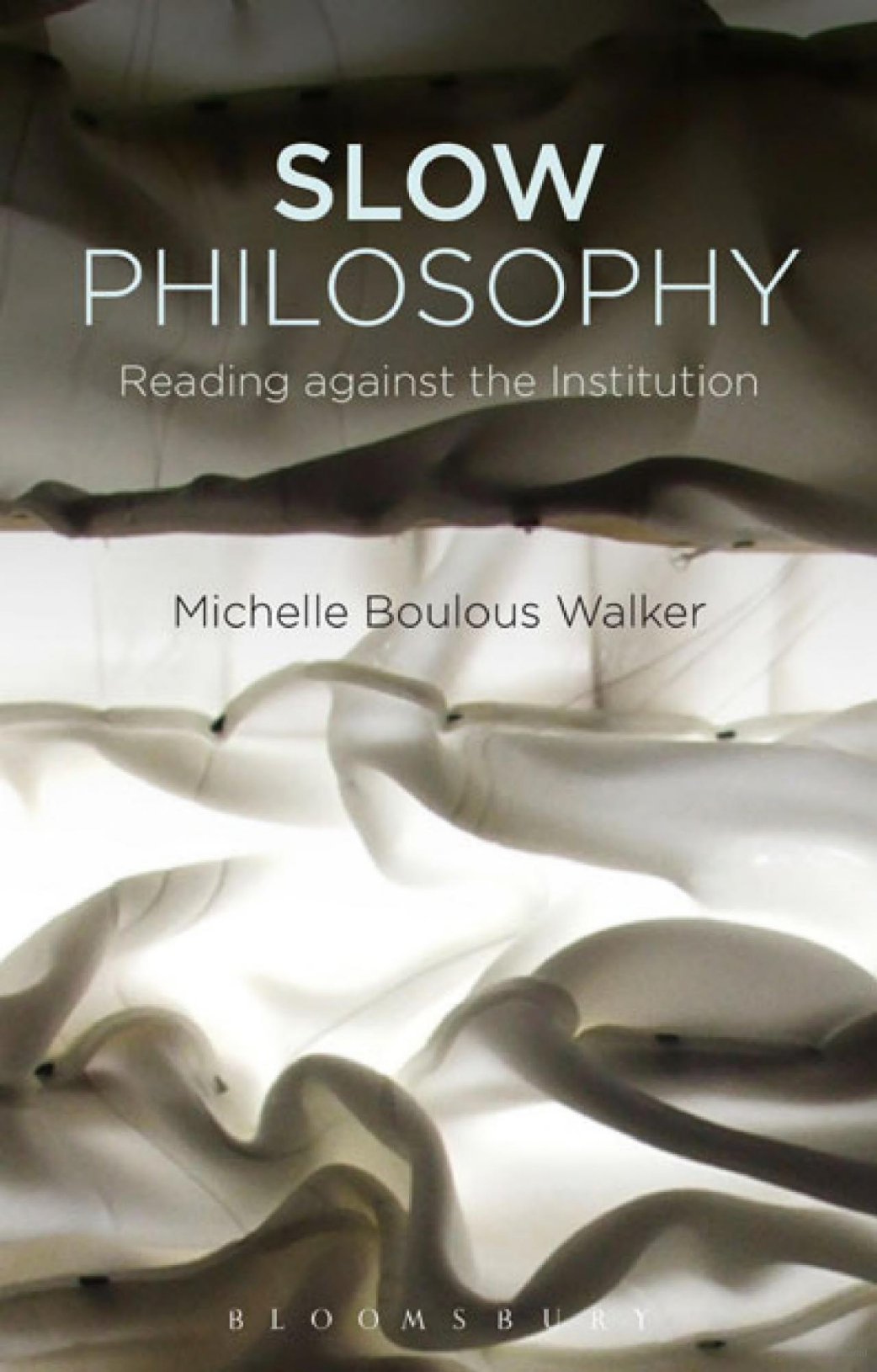
SLOW
PHILOSOPHY
Reading against the Institution
Michelle Boulous Walker
BLOOMSBURY

Slow Philosophy

Reading against the Institution

MICHELLE BOULOUS WALKER

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published 2017

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 9781474279918
PB: 9781474279925
ePDF: 9781474279901
ePub: 9781474279932

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by RefineCatch Limited, Bungay, Suffolk

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing is a thoroughly collaborate practice, despite our intuitions and prejudices to the contrary. In acknowledging this, I acknowledge the collaborative work that I have undertaken with Matthew Lamb, who has been a (slow) reader of extraordinary care and grace in relation to this work. I thank him most warmly for the ongoing opportunity to engage in dialogue and to experience the rare pleasure of thinking with another. I thank him, too, for his generosity and openness in an age where a competitive atmosphere haunts the modern institution, and all too often threatens the very fragile nature of intellectual collegiality. In addition, I thank Costica Bradatan for his intellectual belief in this work and his strategic genius in helping me to publish it. Working with Costica and Matthew constitutes one of the sustaining joys of my academic life. Another of these is the privileged relation of working with graduate students – and I thank the many young philosophers I have worked closely with over the years. They continue to inspire and sustain me. I thank them – past and present – most warmly, especially Laura Roberts, Emma Wilson, Mark Cutler, Marco Motta and Bryan Mukandi. I thank, additionally, the generosity and insight of colleagues who have worked with me, encouraged me, and – in some cases – commented on various drafts. I am greatly indebted to them for ongoing conversation and intellectual support. In particular I thank Fred D'Agostino, Anne Freadman, Caitlin Goss, Max Deutscher, Julie Kelso, Martin Lloyd, Nick Trakakis, Carole Ramsey, Ruth Hagengruber and Louis du Toit. I thank, too, my colleagues in the School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry, especially – though not exclusively, in philosophy. I thank particularly Clive Moore, Marguerite La Caze and Gilbert Burgh. I thank the following people who in various and diverse ways have supported me throughout the writing of this work: Anthony Ashbolt, Christine Barron, Sandi Black, Angela Hirst, Michelle

Irving, Margi Jones, Hilma af Klint, Thomas Kreutzer, David McMillan, Silvia Menjivar, Nyla Pusinsky and my beloved family. Importantly, I acknowledge and thank my Berlin connection, the scholars, writers and journalists who continue to nourish me intellectually and spiritually. I thank Sabine Sielke, Anne Haubek, Riikka Ala-Harja and Laurel Fulkerson. Finally, I thank Ellie Gleeson at *le mot juste* and my publishers and editors, Liza Thompson, Frankie Mace, Merv Honeywood and Carole Pearce at Bloomsbury for the care and attention they have brought to the publication of this work.

Thanks and acknowledgement to the following journals and publishing houses for permission to reprint revised versions of early work: Early versions of parts of chapter two and chapter three first appeared in different form as "An Ethics of Reading: Adorno, Levinas and Irigaray" in *Philosophy Today* 50(2) 2006: 223–38, "Becoming Slow: Philosophy, Reading, and the Essay" in *Antipodean Philosopher: Public Lectures on Philosophy in Australia and New Zealand* edited by Graham Oppy and N.N. Trakakis Copyright © 2011 (used by permission of Roman & Littlefield Publishing Group. All rights reserved), and "Imagining Happiness: Literature and the Essay" in *Culture, Theory and Critique* 54(2) 2013: 194–208 (reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis Ltd, www.tandfonline.com). An early version of part of chapter five first appeared in different form as "Love, Ethics and Authenticity: Beauvoir's Lesson in what it means to Read" in *Hypatia* 25(2) Spring 2010: 334–56 (reprinted by permission of John Wiley and Sons Inc).

Special thanks to Richard Flanagan and Vintage for permission to publish passages from *Gould's Book of Fish* (Sydney: Vintage 2012). These passages appear as epigraphs to each of the chapters in this book serving a purpose that is partially revealed in the conclusion.

PREFACE: WHY SLOW READING TODAY?

. . . an infinitely slow process of metamorphosis.

RICHARD FLANAGAN, *GOULD'S BOOK OF FISH*: 342

> I venture to suggest that our age threatens one day to appear in the history of human culture as marked by the most dramatic and difficult trial of all, the discovery of and training in the meaning of the 'simplest' acts of existence: seeing, listening, speaking, reading.[1]

Posing the question: what is it to read?

In his now notorious reading of *Das Kapital,* Louis Althusser, following what he sees to be Marx's lead, asks, 'what is it to read?' We may think of this as an innocent question, but in this same piece Althusser warns us that any philosophical reading must be distinguished from an innocent reading: '[A]s there is no such thing as an innocent reading', he writes, 'we must say what reading we are guilty of' (Althusser 1979: 14). It is not my concern here to follow the contours of the guilty reading that Althusser goes on to elaborate.[2] I merely suggest that his question, read in a certain way, makes it possible to explore some preliminary thoughts concerning the ethics of how we philosophers read. There is, indeed, no innocent reading – and by this I mean that how we read, how we approach and respond to a text, is more than casually significant. This ought to be a friendly warning for those philosophers who think of reading as, at best, a kind of neutral activity. It isn't, and I aim in this book to demonstrate why.[3]

In a film about the philosopher Hannah Arendt by the German director Margarethe von Trotta (Trotta 2012), Arendt is pictured

lying on a sofa, smoking. Nothing appears to be happening. Arendt, it seems, is thinking. The length of this scene is unusual when compared to contemporary mainstream cinema; a cinema characterized by 'activity' and 'action', narrowly defined. What is it about this image that unsettles? Time passes – and it does so slowly. In fact, temporality and its unique relation with thinking is a theme von Trotta weaves throughout the entire narrative of the film. Arendt is slow (painfully slow, from the perspective of those editing *The New Yorker*), in delivering what will to the larger reading public become her most controversial work – her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (Arendt 1963). From the perspective of those working at *The New Yorker*, Arendt's work is infuriatingly slow. For those with weekly, or even monthly, deadlines the reality of having to wait for Arendt's 'judgement' to arrive is a burden that positions those of us viewing the film between the seemingly everyday world of journalistic reality – with its deadlines and quick analyses – and the slow world of philosophical thought and judgement. Arendt's report arrives 'late' because her work – her thinking, willing and judging – is work that takes time. It is work that slows one, makes one slow.

I am interested to explore the interconnections between philosophy and slowness, and there are various reasons for this; reasons I discuss as the work unfolds. In essence, though, I am motivated to explore the ground between philosophy and slowness because it provides us with one way of asking questions about what philosophy is today. Within the modern institutional context, the nexus between philosophy and slowness has been seriously compromised. The pressing demands of time, efficiency and productivity make it more and more difficult to adopt a contemplative or intense attitude toward our work. So, in what follows, I explore how slow reading allows philosophy to embrace complexity within an institutional context dominated by speed and efficiency. I explore what it means to read slowly. To read carefully, to reread, and return to what one reads. I consider what philosophical reading is, and what we philosophers do when we read – how we read – because I believe these questions to be of importance to us all, and not only when we are reading philosophy. Why? Because reading is fundamental to the process not only of sound philosophical work and thought, but to the important work that a good many of us do, both inside and outside the university. For academic or professional readers, it is

what we do, and when our institutional structures make it less likely that we will do this well, problems follow. In the institutional context, such problems take the form of our reduced ability to encounter and work with complexity. Under situations of high time pressure, it becomes more and more difficult to engage with the complex and difficult in substantial and intense ways. Given that the encounter with complexity is one of the fundamental ways we think about philosophical work, then our diminished abilities to cope with this encounter are troubling, to say the least.

Another way of thinking about the problems that follow from our reduced opportunities to read slowly and to engage with complexity is to turn to Martin Heidegger's work on thinking and its relation with technology. Heidegger's insights into modern technological society have a bearing, I think, on what we could call the creeping technological nature of today's institutions. One of Heidegger's main observations is that our modern ways of being or existing are impacted upon by that aspect of technological life that reduces everything in its wake to a resource. Our understanding and our ways of being in the world are in danger of becoming technological themselves. Our very understanding is in danger of reducing the world in which we exist to nothing other than resource, or to what Heidegger refers to as 'standing reserve'. To reduce the world and our understanding of it in this way is to fail, in Heidegger's terms, to 'stay with things', to engage with the world in meaningful, non-utilitarian ways (Heidegger 1977: 3–35, 36–49). By striving for ever more speed, efficiency and interchangeability, this technological world-view makes objects or resources out of the things that have previously had meaning for us.

I think the malaise Heidegger identifies here echoes in many of our modern institutions, and that speed, efficiency and interchangeability characterize the dominant atmosphere or mood (*Stimmung*, Heidegger would say) of our contemporary universities. Indeed, we seem no longer to hear the danger (and irony) in expressions such as 'Human Resources'; and in our ever more futile attempts to 'stay afloat' in an age of 'Progress Reports' and 'Outcomes' both our teaching and our research suffer. This is, of course, intimately linked with what this means for our opportunities simply to think. Under conditions of time stress, it is harder for our work and our thinking to retain its ability to take new paths, to innovate, to question and to challenge. Heidegger's response to this technological reduction of

our being-in-the-world to 'resource' is to return to the things of the world. In his later work, he refers to this as 'dwelling' (Heidegger 2013: 141–59). We can think of dwelling as the philosophical attitude that involves 'staying with things', a receptive attitude of 'being-with' that makes authentic existence possible. This, like all good philosophy, takes time.

One of the ways that we can honour the kind of philosophical dwelling that Heidegger calls forth is to honour the temporality in which our everyday work occurs. The image of Hannah Arendt smoking,[4] immersed in thought, unproductive to the technological eye, may then serve as a (slow) call to arms. Honouring the rhythms and temporality of deep and careful thought – thought that is threatened by speed, efficiency and interchangeability – means, perhaps, honouring the importance of a slow engagement with the work that we do. In light of this, my call for slow reading is a political gesture as much as it is an aesthetic one. By engaging slowly, carefully and locally with the complex works that we read, by resisting the lure of 'institutional' readings, ones that reduce thought to information extraction or mining, we refuse or, at the very least, frustrate the modern technological drive that pillages thinking as a productive resource. Reading slowly and rereading, returning time and time again to read anew, we return, similarly, to the things in the world anew. Our slow and very local readings resist the all too familiar tone of those technological or instrumental readings that no longer share a relation with thought.

If philosophy involves the patience of 'sitting with' the world, then Heidegger is right to urge us to dwell, to stop, to reflect – to slow down. The slow and contemplative attitude that Virginia Woolf urges us towards, serves, too, to remind us to steep ourselves in the long and complicated process that reading ought to be. In this sense, slow reading would not simply mean always reading slowly, but would, rather, involve a preparedness to return time and time again to what we read. To attend to reading. We must, Woolf claims, 'wait for the dust of reading to settle; for the conflict and questioning to die down; walk, talk, pull the dead petals from a rose, or fall asleep' (Woolf 1925: 266). In the process of this slow and careful waiting (or attention) our dwelling with the world and with what we read returns. 'Then suddenly without our willing it, for it is that Nature undertakes these transitions, the book will return, but differently' (Woolf 1925: 266). Slow reading is, then, this waiting,

this attention, this dwelling that allows the world (and the book) to return to us differently – as thing, Heidegger would say, rather than as resource.

My interest in the intensity of slow reading comes out of a larger concern to re-engage with the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. As I explain in the Introduction, these moments sit in a complex relation with the instituted structure of philosophy reduced to the desire to know. Together, they comprise the institution of philosophy, the sedimented rules, regulations and habits that, over time, orient philosophical work towards established codes and behaviours – well-worn paths. My argument is that slow reading restores the relevance that the instituting moments no longer hold. Slow reading offers alternatives to the institutional readings that today occur within a culture largely dominated by efficiency, speed and haste.

Accordingly, I ask questions about what it means for philosophers to read. In a certain sense, I explore what philosophy is, and what philosophers do, by asking questions about the kind of reading or approaches to reading we undertake when we read works of philosophy, or when we read philosophically. In the process, I explore what might be termed 'an ethics of reading'. I look into the consequences of dominant institutional practices on the way that philosophers learn to read, suggesting that a contemporary 'corporate' orientation can compromise or undermine our otherwise positive engagement with the processes that structure our work. My work aims to provoke philosophers to think, in a more focused way, about the practice of reading. Given that reading is so central to the work that we as theorists and writers do, my hope is to open the question of reading out to the scrutiny of the ethical domain. In this sense, the study has relevance well beyond the sphere of philosophical discussion and debate. It will be of interest to all who read.

Throughout the work I explore reading in strategic and practical ways, engaging with the thought of some key philosophers and theorists. Friedrich Nietzsche, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Emmanuel Levinas, Theodor W. Adorno, Luiz Costa Lima, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Simon Critchley, Robert Musil, Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, Kristof Ziarek, Michèle Le Dœuff, Hélène Cixous, Teresa Brennan and Simone Weil serve as inspiration for developing practices or habits of slow reading, ones that engage the philosopher

ethically. In focusing on an ethics of reading that manifests as 'slow reading' or slow philosophy, I offer a pedagogy, exploring how we can facilitate open, engaged and unhurried readings of complex texts and how this can be used both to initiate and invite others into an ethical community of readers. I argue that the significance of slow reading is linked to our desire to be changed or even transformed by our encounter with complex and demanding works.

