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Dilatory Time

Or, The Necessity of Slowing Down

Conversation and the silent witness

In the central part of his great 1936 film, *Modern Times*, Charlie Chaplin – playing the role of a worker in a self-consciously high-performance and technologically advanced factory – finds himself in the midst of a great industrial experiment. As part of a process and technique of so-called economic modernization, now recognizable explicitly in terms of Taylorist efficiency or productivity, it has been calculated that the worker could save his employer a great deal of time and could be more productive if his lunch-break could become as mechanized as the rest of his day. Chaplin, as the crash-test-dummy for the demonstration, finds himself seated in an odd contraption of a chair. This chair, into which he is strapped tightly, is reminiscent of both an infant high-chair and a threatening electric chair. Chaplin thus finds himself positioned between the beginning and end of a life, between birth and death, and thus caught in the very midst of life itself, as one hovering between innocent infant helplessness and criminal culpability; and this, in fact, is the characterization of the worker in the eyes of the employer. Moreover, symbolically, ‘all human life’ is contained, as it were, in this motif: we are witnessing, in political terms, the speeding-up of Chaplin’s life (proposed as an economic necessity) to the moment where it passes as in an instant or as in an instantaneous now, a *Jetztzeit*. In this construction, he becomes as instantly disposable as the very commodities that he is employed in making; and the question arises for the viewer: what is the worth or value of a life and especially of a life caught in the midst of the now-time?

The meal begins. The problem for the capitalists is that Chaplin’s body is – almost instinctively or involuntarily – the site of a resistance not only to the capitalist characterization of the worker-figure, but also (and yet more fundamentally) it is the site of a resistance to a specific conception of the economies of time. It has difficulty in conforming to this economic necessity of speeding-up production. No wonder, of course, in that, as one seated in a proto-electric chair, it realizes that its own very extinction is at stake. In this scene, his body cannot keep up with the regularized tempo of the machine; and, in a kind of exemplification of Bergson’s theory of comedy with its struggle for supremacy between the animate and the inanimate worlds, we get the predictably comic and chaotic results, though with highly serious intent. Chaplin is more or less

assaulted by the machine, unable to live up to its mechanical 'efficiencies'; as a result, he ends up unfed. For the bosses, of course, the problem is located not in the machinery but rather in the body of Chaplin; for Chaplin, and for the audience, it is the other way round. In these modern times, Chaplin's body is explicitly politicized (we have entered the realm of the bio-political); and the body is threatened with a starvation because of its failures to fit in, temporally, with the modern environment (its *Jetztzeit* is disruptive to the economy).

This fits in with an entire tradition of satire that goes back at least as far as Jonathan Swift, who also brilliantly satirized the attitude of the British to a victimized and starving Irish population and workforce, in his 'Modest Proposal'. One of the key elements in Swift's satirical writing, a writing that often punctured the self-important arrogance of those who believed they were in control of history, was the way in which he demonstrated a rift between the body and its machineries on one hand, and the mind on the other. Swift took delight in noting that, no matter how elevated the mind of the socially pretentious individual, his body still farted, say, despite the best endeavours of a presiding consciousness to ignore the fact or to control such involuntary necessity. We find a similar thing outside of satire, in Montaigne, for example, when he writes in 'On the power of the imagination' of sexual stirrings that happen 'despite' himself:

We have reason to remark the untractable liberties taken by this member, which intrudes so tiresomely when we do not require it and fails us so annoyingly when we need it most, imperiously pitting its authority against that of the will, and most proudly and obstinately refusing our solicitations both mental and manual.

From this, Montaigne derives the observation that, often, our bodies give away what is going on in our thoughts.¹ In yet more recent times, we find the same thing happening in Beckett, whose tramps especially find themselves or their bodies breaking with convention, and sometimes breaking wind as they do so. All through this satirical tradition, what is happening is the establishment of a discrepancy between a world of interiority and an external or public sphere. More pointedly for our purposes, what is happening is what we might call an *unintentional confession*, in which the body makes public that which the mind would have wanted to keep private. As Montaigne puts it in the essay, 'How often do the involuntary movements of our features reveal what we are secretly thinking and betray us to those about us!'²

Perhaps a more precise way of describing this is to suggest that the body enters into the realm of history, one of the first effects of which is to *establish* a separation between the public sphere and an interior realm of secrecy. Once the body acts, as it were, this very division or spatial conceptualisation of the world comes into being. Another way of putting all of this, of course, is to follow Jameson in saying that 'History is what hurts', though clearly this was not entirely what Fredric Jameson had in mind when he came up with that

formulation.³ We might even think of illness itself as the body's method of establishing a division between public and private space, and with it the idea that there is a presiding consciousness that inhabits a different order of being from the body.⁴

Film from the early silent era is especially pertinent here. The technology of cinema in those early days is such that the visual – and in Chaplin's case, specifically the body of the tramp-figure – has to do two things at once: it must be a part of the public realm, the world of exteriority or of nature and history, while simultaneously revealing the existence of a private realm, the world as seen from the point of view of Chaplin's characters themselves. The Chaplin example in *Modern Times* shows that, even in a part-talkie such as this, what is at stake is not just the comic Bergsonian relation between body and machine but, perhaps more fundamentally, the question of temporality itself.⁵ What the modern world discovers or reveals, and what it also cannot easily bear, is that the ostensibly single and commonly shared space of the real can be lived at different times and at different speeds.⁶

Perhaps a yet more precise way of putting this might be to say that the temporal order of the private realm need not coincide with that of the public sphere. It is, in fact, the necessity of a discrepancy between these two orders of time that constitutes 'character' or, in more advanced terms, 'identity'. The *distance* or *décalage* between the public and private establishes the specific individuality of particular private orders of time, particular individuals. Individual characters are individuated precisely to the extent that they establish discrepancies between each other with respect to the relative speed at which they live history, and also in terms of their relations with what they perceive to be the more objective speed of the world of the public sphere. That is to say that the public sphere is not made up of individuals who all *simultaneously* reveal their inner conscience; rather, the public sphere is that arena in which power can be established through a play of forces in which individuals reveal or 'confess' themselves *but do so strategically*. The strategy in question relates to the time or moment in which a confession is made. This is nowhere clearer than in declarations of love or of violence.

