experiencing realities *around* the images whose frames one is obliged to tentatively construct and then break out of. Kurtz's desire "to piece together the fragments, their absences and edges" is given form through a lengthening whose production of gaps in and between events produces a reality for the viewing subject. This reality, as Gibson avers "is not already given, everywhere accessible, available at once," instead, the alterity in reality, its edges and what occurs outside the edges of what we see "happens, here and there, from time to time. Its arrival is unpredictable" (207).

The moving image refutes the philosophical "pathos" implicit in the "absolute idea of reason," marked especially, Adorno reminds us, in "Kant's transcendental dialectic, which wants to immortalize the line between understanding and speculation" ("Essay as Form" 21). *Three Minutes* moves the spectator to speculate in the double sense of reflexively rethinking the thoughts it thinks through the partial and shifting clarity of the images it sees. By starting and stopping, setting images in motion to freeze their movement, the moving images, "while depending on [historical] reality . . . eventually detach themselves from it and produce a potential never-ending archive of significations meant to challenge preferred readings" (Flores et al. 7). When Maurice Chandler says at the end of the film "I was raised in a very religious home, and the disappointment is so great . . . My belief has been destroyed," we as spectators experience the affective weight of his words because the film has configured our hearing of them through our recollection of another set of words that accompanied the same image of the black square and the void of the synagogue door earlier.

Conclusion

Alexander García Düttman describes the uncertainty intrinsic to "thoughts relation to truth" eloquently when he writes "truth is never to be conceived as a relationship of correspondence between a thought and a given or as a self-referential relationship of thinking . . . only when they are carried beyond themselves . . . can they become what deserves to be called thinking or truth (19, 20). My argument has tracked how sound, image and voice are deployed in *Three Minutes* precisely to carry both thought and what is given to the eye/ear "beyond themselves" to register the viewing subject's aesthetic experience of displacement. Further, the reading emphatically underscores the motility of the image as the mode through which what is given to sight and sound becomes the occasion for undoing a neat correspondence between the image and its meaning. Rather than snuggling close to the truth of the object by absenting you/us, the film exposes the gap between the subject and the object by addressing you in too many registers, orchestrating the timbre of voice and the richness of the opaque image, the bodily experience of disembodied words and the materiality of image-manipulation to (con)figure thought and the truth it desires to grasp. By weaving a tissue of words, images and sounds, the moving image figures both the affectively freighted subject's desire to know and the impossibility of definitive knowledge. Both "thought and a given" are carried beyond themselves and the moving image brings their alterity into focus. Avowing the moving image's capacity to dislocate the subject is *not* the valorization of uncertainty for its own sake. Instead, it is an emphatic assertion of the productive instability the object produces as its temporal mobility sketches the historical trajectories through which the subject's outlines get contingently silhouetted against the backdrop of a refractory reality.

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