In what follows I offer:

1. An account of how slow reading re-engages the instituting moments of philosophy as a love of wisdom and a way of life, rather than simply as a desire (or a need) to know.
2. An exploration of slow reading as a transformation of the philosopher from one existential state to another.
3. An alternative, more contemplative and ethical way of doing philosophy in an age of speed and haste.
4. An exploration of the importance of unhurried time in establishing our institutional encounters with complex and demanding works.

About the chapters

In the Introduction I offer a series of preliminary thoughts that serve to frame the work on ethics and slow reading that the book undertakes. As I have briefly mentioned, it is here that I explore the complex interplay between the instituting moment of philosophy as a love of wisdom and the instituted structure of philosophy as a desire or a need to know. I argue that by re-engaging the instituting moments or guiding idea of philosophy, slow reading reminds us that a love of wisdom ought be more than, in Wlad Godzich's terms, 'curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns' (Godzich 1994: 237). I explore Pierre Hadot's argument that a love of wisdom is transformative, propelling the philosopher from one existential state to another. I make a case for a modern reclaiming of the term 'slowness', placing my philosophical discussion alongside popular research emerging between the specialist discourses of neuroscience and psychology (Kahnemann, McGilchrist, Wolf) and educational research exploring reading in contemporary institutional contexts

(Bauerlein, Kamuf). From here I discuss slow reading in terms of how philosophers read, engaging briefly with Ludwig Wittgenstein's 'slow cure'. I explore what makes slow reading ethical. To this end I draw on Virginia Woolf's essay 'How to Read a Book', noting with interest the three phases of reading she describes. I raise preliminary questions concerning the reduction of reading to crude scientific accounts of information extraction, asking what this means for reading in relation to the institution. Here I bring the work of Simon Critchley and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht into play. I consider Critchley's plea for reconnecting with the pleasures and intensities of teaching in order to resist the instrumental modes of exchange that threaten to dominate the institutional practice of philosophy. In Gumbrecht's work I explore the importance of unhurried time in setting up our institutional encounters with complex and demanding works. Following his association of complex encounters with aesthetic experience, I explore the pedagogical importance of Friedrich Nietzsche's untimely reading – his desire 'to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers' (Nietzsche 1982: 5).

In Chapter One I return to the complex relation between the instituting moments and instituted structure of philosophy, arguing that we can see the transformative work of wisdom at play in what I refer to as Michèle Le Dœuff's 'habits' of reading. I argue that her approach to philosophy as 'work', and her belief that this involves shifting thinking from one stage to another, helps us to appreciate the transformation that propels the philosopher from one existential state to another. Additionally, it helps us to think about what slow reading achieves. I explore Le Dœuff's work on philosophy as discipline in order to identify the dual aspects of the tradition. On the one hand, those aspects of the institution that work to hurriedly close down our engagement with complexity (old habits), and on the other, those moments where an open and engaged thought is evident (new habits). I argue that in her own practice, Le Dœuff demonstrates a reading that we can think of as slow. Her tendency to patiently return, reassess, reconsider and re-engage with texts is a 'habit' of reading – or a practice of reading – that serves her well. These habits effectively slow down reading. Alongside these habits, I explore Le Dœuff's work on the gendered nature of reading in the history of philosophy. Le Dœuff's observation that: 'Men treat the text familiarly and knock it about happily' while 'women treat it

with a politeness' is the starting point for new ways of thinking about a future philosophy: new, more modest and less pretentious approaches to thought. Attentive politeness, if not swamped by a 'timidity' or a 'desire to flatter', can lead, Le Dœuff claims, to a form of reading that can 'produce great successes' (Le Dœuff 1989: 124). The fact that these successes are often overlooked by a philosophical discipline that privileges the masculinity of authoritative interpretation over the femininity of receptive reading is a cause for concern. I explore the links between Le Doeuff's work on politeness and my own work on slow reading, suggesting that slow reading cultivates, in the first instance, a receptive attitude of respect that begins by politely listening to the other's point of view. From here I pose the question of how we might unpick old habits of authoritative reading to create new habits that evolve out of, and yet go beyond, polite respect. Le Dœuff's work on an open and incomplete philosophical practice, still to come, helps in this regard. Her future philosophy, at ease with its incompleteness, no longer in need of a defence mechanism involving the exclusion or marginalization of women and others, bypasses a neurotic desire to know and, as such, revives the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life.

In Chapter Two I continue this exploration of a future philosophy in the work of Theodor W. Adorno. I explore the open and open-ended nature of his work on the essay, using this as a starting point for developing a practice of slow reading I call 'essayistic reading'. This essayistic reading links with the instituting moments of philosophy by thwarting our modern preoccupations with system, speed and haste. In place of an efficient or institutional reading (one motivated to extract or to capture information), it offers an open-ended rumination, a reading that meanders in non-systematic ways. This meandering pursues paths largely undetermined. By resisting the containing and limiting gesture that often accompanies the philosophical desire to know, I explain why essayistic reading forgoes absolute comprehension and certainty. To this end, I engage Emmanuel Levinas's work on patience and its centrality to ethics in order to outline the problems that essayistic reading seeks to avoid. Levinas claims that there are many ways in which our dominant philosophical practices in the West fall short of the kind of patient attitude towards the other that makes ethics possible, and I use this to think more specifically about our philosophical practices of

reading. I investigate Levinas's claim that philosophy assimilates or domesticates the other into the Same, and argue that many of our current institutional practices of reading are responsible for closing off the strangeness and challenge that the other (text) represents. This leads to a discussion of how reading might manage the difficult task of remaining open to this strangeness. For Levinas this openness or goodness grounds an ethics of response and responsibility that helps us to think of reading in different ways. Drawing on the work of Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley, I investigate an ethical structure of reading in terms of Levinas's work. Having done this, I return to Adorno to read his important though little-discussed piece, 'The Essay as Form'. Here, Adorno explores the idea of an open-ended and slowly meandering philosophy that takes its cue from the open-ended form of the essay, and I connect this with Levinas's concerns for ethics. Adorno's call to resist completeness, system and closure is useful, I think, for thinking through what a slow reading or an ethics of reading might possibly entail, and I explore these possibilities by outlining my approach to reading essayistically. In support of this, I draw on work from Luiz Costa Lima (on criticity) and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (on reading for *Stimmung*). I conclude with a brief discussion of Robert Musil's work on the essay and its links to both ethics and aesthetics. Throughout this chapter, I explore ways in which ethics can be thought in terms of temporality; that is, how the slow reading of essayistic reading can help to establish an ethical relation of openness with the otherness, ambiguity and strangeness of the text, and how this openness to intensity and intimacy can be transformative.

In Chapter Three I build on the slow and open-ended work of essayistic reading by exploring Luce Irigaray's transformative work on love and wonder. I argue that these terms provide us with practical strategies and attitudes supporting the open and attentive reader. I show how Irigaray's open readings (of Diotima and Descartes) offer us alternative philosophical responses, ones that help us to rethink the future of philosophy in ethical terms. In the process, I develop practices of loving and wondrous readings aimed at re-engaging the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. I demonstrate how both love and wonder open us to otherness, by opening us to a strangeness that we might otherwise read around. By slowing us and helping us to pause, attitudes of love and wonder open us to a contemplative

relation with what we read. However, I argue that love and wonder open us out in subtly different ways. Wonder initiates us into the realm of the other, providing us with an attentive awareness to what is rare and new. This occurs before (and after) any relation between ourselves and the other (subject/world, subject/object, subject/text). Wonder is the passion of moving towards, but it is not yet a relation. Love, on the other hand, is an enveloping; it is the passion that connects us and places us in relation with the other. I explore desire as the arc between the awe of wonder and the enveloping of love, arguing that this understanding of desire contrasts with the desire to know, which is no longer the bridge from wonder to love, but rather a need to know in the service of some anxiety, some utility, some instrumental end. I conclude the chapter by arguing that both love and wonder, in their own ways, have the ability to open our everyday institutional intersubjective relations in a more generous manner, thus orienting us toward a future philosophy that re-engages the instituting moments of philosophy in practical ways.

In Chapter Four I return to Irigaray, this time to engage with her work on listening to explore what it means to think of slow reading as a form of attentive listening. Listening, I claim, builds a bridge with the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. Listening patiently provides a context of proximity and nearness by bypassing the instituted structure of a pressing desire to know. I argue that Irigaray's desire to 'make something exist', to 'stage an encounter', 'to prepare a place of proximity' and 'to search for gestures' helps to orient philosophy toward slow reading as an open and engaged ethics of reading. Her practice of listening, 'listening-to' and 'listening-with' is preparation for what she refers to as a 'wisdom of love between us' (Irigaray 2002). In support of my intuition – that listening provides the foundation for an engaged ethical reading – I detour via Hans Jonas's essay 'The Nobility of Sight' to explore the hierarchy of the senses that in the West places sight in a pre-eminent position. I do this to raise questions about how we can challenge this hierarchy. I ask what it would mean to think of reading as a kind of listening. We do, naturally, tend to equate reading with seeing, but I suggest that any simple or exclusive coupling of reading with vision 'overlooks' the possibility of exploring reading as an activity that involves more of the body, in more complex ways. I suggest that reading, in the slow or ethical mode that I am exploring, has much in common with an

active and engaged form of listening that pre-eminently establishes a relation with the other or text. Listening, perhaps more so than looking, captures what is ethical in the practice of slow reading, and I explore the implications of this for our pedagogical practices and relations. Listening-to preserves the singularity of teacher and of student (or of reader and of text) while simultaneously enabling their being-in-relation. I conclude that within the restraints and structures of our institutions we are still capable of placing the pedagogical relation – between teacher and student – at the centre of an ethical revival of the instituting moments in philosophy that pursue a love of wisdom and a wisdom of love. Such a revival, I note, is something other than a romantic gesture or a return to a golden past. It is, on the contrary, a look toward the future by revising how philosophy can function within the existing institution in new and provocative ways.

In Chapter Five I return to the link between slow reading and love by looking at Simone de Beauvoir's work in *The Second Sex* (1949). I argue that by distinguishing two types of love, Beauvoir helps us to think of two different approaches to reading, and how these are both opposed and interconnected. By accepting Beauvoir's account of romantic love as a flawed, dependent mode of being, and her suggestion that an authentic love – one that engages maturely and openly with the other – is possible, I suggest that we can take the risk of thinking of reading in these terms. I argue that a romantic reading demonstrates an immature dependence in relation to the (other) text, or an equally immature expectation of completeness in relation to the text, whereas an authentic reading offers the possibility of a mature and open-ended approach. I claim that a mature reading accepts both the text's possibilities and its limitations, leading us toward an open and ongoing reading. I maintain that Beauvoir's notion of authentic love can be reworked to develop the idea of an authentic reading as a kind of slow reading or an ethical encounter. The ethical domain of this encounter exists along a continuum over space and time. What I call 'authentic reading' is a reading that resists the certainty and containment of institutional forms of reading; those professional practices that occur without the time required to allow the dust to settle or for impressions to be received (Woolf 1932). Returning to reading by slowly rereading provides us with the discerning quality of attention that allows for a transformation from romance to authenticity to unfold. In this

sense, I claim that authentic reading is a slow practice or exercise of attention that builds toward maturity. This process of maturity will not be hurried; it takes time to establish, and it occurs by building on the spontaneity of the first force of romantic love. I conclude that authentic reading works through the problems inherent in institutional forms of reading by re-engaging with the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. In reading Beauvoir's work in the light of this discussion I am able to raise the question of what kind of reader she is. Specifically, it allows me to ask how Beauvoir reads Sartre – the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*. I argue that Michèle Le Dœuff's immensely influential reading of Beauvoir's reading of Sartre (in terms of an operative philosophy) can be rethought in terms of Beauvoir's own categories of romance and authenticity, and it is in this sense that we can think of Beauvoir's work on love as a lesson in what it means to read.

In Chapter Six I explore Hélène Cixous's practice of reading in order to think of slow reading as an approach of intimacy, tenderness and love. I argue that an unhurried approach towards the other allows us to think of reading as a process of transformation: one that literally transforms us from one existential state to another. I claim that Cixous's approach takes us from the heaviness of the subject who desires to know and to fix, toward the weightless, attentive and receptive space of the ethical encounter. I explore Cixous's particular practice of reading by first encountering the central place writing holds in her work. Cixous's writing is motivated by a slow and respectful approach toward the other – rather than by any desire for appropriation, mastery, or knowledge of the other – and I maintain that this approach guides her reading too. The ethical dimension evident in Cixous's approach to reading is very much grounded in the attentive intimacy she seeks to establish with the other. To read is to be attentive to the trace of the other, and this attention takes time. Additionally, and perhaps paradoxically, it calls for an emptying of the self to prepare for the other, an abandon that allows the other to gleam. Accompanying attention is patience, and Cixous demonstrates this in the slow and considered waiting that forms the approach, which is nothing other than the imperceptible movement toward the other in passion and in grace. Grace, as we see in the conclusion, is the patient work of ethics that opens us to a love of wisdom and philosophy as a practical way of life.

I conclude the book by tying together various themes that have emerged throughout the work, and by suggesting that ethics and aesthetics meet in the work of attention that best characterizes the kind of slow reading I have been exploring. To this end I touch briefly upon Simone Weil's work on gravity and grace, Teresa Brennan's work on discernment, Martin Heidegger's work on rapture (*Rausch*) and meditative thought, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's work on intensity. What I show is that slow reading involves an intensity of reading, or a quality of attention, that keeps the question of ethics both open and alive. I maintain that slow reading matters because it develops practices aimed at reviving the instituting moments of philosophy. Slow reading engages the guiding idea of a love of wisdom in order to restore the transformative potential of philosophy, ensuring that it becomes something more than curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns. In 'an age of "work", that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to get "everything done" at once . . . this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers' (Nietzsche 1982: 5).

Introduction: On Being Slow and Doing Philosophy

Perhaps reading . . . is one of the last defences human dignity has left, because in the end [it] remind[s] us . . . that we are more than ourselves; that we have souls. And more, moreover.

RICHARD FLANAGAN, *GOULD'S BOOK OF FISH*: 33

The love of wisdom and the desire to know

Philosophy in the West bears within its practice two different approaches to thought. To simplify matters we can think of these as, on the one hand, a love of wisdom and, on the other, a particular form of the desire to know. To understand the complex relations between these approaches we need to think about philosophy as an institution. By doing so, we can appreciate how a love of wisdom has, over time, come to be dominated by a very distinctive desire – or better still, a need – to know. However, rather than simply being opposed to this desire to know, a love of wisdom inhabits the institutional space that philosophy has become. This habitation is anything but straightforward; it signals a subterranean presence that has the ability to challenge the forensic desire for knowledge that philosophy, over time, has become.

My argument in this book is that it is timely for the love of wisdom, the instituting moment of Western philosophy, to retrieve its pre-eminent place in philosophical work. To this end, I develop a philosophical practice of slow reading to counter the effects of containment and mastery that the institutionalized practice of philosophy has to a large extent become. As such, I seek to revitalize the institution, rather than to do away with it. By extending the range of legitimate philosophical practice and by reintroducing modes of attentive contemplation, my aim is to work toward a future philosophy realized in the here and now – a slow philosophy.

We can think of the love of wisdom as a kind of guiding idea that precedes the institutionalization of philosophy. In the figure of Socrates we find an embodiment of this guiding idea. Pierre Hadot's work on the history of philosophy from Ancient Greece to the present focuses on Socrates as the *philo-sopher* – the lover of wisdom. This love of wisdom takes the form of what Hadot refers to as spiritual exercises, 'an invitation to a new way of life, active reflection, and living consciousness' (Hadot 1995: 157), where justice (and the like) can never be understood without us living it (155). 'Such a fully just existence is that of the sage, who is not *sophos*, but *philo-sophos*: not a wise man, but one who desires wisdom, precisely because he lacks it' (157).[1] Like the *daimon* Eros, Socrates desires wisdom in the form of a journey toward his own perfection, an 'opening up onto something beyond himself' (162). As a spiritual exercise (love of wisdom), Plato's dialogues exceed pure philosophical system in order to perform the experience of love. Here the love of wisdom merges with a wisdom of love. This experience is transformative, propelling the philosopher from one existential state to another. Philosophy here is very much a way of life: 'Yet the dialogue itself, qua event and spiritual activity, already constitutes a moral and existential experience, for Socratic philosophy is not the solitary elaboration of a system, but the awakening of consciousness, and accession to a level of being which can only be reached in a person-to-person relationship' (Hadot 1995: 163).

If the love of wisdom inaugurates a transformative relation – a way of life that binds philosopher to philosophy – what can be said of the forensic desire to know? Hadot argues that while philosophy as a way of life, guided by the love of wisdom and the desire for transformation, is embodied in the spiritual practices of ancient

Greek philosophy, over time this succumbs to philosophy reconceived as an exclusively scholarly discourse. We can think of this scholarly orientation toward philosophy as the motivation behind a forensic desire for knowledge that stands in place of any direct experience of philosophy as a love of wisdom and a personally transformative experience. From Socrates to Plato and on to Aristotle we note a shift in the definition and practice of philosophy.[2] The love of wisdom gives way to a particular form of the desire to know and this desire dominates the gradual institutionalization or sedimentation of scholarly philosophical inquiry as we know it today. Aristotle, in Book I of the *Metaphysics*, writes:

> All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.
>
> ARISTOTLE 1971: A, 980 a25

From Aristotle on, this form of the desire to know is inscribed in the practice of Western philosophy. Knowledge replaces the love of wisdom with the result that system and certainty become, over time, dominating principles. By the time we reach Descartes, we encounter a desire to know so exhaustive and forensic in its practice that only absolute certainty will prevail. Philosophy and science merge in the discovery of not only our ignorance but more importantly in the conviction that we must, at all costs, dispel this ignorance. We must know. In the opening pages of *A Discourse on Method*, Descartes outlines his four principles, the rules that establish his methodology:

> The *first* was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.
>
> The *second*, to divide each of the difficulties under examination into as many parts as possible, and as might be necessary for its adequate solution.