If it is the case that the body helps to establish not only a distinction of inner and outer worlds, but also a potential discrepancy between them, then it follows that the way in which each body relates to the world need not entirely coincide: we experience or live the world at different paces, therefore. Capitalism, however, with its three eight-hour shifts proposed as a kind of advance on the monastic organization of the day marked by prayer, requires its subjects, its victims, its children, to live at a regularizable speed.⁷ That is to say: capitalist society requires that we subscribe to the belief that our confessions can all be coincident with each other, that they are all made *as if at the same moment*. In this way, confessional culture begins its steady trajectory towards the positive validation and evaluations of an ideology of *transparency*.

Chaplin appears to be fully aware of these issues, and *Modern Times* marks an awareness of the possibility that the material body itself, with all its idiosyncratic particularity, might be the site of a resistance to such regularity, such regulation. The body, that is, might prove to be the site of opacity rather than of revelation; and it might thus start to become a bulwark against the *intrusions* of the public sphere. Crucially, of course, it is the recognizable body of Chaplin – the awkward gait, the moustache, the ill-fitting jacket, the boots – which constitutes his specific cinematic and visual identity; and the tenor of the film is that precisely this kind of personal identity – and the realm of interiority, the realm of a private life, even the realm of silent contemplation – is under threat in the mid-twentieth-century condition of capital. In this cinema, it is taken for granted that the saving of such identity is a good thing. Among many other things, *Modern Times* is about the determination to maintain the possibility of a private realm, of a world that is not always already ‘owned’ and controlled by the demands of the public sphere or of capitalist politics.

For the purposes of this present chapter, the single most significant aspect of this is the link between personal identity and temporality, and the link between these and *silence*. Subjectivity is constituted culturally upon the sense that each individuated subject’s ‘inner’ temporality is the determining instance of identity as such, even when it may be at odds with the hypothetical ‘outer’ or social temporality of the world of objects. Much of the interest of modern and of modernist fiction lies precisely in this fact and in this constructed discrepancy between inner and outer times, as Virginia Woolf famously indicated⁸. Yet it would also be fair to claim that the tension between such a double order of temporality – inner versus outer, personal versus social – is the very condition of modern fictional narrative, especially as it is formulated in the novel from the eighteenth century to present times, as I have argued earlier in my description of the rise of character or of the self-as-point-of-view. In what conventionally constitutes both ‘realism’ and ‘naturalism’, the text finds ways of bringing together the two temporal orders in harmony, usually through the ostensible prioritization of an external temporality to which the central character must, in time, conform.

Yet, to drive a character to ensuring that their identity ‘conforms’ to the identity of a public sphere is, of course, itself tantamount to silencing the character. Against this, a positive silence can be a powerful means of retaining a private realm, even a private life. In religious terms, a confession is a way of saying something while simultaneously and paradoxically maintaining a silence about it. The confessor is there not to hear, but rather to be the earpiece of a god: that is, the confessor ‘hears’ what the confessant says; but does not hear it in the way of a standard conversation. The confessant knows that they can say anything safe in the knowledge that their saying it does not allow it to pass into the public sphere. The confessional is a site of an essential silence. That is to say: the confessional box represents a *reduction* of space and of

time: it is a 'here-now' that cannot be represented (its words cannot be rehearsed again, for the confessor is sworn to silence), and it is thus a kind of space that is nowhere: a utopia.

A good example for discussion of the stakes here is Francis Ford Coppola's 1974 film, *The Conversation*. Ostensibly a film about surveillance, it becomes – explicitly at one point – a film about the act of confession and the issues of silence for the witness. The film opens with a long-distance aerial shot of a busy lunch-time scene in Union Square, San Francisco. We hear the fragments of conversation, the noise of musicians and the general hubbub of the square. Gradually, at the bottom left-hand corner of the square and of the screen, we see the figure of a street mime-artist. His mime involves the imitation of the walking style of passers-by, picking up their body movements and walking characteristics and following them. The imitation is amusing in itself, and it also serves to draw attention to the sensuality of the body. The mime artist is, as it were, the silent witness who, in following precisely the passers-by, gives them a 'character'. In the moments between his acts, when he is looking out for the next walk to imitate, he goes into a kind of default position of walking around in imitation of the famous gait of Charlie Chaplin.

It is this mime-artist who brings the film's central character, Harry Caul (Gene Hackman), into the film. As Caul enters the frame and the square, the mime follows him: it is as if Caul is being 'introduced' into the film itself by Chaplin. The plot of the film requires Caul to record a single conversation that is going on in the square. The couple talking together are randomly walking around ('in circles', as one of them repeatedly says), and so their voices are not only difficult to follow but at times also virtually inaudible under the general cacophony of the square's activities. Caul deploys sophisticated techniques, recording from multiple sources, and then, in the privacy of his editing-room, putting together a full conversation. The client who has hired him to do this is referred to simply as 'the Director'; and we, along with Caul, gradually discern that 'the Director' suspects his wife (one of the participants in the conversation) of infidelity.

Caul is haunted by a memory of an earlier surveillance job in which three people were killed; and, as he carries out this particular project, he begins to fear that the couple whom he has recorded are in similar danger. The question for him is one of responsibility: he repeatedly asserts that 'I don't care what they're talking about. I just want a nice fat recording'; and yet he gets insistently caught up in imagining the backdrop to the conversation. The couple make an assignation to meet in the Jack Tar Hotel, room 773; Caul takes the room next door and goes to work trying to bug the events in their room by listening through a device that he plants in the wall between the rooms. He recoils in horror as he hears the tape of the Union Square conversation being played; and imagining that 'the Director' is confronting the couple with their sexual betrayal of him, Caul visualizes the Director murdering the wife.

However, when he goes to confront the Director, it emerges that he has misconstrued the central action: the couple, in fact, have murdered the Director, with the assistance of the Director's assistant, Martin Stett (Harrison Ford); and Caul himself becomes the victim of surveillance, as he receives a phone call from Stett telling him that he is being watched all the time from now on, since he knows the secret of the murder.

