Slow Philosophy is a timely meditation upon the possibility of practicing philosophy within the limits of an institution (the corporatised university) that more often than not actively inhibits the enabling conditions of philosophy. It is now a commonplace of contemporary academia to rail against the direction of higher education and the restrictions it places on intellectual work. Indeed, a number of recent books already occupy this space. Richard Hil’s Whackademia: An Insider’s Account of the Troubled University captures academics’ frustrations with the university’s bureaucratic, efficiency and PR-driven imperatives, which operate blindly and to the detriment of its most vital functions. Likewise, intellectual historian Stefan Collini’s polemical work What Are Universities For? examines the risks to thinking wrought by universities’ managerial turn in the United Kingdom. Maggie Berg and Barbara Seeber’s contribution to this genre, The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy, perhaps approaches most closely the tone of Slow Philosophy, in its plea to remain true to the temporality of profound thought in resistance against institutional mandates to run faster, jump higher, and produce a greater quantum of research, even while this speed erodes the quality of academic work.

What distinguishes Slow Philosophy from these attempts is its attention to questions of what philosophy is, how it understands itself, and how certain styles of philosophising either resist or contribute to the institutional tendencies currently
endangering the humanities. Boulous Walker poses a question unfortunately too familiar to anyone who engages in academic work, whether securely or precariously: how does one revive the love of wisdom that animates a desire to engage philosophically? How does one find again the instituting moment of philosophy within an institution that alienates, reifies, and perverts philosophy into a “forensic desire to know;” an ends-directed enterprise that too hurriedly settles upon answers and disciplines thought into systems (“aims,” “outcomes,” “outputs,” “impact pathways,” “stages of research,” all determined and measurable in advance). All surely must have asked themselves this question at some time or other, while hurrying to meet a deadline for an article, or undergoing an annual performance review, or rushing through a lecture in full knowledge that a bare minimum of students have even looked at let alone read the materials (you can even quantify their reading, or at least whether they’ve accessed it, on the TELT platforms we now use).

Over the course of the book, Boulous Walker presents an integral critique of philosophy in order to remember to philosophers the love of wisdom (and wisdom of love) that galvanises readers’ attachment to “the discipline,” while further bringing to the fore the tendencies within “the discipline” that close thought and engagement, and thus work against philosophy’s animating principle. In this way, Boulous Walker initiates a thoroughgoing exploration of philosophy in its relation to the institutional forms that currently most challenge professional philosophy, or philosophy as a profession: the imperative for larger classes, faster turnaround times, and clearly delineated outputs—imperatives that foreclose genuine engagement with students and with the materials we read. By contrast, Slow Philosophy brings philosophy into contact with its own instituting moment: the moment that breathes life into one’s activity qua philosopher, and connects that activity to life rather than abstract, detached, formulaic reasoning. It is a book that puts its reader in mind of the reason she decided to engage with philosophy in the first place. It reminds her to be affected by what she reads, and to engage in an open-ended mode of reading: to read like the flaneur, embracing curiosity and aimlessness; to allow oneself to dwell in the text’s ambiguity and uncertainty, to recognize the value of complexity, to relinquish control and even orientation—to forget oneself in the text’s otherness.

To this end, Boulous Walker traces a rich seam throughout the history of philosophical writing in which an ethical relation to otherness is expressed: whether this otherness refers to those whom a more rigid and programmatic style of phi-
philosophy would exclude; or an otherness that would challenge rusted-on interpretations of key texts; or an otherness that must be embraced if philosophy is to continue to adapt and grow into the future. This ethics of reading draws on traditions in which Boulous Walker has been immersed for some years: specifically, the French phenomenological tradition and feminist philosophy that, through Boulous Walker's careful reading, show us at once how to read and how to live as philosophers. The book draws out the inextricable connection between living and reading ethically, in the sense that just as one lives tacitly articulates a relation to others or otherness, so too, how one engages with others in textual interpretation has ethical implications. Boulous Walker navigates her reader through the question of how to revive a loving relationship to philosophy (philosophy as a love of wisdom, and as a wisdom of love) through her impressively diverse readings of the thinkers who have most challenged and shaped her own philosophical attitudes. Her response to philosophy, and recommendations regarding philosophy's future, develops in dialogue and through dialectical exchange with the philosophers she identifies as formative of the discipline's most productive self-relation: Nietzsche, Benjamin, Adorno, Merleau-Ponty, Hadot, Levinas, Lyotard, Gumbrecht, as well as Beauvoir, Le Dœuff, Irigaray, and Cixous (each of whom is rendered through their relation to other philosophers who deepen or enhance their powers). “Slow philosophy” is in this way a readerly approach to philosophy, formed always through an encounter with difference.