> The *third*, to conduct my thoughts in such order that, by commencing with objects the simplest and easiest to know, I might ascend by little and little, and yet, as it were, step by step, to the knowledge of the more complex; assigning in thought a certain order to those objects which in their own nature do not stand in a relation of antecedence and sequence.
>
> And the *last*, in every case to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so general, that I might be assured that **nothing was omitted.**
>
> DESCARTES 1912: 15–16 emphasis in bold added

We are a long way here from Socrates's love of wisdom. Descartes's goals of certainty and exhaustiveness sit uncomfortably with Socrates's claim that he knows nothing at all. Philosophy has lost (or repressed) its transformative urge. It has become, instead, a forensic practice of searching out flaws in arguments, rather than a slow engagement with the 'strangeness' or otherness of the world – an engagement that transforms and moves us beyond ourselves. This search for flaws relies upon (indeed constructs in its very practice) a hierarchical distinction between logic and rhetoric – a distinction that does its best to obliterate (by repressing) the ineliminable ambiguities of the world. In the twentieth century, the excesses of this forensic practice culminate in what Martin Heidegger refers to as 'calculative thinking' and Theodor W. Adorno as 'instrumental reason'. Calculative thinking involves a flight from thinking, a total thoughtlessness that reduces all to system and calculated intention. Here the desire to know has transformed into a computing that relentlessly plans and investigates: 'Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself' (Heidegger 1966: 46). It is a kind of thinking incapable of contemplation. While calculative thinking and instrumental reason represent the extreme edge of the forensic desire to know, there are many gradations leading towards it. For example, in Chapter Two we explore Emmanuel Levinas's account of a philosophy that reduces thought to knowledge and comprehension, where the reasoning will applies a technical knowledge, a conceptual orientation that aims for containment. If we inquire into the motivations of this desire to limit and to contain we uncover an anxiety that seeks the certainty and security (the illusion) of absolute comprehension. This need to know takes the form of a neurotic containment that deals in finality and verdict, rather than in the openness of an ongoing questioning.

My argument throughout is that philosophical practices guided by this desire or need to know result all too often in closed and systematic accounts.[3] By establishing the rules, regulations and demands of systematic thought this kind of philosophy loses its way as a love of wisdom – an open questioning that transforms the philosopher from one existential state to another – and becomes, instead, an institution. As we will see, in founding philosophy as institution, and later still as corporation, we set a path towards the speed and efficiency that will eventually displace the slow, reflective and meditative tradition from which philosophy as a love of wisdom emerges. So, while the desire to know is the impetus behind philosophy as an institution, the love of wisdom retains, nonetheless, a subterranean relation with it. In what ways, then, can we understand these practices as more than simply opposed?

The play between the instituting and the instituted in philosophy

> Whenever the codes and conditions that have assured the consensus necessary for communication begin to change radically or to break down, attention is inevitably drawn to the question of institutions.
>
> WEBER 1987: 33

I mentioned earlier that we can think of the love of wisdom as a kind of guiding idea that precedes the institutionalization of philosophy. It is time now to think more carefully about what this entails. To think of philosophy as an institution or as an institutionalized discourse is to ask questions about how this institution comes into being and what tensions constitute it once it exists. While our initial impulse is to equate the institution with the status quo, there are good reasons to resist doing so. Certainly, academic institutions work to maintain what are deemed acceptable scholarly procedures and behaviours, and yet to focus exclusively on this conservative function of discipline is to overlook the internal tensions that constitute the act of founding the institution. In Merleau-Ponty's (2010) lectures on 'Institution and Passivity' he explores the ambivalent nature of the institution, differentiating

between what is already 'instituted' and what is 'instituting', innovative or coming into being. Temporality, he argues, can be understood philosophically as the unfolding of the new within the familiar. In a similar vein, the work of the French sociologist René Lourau is helpful for thinking about the transformative aspect of the institution, distinguishing, as does Merleau-Ponty, between the *instituting* process and the *instituted* structure of the institution. In *L'Analyse institutionelle* (1970) Lourau argues that the conservative, disciplinary aspect of the institution

> has been increasingly used to designate what I and others before me have called the *instituted* (*l'institué*), the established order, the already existing norms, the state of fact thereby being confounded with the state of right (*l'état de droit*). By contrast, the *instituting* aspect (*l'instituant*) ... has been increasingly obscured. The political implication of the sociological theories appears clearly here. By emptying the concept of institution of one of its primordial components (that of instituting, in the sense of founding, creating, breaking with an old order and creating a new one), sociology has finally come to identify the institution with the status quo.
>
> LOURAU 1970: 137, cited in Weber 1987: xv

In *Institution and Interpretation* (1987), Samuel Weber takes up Lourau's distinction between the instituting process and the instituted organization in order to explore the ambivalent relation between the dynamic, transformative moment and the determinant structure of the disciplinary norm. Weber refers to the 'intrinsic and violent instability' (17) of the institution, and in so doing urges us to appreciate the complexity underlying the processes of institutionalization. In *The Culture of Literacy* (1994) Wlad Godzich pursues Weber's discussion, first by outlining the three conditions for the process of institutionalization: a guiding idea, prescribed behaviour and set procedures. Like Weber, and Lourau and Merleau-Ponty before him, Godzich reminds us of the tension inherent in the institution – simultaneously towards policing on the one hand, and exploring on the other:

> We tend to think of institutions as apparatuses, that is, as constituted bodies with their internal procedures and delimited

> field of intervention. But an institution is first and foremost a guiding idea, the idea of some determined goal to be reached for the common weal; it is this goal that is sought according to prescribed behavior and by the application of set procedures. This idea itself is adopted by a group of individuals who become its public possessors and implementers. This group then becomes the institution as a result of the combining of the guiding idea with the set procedures. The members of the group are shaped by the guiding idea they seek to implement and the procedures they apply; they adopt common behavior, develop similar attitudes, all of which tend to unify them into a determinate and identifiable group and give the institution its distinct unity.
>
> GODZICH 1994: 236

Unlike the others, however, Godzich points to the underlying significance of the guiding idea and how it combines with the set procedures that will come to define the discipline or institution. What is most relevant for our discussion is that he goes on to position the guiding idea along with the instituting moment – the dynamic, transformative process that exists in a complex relation with the instituted or established order. The guiding idea is the flash of inspiration and imagination that avoids the established paths of acceptable thought and practice, and yet it is somewhat paradoxically incorporated into the newly emerging discipline or institution. Once there, the guiding idea or instituting moment becomes 'curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns':

> In short, the insightful path [of the guiding idea] is turned into a beaten one, with the subsequent development of procedures within and by the institution being akin to road-improvement. The trail-blazing . . . the instituting, becomes a moment of odd standing in the now constituted institution. Its necessity is acknowledged, for without it the institution would not exist, but *it no longer really matters* except insofar as the marking out of the line that brought point of departure and point of arrival together is concerned. In other words, the instituting moment, which endows the entire institution with signification and meaning, is held within the institution as *both proper to it and yet alien: it is its other, valued to be sure yet curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns.*
>
> GODZICH 1994: 237, emphasis added

The guiding idea remains in a somewhat subterranean relation with the institution as 'both proper to it and yet alien' and this is, I think, a useful way of thinking about the relation between the love of wisdom and the contemporary institution of philosophy. For the institution of philosophy, the love of wisdom no longer really matters, though it has at one time endowed the entire institution with signification and meaning. It is now paradoxically both proper to it and yet nonetheless alien. It is valued, to be sure, and yet curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns. My argument throughout this book is that slow reading, a practice that takes its cue from the love of wisdom, is about restoring the relevance that the instituting moment no longer holds. As such, slow reading is a revitalization of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life (instituting moments) in the face of the dominance of the desire to know and philosophy as a scholarly discourse (instituted order).

Philosophy as a way of life: slow reading – slow philosophy

> It is to him [the *flâneur*], aimlessly strolling through the crowds in the big cities in studied contrast to their hurried, purposeful activity, that things reveal themselves in their secret meaning: 'The true picture of the past *flits* by' ('Philosophy of History'), and only the *flâneur* who idly strolls by receives the message ... the *flâneur*, through the *gestus* of purposeless strolling, turns his back to the crowd, even as he is propelled and swept by it.
>
> ARENDT 1969: 12–13[4]

The instituting moment of philosophy as a love of wisdom involves the patient work of thought. It is, first and foremost, the patience involved in 'sitting with' the world and of being open to it; not merely for the sake of being patient but, rather, for engagement with the complexity of the world that this slow and open process of thought permits. Philosophy, at its best, involves judgement, but not the fast and furious judgement of a final verdict. Rather, it is the judgement that comes from suspending certainty, from hesitating, deliberating and taking time. Philosophy's patience goes

hand-in-hand with slowing down – a slowing that allows thought to emerge and respectfully engage with the world. In certain respects this kind of philosophical work follows the purposeless strolling of Walter Benjamin's *flâneur*; turning its back on everyday hurried, purposeful activity (even while it is propelled and swept by it); philosophy sinks into the world. In some significant ways, it resembles serious works of art. Art, too, takes time and patience.[5] Of course, Heidegger writes at length about this relation between art, philosophy and time. When he writes 'art breaks open an open space, in whose openness everything is other than usual' (Heidegger 1971: 75) and (echoing Hölderlin) 'poetically, man dwells', he acknowledges that good art and good philosophy urge us to stop, to reconsider, to rethink everything we think we know. Philosophy and art provide us with different ways of dwelling on the things of our world. We see evidence of this slow, patient work in the photography of Alfred Stieglitz, an artist who understands the importance of a meditative relation with the world. Stieglitz's art can be seen as a slow and repeated return to the world, one that quite literally takes its own time. In his perceptive essay on Stieglitz's Lake George years, Peter Conrad captures this well:

> The art he [Stieglitz] practiced was meditative, a prolonged reverie, not the quick seizure of instants. He was happy to spend 20 years photographing the same stand of poplars, the same configurations of clouds overhead or the same barn . . . In 1925, he told novelist Sherwood Anderson, 'I have been looking for years – 50 upwards – at a particular skyline of simple hills . . . I'd love to get down what "that" line has done for me – may be I have – somewhat – in those snapshots I've been doing the past few years'.
>
> CONRAD 2010: 68[6]

I think of Stieglitz's photographic art – his patient 'looking' and returning – as a kind of reading, a slow and meditative openness that shares affinity with the kind of reading that underpins the slow philosophy I am interested in. So, what follows are a series of thoughts on how to frame the work on ethics, aesthetics and reading that this book explores. These ideas announce my interest in a reading that comfortably returns, time and time again, to the same terrain – the same book, the same passage, the same title – to ponder

its significance with all the benefit of unhurried time, the passage of time and the silence and space this time affords. I think of this reading as an unfinished reading, an inconclusive reading, a wondrous reading that manages to remain open and engaged (present) with what it reads – ready for transformation and ready, too, for the possibility of revelation. By revelation I mean access to what often remains hidden from our everyday awareness, or our everyday, casual, quick and hasty modes of reading and being. This revelatory reading is what helps to bring something into existence, not simply to uncover it.

Slow reading suggests a positive kind of reading; an engaged and open reading that gains much by taking its time. However, it is prudent, at the outset, to draw attention to the various connotations that the word 'slow' has in the English language. If we turn to a dictionary definition we are bombarded with a host of negative meanings: sluggish, not quick, not clever, blunt, uninteresting, dull, dull-witted, stupid.[7] It seems that 'slow' used as a term for 'dull' and 'tedious' dates from around 1841, and while this is mere speculation, it is possible that this and other pejorative connotations arise within the context of early industrialized society and the theories of progress and efficiency that accompany it.[8] Associations of slowness with sloth (*acedia*), one of the deadly sins, bring to the fore slow physical movement, inertia and, in extreme cases, paralysis. These associations surface earlier and date from medieval times.[9] Consequently, my use of the term 'slow' necessities a modern reframing and reconsideration of its various negative connotations.[10] Such a reframing, though, does not deny the senses in which slowness can, in various circumstances, be problematic. For example, slowness can, in some political contexts, be equated with inaction and prevarication.[11] In Europe in the twentieth century, the fallout from the Munich Pact suggests that a slowness to act can be a political evil. While there is strong reason to support this claim, my argument is that when it comes to reading, a slow and reflective approach is necessary to counter a speed and haste that threatens the very culture of intense thought today.

It is clear that in everyday life there are countless instances where speed is both necessary and desirable. Problems begin, though, when speed encroaches more and more on those practices that comprise the academic institution. In the context of academic research and reflection, I argue that the cult of speed and haste is both misplaced

and undesirable. If we understand our work in terms of the critical processes involved in engaging with complexity, then speed and haste represent dangers that threaten to derail our reflective work. Overcoming historical prejudices against slowness means simultaneously uncovering the often unconscious – or barely conscious – associations we make with speed. One way of thinking about this is to look towards the philosophical research on complexity that Paul Cilliers undertakes. In an article 'On the Importance of a Certain Slowness' (2006), he argues that the positive and common equation of speed with efficiency is a destructive one founded upon current distortions in our understanding of time. These distortions, in turn, rest upon the interconnection between instrumental theories we hold concerning the modern world and the effects of certain computer and communications technologies. Cilliers supports his case by reference to the temporal nature of complex systems, specifically to the relation between memory and anticipation, and the importance of delay and iteration in building complex systems (Cilliers 2006: 107). He is keen to explain that the argument for slowness is most certainly not a conservative one: 'It is not merely backward looking nor a glorification of what has been' (107). On the contrary, it concerns our present and our future. We could say that it concerns our ability to embrace the challenges that an increasingly complex world throws forth. An equation of slowness with delay, from the perspective of an uncritical valuation of speed, serves to distance us further from the reflective work that thinking is.[12] Relatedly, the case for slowness is not an argument against speed or fastness in appropriate contexts and at appropriate times. It is, rather, a reminder that speed is not a virtue in itself, and that efficiency (even the kind that speed is said to produce) is not necessarily helpful in our attempts to encounter complexity in more meaningful and creative ways. As Cilliers points out: 'The argument is against unreflective speed, speed at all costs, or, more precisely, against speed as a virtue in itself: against the alignment of "speed" with notions like efficiency, success, quality, and importance' (107).[13]

The common opposition between fast and slow is possibly not the most helpful for thinking about slow reading. Reading or rereading can at times be fast. What it should ideally not be, however, is hurried or rushed. Perhaps when it comes to reading philosophy, 'rushing' or 'haste' are terms that unsettle any neat

binary between fast and slow. Being fast becomes problematic when it is a matter of rushing or hurrying.

My own modern reframing and reclaiming of slowness resonates with some of the popular research emerging in between the specialist discourses of neuroscience and psychology.[14] One relatively recent work in this field demonstrates an interest in questions of temporality, and while this research has little direct relation to what I am exploring here, it nonetheless suggests possibilities for future thought. Iain McGilchrist's study, *The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (2009), explores the implications of the difference between the cerebral hemispheres, suggesting that it is not what each hemisphere does that is important in figuring this difference but, rather, how each goes about doing what it does. Gilchrist's observation, that the most fundamental difference between the hemispheres is the quality of *attention* each gives to the world, is intriguing, and more so when he goes on to link this to our ability (or not) to relate reciprocally with whatever exists apart from (or other to) ourselves. He writes: 'The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are, literally, partners in creation. This means we have a grave *responsibility*, a word that captures the reciprocal nature of the dialogue we have with whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves' (McGilchrist 2009: 5). McGilchrist distinguishes two very different sets of values and priorities linked to these differing forms of attention: on the one hand, a largely conceptual, hierarchical and bureaucratic attention (associated with left hemispheric processes); and on the other, a deeper, relational and contextual attention (associated with the right hemisphere). He contends that these attentive modes exist in between creative tension and open warfare, and that the 'battles between them are recorded in the history of philosophy, and played out in the seismic shifts that characterize the history of Western culture' (14). (We might think of these as a love of wisdom and a forensic desire to know). While there are dangers aplenty in adopting a bihemispheric account of the brain (let alone the mind) – and McGilchrist certainly cautions against doing so uncritically – it is tempting to think of his deeper, relational and contextual attention as resonating with the account of slow reading that I am developing here. This is not, however, to suggest there is a neuroscientific basis for the slow and open reading I am calling for. Rather, it is to point to the central role that attention plays in

contemporary accounts of our intellectual ways of being in the world (McGilchrist 2009).