At one level, then, this is a straightforward thriller plot. Yet it is also a good deal more than that; and it becomes a story explicitly about the relation between the examination of conscience and questions of surveillance, the relation of confession to conversation in a public square (a 'Union' square) and a culture of transparency. Caul is a Roman Catholic, upset at any hint of blasphemy. Throughout the film, he wears a plastic mac, regardless of the weather; but the striking thing about the mac is that it is transparent, and the lighting plays on that transparency throughout. The narrative is set around Christmas time, and we find out that this is also Caul's birthday. We thus have a quiet relation established between Caul and a Christ-figure of sorts. At the end of the film, when Caul effectively trashes his own apartment looking for the bugs that are keeping him under surveillance by Stett, he protects (until the very last moment) a small kitsch statue of the Virgin Mary. When he eventually smashes this too, he discovers that it is empty.

The essential thing about *transparency* is not just that it reveals the inside of something; rather, the essence of transparency is that it does this *immediately*. That is to say, transparency is related to the immediacy of the moment: it literally takes no time at all to see what is going on inside something or inside someone's head. However, as in Chaplin's *Modern Times*, Coppola's film here indicates that such revelations *take time*: it takes a long while, with much *stammering* and repetitions of parts of his three recordings, for Caul to reconstruct or to hear the conversation in the square. Further, the demand for transparency occurs when one feels that there is something being occluded, some obscure *mystery* that needs to be opened up. Such a mystery, within Catholicism, is that of a Virgin birth; but Caul discovers the vacuity of his statue: there is nothing inside, and the only individual whose birth is in question here is already outside, in the external world: Caul himself.

At a crucial moment in the film, Caul goes to confession. We see him in the tiny space of the confessional box, trying (and not quite managing) to confess to what is really on his mind, which is the question of his potential responsibility for the death of three people in the earlier job and the potential death of two more now. Crucially, as this scene flows, the camera focuses less and less on Caul's face and we start to see, emerging in the background, the woven net, the semi-transparent wall, that separates his mouth from the ear of the priest on the other side. As this comes more into focus, we also see the ear of the priest. Importantly, though, the priest remains in total silence. This is the silence of the witness.

This scene is ‘matched’ by that in which Caul eavesdrops on events in the Jack Tar Hotel room. When he hears his own tapes being played, he is in the position of the priest in the confessional; but, unlike the priest, he tries to drown out what he can hear. He determinedly plays the TV very loudly and buries his head under the bed-covers. As this scene closes, we overhear a news item on the TV: it is about President Nixon.⁹ Yet more telling, however, is that in his efforts to overhear events next door, Caul has to get himself into the tiny space underneath the bathroom sink. There, he sits crouched in what is essentially a foetal position, overhearing an adult conversation outside of his body, but in a voice that he himself has already captured and whose words he has internalized, as if he himself could say them. It is this voice – essentially now his own voice – that he must stifle.

As the film closes, he realizes that he is himself forever under surveillance; and thus he can no longer speak at all. The closing scenes leave him, in his destroyed apartment, playing his sax while the camera swivels around, exactly like a street surveillance camera. He has been reduced to an essential silencing of his voice. He has become the mime-artist who introduced him to the film in the opening sequence. Instead of a voice that makes sense, we have a sax that plays sensuality. At this stage, the film becomes one less about conversation and more about the silence that constitutes witnessing; but, as with all witnessing, the witness who is reduced to silence nonetheless experiences the demand to speak. It is this tension that the film captures.

The silence of the witness is what allows a confession to take place; but the question is whether that conversation takes place in a crowded public sphere, a sphere governed by the temporality of a dilatory time in which things are not ever transparent, or whether it takes place under the sign of a non-secular ‘eternity’ in the confined space of the confessional, where the public is emptied of significance and emptied of time, and where the relation to a transcendent God-figure is determining.

Of wit, witchcraft and capital

This is not just a cinematic phenomenon, nor is it simply of recent date. At roughly the same time as when the modern novel formulates itself into a recognizable ‘character-based’ genre, philosophers such as Hume were pondering the temporal condition of personal identity. He contests those philosophers who make a foundational principle of the self, claiming instead that we are but a succession of perceptions:

self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos’d to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro’ the whole

course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time.¹⁰

Here, Hume asserts that the very condition of temporality, in the form of temporal succession, may constitute a narrative, but cannot found that narrative upon the supposed stability or identity of something called a permanency of self. Consequently, what he calls 'succession' shapes the very idea of selfhood: it can never be, in the terms I am using here, *immediate* or *transparent*. It is, if you will, a position that either retains such a stability and ascribes it to the condition that we conventionally call God, or that acknowledges that such a position simply does not exist. He goes on, in a fashion proleptic of Woolf and, later still, of Deleuze, to claim that 'I may venture to affirm to the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.'¹¹

It is in the face of this scepticism that the *fiction* of a self must be constructed; and one might venture so far as to affirm that the novel exists in answer precisely to this difficulty of considering the self as a entity that is dissolved in or attacked by the fact of temporality. The novel is one of the first 'strategies of containment' in the face of an emergent sceptical and anti-foundationalist philosophy. What it 'contains' is the dissolution of identity through the strategy of insistence upon an essentially autobiographical fiction. In a deconstructive manoeuvre, the self – ostensibly threatened by the temporality of the narratives of successive experience which produces a personal history – becomes, in the novel, the condition of the possibility of narrative itself.

Such manoeuvring comes under further pressure in the twentieth century, when the temporal dimension of fiction is often thematized and foregrounded. Proust's great text, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, offers a time that overlaps with itself, giving us continuous present moments that act as a repository of the past while being simultaneously an enactment of the present. Joyce organizes *Ulysses* around a classical framework of twenty-four hours, simultaneously stressing the specificity of 16 June 1904 and aligning its every moment with a mythic classical precursor. Woolf repeatedly celebrates the transitory and evanescent series of fleeting moments that fail to amount to a chronology. The later *nouveau roman* in France, much influenced by these modernist writings (as we have already seen in the case of Perec), experiments with what Nathalie Sarraute described as temporal *Tropismes*, with repetitions and contradictions whose point is the rupturing of any kind of linear temporality, progress or developmental narrative. In mid-twentieth century Europe and the United States, theoretical feminism starts to argue against the construction of time as simply linear, claiming that such linearity is intimately associated with masculinism; and the effect of this theoretical move is to reassert the link between time and the (now gendered) body. No longer can time be construed

in fiction as the expression of an immaterial subjectivity (*durée*) but rather as a corporeal experience, tied firmly to material history and especially to the materiality of that history as it is inscribed on the body.