Chapter one begins with a consideration of Michèle Le Dœuff’s approach to philosophy as a form of reading, and as an institutionalised form, or “discipline,” that founds itself in the act of excluding its “other:” that is, by demarcating itself from literature, poetics, history, sociology, etc. This chapter performs a number of significant moves in setting up the approach that Boulous Walker will sustain throughout the book. First, she emphasises Le Dœuff’s methodology of foregrounding the habits of reading that various approaches to (or of) philosophy embody. The first of these is Le Dœuff’s ethics of reading the history of philosophy as revisionist, or as “re-reading,” which transgresses against received interpretations of a work in order to open it to other, hitherto unexplored significances, and so as not to take the work as already read, so to speak. Boulous Walker characterises as “feminine” this mode of reading, drawing out Le Dœuff’s reflections on the styles of reading that philosophers most valorise or disparage. Vaunted styles of reading Boulous Walker designates, with Le Dœuff, as “masculine:” this is the so-called “strong reading,” that violently (or creatively) subordinates the work to one’s own philosophical purpose. This is counter posed against the kind
of close and faithful reading that is characteristically associated with women philosophers, and is demeaned as less creative or “seminal” than masculine habits of reading. Boulous Walker urges that we evaluate these habits differently, in order to recuperate significant readings that have been performed by women. Moreover, she suggests that these “faithful” readings have themselves been under-read, and that perhaps “a polite demeanor hides something altogether more provocative and engaged” than we may at first give credit to (45). Rather, fidelity as a strategy of reading may yield a more thorough and interrogative interpretation of the text than the “masculine” reading, which is so distant as to leave the work virtually unpenetrated. This formulation of reading as both gendered and habitual contributes to a further shift in our understanding of reading as embodied or corporeally elaborated. Boulous Walker situates this idea with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of “habit” as a bodily discipline from which consciousness withdraws, and urges the reader to pay heed to these habits and what they entail for the stance we take with regard to philosophy—what a philosophy is and what it can do. Such consciousness would involve returning to texts in order to read them differently, breaking habits in order to find a new ethical relation to philosophical works (a relation that is more engaged, open, and dynamic). Slow Philosophy in this way also prepares philosophy’s future, as an open-ended, experimental activity, unburdened by a self-image (or self-imagining) that forecloses against change and growth. Both the re-reading and the orientation to philosophy’s future is situated in pedagogy, understood as a collaborative activity, encouraging new interpretations rather than disciplining them with “red ink in the margin” (another reference to Le Dœuff’s corpus).

Chapter Two takes up Levinas and Adorno, in order to explore further the ethical implications of reading through consideration of Adorno’s favoured form, the essay. Here Levinas’s ethical imperatives of openness to the other and reciprocity are elaborated in terms of the essay, which Boulous Walker characterises as the form most conducive to slow reading: as untimely or anachronistic, open-ended, and explorative rather than the manner usual to contemporary philosophical discourse of limiting the kind of questioning that is possible. Adorno critiques modern philosophy after Descartes, as precisely a disciplining of philosophy to only the most certain, calculable ends: an instrumentalisation of thought that is countered by the kind of essayistic reading that resists institutional (ends-directed) reason. The untimeliness of the essay is again key to its capacity to open to a future philosophy, unhurried by the demand to simplify thought so that only the most certain truths are brought to light. Boulous Walker then again emphasises
the corporeal dimension of reading through Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht’s approach of reading for *Stimmung*—the mood, energy, or intensity of a writing—through which the reader registers the otherness of the text through an intimate and vital engagement with it. This attention to reading, according to Gumbrecht, affectively responds to the work in a manner that risks one’s certainties, or preconceived attitude to the work.

In chapters Three and Four Boulous Walker engages with Luce Irigaray’s approach to reading, which will further inform the affective and temporal elements of her conception of “slow philosophy.” Chapter Three explores Irigaray’s approach through the passions of “love” and “wonder,” both of which Irigaray had emphasised in her volume of re-readings of classic works of philosophy, *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Here Boulous Walker showcases Irigaray’s somewhat idiosyncratic interpretations of Plato and Descartes as paradigm cases of slow reading, by drawing attention to the manner in which Irigaray’s critical intervention in these works releases significances suppressed even by their own authors. Contrary to the orthodox reading, then, Irigaray’s explorative reading technique interrogates the text for the meanings that resist the received understanding of either work or author. Thus, Boulous Walker shows, Irigaray reads Plato against Platonism, and Descartes against Cartesianism, to bring to light a new appreciation of these philosophers and philosophies. This method in itself exemplifies slow reading, to the extent that it opens to otherness, to the unexpected that dwells already within philosophy, as the germ of philosophy’s future. However, Boulous Walker further develops the passions Irigaray retrieves from these philosophers—love and wonder—to bring to the fore the embodied disposition of slow reading. Irigaray’s recuperation of the *daimonic* character of love in her reading of Diotima’s speech (which is retold by Socrates at the Symposium, in Diotima’s absence) makes available an affectively situated concept for the movement between two opposites that not only conditions the possibility of change, growth, and communication between the two, but, importantly for Boulous Walker, also institutes philosophy as a love of wisdom and a wisdom of love.