Attention is the focus of a number of recent studies that delve into the superficiality of contemporary online reading. In *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain* (2007), Maryanne Wolf suggests that superficial skimming techniques developed online are finding their way back to our complex everyday reading encounters, with the result that our reading abilities are impaired (Wolf 2007). Michael Rosenwald, in his discussion of this contemporary research, reports that cognitive neuroscientists (such as Wolf) warn that we 'seem to be developing digital brains with new circuits for skimming through the torrent of information online' and that these circuits are in competition with 'traditional deep reading circuitry developed over several millennia' (Rosenwald 2014). Given 'our' increasing tendency to become restless with reading material, Rosenwald wonders whether scanning and skimming are able to impair the development of deep reading skills. He reports that the pace and different spatiality of online reading, what is sometimes referred to as 'non-linear reading', is considered troubling: 'The Internet is different. With so much information, hyperlinked text, videos alongside words and interactivity everywhere, our brains form shortcuts to deal with it all – scanning, searching for key words, scrolling up and down quickly' (Rosenwald 2014). What the effects of these skimming techniques are on more traditional linear forms of reading is a question Wolf and others are keen to engage.

In a paper devoted to the inadequacies of contemporary North American teenage reading skills, Mark Bauerlein argues that students used to multitasking and online nonlinear skimming are increasingly unprepared for the demands of university reading.[15] Engaging with complex texts demands skills that 'screenagers' are ill-equipped to undertake. For Bauerlein, the basic skills of concentrated attention, uninterrupted thinking and receptivity are lacking in an alarmingly large proportion of first-year students. In an effort to counter this trend Bauerlein makes the case for developing habits of slow reading aimed to accustom high school students to the attentive mode that complex material demands:

> This is not to say that schools should go Luddite. We should continue to experiment with educational technology, but we

> should also preserve a crucial place for unwired, unplugged, and unconnected learning. One hour a day of slow reading with print matter, an occasional research assignment completed without Google – any such practices that slow down and intensify the reading of complex texts will help. The more high school teachers place complex texts on the syllabus and concoct slow, deliberate reading exercises for students to complete, the more they will inculcate the habit. The key is to regularize the instruction and make slow reading exercises a standard part of the curriculum. Such practices may do more to boost college readiness than 300 shiny laptops down the hall – and for a fraction of the price.
>
> BAUERLEIN 2011: 33

Our educational institutions ought to resist the trends Bauerlein reports on, not facilitate or give in to them. Of course, there are institutional pressures related to funding and resources, and this is related to the practice of linking funding to student numbers. There are no easy solutions here, and yet philosophy can arguably play a key role in raising the issues and engaging in critical ways with these.

My interest in the need for slow reading (raised in Bauerlein's work), and with what it means to do philosophy slowly and patiently, sits rather uncomfortably with what it means for many of us to do philosophy today; that is, to undertake philosophy within an institutional context of speed and haste.[16] What are the implications of this institutional practice for the quality of attention we are able to sustain and the reading practices that come from this? Does the institution impact on our ability to read well? One way of thinking about these questions is to turn to the definition of philosophy and philosophical practice that emerges in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.[17] Wittgenstein describes philosophy as a slow way of living; he writes: '[the] slow cure is all important' (Wittgenstein 1967: 69).[18] In his lectures on the foundation of mathematics he adds: 'I am trying to recommend a certain sort of investigation . . . [T]his investigation is immensely important and very much *against the grain* of some of you' (Wittgenstein 1976: 103). Wittgenstein's investigation is, above all, protracted. His philosophy is essentially a slow process – one in which the philosopher comes 'by degrees to a new understanding of the nature

of the problems that trouble him [or her]' (McGinn 1997: 23).[19] Wittgenstein's 'therapeutic' philosophy celebrates a slow and engaged mode of thinking. Indeed, we need to appreciate this point in order to better appreciate why it is that he writes in the ways that he does. Wittgenstein's later challenge to strictly argumentative modes of thought is part of the 'protracted' nature of his project. In *Über Gewissheit* he writes 'Meine Sätze sind alle *langsam* zu lessen' (Wittgenstein 1984: 531) and this calls us to read his work in a particular way. Not only does this philosophy need time to emerge, but it must be received slowly as well. *Meine Sätze sind alle langsam zu lessen* (My sentences are to be read slowly) – we must read Wittgenstein slowly if 'philosophy' is to be done at all.

In his discussion of the intensity with which Wittgenstein engaged philosophy, Raimond Gaita draws our attention to the devastating effects of the instrumentalization of those institutions we still call universities. By bringing to mind the intensity this instrumental conception has displaced, Gaita celebrates the slow and attentive mode of philosophy that Wittgenstein embraced:

> Wittgenstein suggested that philosophers should greet one another by saying, 'Take your time'. One needs time to muse, to meditate. Meditative reflectiveness does not issue quickly in publications and is often not sure of itself. It is seldom impressive on its feet. Yet for those of us who are not geniuses, it nourishes critical reflection, enabling one sufficient space and time to step back and to examine assumptions one might not have noticed.
>
> GAITA 2012

Philosophy here is clearly philosophy as a way of life.[20]

Both Wittgenstein's writing and his philosophical method frustrate attempts to systematize thought in crudely 'scientific' ways. They frustrate the reduction of philosophy to a restricted form of the desire to know. In many respects, Wittgenstein's work calls forth our imagination rather than our argumentative faculties. As Ray Monk points out, Wittgenstein was fond of drawing attention to the links between his approach and Freud's. Both works are therapeutic in the sense that they aim to produce 'the kind of understanding that consists in seeing connections' (Wittgenstein,

cited in Monk 2005: 72).[21] Given what Wittgenstein has to say about a slow approach to philosophy we can think of this understanding – one that creates connections and interrelations – as a slow and careful reading open to the world around us. For Wittgenstein, this openness and the sensibility that arises along with it is evident in works of art where experience trumps calculation as a mode of engaged being. The kind of understanding that emerges from really good art is the kind that cannot be 'evaluated, weighed, pondered, by appeal to any system of general principles or universal laws' (Monk 2005: 104).[22] So too, I argue, with slow reading: an approach to reading that cannot be determined in advance by systematic principles or laws. In slow reading we move beyond calculation to thought.

Wittgenstein's exhortation to read slowly fits rather nicely with something that Virginia Woolf writes. In her essay 'How Should One Read a Book?' (1925), Woolf encourages a slow and meditative attitude, urging us to open to what we read, to steep ourselves in the long and complicated process that reading is (Woolf 1925: 259).[23] Having established the importance of this, she reminds us of the 'true complexity of reading' (266), suggesting that there are two different phases and that both these benefit from a slow and careful approach. The first phase involves reading slowly, in order to open to and receive impressions; this is a kind of mindful 'sitting-with' what we read,[24] while the second phase works on these impressions, passing judgements and making comparisons. The weight of inevitability of this second phase of (hard and lasting) judgement is significantly lightened, though, by Woolf's insistence that a slow and careful waiting 'for the dust to settle' must precede any account. We must decide, but 'not directly':[25]

> The first process, to receive impressions with the utmost understanding, is only half the process of reading; it must be completed, if we are to get the whole pleasure from a book, by another. We must pass judgment upon these multitudinous impressions; we must make of these fleeting shapes one that is hard and lasting. *But not directly.* Wait for the dust of reading to settle; for the conflict and questioning to die down; walk, talk, pull the dead petals from a rose, or fall asleep. Then suddenly without our willing it, for it is thus that Nature undertakes these transitions, *the book will return, but differently. It will float to*

> *the top of the mind as a whole. And the book as a whole is different from the book received currently in separate phrases.*
> WOOLF 1925: 266, emphasis added[26]

Woolf's 'not directly' interests me here, and if we couple this to what she later hints at as a phase beyond judgement[27] (or 'verdict' – which is so final), then what emerges is a practice of reading that takes its own time, a reading capable of perceiving the 'signs and hints of almost imperceptible fineness, from the twist and turn of the first sentences' (259). Woolf's suggestion that another reading lies beyond judgement links her discussion with imagination, rather than with comparison or discrimination.[28] This far 'rarer pleasure' (269) comes only with time: 'as time goes on perhaps we can train our taste ... we shall find that it is changing a little; it is not so greedy, it is more reflective. It will begin to bring us not merely judgements on particular books, but it will tell us that there is a quality common to certain books' (268). This imaginative reading brings insights that come from a continual questioning, a bringing of questions that arise from the slow and repeated reading and rereading that time allows.[29]

And yet, this rarified imagination that gives birth to an almost transcendental mode[30] of reading is eclipsed on the final page of Woolf's essay. By way of conclusion, she returns to the everyday reader she addresses in the opening pages. Here she urges us to read slowly and unprofessionally: 'reading for the love of reading' (270), refusing the speed and haste of the journalistic literary critic and the circumstances that lead to *him* having 'only one second in which to load and aim and shoot' so that *he* 'may well be pardoned if he mistakes rabbits for tigers, eagles for barndoor fowls, or misses altogether and wastes his shot upon some peaceful cow grazing in a further field (270).[31]

We will return to this cow and its slow, ruminant grazing, but allow me to say now, in response to Woolf's work, that her call to read slowly and unprofessionally links us back to Wittgenstein's earlier insistence. Woolf's 'unprofessional' reading can productively be thought of as a kind of non-institutional reading, a reading that refuses the speed and haste required by the corporate nature of today's institutional demands – demands dominated by a need to know. To read professionally or institutionally would thus mean to read without the time required to allow the dust to settle, or for

impressions to be received. It would mean to read 'directly', without the necessary and essential element of time that makes the world of difference. With Wittgenstein, we can condemn an institutional context that reduces philosophical reading to a mode that occurs primarily as immediate and hasty judgement [verdict], a reading that occurs without the time taken for impressions to be received and, more often than not, without waiting for the dust of reading to settle.

This kind of hasty reading is sometimes aligned, for better or worse, with a 'scientific' or 'technological' model that has, over the past century or so, constructed links between reading and information. In the context of institutional trends that have seen 'science' emerge as the model for all intellectual work, a normative idea of reading has taken hold, one that stresses an almost exclusive intimacy between reading and 'information extraction' or 'mining'. In 'The End of Reading' (2000), a paper commenting on this disconcerting trend, Peggy Kamuf discusses how this impoverished idea of reading is reproduced in the modern university:

> Reading is or is read as technique for capturing information. Thus according to the scientific model . . . reading is essentially information technology. We can suppose, therefore, that this model of reading will be increasingly reinforced by the general network of information technologies as they continue to replace reading's traditional support, for now some seventeen or eighteen hundred years, the book. The book ends, but this model of reading, at least, will not. On the contrary, it will become the vastly dominant way in which something still called reading continues. It is not just as an abstract moment of definition that we must deal with this scientific and dominant model of reading. That model of reading is also getting produced and reproduced in reading practices. The common notion of reading as information-extraction sets the principles, and thus institutes the laws and the institutions through which reading practices are maintained, that is, reintroduced, reproduced, and reinforced in each new generation of readers, as we like to think of them.
>
> KAMUF 2000[32]

Wittgenstein's ideal of philosophy as a 'slow cure', so much against the grain for institutional practices today, is an important counter

to reading as 'information-extraction' that Kamuf warns against. In what we might think of as a modern take on Wittgenstein's call, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht returns to the 'slow cure' by celebrating the potential that the institution has within it to enact this cure. In this sense we can say that Gumbrecht works with the 'instituting' process of the institution – ever alive and open to innovation. In three works, *The Powers of Philology* (2003), *Production of Presence* (2004) and *Our Broad Present* (2014) Gumbrecht writes about the importance of time, and how this relates to an entirely different way of thinking about what reading is. To begin with, Gumbrecht makes a positive link between reading and complexity, arguing that a certain slow and careful reading, without immediate institutional demands, makes it possible for us to confront – I would say 'encounter' – high levels of complexity, thus resisting the temptation to reduce and simplify the issues at hand. Alternative modes of reading would engage this complexity, rather than reduce it by 'mining' or 'extracting' manageable chunks. Slow reading would inhabit a space between the pain and joy of losing and regaining intellectual orientation:

> This formula, exposing oneself to high intellectual complexity without having an immediate need to reduce this complexity, is probably close to a new and highly auratic[33] concept of 'reading' that humanists today increasingly use as a positive self-reference. *Reading* here is clearly not synonymous with *deciphering* (as was the case in the heyday of semiotics). Rather, the word seems to refer to both a joyful and painful oscillation between losing and regaining intellectual control or orientation.
>
> GUMBRECHT 2003: 85

Gumbrecht is working here with an idea of complexity that owes something to Niklas Luhmann's now classical discussion of the university as an institution of teaching as well as of research. Famously, Luhmann depicts the university as a 'secondary social system' whose primary identifying function ought ideally be the production of complexity, 'in distinction from and in reaction to most other social systems' (Gumbrecht 2004: 128, 129).[34] Supporting this definition, Gumbrecht claims that our primary pedagogical task should be identifying instances of complexity and then staging 'our students' encounters' with the inevitable

oscillations these instances entail.[35] Reading is thus re-figured in his work as a kind of bitter-sweet exposure or openness to complexity, one that inevitably takes its time. Precisely because it takes its time, Gumbrecht's reading positions itself as kin to the domain of art. He writes: 'This would mean that any academic work that fits the formula of being a confrontation with complexity in a situation of low time-pressure; academic work in all its different dimensions, whether learning, teaching, or doing research . . . all this would be close to aesthetic experience' (Gumbrecht 2003: 86).[36]

This important link to aesthetic experience occurs if and only if the institution provides a context of 'low time-pressure' or, more simply, time. What Gumbrecht says here makes sense, especially if we think of Stieglitz's aesthetic experience as work carried out over long periods of time. Stieglitz's photographic art is possible *because* of this time. For Gumbrecht, the possibility for real philosophical or critical work (in the academy) is enhanced when one is exposed to complexity within an institutional context that both recognizes and safeguards (we might say 'cares for') the importance of 'excess' time:

> The condition of the possibility for lived experience and for *Bildung* to happen is time – more precisely, the academic and ivory tower-like privilege of being allowed to expose oneself to an intellectual challenge without the obligation to come up with a quick reaction or even with a quick 'solution' . . . We need institutions of higher education to produce and to protect excess time against the mostly pressing temporalities of the everyday . . . the academic institution is [or should be] all about such untimeliness.
>
> GUMBRECHT 2003: 87[37]

Once again, philosophy here returns to philosophy as a way of life.

For Gumbrecht, this Nietzschean untimeliness involves 'the intense quietness of presence' (Gumbrecht 2004: 137) that severs us from the demands of productivity and meaning that have paradoxically and problematically become usual for so many of us working in contemporary universities.[38] Gumbrecht's vision of untimeliness would enhance the possibility of academic work once again resembling aesthetic experience, precisely by providing the time for 'intensity' to emerge.[39] If aesthetic experience is partially

defined by an intensity that disrupts our everyday view of the world, then philosophy becomes intense when the institution provides the possibility of what Gumbrecht refers to as 'riskful thinking' or a slow 'thinking [of] what cannot be thought in our everyday worlds' (Gumbrecht 2004: 126).[40] This intense kind of work both accompanies and is enabled by the reading that Gumbrecht applauds, the reading that sees us hover slowly and hesitatingly between 'losing and regaining intellectual control and orientation' (Gumbrecht 2004: 128). This type of reading emerges from stopping; it comes out of our 'being quiet for a moment' (142–3), and this is possible only when time is not an issue. Gumbrecht calls us 'to be quiet for a moment from time to time amid the technological and epistemological noise of our general mobilization' (141) and, by way of example, he points us towards the practice of Japanese No theatre, suggesting that herein lies one instance of slowing and opening to the intensity of the world:

> No pieces ... and their music are breathtakingly slow and repetitive. But ... if you have enough patience to let the slowness of emerging and vanishing of form and unformed presence grow on you, then after three or four hours, No can make you realize how your rapport to the things of the world has changed ... [through composure] you ever so slowly begin to let things emerge, you become part of them.
>
> GUMBRECHT 2004: 150–1

By allowing things to emerge and becoming part of them, we open ourselves to the world in new and important ways.

If Gumbrecht's celebration of the slowness of No theatre seems worrying to the Western (or specifically, the North American) mind, then it may be worth reminding ourselves of what philosophy, as a practice – at its best – embodies. Philosophy, in its ideal form, *is* a slow and repetitive art. In doing philosophy well we return time after time to similar passages, similar problems and similar writers. We patiently absorb ourselves in questions that can engage us for a lifetime. We sit quietly and immerse ourselves in contemplative thought, and we do so in order to gain a perspective or 'intensity' that our everyday lives do not readily afford. We compose ourselves so that the world returns to us anew. Seen from an imaginary 'outside', philosophy is a slow business indeed; it is hardly a gripping

spectator sport. And yet, this very manner of doing philosophy is under threat in the modern university, where a desire to know and to produce so often outweighs a love of wisdom and of exploration.