This, I stress, is not a new issue; rather, it is the condition of the problem of narrative itself. For random examples, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* offers us a central character whose somatic experience is every bit as firmly tied to temporality – to delay and deferral – as Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* is as conditioned by contradictory time – if in different corporeal ways – as is Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo*. Yet, in every case, no matter the historical period, what is fundamentally at issue is the construction of a philosophy of identity; and what is engaged is the strategy of containment which cannot bear the anti-foundational impetus uncovered by Hume. The result is that narrative, paradoxically, while being conditioned necessarily by temporality ('what happens next?') is nonetheless also the site for the circumvention of temporality and of its effects. Narrative is thus a kind of 'scandal' which allows a culture to believe that it is fully facing up to the facts of temporality (i.e. fully facing up to the eventual fact of death), allowing it also to believe that it has countered the dangerous or menacing effects of time on personal identity, while actually being engaged in a project of denial of temporality as such.¹²

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the great modern form of the *Bildungsroman* where, as Franco Moretti has convincingly argued, the entire temporal dimension is always subservient to a spatial organization of the network of social relations.¹³ The central characters of the *Bildungsroman* find themselves on the margins – or sometimes 'outside' – of their society or community. They lack authority or legitimacy, often by dint of the fact of their relative youth: typically, when we meet the character, they are at the early stage of maturity. Accordingly, lacking in recognition and legitimacy by the social formation, and feeling themselves to be on the outside of it, they must use their time in order to establish the proper relation or distance with regard to that community. Typically, then, the character undergoes what I have called the *crisis of intimacy*; and it is by finding an appropriate or 'proper' place in such a community, often through a marital or otherwise erotic engagement with one who is perceived to be already 'on the inside', that the character resolves their difficulties of identity and of legitimation.¹⁴ This most temporal of narrative forms is actually a cover for the establishment of a kind of spatial consensus-formation, in which 'outsiders' can be accommodated; and the accommodation in question is one that gives them their identity – and with it their authority – explicitly as 'insiders', in agreement with the dominant norms of their social formation. In this, the outsider fundamentally has to ignore their own inner temporality (their youth, say), and to regulate themselves with respect to the social formation: they internalize its ideology, and thus become themselves internal to that ideology, accepted within the society. This is what we saw being

deplored by Chaplin, and more specifically by Chaplin's body, of course, in *Modern Times*. It is that condition in which a Harry Caul tries to prioritize the non-secular relation established by confession-as-examination-of-conscience over the opacities of a public sphere in which dilatory time ensures that the private is not always immediately revealed or in which transparency becomes the poor substitute for truth.

The most successful explanation of these suppressed temporalities, and the philosophy which 'excuses' our ignoring the anti-foundational condition of the temporal or historical subject, is phenomenology. In the work of Georges Poulet, Jean Pouillon, Jean-Pierre Richard, A.A. Mendilow and, more recently, Paul Ricoeur, we see the explication of modern and modernist time in terms of the experience of temporality by a subject of consciousness which takes its identity in relation to whatever it construes as its objects: such an experience is always conditioned by the subject's 'point of view' upon an essentially stable order of objects in the world.¹⁵ The experience of time has given way to an experience of distance or perspective upon the objects which are thought to constitute the real.¹⁶ In such a manoeuvre, this historicity of both the real and of the subject can be evaded. The result is that time is homogenized in what is fundamentally that *theological* version of time that Auerbach characterized as 'figural' time.¹⁷ How might we recuperate a heterogeneous time which lies repressed under the predilection for a spatial consciousness whose function appears to be the preservation of a philosophy of identity in the face of the anti-foundationalisms that, after postmodernism, we now know very well?

Michel Serres argues for a different and less homogeneous (or transparent) sense of the temporal. He indicates that the past is not necessarily always finished with, and that different levels of time can overlap with each other. He offers the simple example of the modern car which, though apparently merely a twentieth-century phenomenon, nonetheless is temporally much more complex:

elle forme un agrégat disparate de solutions scientifiques et techniques d'âges différents; on peut la dater pièce à pièce; tel organe fut inventé au début du siècle, l'autre il y a dix ans et le cycle de Carnot à presque deux cent ans. Sans compter que la roue remonte au néolithique

It forms a disparate agglomeration of scientific and technical solutions from different ages; you can date it bit by bit; such and such a component was invented at the start of the century, another piece ten years ago and the Carnot cycle nearly two hundred years back. Not to mention the wheel, which goes back to neolithic times.¹⁸

He corroborates a view that a linear conception of time marked under the sign of constant progress and 'modernization' is inherently theological.¹⁹ He argues that this mode of thinking is that of 'breaks' or 'ruptures', progressive steps:

Entre l'Antiquité mythique et la science contemporaine, intervient une fracture qui rend à la fois le passé révolu et le présent véridique. Cette thèse m'a toujours

paru de l'ordre de la religion: entre un archaïsme perdu et l'ère nouvelle, il y a un événement, la naissance d'un nouveau temps.

Between mythic Antiquity and contemporary science, we have the intervention of a break that both renders the past superseded and the present veracious. This thesis has always seemed to me to be of the order of religion: between a lost archaism and the new era, there is an event, the birth of a new time.²⁰

The very notion of progress is one that produces an alleged or implied intimacy between the present moment and truth itself, such that to be in the 'now' is to be in the know as well. Such Optimism, in philosophical terms, is fundamentally religious, and also fundamentally non-historical, in a paradoxical sense. We have here, according to Serres, not time at all, but rather simply a form of *violence*:

Ce n'est pas là le temps, mais une simple ligne: ce n'est même pas une ligne, mais la trajectoire de la course à la première place, à l'école, aux Jeux Olympiques ou au prix Nobel. Ce n'est pas du temps, mais le simple jeu de la concurrence: encore la guerre ... Plus profondément: seul, en effet, le temps peut rendre compossibles deux choses contradictoires; exemple: je suis jeune et vieux; seule ma vie, son temps ou sa durée, peut rendre ces deux propositions cohérentes entre elles; l'erreur de Hegel fut de renverser cette évidence logique et de prétendre que la contradiction produit le temps, alors que l'inverse seulement est vrai, que le temps rend possible la contradiction. D'où toutes les absurdités racontées depuis lors sur la guerre, mère de l'histoire.