Turning to Descartes, “wonder” is for Irigaray a passion that places into abeyance the greater (or more conventionally recognised) tendency of Cartesianism to circumscribe knowledge in advance as only what can be conceived of with certainty. Wonder, the first passion, instead registers the strangeness of whatever is encountered, and far from assimilating it to what is already understood, in wonder one suspends judgment in order to appreciate the other *in its* otherness. Such a
moment is fleeting for Descartes, whose tendency accords more to the derivative “forensic desire to know” than the instituting love of wisdom. Yet, as Boulous Walker shows through Irigaray, each of these moments signals a different possibility for philosophy, either as tending towards the kind of instrumental reason that presently dominates the discipline (and institution), or a contemplative, open, explorative, and untimely approach that relinquishes the desire to exhaust thought in its search for truth.

Chapter Four stays with Irigaray’s approach to reading as a mode of attention, or “listening.” Here Boulous Walker brings out a further embodied register of reading through consideration of the sensory dimension of how we read, through a critique of the conventional evaluation of perception embedded in Irigaray’s “elemental” readings of the philosophers. A particular target of critique here is the privilege customarily afforded to “sight” over other senses, where reading is (mis) understood to be purely visual. Drawing on Hans Jonas’s account of perception, Boulous Walker argues that this overreliance on sight engenders a tendency to isolate, analyse, and render abstract whatever one encounters, at the expense of a mode of attention that would take account of sound, smell, texture, and bearing, to open to other ways of apprehending the world or text. Reading should engage us as mortal, embodied, and sexuate beings, so that reading that is sight-centred to the exclusion of other modes of sensing incorporates rather than encounters others, ignoring not only the other’s embodied specificity, but also that of the reader. This mode of reading, according to Boulous Walker (after Irigaray), aligns to the masculine approach characteristic of contemporary philosophy. Bringing into play these marginalised senses also challenges the active/passive dichotomy that structures masculine orientations to “objects:” an orientation that evaluates listening to be passive, whereas seeing is understood as active, penetrating, and transcendental. Thus, a reading that emphasises listening resists the disengaged abstraction of conventional philosophy, favouring instead a philosophical practice attentive to particularity, and which engages in dialogue with its subject matter. To see reading as a form of listening also involves a different temporal and spatial relation to texts than reading conceived in terms only of sight. Rather than occupying a superior and separate aspect that characterises its objects as discrete, encapsulated, and a-temporal, listening receives and organises phenomena sometimes simultaneously, according to complex rhythms that can slow down and speed up experience, and which registers in the spectral “voice” of the text traces of corporeality (such as breath, timbre, mood, relation to the reader, and gender). As Boulous Walker states, “the idea of attentive listening reminds me that the
philosophical work that we do always involves us bodily, that it always engages us as embodied—and necessarily sexually embodied—beings” (116). Here, again, Boulous Walker returns to the question of teaching, and the part of listening in fostering dialogue in the classroom.

Chapter Five brings us to Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of love, which Boulous Walker deploys to distinguish two approaches to reading that accord to Beauvoir’s ethics of ambiguity. Beauvoir’s critique in The Second Sex of women’s tendency to subordinate their tastes and judgment to their lover’s in “romantic” love, as opposed to a more critical and self-affirming “authentic” love, is developed as a means of articulating the affective dimension of particular styles of philosophical interpretation. On the one hand, according to Beauvoir’s dichotomy, the interpretation under the rubric of romantic love cleaves too faithfully to the text, and thus fails to differentiate itself and become critical, to build upon or transcend the work that it reads. On the other hand, authentic love belongs to the more mature reading that is able to appreciate the work both in its transcendent or subjective nature—as something other than and beyond me—and in its objective nature—according to its limitations, and as constituted within a particular history or situation (its facticity). Boulous Walker compares the first, immature mode of reading to the reductive, “masculine” style of reading addressed already in chapter One, in that it also fails adequately to appreciate the text’s otherness. But she then problematises the opposition between “romantic” and “authentic” readings by bringing into play Michèle Le Dœuff’s complex interpretation of Beauvoir’s relation to Sartre as both “romantic” (wherein she overestimates Sartre’s philosophy and subordinates her own to it), and as overcoming Sartre’s work in a more “authentic” mode, by recognising and overcoming its limitations. Beauvoir’s philosophy, the chapter concludes, is developed through a reading of Sartre that is both faithful and unfaithful, loving romantically on its way to a more authentic love/interpretation that attempts to improve upon Sartre’s ethical failings: his incapacity to conceive of intersubjectivity outside of the master/slave dialectic, for instance. Ultimately Beauvoir’s philosophy is offered as both explication and demonstration of a form of relationality that engages the “instituting” moments of philosophy, by taking seriously its ethical task as a form of engagement with others.