Gumbrecht's earlier claim – that our primary pedagogical task should be identifying instances of complexity and then exposing our students to these so that they may encounter the joy of sinking deeply into a slow and careful engagement with the complexities of thought – reminds us of the positive role that teaching can – and ought to – still play in the institution.[41] It seems to me that teaching is the future of the kind of slow reading and slow philosophy that I am interested in nurturing. Are there ways, then, that we can, as teachers of philosophy, welcome our students into an ethical community of readers? I certainly think so, and it is my hope that this book provides a step in that direction. In essence, though, the very act of valuing the teaching that we do is a way of reclaiming the instituting moment of the institution as our own; a first step towards a future philosophy. Simon Critchley has some helpful things to say about this in his paper 'What is the Institutional Form for Thinking?' (Critchley 2010).[42] Here he invites us to become more attentive to the practice of teaching, imagining alternatives to dominant institutional modes; alternatives that move us away from the increasingly corporate models that have come to dominate the academy. This overlay of a corporate mentality carries with it an instrumental approach to 'output' and 'production'[43] that, I think, inevitably places time restrictions on thought and reading alike. By reclaiming the pleasures of teaching, learning and thinking, Critchley argues in his paper that we can, to a large extent, resist the pressures that threaten the very possibility of thought. It is precisely here, in this reconnection with the pleasures of teaching, that a slow reading can gradually take root. Though slow reading is not Critchley's focus, what he has to say about thought and its relation with pleasure nonetheless supports my case. His call for 'a better, collaborative, institutional form for thinking' based on the enjoyment of teaching (Critchley 2010: 24) is one that has much in common with the idea of the teaching of a reading that opens us patiently to the otherness of the world. When Critchley refers to 'the delicate tact of teaching' and its involvement in 'the formation of human beings' (26), I think of this in terms of the ethical work that the teaching of slow reading can do. Importantly, Critchley locates the pleasures and joys of such a teaching within the ethos of

familiarity and trust – an ethos that 'is fragile, at times obscure, and that cannot be reduced to the bean-counting methods of measuring research quality' (22).[44] Philosophy as a way of life triumphs here over any desire to calculate and simply to know.

Critchley's determination to reconnect with the pleasures of teaching and Gumbrecht's desire to enhance the possibilities for intensity rest largely on the institution's ability to provide the space and time for real thought to emerge. Both sit well with approaches to teaching philosophy that recognize the importance of reading slowly, and both challenge institutionalized models of reading or doing philosophy reduced to 'information-extraction' or 'mining'. Critchley argues that, at its best, philosophy doesn't offer knowledge conceived as information. In fact, it doesn't even offer wisdom. What it does offer, though, is a disposition *towards* wisdom: 'a disposition toward thinking and thoughtfulness' (Critchley 2010: 29), 'an orientation of the soul toward the true' (25).[45] By challenging the discourse on knowledge and offering in its place 'a nonknowledge where the object of philosophical investigation is not conceptualized, compartmentalized, or neatly defined' (26), philosophy, we can argue, becomes again a love of wisdom and a way of life. Gumbrecht's intense reading and Critchley's pleasurable teaching move us well beyond 'information' and a forensic desire to know. Now I think that Wittgenstein's 'slow cure' returns to us in the patient and intense reading that we have seen Gumbrecht invoke. In saying so, I am suggesting that Wittgenstein can be thought of as a silent interlocutor in Gumbrecht's contemporary discussion. And yet, there is another voice that needs to be included in this conversation. I have already indicated that Gumbrecht frames what he says about the institution in terms of Friedrich Nietzsche's idea of an untimely philosophy.

It is time now to consider what Nietzsche has to say about reading. Throughout his work, Nietzsche writes eloquently on the need for us to become slow, and much of what he says sits well with Gumbrecht's celebration of intensity. In the Preface to *Daybreak*, Nietzsche describes the reading that accompanies this art of slowing – this slow philosophy:

> That venerable art which demands of its votaries one thing above all: to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow . . . But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today

> . . . in the midst of an age of 'work', that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to get 'everything done' at once . . . this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers.
>
> NIETZSCHE 1982: 5[46]

Nietzsche's description of a reading 'with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers' is a marvellous counter to an anxiety that needs 'to get "everything done" at once' and to the modern university that seeks comprehension and certainty with 'indecent haste'. It is a reminder, too, that teaching matters. In addition, Nietzsche's reading counters a certain kind of philosophy that reduces reading to a conflict or struggle, a battle where what we read is to be ultimately contained, determined – pinned down, known. As Nietzsche himself reminds us, 'the worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole' (Nietzsche 1996: 137).[47] In place of this combative reading, Nietzsche offers us a slow reading that partakes of an almost bovine sensibility. For example, he provides the following rather striking image: 'I admit that you need one thing above all in order to practice the requisite art of reading . . . you almost need to be a cow for this one thing and certainly not a "modern man": [and what is this thing?] it is rumination' (Nietzsche 1965: 9–11).

Making good on my earlier promise to return to our cow, we can, with Nietzsche's help, think of slow reading as a kind of rumination, a slow chewing over of thought. Rumination gives us ample time to engage with what we read.[48] We allow impressions to form. We allow the dust of our reading to settle. We patiently take our time. It is possible to think of slow reading in terms of the slow movement generally,[49] which acknowledges that 'speed has helped to remake our world in ways that are wonderful and liberating' but that our current addiction to haste is now verging on the catastrophic (Honoré 2004: 4). The slow food movement, part of this slow movement, consciously promotes the idea of rumination that I am celebrating here, and to juxtapose these two – slow reading with slow food – is to bring reading and eating into a potentially fruitful dialogue.[50]

In what follows I touch briefly upon moments in contemporary

philosophical practice that bear traces of Nietzsche's call to slowness, linking reading with – and thereby renewing – the instituting moment of philosophy as a love of wisdom and a way of life.

We find traces of Nietzsche's call to slowness in the work of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. In his later work, Lyotard sees critique (along with theory and interpretation) as part of a restricted judicial process, in that it remains tied to the adversary's position. In order to work philosophically in new ways, he avoids the finality of verdict by developing an approach characterized by an indeterminate judgement. Bill Readings, following Lyotard's lead, frames this new approach to judgement in terms of reading. Lyotard's 'reading', he says can be understood as 'a performance which should be judged in ethical terms' (Readings 1991: xxiii),[51] involving, as it does, invention rather than fidelity. In *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard writes: 'We do not interpret, we read, and we effect by writing' (Lyotard 1993: 94). So the work of philosophy is for Lyotard the work of reading, and I would add to this that his particular form of reading is ethical in that it is characterized by an openness to otherness that occurs in slow and unhurried ways. For example, in *Driftworks*, Lyotard speaks of 'drifting' as an alternative to the adversary's position of critique (Lyotard 1984). Lyotard's drifting is a slow reading that turns its back on the hurried judgement of critique and verdict.

In indeterminate judgement Lyotard is referring to situations or events where something occurs, with the result that our pre-existing understanding is radically disrupted – leaving us with no obvious way to think through what has happened. In such a context, Lyotard urges us to experiment with new ways of engaging with the event, ones that imaginatively open us to what has happened, rather than prematurely resolving and thus containing and ultimately losing the event. Indeterminate judgement involves inventing new understanding, and this process of experimentation and invention takes time. Here, the philosopher engages slowly, so as to avoid a hasty and reductive conceptualization. This 'paralogical experimentation'[52] resists the lure of a judgement that both limits and contains.[53] As it moves it hesitates, ever careful not to resolve the event in some convenient and prematurely finished form.[54] Imagination takes the place of conceptualization here and in this, and other respects, Lyotard's work connects with Wittgenstein's

philosophical project (Lyotard 1985).

The philosophical and political, not to mention juridical, implications of Lyotard's important work on indeterminate judgement bring us, if we continue with the imaginary genealogy I am proposing, to the equally significant work of the Brazilian intellectual, Luiz Costa Lima whose work we will consider in Chapter Two. Costa Lima's work on 'criticity' – a questioning that does not lead to the finality of judgement – evokes a similarly slow and open engagement that requires imagination in the place of conceptual rigour and system (Costa Lima 1996).[55] His point, that the 'reasonable' quality of (philosophical or theoretical) thought too often threatens to drown the voice of imagination, to tame it in order to better control and regulate it, sits nicely alongside the concerns that Lyotard has for judgement in general. Costa Lima's work, more consciously oriented towards questions of reading than Lyotard's, highlights the fate of imagination and its links with fiction (broadly interpreted) in modern times. Throughout his many works, Costa Lima explores the mechanisms of control that work to institutionalize both reading and thought,[56] and in doing so he gestures towards other possibilities – other ways of reading and engaging that promise to salvage the great potential of thought. Costa Lima's work is particularly important reading for those of us who are institutionally based, as it challenges us to think through the implications of a specialized academic or professional reading (critique) that departs from reading perhaps more commonly practiced.[57] And while he does not say so himself, the reading that Costa Lima both gestures towards and performs in his own work is slow – precisely in the sense of Nietzsche's reading 'with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers'.

This slow reading finds quite another inflection in the work of Luce Irigaray. Irigaray's readings of some of the major philosophical texts of the Western tradition provide us with models of engaged and ethical encounter (Irigaray 1993). Starting from a love of wisdom and moving towards a wisdom of love, Irigaray challenges the institution to face its instituting moment. In her encounter with Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* she provides us with a reading that offsets the dangers of speed and haste with the slowness of a wonder that constantly stops to encounter difference.[58] (Nietzsche surfaces momentarily in Irigaray's essay as a luminous guide whose own thought inspires a patient return to wonder.)[59] Wonder, the first of

the passions, stops us, stills and quietens us long enough to be in proximity with the other, to slowly appreciate the strangeness or newness of the other, rather than hurriedly moving on. Wonder opens us to the element of surprise, exposing us to the other's uniqueness and difference, suspending us between flux and certitude. Wonder provides the basis for an open and optimistic engagement with the other – 'doors left open . . . delicate eyes and fingers'. No anxious search for certainty and containment, but rather an infinite response that patiently reaches out time and time again. The implications for an open and engaged reading seem clear to me here.[60]

I have suggested that Nietzsche's call to read slowly, to become slow, to avoid haste, to read 'with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers' finds sympathetic expression in the work of writers as diverse as Lyotard, Costa Lima and Irigaray.[61] I have hinted – all too briefly in an Introduction savouring the delights of slow reading – how I see this to be the case, and I have reframed their work in order to emphasize the links I see with Nietzsche's call. But what precisely is the nature of this call? What is it in Nietzsche's work that separates him from the haste of a largely modern philosophy? Is Nietzsche's call an ancient one? One way of exploring these questions is to think, at the same time, about Hadot's suggestion that in the modern era only a few rare exceptions (Nietzsche included) challenge the legacy of the scholastic tradition by returning to something of the ancients.[62] He writes:

> The idea of philosophy reduced to its conceptual content has survived to our own time . . . We encounter it every day in our university courses and in textbooks at every level; one could say that it is the classical, scholastic, university conception of philosophy. Consciously or unconsciously, our universities are still heirs of the 'School' – in other words, of the Scholastic tradition.
>
> HADOT 2002: 258

And in an earlier work:

> From now on, with few rare exceptions like Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, philosophy would be indissolubly linked to the university . . . This fact is not without its importance.

> Philosophy – reduced . . . to philosophical discourse – develops from this point on in a different atmosphere and environment from that of ancient philosophy. In modern university philosophy, philosophy is obviously no longer a way of life or a form of life – unless it be the form of life of a professor of philosophy . . . modern philosophy is first and foremost a discourse developed in the classroom, and then consigned to books.
>
> HADOT 1995: 271[63]

Hadot is concerned to distinguish ancient philosophy from the discourse-bound tradition of scholasticism – to distinguish philosophy as a way of life from philosophy as a written discourse. Philosophy 'today', he claims, emerges out of a scholasticism that abstracts itself from life: 'philosophy in the Middle Ages had become a purely theoretical and abstract reality. It was no longer a way of life' (Hadot 1995: 270):

> If ancient philosophy established an intimate link between philosophical discourse and the form of life, why is it that today, given the way the history of philosophy is usually taught, philosophy is presented as above all a discourse, which may be theoretical and systematic, or critical, but in any case lacks a direct relationship to the philosopher's way of life?
>
> HADOT 2002: 253

Hadot charts stages in what he sees as this gradual deformation of philosophy, and he concludes this with a discussion of Descartes – a philosopher he sees as best embodying this 'new' philosophy that disengages with life.[64]

The fact that Hadot identifies Nietzsche in this story is interesting; interesting because it suggests that Nietzsche manages to escape the stranglehold of scholasticism by retaining ties (complex as these may be) to an ancient philosophy that remains, above all, a way of life.[65] Might pace have something to do with the invisible thread that connects Nietzsche back to the ancients? While Hadot's understanding of the problem is the focus on discourse that emerges from scholasticism, I suggest that contemplation and the slow pace required for contemplation to occur is also an issue here.[66] We need to ask whether there is something in the scholastic tradition that works against a slow practice of philosophy – one that ties us back

to the world. Does the abstraction of scholasticism ultimately undermine contemplation of one's place *in* the world? Does scholasticism initiate a way of doing philosophy – a methodology – that separates us from philosophy practised as a *way* of life?[67] Clearly the answer to these questions from Hadot's point of view is a resounding yes!

Another way of thinking about this is to separate slow reading from a formulaic version of close reading. We can distinguish slow reading from this kind of close reading in the following ways. Slow reading follows an anti-systematic trajectory and has questioning as its major motivation. It is an open-ended reading that has ethics as its core – ethics here denoting an openness to the other. In certain kinds of close reading the temporality of slow reading is replaced with a spatiality of being close, rather than proximate. This somewhat suffocating closeness interrogates at close quarters, providing a microscopic examination of the other. This version of close reading is systematic and formal; it draws its inspiration from the needs of the system – to read systematically and thoroughly. To confirm what is already known. It is exhaustive, and all too often works to contain what it reads by producing a systematic or coherent commentary, one that at times smoothes over ambiguities and irregularities. This form of close reading interprets and attributes meaning, while slow reading takes the opportunity to engage in open-ended thought. In this sense, scholasticism – and its modern institutional philosophical counterpart – involves a version of close reading that is, at its worst, devoid of contact with the world or the philosopher's life. This abstract, internal, disengaged reading fails to return us *to* the world. Slow reading, on the other hand, is a practice that grounds thought in the body, in experience – it is both external and open-ended. It is a reading that encourages us to take our time, to pause, to look up from the page; taking the time to do so, rather than remaining with one's head buried in the page, as is so often the case in formulaic forms of close reading. Of course, having said all this, we need to distinguish systematic and formula-driven versions of close reading from those that are both slow and problematizing.[68]

If philosophy is to regain something of the weight or gravity of its ancient practice, to be once more a love of wisdom, we need to reinstate a pace that permits it to become, again, a way of life.[69] In the light of this, I suggest we practise a philosophy and a reading

that is both slow and meditative; a careful and concerned practice that patiently connects us both with what we read and with how we live. Such a reading involves a slow engagement capable of attention to what we have seen Gumbrecht refer to as the complexity of the world.[70] This reading challenges contemporary philosophy to be more than 'activity' and 'mobilization',[71] something more than production – perhaps a slow sinking into the world[72] that allows thought its time.[73] Indeed, Hadot himself points us in this direction when at the end of a section entitled 'Learning How to Read', he writes:

> And yet we have forgotten *how* to read: how to pause, liberate ourselves from our worries, return into ourselves, and leave aside our search for subtlety and originality, in order to meditate calmly, ruminate, and let the texts speak to us. This, too, is a spiritual exercise, and one of the most difficult. As Goethe said: 'Ordinary people don't know how much time and effort it takes to learn how to read. I've spent eighty years at it, and I still can't say that I've reached my goal'.
>
> HADOT 1995: 109[74]

The eighty patient years that Goethe spends learning how to read echo the fifty slow and meditative years we saw Stieglitz devote to his photographic art of 'reading' early in this Introduction. Both invest time and effort in learning how to read well, and given the connotations of the term 'reading', this may not be as surprising as it seems. *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* suggests that in English from roughly 1175 *reden* comes to mean to consider, discern, read (writing), and that it is influenced by the word *rǣdan* in Old English (West Saxon), meaning to explain, read, rule, advise (before 899). Associations of reading with advising, counselling, considering or explaining something complex or difficult to understand, come to English via the Germanic languages where such associations are common. However, later associations of reading with the deciphering of written symbols appears to be unique to English and Old Icelandic. In addition, reading has historic associations with 'considering' in Old Irish (*immrādim)*, 'minding' in Old Welsh (*amraud*) and 'caring for' in Old Slavic (*raditi*) (Barnhart 2010: 891).[75] Perhaps this subterranean sense of reading as 'caring for' helps us to better appreciate the kind of slow

and careful (ethical) effort that reading is for Goethe and Stieglitz. Slow reading comes out of the practice of both caring for what we read and for how we go about it.

This sense of reading as 'caring for' allows us to ask precisely what it is that slow reading permits. Of course, we have been discussing this throughout the Introduction and yet it is worth returning to this one more time. It seems to me that what slow reading allows is an open relation to the complexity of the world we inhabit. In this it partakes of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. By granting us unhurried time, we are able to open out to the world. It is this openness that permits us what is ultimately an ethical relation with our world. Openness to otherness, to strangeness, to complexity is what *constitutes* ethics. And slowness, in this sense, is what *enables* this openness. Now it may well be that slowness takes various forms. Indeed, we need only look to musical notation and tempo to discover that slowness exists along a continuum from moderately to very slow. Between the moderate walking pace of *andante* and the very, very slow gait of *larghissimo*, there exists the possibilities of *andante moderato*, *adagietto*, *adagio*, *larghetto*, *largo*, *lento* and *grave*. In addition, there are *ritardando* and *rallentando*, both of which indicate a gradual slowing down. It may be useful to think of slow reading along this continuum, or even along the entire continuum of tempo. What I mean by this is that at any given time the openness we seek, in order to connect with the otherness, strangeness or complexity of the world, may be accessible in a variety of ways. Slowness may be our first and necessary encounter with the world in order that we read in engaged, open and ethical ways, and yet successive readings or rereadings (whether slow or not) may occur in quite different ways. For example, slow and open approaches to reading may build over time to a sudden burst of insight where, however fleetingly, we engage the world in entirely different ways. The moment of '*Aha-Erlebnis*'[76] is one way of thinking about the culmination of slow and ruminant thought in a moment of instant gestalt. Throughout this book, I will argue that the practice of returning to what we read – of rereading and being willing to reread (at whatever speed) – is fundamental to any ethical engagement with complexity.