This isn't time, but a simple line: it's not even a line, but the trajectory of the race for first place, at school, at the Olympic Games, or for the Nobel Prize. It is not time, but the simple play of coincidence: war again ... More profoundly: in fact, only time can make two contradictory things able to coexist; for example: I am young and old; only my life, in its time or duration, can make these two propositions cohere with each other; Hegel's mistake was to overthrow this logical evidence and to pretend that contradiction produces time, when in fact only the inverse is true, that time makes contradiction possible. From this come all the absurdities recounted ever since about war as the mother of history.²¹

A different conception of time is implied by this Serresian logic. According to this, the present can never simply be the present in all its supposed transparent identity. As we have seen before, the present cannot coincide with itself: *now is always then*. The present is marked by the contradiction of difference; and, further, such contradiction is fundamentally the counter to a more primal violence or to a 'war-mentality' which more usually conditions our ideological formulations regarding temporality or progress or history as endless chronicle or 'annalistic' movement. For Serres, the presence of the past is as important as the presence of the present; and it follows from this that we might attend to our experience of time, time as it is lived, as being never constituted simply or purely by a present tense that is considered as some kind of advance on the past.²² Every moment as it arises opens a new present or a new set of temporal possibilities, relations, intimacies; and, consequently, history 'eventuates' or

actually happens – that is, takes place as an event – when we are made aware of the inter-relation between two or more temporalities. This is close to what André Gide might have meant when he described his ideal novel as one where the plot would not cohere, where ‘*l’action ne s’engagera pas*’. It is also closer to the notion of time that we see in some other great literary modernists, like the Eliot of the opening of *Four Quartets* or of Proust.

In *Le temps sensible*, her great study of Proust, Julia Kristeva proposes something similar to Serres when she asks:

En effet, dans quel temps vivez-vous? Dans quel temps parlez-vous? Un dictateur nationaliste, qui a vite fait de répandre l’intégrisme, vous rappelle un Moyen Age inquisitorial ... Nous vivons une chronologie disloquée qui n’a pas trouvé son concept.

In fact, in what time do you live? In what time do you speak? A nationalist dictator, who has quickly moved to spread integrationism, recalls for you an inquisitorial Middle Ages ... We inhabit a dislocated chronology that has not found its concept.²³

Two competing notions of history are at work in these different conceptions of time. The first, marked by Optimism and contaminated by religion, is that accepted by many forms of leftist ‘historicizing’ criticisms. It reveals a narrative of history whose truth is fundamentally guaranteed by the fact that it is the latest version of events. This is the truth of the modernists, as satirized by Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*, when his author, the protagonist in another battle between times or between ancients and moderns, writes that ‘I here think fit to lay hold on that great and honourable privilege of being the last writer. I claim an absolute authority in right, as the freshest modern, which gives me a despotic power over all authors before me.’²⁴ In this manner of thinking, time is *only ostensibly* heterogeneous, for the different times of the past are all guaranteed as fundamentally homogeneous by the *identity* of the subject who narrates them: by definition, ‘I’. This is, as it were, the author as guarantor of Auerbach’s figural time.

A surface level of difference, according to which we say that yesterday is different from tomorrow, is merely incidental to the identity formation of the subject in whose consciousness such differences are finally eradicated in the construction of an identity-position which makes a narrative sense of the world, and then claims this as the only – or totalizing – narrative sense of the world. Thus, the critical ‘I’ claims a truth grounded in that ‘I’, but a truth that is only a falsely constructed transparency. This critical ‘I’ confesses itself, reveals itself as the very substance of what it claims as history; but to do so it has to appeal to a now-time that is itself taken out of history and evacuated of content. This is the ‘I’ of Coppola’s confessional box: an I that has divorced itself from the public square and that gains its identity by an appeal to a transcendent and non-historical transparency or immediacy.

The second understanding of history here is one that is less concerned with the construction of a 'coherent' identity for the subject of its narrative. In contradistinction to the first, this second history is 'dislocated', in Kristeva's terms. It is a time which, in the language of Serres, makes contradiction – and hence criticism – possible.²⁵ With regard to time in fiction, the effect of this is the production of different types of plot-structure. Kermode described plot in terms of the minimal, yet substantive, distinction between the 'tick' and the 'tock' of a clock as it marks the movement of time. However (as I have argued at length elsewhere),²⁶ this structure is by no means universally accepted, nor has it even really been a normative structure for the novel, as we have inherited that form from the late Renaissance to the present day. What Kermode described was plot as the difference between a beginning and an ending; yet it is still clear that there remains a philosophy of identity and of 'self-sameness' here, for the beginning and ending are the beginning and ending always of *the same thing*, such sameness being the very condition that permits the perception of difference in the first place.²⁷ But what if 'your' end is 'my' beginning, or vice versa? What if the beginnings and endings are not contained within the one whole or structure: that is, what if these are historical beginnings and endings that do not necessarily coincide in an alleged single universal history? In this, the critic's 'confession' is a gambit in a conversation held in the public sphere.

The 'tick-tock' model of fictional time is one where plot is homogenized into a single and univocal sense. It is thus the structure usually ascribed to a hypothetical 'classical realist novel'. However, what is much more important for the development of this present argument is the element of *speed* in this. As A.A. Mendilow indicated in his early study of time in the novel, the word 'speed' is intimately related to the word 'success' or, as I would prefer it, 'succession' and successive time.²⁸ For instance, the plot of classic detective fiction operates according to a certain dynamic of speed and logic of succession: it is the task of the reader in this fiction to get one step ahead of the detective, to hasten things towards a resolution in which the disparate elements of the narrative or plot can fall into their 'proper' or assigned and definitive steps, ranged and rearranged in order to construct one vision of a single homogeneous and plenitudinous time: all moments accounted for, and all in their 'proper' and defined place. The element of suspense usually associated with such fiction is itself directly related to speed and to this hastening towards a teleological thinking whose guiding principle remains that of philosophical Optimism, and whose driving force is that of an alleged historical progress under the sign of a homogeneous, univocal – or, as we have seen already in Auerbach's expression, 'figural' – narrative. The plot structure of 'success' and 'succession' is one that operates as a guarantor of truth in the epistemology of fiction, for it produces the identity of the reading subject, and legitimizes such identity through the identification of the reader's temporal solution of the text with that of its focalizing point of view in the detective.

Of course, fiction does not always conform to this theoretical model. It is my contention that, within every such temporality of succession, there lurks an impetus to arrest time, to slow things down and to deny thereby the optimism implicit in the idea of universal history, progress and the accords of a univocal view of what constitutes the truth of the things of the world. This is most obviously laid bare in a fiction such as *Tristram Shandy*, where Laurence Sterne explicitly describes his preferred organization of plot as one based not upon progress but upon digression and deviation, and in which there are found many examples of the refusal to accept speed as the condition of narrative. Yet more important is the refusal to accept speed as the condition of the eventual marrying or coinciding or *intimacy* between text and reader that allows the reader to subscribe to a belief in a single universal history in which we can all be located as coinciding with each other or as living the same moment. Interestingly, this textual example, ostensibly about the identity of Tristram, denies the solace of such a good formal identity: not only does the text not really get any further than the day of Tristram's birth, it also gives the character the 'wrong' name, poses problems about the genealogical heritage of the character, and reduces identity to – at best – the notion of the 'hobby-horsical' obsessions of one such as 'my Uncle Toby'.

Sterne's text initiates a tradition that acts as a counter to the philosophy of identity at work in the temporality of fiction. That tradition has come to appear more and more insistently in writing that figures under the sign of the so-called postmodern. Stevens, for example, in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, undertakes a six-day trip whose temporal direction is consistently regressive; Tom Crick, in Graham Swift's *Waterland*, recounts a personal history whose roots lie in the ancient history of Fenland in a tale that is almost Faulknerian in its dilatory telling; Martin Amis, in *London Fields*, digresses in Dickensian serializing fashion, following that with a text whose temporal organization is explicitly backwards, *Time's Arrow*; and so on through many other less celebrated examples. In the latter part of this chapter, I will attend in some more detail to one paradigmatic text in this tradition, Ian McEwan's *The Child in Time*, in order to reveal more fully the stakes of this tendency to *slowing down*.

The Child in Time follows to some extent in a tradition associated with the postmodern in which the contemporary novel looks back to the great themes or forms of the past. While certainly not a novel in Linda Hutcheon's category of 'historiographic metafiction', nor Ackroydian *imitatio* such as *Hawksmoor*, nor yet a Barthian parody in the manner of *The Sot-Weed Factor*, it is nonetheless a text that tackles a great Victorian theme: the construction of childhood and the 'sentimental education' of one who thinks of himself as already sentimentally educated.

In some ways, the text is structured like a Victorian novel, though never quite as explicitly as in the case of Amis's *London Fields*, say. Where this latter almost

revels in its Dickensian scope, McEwan's novel prefers a tight organization, in which Hardy-esque scenes of déjà-vu overlap with events strongly linked by metaphorical coincidence or structural repetition. *The Child in Time* opens with the kind of random occurrence favoured by Woolf and theorized by Gide in his notebook for *Les faux-monnayeurs*, where he argued for the necessity of a plot in which '*l'action ne s'engagera pas*'.²⁹ In McEwan's case, the event is the disappearance of a child, which sets up the neo-Romantic quest structure that ghosts the novel; but, for McEwan's characters, such a structure is set up to engender not the keeping of an appointment or the establishment of a coinciding of the time of the child with that of her parents again, but rather a structure of *disappointment*. Kate, the child, is never seen again; and, to some extent, her disappearance is but the excuse for a narrative that does not concern her, that takes place as if in another time entirely.

McEwan, like some of his modernist precursors, is looking here for what is ostensibly a contradiction in terms: he seeks a plot that is 'un-preprogrammed' or *undetermined* while not yet being simply aleatory. This is a modification of conventional plotting, which we might think of as an organization of things based on the *magical* power that is metaphor. The time of metaphor is, of course, *immediacy*: metaphor brings together two ostensibly unrelated events or things and links them in a chronology that is instantaneous. Michel Butor explains something of what is at stake here in his *L'emploi du temps*, where his character George Burton outlines how detective fiction works:

tout roman policier est bâti sur deux meurtres dont le premier, commis par l'assassin, n'est que l'occasion du second dans lequel il est la victime du meurtrier pur et impunissable, du détective qui le met à mort... par l'explosion de la vérité ...

Le détective est le fils du meurtrier, Oedipe ... parce qu'il tue celui à qui il doit son titre ... parce que ce meurtre lui a été prédit dès sa naissance, ou, si vous préférez, qu'il est inscrit dans sa nature.

every detective novel is built upon two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is but the occasion for the second in which he is the victim of the pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective who puts him to death ... by the explosion of truth ...

The detective is the son of the murderer, Oedipus ... because he kills the person to whom he owes his identity ... because this murder has been predicted for him ever since his birth, or, if you prefer, it is inscribed in his very nature.³⁰

The detective is immediately – metaphorically – linked to the criminal in a way that brings their temporal existence into immediate relation: they live the same moment, as it were, just like Oedipus and Laius. Further, this Oedipal structure is one where not only is there a kind of interchangeability between Oedipus and Laius, between criminal and detective, but also (and more pertinent to our present argument), *time itself is controlled*, and controlled in such a way as to *prevent* any kind of event: '*ce meurtre lui a été prédit dès sa naissance*' ('this

murder has been *predicted for him ever since his birth*'). The character simply fulfils a pre-existing role, and realizes an essence that was always already there and latent; and this, of course, is anathema to action or event.

The temporal relation involved here is one that has been seen before, in the early modern period, for example. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is built upon precisely this metaphorical 'magical' structure, in which 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' is always already with us, as it were. The witches are there partly as a reminder that time itself is controlled; and, as they control it, urging it ever onwards to its predetermined fulfilment or resolution, so the future becomes the 'immediate', visible, here-and-now. The play is one in which there is no temporal dilation, no ability among any of the characters to slow things down such that they can be fully in their present tense. Always, the action is geared towards a future which insistently contaminates, infiltrates and, indeed, *informs* or gives an identity to the present moment.

This is the control of time and of speed; and there is a philosophy explicitly associated with such control; and that philosophy is capitalist through and through. Lyotard is interesting in this regard. Like the McEwan of *The Child in Time*, looking for the underdetermined event in his plot, Lyotard describes the 'event' of thinking – indeed, philosophy itself – as the unprogrammed, as the thought that answers to no predetermining theory or homogenizing force. Thinking, for Lyotard, aims not at the solace of the good form of consensus or of a truth that would not be subject to temporal difference, a truth that could be transparent, immediate and so self-evidencing that it means the end of persuasion; rather, it is always dissident precisely because, insofar as it is genuinely historical thinking, its content cannot have been entirely or purely predetermined by the circumstances that give it its occasion.