In a similar vein, it is also worth considering the importance of space in any discussion of what slow reading might possibly entail. The tempo of a slow or meandering reading arguably requires space

or room for such a reading to move around in; that is, room for the reading to occur. References in musical tempo to 'walking pace' are not incidental. They indicate the spatial location of tempo *in* the world; between the body *and* the world. Slow reading proceeds at a meandering walking pace and, as such, is a reading that arguably fits the body's rhythms.

What ultimately makes a slow and meditative reading worthwhile is not only that it hesitates or suspends judgement, that it deliberates before it takes a stance or compares one work with another. Rather, what makes such a reading worthwhile is that these eventual acts of judgement or comparison emerge out of a process of slow, careful and open immersion *in* the work – in the reading. Slow reading is an open reading that delights in taking its time, in sitting with the text, waiting for the dust of reading to settle before gathering itself to respond to the text and to engage fully with it. With Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Woolf and Gumbrecht, I am calling for a slow, open and considered reading, a careful reading that is concerned more with raising questions than with determining answers. An open reading that ignores the demands of system and structure for the sheer pleasure and intensity of allowing thought its time. This reading allows us 'to go aside, to take time, to become still, to become slow' so that we resist the hurry of 'indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to get "everything done" at once'. This reading does 'not so readily get anything done' but rather 'teach[es us] to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply . . . with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers'.

Resisting institutional reading

By framing this investigation in terms of the complex interplay between the love of wisdom (the instituting moment) and the forensic desire to know (the instituted structure), I am working with a series of oppositions that follow from this division. Accordingly, slow reading restores the relevance that the instituting moment no longer holds by gathering a set of practices that resist the dominance of institutional forms of reading. For example, in the following chapters I explore slow reading as an attentive rereading rather than a speed reading; as a common or unprofessional reading rather than a professional one; as an open or open-ended reading rather

than a closed or finite one; as an exploration of ambiguity and contradiction rather than a need to know; as an imaginative engagement rather than a disciplined approach; as an experimental gesture rather than a rigorous one; as a fascination rather than a final interpretation; as an intellectual curiosity rather than a deferential account; as a questioning rather than an explanation; as an incomplete reading rather than a final one; as a partial account rather than an exhaustive one; as a suspended judgement rather than a verdict; as an essayistic reading rather than a systematic one; as a loving relation or wondrous appreciation rather than an authoritative account; as an attentive listening rather than a closed mind; as a careful engagement rather than a reductive response; as an authentic reading rather than a romantic or a deferential one; as a slow and intimate approach rather than a hasty reduction; as a generosity and a giving rather than a plundering; as a polite respect rather than a pretentious or an authoritative interpretation; as a discerning reading rather than a self-interested one; as an intense encounter, an extreme proximity or an *entredeux* rather than an objective account; as a meandering, an unhurried reception, a reflection, a rumination, a meditative relation, a patience, a receptive attitude rather than an activity, a mastery or a mobilization; as a feeling, an atmosphere or a mood rather than an academic exercise; as an attention, rapture, felicity, surrender or grace rather than the gravity of a calculation; as a future philosophy rather than a moribund one; as an ethical engagement rather than an adversarial one; as an ethics of reading rather than a desire to know.

By institutional reading I mean the kind of reading that comes to dominate the modern institutional context. In philosophy this means the largely professional reading undertaken in the university that occurs within a culture of speed and haste – of publish or perish. Reading institutionally means to read without the time required to allow the dust to settle, or for impressions to be received. It means reading directly, without the necessary and essential element of time. It means reading so as to produce immediate (and often hasty) judgements (verdicts). It means reading 'scientifically' or 'technologically' (as 'information technology') – for information and for information extraction. It means reading to mine resources. It means reading to construct coherence by radical simplification and jumping hastily to conclusions. It means reading closely in the sense of an exhaustive, systematic or formal reading that draws

inspiration solely from the needs of the system. It means reading purely to interpret rather than to engage. It means reading in an abstract, disengaged manner, in place of a relation with the world. It means reading in order simply to know. Each of these faces of institutional reading limit our potential to pursue a love of wisdom, whether this be in our research, our teaching, our collegiality or our interactions with other traditions and other disciplines.[77]

In offering alternatives to institutional reading I look towards slow reading as the work involved in transformation that philosophy as a way of life should be. This transformation comes about through the quality of attention that underpins and ties together each of the slow reading practices I explore. My aim is to offer these instances of slow reading as counters to the institutional readings that unconsciously support the dominant scholarly context of speed and haste. In doing so, I seek to reclaim or release what is best in our Western tradition – the instituting moments – by formulating contemporary philosophical practices that engage with the Socratic orientation of philosophy as a love of wisdom rather than as simply a desire to know. In effect, my work introduces a necessary reversal in practice, aimed to challenge and eventually undo aspects of this institutionalization. Having said this, though, I should be clear that my project is not a return to some ideal past or prior position, which would of course be a kind of romantic gesture, but rather it offers a way of rethinking how philosophy within its current institutional context can operate. It works with the institution to revitalize it, acknowledging that the guiding principal of the love of wisdom can and ought to be more than curiously irrelevant to immediate concerns.

CHAPTER ONE

Habits of Reading: Le Dœuff's Future Philosophy

Resolving to read

RICHARD FLANAGAN, *GOULD'S BOOK OF FISH*: 373

In the Introduction I outlined two very different aspects of philosophical work: the *instituting* moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life, and the *instituted* structure of a desire to know. These tendencies come together in complex ways to form the *institution* of philosophy as we know it today. I argued that the guiding principle – the love of wisdom – is responsible for instituting an orientation towards philosophy as transformative, propelling the philosopher from one existential state to another. In this chapter, I continue this exploration, looking to Michèle Le Dœuff's work to focus on what I refer to as her 'habits' of reading. I argue that Le Dœuff's approach to philosophy as 'work' and her belief that this involves shifting thinking from one stage to another is an excellent way of thinking about the transformation that propels the philosopher from one existential state to another. As such, Le Dœuff's work brings us back to the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life, offering us sites of resistance to the institutional reading I seek to avoid.

Philosophy as discipline

Before proceeding to Le Dœuff's habits of reading, I want to take a moment to engage with what she has to say about the institution of philosophy, as this has direct bearing on the argument I develop in this book. Put simply, Le Dœuff's exploration of contemporary philosophy as a discipline offers us a helpful way of thinking about how and why the guiding idea of a love of wisdom recedes in the institutional context – and how a desire to know and to limit comes to the fore. Additionally, Le Dœuff's understanding of the disciplinary nature of contemporary philosophy has implications for the kind of future philosophy she works towards: a future that allows us to challenge the institutional culture of philosophy.

In an early work, *The Philosophical Imaginary* (1989), Le Dœuff explores the various limits and borders that accompany philosophy when it is practised as a discipline. She claims that philosophy works to repress, exclude and dissolve an otherness that it sets itself against: 'For philosophical discourse is a discipline, that is to say a discourse obeying (or claiming to obey) a finite number of rules, procedures or operations, and as such it represents a closure, a delimitation which denies the (actually or potentially) indefinite character of modes of thought; it is a barrage restraining the number of possible (acceptable) statements' (Le Dœuff 1989: 114). Le Dœuff's argument is a complex one, engaging with the paradox of philosophy's relation with its interminable otherness. Philosophy creates itself precisely by opposing itself to an outside or exterior that it largely creates: 'For in defining itself through negation, the philosophical creates its Other: it engenders an opposite which, from now on, will play the role of hostile principle, the more hostile because there is no question of dispensing with it' (115). Philosophy's hallucinated and persecuting other (its internal enemy) haunts its borders, and surfaces in philosophy's clashes with other discourses and modes of thought. Philosophy as discipline does its best to exclude the otherness that exists paradoxically at its inner imaginary core.[1] In this sense, its disciplinary nature is constructed as a general form of exclusion, and this works to minimize philosophy's contact with an otherness that inhabits the world. When experienced as discipline, philosophy is a closing down that seeks a restricted and managerial relation with the world. This specific form of philosophy is equated, in Le Dœuff's account, with closure, delimitation, exclusion, restraint and control,

and we can recognize in these terms a depiction of the instituted and institutional nature of philosophy.

Given this, we can ask why Le Dœuff situates her own work within the domain of philosophy. We can ask, too, how she understands her relation with its disciplinary or institutional practice. If philosophy has historically worked towards closure, how can it help us to engage openly today? Old habits die hard and the disciplinary nature of philosophy is certainly cause for concern, and yet Le Dœuff's work is aimed squarely at identifying and transforming those aspects of philosophical work that close down our engagement with the complexity of the world. At the same time, she affirms a positive history, a history that we can equate with the instituting moments of philosophy – a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. In this positive mode, Le Dœuff looks in two directions at once; she identifies moments in the history of philosophy where open and engaged thought is evident, while simultaneously looking towards a future philosophy that is not defined by discipline, one that – as we will see later in the chapter – resembles other modes of thought. Indeed, she writes: 'Personally, if I did not stop halfway on the path to identification [as many other aspiring women philosophers have done], it was because I thought I saw the possibility of a fork in the path ahead, and thus of throwing in my lot with a philosophical practice which was still to come' (Le Dœuff 1991: 79).

Philosophy's old habits of reading

If philosophy has functioned to a large extent as discipline and exclusion what are the implications of this institutional structure for reading? Although reading is not Le Dœuff's obvious focus, there are many observations scattered throughout her work that help us to respond to this question. Reading carefully through her œuvre, we can piece together a series of insights that help us to identify (i) old habits of reading; (ii) engaged and open modes of reading; and (iii) questions concerning the gendered nature of reading more generally.

In a section of the 'Third Notebook' of *Hipparchia's Choice*, which begins appropriately with a reference to 'the ethics of the trade', Le Dœuff identifies three ways to characterize the relations between philosophy and the history of philosophy (Le Dœuff 1991:

166). What she says here can usefully be thought in terms of three different approaches to reading the history of philosophy, or simply as three ways that philosophers read. Genevieve Lloyd's depiction of these three relations, although not referring to them as readings, offers a helpful way to engage with and extend the categories Le Dœuff constructs, and I will refer to it here. The first approach involves reading as a kind of clear articulation of the truth or knowledge previous philosophers have written: reading as a desire to know what is already known. It is a somewhat ahistorical reading or commentary that positions the great work as 'monument'. The assumption is that an absolute transparency allows past philosophers to know and to write in ways that admit no 'unthought' to inhabit the text. The key to this kind of reading is a faithful rendering that, as Lloyd notes, positions the commentator 'at the speaking position of the author, stripping away the misinterpretations that have preceded her, to offer a clear articulation of what the author really said' (Lloyd 2000: 33). This approach to reading shares something of the commitment that Le Dœuff elsewhere refers to as fidelity (Le Dœuff 1989: 125). The faithful reader Le Dœuff identifies in *Hipparchia's Choice* is committed to the work of uncovering a truth that is self-evidently there.[2]

The second approach to reading that Le Dœuff identifies places truth or knowledge with the contemporary reader. Here reading targets the philosopher's 'unthought', aiming to identify and shame those points of tension that structure the philosophical work. With hindsight the reader uncovers what is hidden in the text, demonstrating that 'the exegete understands a work better than its author, since the former knows both the work, its outside and what links it to its outside' (Le Dœuff 1989: 167). There are links, here, with aspects of Le Dœuff's early approach to reading in *The Philosophical Imaginary*, and Lloyd identifies two versions of this second approach: in the weaker version 'the interpretation of imagery in philosophical texts goes together with a search for points of tension in a work: The imagery is seen as inseparable from the difficulties, the "sensitive points" of an intellectual venture', while in the stronger version 'the interpretation of the philosopher's imagery involves a deeper tension – approaching a contradiction – in the workings of the text' (Lloyd 2000: 34).

Le Dœuff's third approach equates reading with 'work' and here a different practice comes into play. A sense of movement frames

reading as dynamic: neither as 'a monument' (complete/finished), nor as 'an effect which is blind to its origins' (incomplete/lacking), but rather as 'an effort to shift thinking from one stage to another' (reading as a love of wisdom). Reading as work would be neither completion nor beginning; more properly it would be 'impulse and movement' (Le Dœuff 1989: 168). This effort to shift thinking from one stage to another is one good way of thinking about reading in ethical terms, and we will return to this in due course. For now, though, let us make some preliminary observations that will help us later to think more carefully about the relation of this third approach and Le Dœuff's own reading practices. This third approach moves beyond uncovering the tensions structuring the philosophical text (as with the second approach Le Dœuff identifies), establishing a more collaborative relation with what it reads. Creativity and imagination are brought into play, stretching the original intentions of the author in new and unexpected ways. As Lloyd observes, the reader opens philosophy out to wider concerns:

> The contemporary reader of philosophical texts becomes not the superior judge of the author's pretensions, but rather a constructive, though tough-minded, appropriator. The difference is one of tone and spirit. The task is collaborative rather than antagonistic (or adversarial): not so much to confront the author with what has been repressed or evaded, but rather to rethink in a new context what the author said.
>
> LLOYD 2000: 37

Contemporary concerns and issues can revitalize earlier philosophical discussions, and earlier discussions can help to open contemporary concerns in new and sometimes unexpected ways. Le Dœuff's approach to reading as work shares something with the reading Nietzsche celebrates when he writes: 'We honor the great artists of the past less through that unfruitful awe which allows every word, every note, to lie where it has been put than we do through active endeavors to help them to come repeatedly to life again' (Nietzsche 1996: 126).[3]

Le Dœuff's third approach to reading shifts philosophy away from its old habits, and orients reading towards practices that prefigure a future philosophy. In doing so, it expands the possibilities of philosophical discourse, bringing it into both relation and

> Who better than a woman to show fidelity, respect and remembrance? A woman can be trusted to perpetuate the words of the Great Discourse: she will add none of her own. Everyone knows the more of a philosopher one is, the more distorted one's reading of other philosophers. Think of Leibniz's reading of Malebranche, or Hegel's reading of Kant! They cannot respect the thought of the other: they are too engrossed in their own. Nietzsche said that a scientist's objectivity indicated his lack of instinct. How could a woman manhandle a text, or violate a discourse? The vestal of a discourse which time threatens to eclipse, the nurse of dismembered texts, the healer of works battered by false editions, the housewife whom one hopes will dust off grey film successive readings have left on the fine object, she takes on the upkeep of the monuments, the forms which the mind has deserted. A god's priestess, dedicated to a great dead man. This phantasmagoria of the commentary has to some extent enabled women to find a place for themselves in philosophical work. A minor one, however: as in cooking, so in commentary – the high-class works are always reserved for a Hyppolite or a Bocuse.
>
> LE DŒUFF 1989: 125[8]

There are questions, of course, concerning the status of commentary in English-speaking philosophical circles and how this equates with its role in the French context Le Dœuff evokes, but this aside, she makes an important point in bringing to our attention the question of how women and men read.[9] The distinction Le Dœuff draws between weak and strong commentary (faithful reading or violation) – or between commentary and 'philosophy proper' – has implications for how we think about reading and the various habits it involves.[10] Indeed, Le Dœuff draws our attention to the gendered nature of these habits in her questions: 'Is it true that "to read is to write" and to rewrite what one thinks one is reading? And if that is the case, does the "same" book cease to be the same, depending on whether it is read by a man or a woman?' (Le Dœuff 1991: 65).[11] Although Le Dœuff thinks it likely that a woman (especially a feminist woman) will bring a different set of priorities and orientations to any reading,[12] she does not feel there is any need to transform these differences 'into a radical and definitive difference', suggesting instead that 'we would do better to assume that any way of [reading] someone else's work

can be analysed and should be examined' (Le Dœuff 1991: 66). This examination ought to, of course, involve an assessment of the social and political context within which any reading is embedded.

From Le Dœuff's perspective, commentary has been one of the few places where women have been able to feel somewhat at home in philosophy. Penelope Deutscher takes up this question of 'being at home', observing that for Le Dœuff it occurs by first identifying with and then separating from our philosophical mentors and their work (Deutscher 2000: 199–220). In separating from our teachers and the authority of the discipline over time, we develop an independent relation with philosophy that allows us finally to be at home in our own right. For many women, this process is not straightforward and Le Dœuff explores the various structural and institutional conditions that make it less likely for them (us) to complete a separation beyond an initial (and possibly tentative) identification. Despite this, she thinks optimistically about the ways in which women philosophers can make a positive force out of being 'not quite at home'.[13] Le Dœuff's discussion of identification and separation to some extent parallel the types of love and reading that we will go on to explore in relation to Beauvoir's work in Chapter Five. Identification has much in common with a romantic relation with the other, and separation is part of what underpins and makes possible any authentic relation. The value of Le Dœuff's discussion is that it provides a nuanced understanding of how the two moments, identification *and* separation, work together and how both are integral to our ability to be 'at home'.