In his essay on 'Time Today', Lyotard argues against the Optimism and totalizing impetus of a Leibnizian monadology, claiming that the perfect monad (God) is an entity for whom time is an impossibility. For such an entity, as for the witches in *Macbeth*, all history is homogenized – *and thus cancelled* – under the sign of instantaneity. To think the world in the totalizing terms of Optimism or the monad or a single univocal and universal history – and, by analogy in passing, to think the novel in terms of predetermined 'Oedipal' plot – is to pretend or aspire to control the future, to deny its possibilities, and finally to foreclose the future to the extent that it actually comes 'before' the present. As he explains this, Lyotard is able to tie this attitude to temporality and the homogenization of history to a specific political or philosophical economy. Here is how he puts it:

what comes 'after' the now will have to come 'before' it. In as much as a monad in thus saturating its memory is stocking the future, the present loses its privilege of being an ungraspable point [a point that asymptotically disappears 'between' a past and a future] ...

Now there is a model of such a temporal situation. It is offered by the daily practice of exchange. Someone (X) gives someone (Y) an object *a* at time *t*. This giving has as its condition that Y will give X an object *b* at time *t1* ... the first phase of the exchange takes place if and only if the second is perfectly guaranteed, to the point that it can be considered to have already happened.³¹

The political dimension becomes clear and can be related directly back to the predicament in which we left Charlie Chaplin at the opening of this present chapter. If the future can be brought thus into strict intimacy with the present, we are in a situation governed by the excess of speed. Technological speed thus brings about the identification of times *t* and *t1*, to the point where they entirely coincide. At this point, if you will, Oedipus becomes his own father. Two consequences follow: first, the myth of the autonomy of the subject begins; secondly, history as such is eradicated. That is to say, the construction of the myth of modernity, characterized by the autonomy of the subject, finds that such autonomy is established at the cost of the possibility of historical agency. The modern malaise is that we become autonomous and free precisely at the point where we leave the arena in which such autonomy might count, in which we might actually do something.

Capital, whose value structures find their origins in the kind of exchange described by Lyotard, is thus complicit also with the eradication of history: paradoxically, this most energizing and mobile of political forms knows only the 'scandal' of time and permits only superficial historical change: indeed, as we already know, change at the level of the superstructure thrives on the monumental solidity and unchanging nature of the base. In these terms, capital is anathema to history for the simple reason that it cannot see the historical event in its singularity; capital requires the magic of metaphor, the programming of a future, the 'plotting' or spatialization of historical time if it is to survive.

At the opening to our cultural modernity, Shakespeare was already aware of something akin to this. In *Othello*, Iago knows well the political importance of time and speed. Having told Roderigo to put money in his purse – in passing, we should note the link to the economics of a situation – Iago urges patience in terms which make it clear that he knows the lessons that will soon be displayed in *Macbeth*, written and performed probably just a few years later. He tells Roderigo the difference between wit and witchcraft: the latter is immediate, rather like those Lyotardian exchanges or like metaphor; and thus, witchcraft is also like the operation of capital. The former, wit, depends however upon the dilations of time: 'Thou know'st we work by wit and not by witchcraft, / And wit depends on dilatory time.'

When the novel emerges as the dominant form of literary modernity, it emerges as a form that conventionally depends upon witchcraft, insofar as it depends upon the compression of time or speed: the reduction of the time of the plot into a single temporal moment, or into space. The novel conventionally

works by producing sets of ‘coincidences’, and the entire impetus of the structure is geared towards a speed in which the reader attempts to forestall, to ‘prevent’, the text’s resolutions through the witchcraft that we call prediction.

McEwan’s *The Child in Time* adopts a contrary principle to this principle of coincidence. Like a number of newer fictions, especially those associated with an experimentalism admittedly far removed from McEwan, this novel adopts the principle of *disappointment*. Where Beckett’s characters, Vladimir and Estragon, can console themselves in *Waiting for Godot* with the assurance that at least they keep their side of the appointment, here it is the failure to coincide that opens the text to temporality, playing its disappointments off against the more usual temporalities that we associated with modern narrative. *The Child in Time* is concerned with Iago’s ‘dilatory time’, with a time that will allow for an attention to the specificity of the singular event without always requiring that such an event finds a metaphorical correlate elsewhere which will give it significance or value, or which will reduce it to an element of our ‘understanding’. The novel is aware that there may be events that are simply not available for our understanding, or that are not there in order to be understood; rather, some events – insofar as they genuinely are historical events – are there to be undergone, experienced.

We have a number of examples of this dilation of time in McEwan’s text. Consider, for instance, the road traffic accident in which Stephen is involved. When Stephen is driving to see Julie on one occasion, a truck in front of him overturns and blocks the road. As he travels inexorably towards the truck, Stephen experiences the event – according to the standard and apocryphal view of these things – as one in which time is felt to slow down. The text emphasizes this tardiness, this duration which, in objective terms, is but a matter of seconds but which is experienced entirely differently:

In what followed, the rapidity of events was accompanied by the slowing of time ... Stephen headed into it [the truck] from a distance of less than a hundred feet and at a speed which he estimated, in a detached kind of way, to be forty-five miles an hour.

Now, in this slowing of time, there was a sense of a fresh beginning ... He had removed his foot from the brakes, reasoning – and it was as if he had just completed a monograph on the subject – that they were pulling the car to one side ... The whole experience had lasted no longer than five seconds. Julie would have appreciated what had happened to time, how duration had shaped itself around the intensity of the event.³²

Following this, Stephen helps the driver from the wrecked cabin of his truck. McEwan gives a lengthy description of how this is done, the effect of which is to increase the peculiarly realistic intensity of the event itself. Yet this is a scene that will later be realized as having been uncannily proleptic; but the important point for the present argument is that the prolepsis is unseen for the moment. At the time, it does not call out for any ‘magical’ or witchcraft-like

metaphorical completion in any latter narreme which will 'resolve' its function in the text. Instead, it is read simply as an episode marked by verisimilitude and intensity.