In the context of university examinations in philosophy, Le Dœuff makes observations that connect with the few things she has said regarding men and women and their relation to commentary. She suggests that there are two identifiable approaches to reading evident in student responses. On the one hand, there is a tendency towards authoritative interpretation, while on the other there is evidence of a polite receptivity. Writing in 1980 she notes:

> [A] paper can be identified as masculine by its authoritative tone, by the way interpretation dominates over receptivity to the text, resulting in a decisive and profound reading or in fantastic misinterpretation. Women, on the other hand, are all receptivity, and their papers are characterized by a kind of polite respect for the fragmentation of the other's discourse (this is called

> 'acuteness in detailed commentary but lack of overview'), by a great timidity (it is as though they left it to the text to explain itself), and also by a talent for what one might call the 'flattering comparison' . . .
>
> Men treat the text familiarly and knock it about happily; women treat it with a politeness for which girls' education has its share of responsibility. If the timidity and desire to flatter are not too strong this form of reading can, I think, produce great successes, a distanced kind of reading which enables one to see what is implicit in the text or to pick out the 'gaps' in a theorization.
>
> LE DŒUFF 1989: 124

It is perhaps not overly surprising that those marking university examinations in the 1980s would routinely (if unconsciously) map masculinity with authority and femininity with receptivity. However, the distinction between these two approaches remains interesting for us today and is worth some further consideration.[14] We learn from Le Dœuff that decisive and profound readings are ones demonstrating an authoritative style that lacks deference towards the text; these readings exhibit a certain violence and familiarity (are these connected?) and are happy to knock the text about; in these approaches interpretation dominates over receptivity (a desire to know over a wisdom of love?). Politely receptive readings, on the other hand, present an attentiveness to detail that is undercut by timidity,[15] a tendency towards flattering comparison, and a general lack of overview.[16] What Le Dœuff observes here we may refer to as culturally embedded gendered habits of reading, habits that are passed down institutionally from generation to generation.[17] In this context philosophy perpetuates dominant modes of reading, granting the greater spoils to those aggressive and authoritative approaches that serve to make their mark – or at the very least, to leave an impression.[18] While we associate habit with settled tendency or customary behaviour, Le Dœuff's strategy is to unmask the complacency behind these approaches so that we might think about them in new and different ways. Le Dœuff begins this process of reassessment when she states that '[i]f the timidity and desire to flatter are not too strong [the politely receptive] form of reading' can 'produce great successes, a distanced kind of reading which enables one to see what is implicit in the text or to pick out the

"gaps" in a theorization' (Le Dœuff 1989: 124). This positive (though qualified) account of politely receptive reading gives us pause to reconsider our own cultural biases in order to think through the advantages of reading in non-authoritative ways.[19] (It may also help us to think a little differently about the role of the romantic reading that we will discuss in Chapter Five.)

One way of thinking through the advantages of reading in non-authoritative ways may be to reread the faithful and detailed commentaries of women philosophers; that is, to attend to this work in ways that we have failed to do in the past, possibly in our haste to consume the definitive interpretation by the latest, greatest and most fashionable philosopher of the day. Clearly, the French tradition values these commentaries, and Le Dœuff certainly acknowledges this.[20] However, we usually think of these readings as supporting existing philosophical values, thus reinforcing the hegemony of great texts by great men. If, however, we return attentively to these commentaries and reread them, we may discover something more than fidelity and respect. Perhaps we have been guilty of under-reading these works; of finding within them little other than what our expectations (and prejudices) support. If so, then the 'faithful' commentary requires another look. It may be the case, for example, that a polite demeanour hides something altogether more provocative and engaged.[21] Is it really true that these women have perpetuated the words of the Great Discourse and added *none* of their own? (Le Dœuff 1989: 125). This suggests some important recuperative work needs to be done in rereading these significant historical works by women.

However, if Le Dœuff is correct, and these commentaries by women are as faithful as she suggests, then we ought to return to the question of reading in order to think through the strategies involved in moving loving (or romantic) commentary towards more ethically engaged forms. We need to move, as Le Dœuff so rightly claims, beyond the false alternatives of fidelity and violation, for I am not suggesting that the way forward for women (or others) in philosophy is to mimic the violations of the past. There are, indeed, alternatives to reading too politely and paying no attention at all, alternatives Le Dœuff identifies as 'work'. How are we to think further about these alternatives? How are we to unpick the habits of authoritative reading, creating new habits that evolve out of and yet go beyond polite respect? In short, how are we to challenge the

institutional or disciplinary culture of philosophy? The alternatives we seek are evident in Le Dœuff's own work. Her own particular engagements with the history of philosophy offer us attentive readings that help us to develop new 'habits' – habits that prefigure a future philosophy that she works toward. This future philosophy, while pointing us forwards, has roots in the instituting moment of the Socratic tradition that orients philosophy towards a love of wisdom. As such, it challenges the reduction of philosophy to the limited practice of a desire to know.

Teaching reading: sadism, collaboration?

If we are concerned to develop new habits of reading, ones that move us beyond an authoritative relation with our tradition, then teaching, as we have seen from our discussion in the Introduction, is an important place to begin. Le Dœuff has something to say about this in her essay 'Red Ink in the Margin' (Le Dœuff 1989: 57–99) where she draws our attention to our disciplinary incapacity to deal effectively with contradiction and how this failure underpins negative responses to a certain genre of student commentary. A sadistic streak infiltrates our desire to banish what is deemed vague in student readings, ensuring obedience to dogma, and Le Dœuff questions the somewhat brutal manner in which this is enacted:

> [P]edagogy is not unrelated to sadism. For the point of this correction [red ink in the margin] is, rather, for the master to confirm his mastery – that is, in the first place, his difference relative to the pupil, who lives only off a philosophical subculture, whereas the master 'knows his texts' otherwise than through second-hand sources ... This does not only happen in the pedagogical relation between teachers and their students; it operates also, in a brutal manner, in examinations. The charge of 'hearsay knowledge of the great philosophical texts', of 'vague knowledge of the most classical works' is too insistent in the examiners' reports to be ignored. I would gladly wager that what is called 'vague' is not always devoid of sense, and that one might learn a good deal by giving a hearing to the failed scripts. At any rate, the incapacity which we perhaps all share to handle the category of contradiction in what pertains to the history of

in human time; in the time of the body, and it partakes of the body's rhythms, of heartbeat and breath, of the movement of our eyes, and of our fingers that turn the pages, but we do not pay particular attention to any of this' (Hustvedt 2012: 134). We might respond to Hustvedt that we do not pay attention because the work of reading has become habitual. Habit is activity that becomes something like a second nature, an activity from which 'we' consciously withdraw. In this, I think that habit has something in common with our institutional ways of doing things, for institutional or disciplinary activities are carried out in largely unconscious ways. Indeed, we can think of institutions (or even traditions) as structures supported by unacknowledged habits. Changing habits is, by definition, a difficult thing to undertake. Yet this is what I think Le Dœuff sets out to do. Le Dœuff's way of doing philosophy is to unmask the habitual activities of certain ways of thinking and reading so that a future philosophy can be something other than what it is today. To do this, she makes conscious the habits that sustain the more obvious pretensions of philosophy so that we may address them in our attempts to do better work. (We can read her work in *The Philosophical Imaginary* in this way.) In effect, Le Dœuff exchanges old habits for new, understanding that habit orients us towards the world whether for better or for worse.

Le Dœuff's habits of reading have been honed over years of careful attention to a history of philosophy that she cares a great deal about. Perhaps it is her real affection for the works that comprise this history that allows her to engage in such productive ways. By carefully unpicking the worst of the habits supporting the pretentious aspects of this tradition, she is able to tailor a set of new, open and engaged approaches to reading. In part, these approaches begin with, and yet go well beyond, the polite receptivity we have seen her identify. Attentiveness to detail is one of the hallmarks of Le Dœuff's reading practice, and yet this attention, however polite and engaged, is something quite different from the faithful commentary she has reservations about. Max Deutscher puts it well when he writes: 'Though Le Dœuff will make unparalleled [readings] of the "great texts", this is not out of awed respect for them . . . She keeps her distance from its entirety, however close her readings of its details' (Deutscher 2000: 11). This attentive quality of her reading originates in generosity and in a real intellectual curiosity rather than in the deference of a devoted approach.

Thinking back to the third approach to reading that Le Dœuff identifies – the transformative reading that shifts thinking from one stage to another – we see how this helps us to elucidate what is distinctive in her own reading habits. This approach equates reading with work, and is helpful for framing the collaborative relation that Le Dœuff establishes with what she reads.[24] The methods she employs in her readings are oriented towards the kind of work that gets things done; they are strategies aimed at particular problems and in this sense can be gauged in terms of their 'sufficiency to their tasks'.[25] This approach to reading involves attention to both detail and context. It intervenes in a particular place for a particular purpose, not setting out to provide an overarching critique or systematic account.[26] Its goals are less ambitious or, in Le Dœuff's own terms, less pretentious. This is, to use another of her terms, an operative approach to philosophy, a particular or temporary intervention that opens reading out towards other works and other disciplines exterior to philosophy.

One of the practices that supports Le Dœuff's approach to reading as work is her habit of rereading. Le Dœuff returns to the history of philosophy, reading and rereading its works, the better to reassess and reconsider her relation with these. In Chapter Five we witness an example of this in her readiness to reread Simone de Beauvoir's work. By re-engaging with Beauvoir's thought, Le Dœuff's successive readings explore new and challenging ways of understanding the real difference Beauvoir's political and ethical thought makes. While Le Dœuff's early readings are insightful, it is her successive returns that open Beauvoir's work to us in really radical ways. Revisiting a field that one feels one has explored well can uncover surprising and unexpected results.[27] If openness is an ability to be changed by what we read, then Le Dœuff's habit of rereading results in a more open, engaged and dynamic approach.

Returning to the question of Le Dœuff's relation with philosophy, I suggest that her strategic approaches to reading provide her with an identification that changes from context to context. Does this suggest a nomadic sense of being everywhere at home?[28] Whatever the case, Le Dœuff's current 'home' in philosophy emerges somewhat paradoxically out of her work on the future of philosophy, a future that is by definition an as yet unrealized home. In order to appreciate the full import of Le Dœuff's reading we need to engage with the plans for her future home – the future philosophy she points us toward.

A philosophy still to come: open-ended work

Le Dœuff commits herself to a new form of philosophy, one unmotivated by a desire for absolute knowledge or theoretical omnipotence, and it is noteworthy that she connects this with a future in which the 'feminine' will no longer be required as the inferior marker that a hegemonic rationality compares itself against. In *The Philosophical Imaginary*, she writes:

> Since for the last twenty-five centuries philosophers have been comparing the world to a theatre and philosophy to a tragedy, relating this metaphor to the close of the performance that makes a well-finished whole of the play, I would say that the future of a philosophy that is no longer anti-feminist is being performed somewhere in the region of Brechtian drama, which . . . produces unfinished plays which always have a missing act and are consequently left wide open to history.
>
> LE DŒUFF 1989: 118

The openness of Le Dœuff's future philosophy is a philosophy at ease with its incompleteness,[29] one no longer in need of a 'defence mechanism involving the exclusion of women' and others. This brings forth 'the idea of an unfinished philosophical discourse, never closed and never concluded', disconnected from any 'totalizing aim' (Le Dœuff 1989: 126). Given the close connections in Le Dœuff's work between approaches to philosophy and ways we read, we can revise her depiction slightly to reveal an incomplete reading, wide open to the otherness it engages. Le Dœuff's future reading disconnects from any totalizing aim. In this, its ethical qualities rest partially on the fact that it 'no longer considers its incompleteness a tragedy' (Le Dœuff 1989: 126). From tragedy to Brechtian drama,[30] Le Dœuff moves us towards a reading that embraces the incomplete nature of philosophy and understanding, one that resists the temptation to reconstruct the theatre of the other as a fantasized whole.[31]

It occurs to me that the primary way that Le Dœuff explores this unworried, incomplete approach is in the written form of the essay. Indeed, she introduces *The Philosophical Imaginary* as a collection of essays aimed at exploring hunches in philosophy in open and

experimental ways: 'a series of essays, perhaps the only format allowing one not to close a question reductively before it has even been posed' (Le Dœuff 1989: 2). Le Dœuff adopts the essay as an unhurried form of questioning that follows no predetermined path. In the essay we can return to rework and reconsider our positions in relation to thought. We can constantly reframe the boundaries of our research in open and open-ended ways. In addition, we can engage and disengage with other disciplines, moving across intellectual terrain in unencumbered ways. In certain senses, the essay allows us to be at home (or at the very least at ease) in unfamiliar and nomadic territory. In this, the essay is the precursor to a future, more open philosophical form.

The essay's modesty undoes those lingering pretensions within philosophy towards a complete and total knowledge (a desire to know). Like the fragment and the notebook (both of which Le Dœuff employs), the essay announces an unfinished and incomplete work. This announcement occurs without the customary anxiety that certain approaches to reading and writing philosophy entail. In this, the essay, and the future hopes Le Dœuff attaches to new and incomplete forms of doing philosophy are signs of an ethical openness to the world. They are signs, too, of new habits orienting us towards reading as a process of mediation in a future philosophy which – for the time being – remains difficult to conceptualize. To return to Le Dœuff's earlier observation, and to reframe it, we can suggest tentatively that the ethical nature of a future philosophy is evident in it no longer considering its incompleteness a tragedy.[32]

Habits of slow reading

Towards the close of the Introduction, I outlined the dominant characteristics of institutional reading. I pointed to the problems inherent in allowing this form of reading to dominate contemporary philosophical work. I described the reduction of reading to information extraction and mining – undertaken within a context of high time pressure, and I suggested that this form of reading supports the instituted structure of philosophy as a desire to know. Le Dœuff's approach to philosophy as 'work' and her belief that this involves shifting thinking from one stage to another sets in motion a transformation that propels the philosopher from one

existential state to another. Le Dœuff's work on re-figuring habits of reading provides us with ways of reintroducing the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and a philosophy as a way of life.

In what specific ways are the habits of reading we have identified in Le Dœuff's work connected with the slow reading we are exploring in this book? Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that Le Dœuff's third approach to reading – the effort to shift thinking from one stage to another – is one way to think about reading in ethical terms. These two things are related. Slow reading is the philosophical practice that enables an unhurried openness to otherness; it involves a desire to be transformed in this open encounter. In our efforts to shift thinking and reading from one stage to another we undertake the work of this transformation. We embrace openness as the beginnings of a reciprocal relation with the other and the world. In this sense we can think of Le Dœuff's focus on the future as ushering in a new reader capable of transforming philosophy from what we know of it today. Whatever form or forms it takes, a future philosophy will engage with complexity and the unthought, demanding an attentiveness to ambiguity and contradiction. It will be, once again, a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life.

Le Dœuff's habits of reading demonstrate an ongoing patience, a willingness to return to texts to reread them and to re-engage with them. This return, or looking back,[33] slows reading in ways that permit careful thought to emerge. Similarly, her fine-tuned attention to detail and her attentiveness in general are qualities that slow down thought. In this regard, Le Dœuff's ability to stage reading as a conversation with her texts is the source of an attentiveness that opens to the play of imagination at work in what she reads. This may be, as we see in *The Philosophical Imaginary*, an attentiveness to the unacknowledged imagery structuring philosophical argument and reason, or it may be an attentiveness to imagination more generally defined. Whatever the case, Le Dœuff's reading opens to the infinite possibilities that imagination heralds, prefiguring the outline of a philosophy still to come. In this it partakes of the wondrous openness of philosophy as a love of wisdom rather than a neurotic desire to know. By drawing on the best of the Socratic tradition, Le Dœuff's philosophy looks forward rather than (simply) back, ensuring that philosophy remain a present and future engagement with life.

Towards the close of the previous chapter, we looked at Michèle Le Dœuff's hopes for a future philosophy. There I argued that the open and unfinished nature of this future links us back to the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. This openness avoids the totalizing aim of a desire to know. Le Dœuff embraces the incomplete nature of philosophy in the current form that her philosophical work takes, and I suggested that the essay is the form that conjures her future in the here and now. The essay allows us the time and space to reconsider our work in open and open-ended ways. In this chapter, I return to these themes in order to develop a form of slow reading that takes its cue from the essay. I develop a practice of reading I refer to as 'essayistic', one that I find embedded in the philosophical work of Theodor W. Adorno. This essayistic reading links with the instituting moments of philosophy by thwarting our modern preoccupation with speed and haste. In place of an efficient or institutional reading (one motivated to extract or to capture information), it offers an open-ended rumination that meanders in non-systematic ways – a meandering thought that, as we will see, pursues paths largely undetermined.

The essayistic reading I pursue in this chapter is one that resists the instituted structure of philosophy's desire to know. It resists the containing and limiting gesture that so often accompanies this desire. Additionally, it resists the desire for absolute comprehension, for the certainty and security of knowledge that accompanies the anxiety of needing, at all costs, to know. The problems inherent in this containing aspect of instituted philosophy are explored by Emmanuel Levinas in his work on ethics, and I draw on it here as a way of outlining the problem or problems that an essayistic reading seeks to address.

Emmanuel Levinas: an ethics of reading?

> In conformity with the whole tradition of the West, knowing, in its thirst and its gratification, remains the norm of the spiritual.
>
> LEVINAS 1998: 96

One of the starting points for my inquiry into reading, and reading well, has been the work of the Lithuanian-born French philosopher

Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas's work in and on philosophy is carried out in the context of his broader examination of ethical responsibility and obligation, and it is this context that encourages me to place the question of ethics at the centre of my investigation.[2] By doing so, I draw on the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life that I see as fundamental to Levinas's philosophical approach.