Towards the end of the novel, Stephen – and McEwan – will recall it for the reader when Stephen is delivering the child to whom Julie gives birth. The child's head as it emerges is paralleled with the head of the truck-driver in the crash. There, in the crash, we have seen the truck-driver's cabin, upside-down, crushed into a small space; and the truck-driver's head sticks out, awaiting what we can now see as a 'delivery' at the hands of Stephen. The effect of this structure, however, is almost precisely a counter to the 'magic witchcraft' structure of the capitalism of which the novel's content is critical. Where the capitalist organization of time gives a present tense whose function is to control the future and homogenize time, here, in McEwan, the future sends us back once more to the singular intensity of the primary or original event. Importantly, further, the future event does not 'redeem' the past by making a sense of it: on the contrary, the later event serves to enhance the peculiar particularity of the former event.

The effect of this narrative organization is to slow the reader down, to send them backwards in time – and backwards in the text – in order to appreciate once more and more fully the singular and radically heterogeneous intensity of the event of the accident on the road. This can be seen to be 'wittily' linked to the birth of Julie's and Stephen's second child; but it cannot be assimilated fully to that birth. It most certainly neither foretells nor structurally 'demands' or requires it. Neither the birth nor the accident is the product of the control of time; rather, they are the effects of its uncontrollability and of its dilation.

This backwards motion, or temporal dilation, is reflected in the larger scale of things by the trajectory of the character of Charles Darke. Darke, who reverts to childhood in a very unsettling fashion in the text, is seen to play out his adult life in a series of intense experiences whose value is increased precisely because he takes – or recaptures – the time required to indulge them, his own version of an earlier Proustian 'lost time'. The loss with which this text concerns itself is not just that of a child; rather it is a novel focused on the loss of *time* itself, on the loss of the kind of temporality that we experience in childhood, an open temporality that is pure history in the sense that, in childhood, we lack the necessary ability to make sense of one thing in terms of another.

We have another series of circumstances in this text, directly involving Stephen and his own birth, which will help attest to just such a claim. When Stephen visits Julie in the country, he stops near a pub called the Bell. The Bell marks time in this text in a very specific way. Stephen feels drawn towards the pub and, looking in through the window in a somewhat disturbed state of mind, he sees his parents. Here, he is not looking across space and not across a distance; rather, he is looking across time, though he does not yet know it. The significance of this event is once again delayed or deferred, and is to

be revealed only when his mother also looks across time, recapturing a lost moment when she informs Stephen that the matter of his own birth had been resolved when his parents sat in the Bell, and his mother 'saw' Stephen, not yet born, as she looked out through the pub's window. When the story is shared between them, much later in the text, Stephen's mother does not claim any kind of deep correspondence; rather, she contents herself by saying only that "It almost connects up ... Almost."³³

It is with his mother that Stephen establishes a deep temporal relation. Before she was married, her name was Claire Temperly, already suggestive of some notion of a 'clear time'. She works in a department store where she is praised for her punctuality; and her meeting with Mr Lewis, Stephen's father, comes about when she is transferred to the clock department of the store. She is a kind of repository or archive of time itself; and, insofar as Stephen's detective-like Oedipal position is confirmed, it is confirmed precisely by a *dis*-identification with his father, and by a close intimacy with the womb of his mother.

It is this intimacy that is played out in the pregnancy of Julie, of course. When Stephen makes his first visit to Julie in the country, the visit that is punctuated by the stop at the Bell, they make love. He plans to return later but fails to do so, delayed as he is by the road traffic accident. It is on his third visit, some nine months later, that Julie and he will rediscover the possibility of their relation. Julie had become pregnant as a result of their sexual relation in that first visit, and she now gives birth to the child who will certainly not be a replacement for the lost Kate, who will not act as any kind of magical or metaphorical redoubling of her, who will not make her loss in any way understandable or bearable, but who will open Julie and Stephen to the possibility once more of a future, to the possibility of their having a historical life. It is at the end of the text that we can see it all to have been a kind of intensely delayed and experienced present tense, from the moment of the disappearance of Kate to the moment in which their child is born. The structure is a kind of reverse-chronology, making its way from the disappearance of a child back to the moment of a child's birth; but it is vital to stress that the children in the case are not interchangeable, one not a substitute or representation of the other. The second child does not redeem the loss of the first. We do not have here anything as simple as a kind of flashback structure; rather, we have a narrative structure in which the same (the child) turns out to be different (not Kate), and in which time's passage is so arrested, so dilated, that it appears to stall and go backwards.

Finally, it is clear that there is a philosophy associated with this temporal dilation. In the countryside, Stephen stands alone at one moment and ponders that the place where he stands 'needed a child'. He goes on:

Kate would not be aware of the car half a mile behind, or of the wood's perimeters and all that lay, beyond them, roads, opinions, Government. The wood, this spider rotating on its thread, this beetle lumbering over blades of grass, would be

all, the moment would be everything. He needed her good influence, her lessons in celebrating the specific; how to fill the present and be filled by it to the point where identity faded to nothing.³⁴

It is the celebration of the specific, the ability to experience time itself, that Stephen is after here. The consequence of such an experience is, paradoxically, the loss of an identity; after all, identity requires that there be a coinciding between the I and time t and the I and time $t1$; and an attention to the particularity of the present precludes such identity being established. It is, in short, a celebration not just of heterogeneity as such, but of the heterogeneity of time that is proper history, and also the heterogeneity of the I that is always *becoming*, always differing from itself, always, thus, historical. I am not claiming here the validity of a kind of ‘intensity of the present’, for the text as a whole demonstrates clearly the points made by Serres and reiterated by Kristeva that the present is itself always already contaminated by other times. The present is not the site of identity at all but rather of difference in a specific form. Such difference is associated with what Clément Rosset called a form of ‘idiocy’: a specificity which, insofar as it is real at all, is thereby inimical to duplication, to representation, to metaphor – and hence to capital. Dilatory time offers the wit necessary to outwit the politics of the kind of government (recognizably Conservative and capitalist) deplored in *The Child in Time*. It allows for an opposition to the time that is being imposed on Charlie Chaplin as he sits in his high-chair, a high-chair that is really an electric chair, in *Modern Times*.

It is for this reason that slowing down offers a narrative politics whose impetus, perhaps paradoxically, can be called ‘progressive’. More importantly for the purposes of this book, it gives a historical dimension to any act of confession, making it an event in the public sphere.