Levinas's work on patience and its centrality to the ethical relation outlines a slow encounter with the other (or strangeness of the other) that does not rush to reduce the other back to what I already know or can understand. Patience involves exposing and subjecting myself to the other; coming near, in order that a relation be established and the work of ethics done.[3] Throughout his work, Levinas points to the many ways that our dominant philosophical practice in the West falls short of the kind of patience that he refers to here. For example, he points to the philosophical tendency to reduce the world to pre-existing categories or understandings. This reductive tendency has implications for how philosophers read, and I shall explore these in the course of this discussion.

To begin with, Levinas suggests that in the production of certain kinds of philosophical knowledge there is a tendency to comprehend the other or object in terms of seizing or grasping it. There is, he writes:

> [T]he notion of an intellectual activity or of a reasoning will – a way of doing something which consists precisely of thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making it one's own . . . an activity which *appropriates* and *grasps* the otherness of the known. A certain grasp . . . Knowledge as perception, concept, comprehension, refers back to an act of grasping. The metaphor should be taken literally: even before any technical application of knowledge, it expresses the principle rather than the result of the future technological and industrial order of which every civilization bears at least the seed . . . that unit of knowledge in which *Auffassen (understanding)* is also, and always has been, a *Fassen (gripping)*. The mode of thought known as knowledge involves man's concrete existence in the world he inhabits, in which he moves and works and possesses.
>
> LEVINAS 1989: 76[4]

Levinas is clearly describing the instituted structure of the desire to know in his account here. According to him, philosophy has certain ways of doing things, and its dominant (institutional) mode – the reasoning will – cultivates a kind of understanding (or knowing) that readily grips or grasps what it encounters.[5] We can both see and hear the direct connection between this theoretical understanding and the literal act of gripping in the German language, where *fassen* (gripping) provides the base and ground for *Auffassen* (understanding).[6] Levinas's point here is not minor. He implicates certain philosophical modes of understanding in acts of seizure. The philosopher 'seizes' the world and this has the effect of containing experience; in effect, leaving little to no trace of what has been encountered. Philosophy grasps and contains the world through the force of conceptual or logical argument, reducing it to what can already be understood. But what is the motivation for this kind of containment? For Levinas, this containment occurs in order to establish the certainty and security of knowledge – of (absolute) comprehension; the certainty and security of the ground of the reasoning will.

While we can argue that this is something of a caricature of philosophical practice, a great deal of what we academic philosophers do is motivated by a need or anxiety to know, and to know fully (in the manner of the neurotic),[7] and this need finds expression in a certain institutional way of going about reading. Some of the more extreme readings that accompany this anxiety seek to grasp or contain in ways that result in a kind of stand-over technique. This mode of philosophical reading (extracting/mining) intimidates by reduction (and 'knock-down arguments'), by demanding that what is read deliver up, yield or surrender its goods in such a way that 'knowledge' is subsequently confirmed. Other versions of reading in this reductive mode proceed by trivializing or simplifying existing work for the sake of creating a strategic space for their own ideas. In such readings there is little engagement with the complexity (or otherness) of what is being read.[8] At times, there is no engagement at all. Indeed, these reductive modes of reading are, at other times, a form of containment via assimilation. Simon Critchley, ever the careful reader of Levinas's work, picks up on this in the following account: 'For Levinas, the ontological event which defines and distinguishes the entire philosophical tradition from Parmenides to Heidegger, consists in suppressing all forms of otherness [*L'Autrui* – the singular other] and transmuting alterity into the Same (*le Même*).

Philosophy is the assimilation of the other into the Same, where the other's otherness is assimilated and digested like food and drink' (Critchley 1989: 100).[9]

Here the other (or text) is hastily consumed, appropriated and assimilated back to ourselves and our own existing knowledge. The reductive tendencies that Levinas uncovers bear something in common with Sigmund Freud's remarks about the technical process of secondary revision in the dream-work. Freud claims that the absolute otherness of the unconscious – although this is not his exact term – is forcefully reduced back to the logical structures and meanings of rational thought. He characterizes secondary revision in intentional terms, arguing that its purpose is to clean up what registers as the messy incoherence that, if left intact, challenges the pretensions of rational thought. Freud writes:

> The thing that distinguishes and at the same time reveals this part of the dream-work is its purpose. This function behaves in the manner which the poet maliciously ascribes to philosophers: it fills up the gaps in dream-structure with shreds and patches. As a result of its efforts, the dream loses its appearance of absurdity and disconnectedness and approximates to the model of an intelligible experience.
>
> FREUD 1965 [1900]: 528

Freud's intelligible experience brings us back to the desire to know. In likening secondary revision to the 'shreds and patches'[10] that the philosopher employs in order to fabricate a rational meaning, Freud alludes here, albeit playfully and somewhat indirectly, to the force of philosophical reading, the sense in which the philosopher obliterates the otherness that confronts 'him' in 'his' attempt to impose clarity and meaning.[11] In a not dissimilar fashion, Levinas wants to show how philosophy's meanings are – like Freud's manifest dream – fabricated events. And in doing so, he urges us to confront, in ethical terms, the effects of this fabrication. While meaning may emerge from the work (secondary revision?) that philosophy does, it is, Levinas contends, at the expense of the otherness philosophy hopes to domesticate. At best we might say that philosophy misses the other in its ardour to found truth. At worst – and this is certainly Levinas's point – we have to face the fact that this kind of philosophical practice obliterates the very

alterity (or foreignness) of the other, what makes it distinct and different in the first place. In desiring at all costs to know, philosophy loses its way.

If the grasp of assimilation and containment that Levinas identifies in the reasoning will is as problematic as he suggests, what other ways are left open for philosophy? What other ways are there to read? And what might mark such other readings as ethical? Levinas offers us a way of engaging with these questions, at least indirectly, in the sense that he distinguishes between a dominant philosophical approach that imagines that it can finalize and complete a topic (*le Dit* – the Said), and another philosophical response, one that touches upon a theme in such a way as to leave the terrain of understanding both open and open-ended (*le Dire* – the Saying) (Levinas [1961] 1969).[12] We can, of course, think of these in terms of the instituting moment (*le Dire*) and the instituted structure (*le Dit*). Additionally, we can think of Levinas's open and open-ended approach in terms of Le Dœuff's future philosophy. Levinas's open-ended approach (*le Dire*) involves an attitude of respect that recognizes the strangeness of what is there to read. It involves encounter and engagement, rather than containment and finality; it reorients the philosopher toward, alongside, or 'near to' what he or she reads, rather than positioning him or her over and above it (Levinas 1998: 142–3).[13] Now, I am glossing Levinas a little here, as what he has to say speaks more directly to an alternative approach to writing philosophy, but this can – and ought to, I think – allow us to think, as well, of reading in new and specifically ethical ways.

The kind of reading I am hinting at here involves the risk of exposure or nearness to the other that Levinas equates with sincerity. This exposure or proximity *is* precisely ethics.[14] It is an attitude of openness, or we might even say goodness, that occurs despite oneself. Over and above a philosophy that presents itself as finished and complete, 'impervious to critique', a reading influenced by Levinas's approach would offer 'the sort of talk that enters into genuine sociality by opening itself to the critique and justification of others' (Smith 1986: 64). We can reorient what Levinas has to say about this other way of doing philosophy quite directly towards our question of reading. By doing so, we can say that the very act of reading opens the possibility of an ethical space or encounter, one that signals our willingness to be changed or transformed by what

and that it does so, in part, by exploring the fragmentary and partial rather than the (imaginary and closed) whole; it deals with what remains unfinished, incomplete.[23] The essay 'does not strive for closed, deductive or inductive, construction. It revolts above all against the doctrine – deeply rooted since Plato – that the changing and ephemeral is unworthy of philosophy' (Adorno 2000: 98). Free from the violence of dogma, the essay is deaf to the usual reproach that the fragmentary, the ephemeral, and the random lie somehow outside legitimate thought. By embracing the fragmentary[24] and the inconclusive, the essay suspends traditional philosophical method in favour of a *meandering* thought that pursues a path or paths always largely undetermined.[25] This openness 'takes the anti-systematic impulse into its own procedure' (Adorno 2000: 100), and recognizes as delusion 'the longing for strict definitions' that promises to eliminate 'the irritating and dangerous elements of things that live within concepts' (Adorno 2000: 101).[26] As such, the essay resists both identity thinking and instrumental thought. By engaging with singularity and difference it refuses to reduce the instance of the specific under the law of the general. While the institution beats a familiar path towards knowledge and truth narrowly defined, the essay meanders its way along branching tributaries, without concern for where it is supposed to be.

For Adorno, the essay is evidence that 'thought does not advance in a single direction',[27] but rather that 'aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet' (Adorno 2000: 101). This interweaving or 'density of texture' speaks to the layering inherent in the essay – the careful return to a theme in order to texture it again and again. Never quite done, the essay celebrates patiently, attentively the demands of thought. 'In the essay discreetly separated elements enter into a readable context; it erects no scaffolding, no edifice. Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration' (Adorno 2000: 102).[28]

Above all, the essay resists the rule-bound tradition of philosophy that Adorno sees inaugurated in 1637 with Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (Descartes 1912).[29] Here, as we have seen in the Introduction, absolute certainty guides the earliest gestures of modern Western theory and science, setting the tone for a method of inquiry that comes to resemble an exhaustive quest for the final word. Philosophy, henceforth, will be the certainty that nothing is omitted.[30] As an antidote to this quest, Adorno sees the essay as a

activity and mobilization.[37] What emerges, I think, is a kind of meditative work – the work of thought that sinks into its relation with the world. This idea of meditative work brings us back to philosophy as a slow way of life, philosophy as a slow sinking into the world – a patient engagement that allows thought its time.

We can see something of this meditative work in what Martin Seel refers to as Adorno's ethic of contemplation, a praxis by which one is open to the other while allowing the other to be (Seel 2004: 264).[38] In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno defends this non-instrumental receptiveness, distinguishing it from a self-sufficient or instrumental contemplation, one indifferent 'to the task of changing the world'. It is possible, he claims, to have 'contemplation without inhumanity' (Adorno 1979: 244). The very non-instrumental quality of the contemplative ethic Adorno champions is its unhurried receptiveness to the other, marking the self as open to change and transformation. In this sense, contemplation comes close to the tenderness that Adorno sees as 'nothing other than awareness of the possibility of relations without purpose' (Adorno 1974: 41). The tender work of openness is the basis of our ethical relation with the other and the world. In opening us tenderly towards the other, Adorno's work reinvigorates the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life. Non-instrumental modes merge with non-institutional ones, creating relations without purpose or intent.

Luiz Costa Lima: criticity and the essay

The importance of a slow, more open-ended approach to reading, one that allows thought its time, finds expression, too, in Luiz Costa Lima's work on *criticity*, which is his term distinguishing 'the act of questioning from both the act of judging ("critique") and the activity by means of which the act of judging is effected ("criticism")'.[39] Criticity is the idea Costa Lima develops to explore the critical thread that escapes from Kant's ambiguous attempt to define aesthetic judgement. Criticity and aestheticization are two modalities of aesthetic experience and in 'The Subject and the Law: A Kantian Heritage', the second chapter to *The Limits of Voice* (Costa Lima 1996), Costa Lima distinguishes these in the following manner. Criticity, or the critical orientation, embodies an openness, a questioning against the grain and a refusal to be systematized: it

is a 'form of investigation that eschews both dogmatism and scepticism, seeking the limits of reason and trying to locate them in the object it experiences and considers' (Costa Lima 1996: 129). Criticity avoids the Law (and the instituted structure of the institution). Aestheticization, on the other hand, is systematic, establishing a law of its own in the absence of a universal law (God). It is 'the reduction, in actual practice, of any and all value to the aesthetic dimension' (Costa Lima 1996: 129).[40] Criticity is an approach that engages with works (and the world) as unique, rather than 'present[ing] them as examples or illustrations of something that precedes them' (Costa Lima 1996: 149).[41] It is a 'progressive, experimental drive that does not aim at a predetermined point of arrival' (Costa Lima 1996: 176).

From this, it is not surprising to learn that Costa Lima's work on *criticity* engages with work on the essay, and in order to highlight the questioning that both *criticity* and the essay share, he turns to Georg Lukács's seminal work, *Soul and Form*, to read the introductory piece 'On the Nature and Form of the Essay' (Lukács 1974) (Adorno refers to this work four times throughout his own essay).[42] Lukács's essay is influential, and it is worth pausing a moment to consider it here. He begins his discussion by focusing on the essay as an ambiguous form, one hovering between art and science: 'Science affects us' he writes, 'by its contents, art by its forms: science offers us facts and relations between facts, but art offers us souls and destinies' (Lukács 1974: 3). Somewhere in between lies the essay, and while it is neither one nor the other, the essay veers towards art in some important ways. Questioning frames the essay, gives it a kind of form, and this questioning (which seeks no 'solutions') serves to bind it in a familiar way to the art it comes so closely to resemble.[43] In the essay '[t]he question is posed immediately: what is life, what is man, what is destiny? But posed as a question only: for the answer, here, does not supply a "solution" like one of the answers of science or, at purer heights, those of philosophy. Rather, as in poetry of every kind, it is symbol, destiny and tragedy' (Lukács 1974: 7). The essay is an errant 'form', 'the genre of problematization par excellence, its own richness . . . not allow[ing] it to assume a form: it [thus] remains protean, formless'.[44] For Costa Lima, it will be this process of problematization that comes to the fore. The essay judges, but this is a special form of judgement that refuses the finality of the Law's verdict in order to

Gumbrecht and his recent work on *Stimmung*,[51] which provides an ideal starting point for our inquiries. While Gumbrecht's work comes out of literary theoretical discussions, I think that what he has to say about reading can be thought through to great advantage in the philosophical domain. Like Adorno and Costa Lima before him, Gumbrecht engages with Lukács's work on the essay in *Soul and Form*, noting with pleasure his demand that the essay deviate from a limited 'scientific' search for truth in order that the essayist 'find, at the end of his way, what he has not sought: life itself' (Lukács, cited in Gumbrecht 2012: 17). The meanderings of the essay, the various detours and pauses it takes, permit the essayist to counter the limited ambitions of interpretation and systematic method, in favour of following the hunches or hints that counterintuitive thought permits. For Gumbrecht, 'Following a hunch means trusting an implicit promise for a while and making a step towards describing a phenomenon that remains unknown – one that has aroused our curiosity and, in the case of atmospheres and moods, often envelops and even enshrouds us' (Gumbrecht 2012: 17).[52] Gumbrecht's approach of reading for *Stimmung* is 'to follow configurations of atmosphere and mood in order to encounter otherness in intense and intimate ways' (12–13). Now this description of an intense and intimate encounter with otherness is a good way of thinking about the traces of the instituting moments that comprise the ethical dimensions of slow reading that I am developing throughout this book. Reading for *Stimmung* provides one approach, among many, for reading in different and more open ways. I am seduced by Gumbrecht's work, particularly because of its stress on intensity and intimacy, and its orientation towards what Lukács identifies as 'life'. Gumbrecht's approach mobilizes the body[53] and its affects for reading in vital and energetic ways:

> Reading for *Stimmung* cannot mean 'deciphering' atmospheres and moods, for they have no fixed signification. Equally little does reading for *Stimmungen* mean reconstructing or analyzing their historical or cultural genesis. Instead, it means discovering sources of energy in artifacts and giving oneself over to them affectively and bodily – yielding to them and gesturing toward them . . . [Reading for *Stimmung* is] an experiment, where certainties and conventions of how to write [and read] are still undefined.
>
> GUMBRECHT 2012: 18


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available

Irigaray rediscovers the Diotima of fecund inspiration, but she laments that it is only to lose her once again. This time Diotima places the stake of love beyond the self, not simply in the sense of the child-product, but rather in terms of the (related) quest for immortality through fame or renown. While such goals might, indeed, be sought in the begetting of children, Diotima notes that a superior path leads to the begetting of children of the soul, the spiritual progeny of wisdom and virtue. According to this Diotima:

> Those whose creative instinct is physical have recourse to women, and show their love in this way, believing that by begetting children they can secure for themselves an immortal and blessed memory hereafter for ever; but there are some whose creative desire is of the soul, and who long to beget spiritually, not physically, the progeny which it is the nature of the soul to create and bring to birth. If you ask what that progeny is, it is wisdom and virtue in general . . . Everyone would prefer children such as these to children after the flesh.
>
> *Symposium* 208, 209 PLATO 1967: 90, 91[28]

Irigaray mourns the fact that Diotima's demonic love dissolves under the weight of an immortality to be conferred. It is no longer a becoming, but now an end (a finality, a verdict). Love serves as servant to the master of immortal reknown. The ephemeral nature of being must at all costs be denied, kept at bay by the promise of life eternal, and in her reading Irigaray laments this passing:

> What seemed to me to be original in Diotima's method has disappeared once again. This intermediary milieu of love, which is irreducible, is resplit between a 'subject' (an inadequate word in Plato) and a 'beloved reality'. Falling in love no longer constitutes a becoming of the lover himself, of love in the lover (male or female), or between the lovers, but is now the teleological quest for what is deemed a higher reality and often situated in a transcendence inaccessible to our mortal condition. Immortality has already been put off until death and does not figure as one of our constant tasks as mortals, a transmutation that is endlessly incumbent upon us here, now – its possibility having been


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available


image
not
available