The book culminates in a reflection, in the final chapter, on love as readerly relation and philosophy’s genetic principle through French feminist philosopher Hélène Cixous’s practice of “intimate reading.” For Cixous, Boulous Walker argues, the relation to otherness precipitates a process of reciprocal transformation.
between-two [entredeux], respecting both other subjects and the otherness within oneself: that is, the unconscious. Driven by a different economy of desires and pleasures from the conscious self, the unconscious unmoors the ego from whatever it takes to be certain. The unconscious is thus understood as a reservoir of sense that confronts the ego-self as if from another place, principally the maternal body in intimate relation to which each self had emerged. In her account of this unconscious otherness, Cixous sketches two rival economies: the conscious, symbolic of language, which keeps count of exchanges in vigilance against potential loss, attempting instead to accumulate; and the unconscious, instituted through loss, mourning, and fundamental displacement, and which gives of itself generously rather than accumulating. These differences are themselves sexuate: the former being “masculine,” the latter “feminine,” each designating not so much biological necessities, but rather a relation to authority and to law (160-61). For Cixous, writing as écriture féminine forms an intimate, corporeal relation to texts to which it responds because it picks up this unconscious register, and brings one into contact with the deep ethical dimension of text that eludes its surface, symbolic level. Boulous Walker thus elaborates “slow philosophy” in terms of Cixous’s writerly practice, picking up again the themes of generosity, “feminine” approaches to reading, and the corporeality of reading and thought.

All the while, what might perhaps be called Slow Philosophy’s “inhibited aim” is to place into fundamental question the tempo of university (institutional) life, and, through the practice of slow reading, to create space within the university once again for “the instituting moments of a love of wisdom and philosophy as a way of life” (178). It must be said that the realities of academic work sometimes betray the ethical imperative to read slowly. It is tempting to read Slow Philosophy as backward looking… nostalgic for a bygone day when “old boys” could work at their own pace and in safety afforded by tenure … as not facing up to the realities of the contemporary academic industrial landscape… and even as perpetuating a mythology that renders academic workers vulnerable to exploitation by promising, to those willing to wait, the kind of security that allows time for reflection. I think that on balance the book is doing something more radical than this, and it helps to remember that even as early as 1881, Nietzsche was already guarding against the encroachment of haste as a threat to thought, in a refrain that recurs frequently throughout Boulous Walker’s book.

But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, 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, including every old or new book: 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.\(^5\)

With this memento in mind, to understand philosophy as slow reading may be countercultural, and by regularly reaffirming our commitment to it as such, we may also commit to support one another in putting into place practices to help slow time down. The imperative to slow philosophy down speaks not only to its future as a profession, however, and it is worth considering that philosophy as slow reading may not survive its struggle with the institution... So, keeping in mind the critiques of the institution offered by so many at this moment, what are the implications of this book, Slow Philosophy, for the profession, and the industrial and cultural context in which philosophers work in Australia and elsewhere?

First, throughout the book, Boulous Walker very deliberately connects the imperative to read slowly and engage with otherness to teaching, and asks readers to consider how they might cultivate philosophy and a love of reading slowly in their students—to find time in teaching to impart that love to them. This reaches right to the heart of a concern for philosophy's future not only as a poetical return to philosophy's instituting moment—the love of wisdom and wisdom of love. Rather, in a time and place that measures the value of programs of study according to graduate attributes, there is a need to convey the worth of philosophy in ways that undercut that discourse, and moreover, in ways that convey to students directly the good of philosophy as a transformative practice, which actually helps them see the world—and evaluate life—differently. To achieve this in the classroom would take forethought and a feeling of freedom around time: it would need an excess of time to plan classes and to teach them, without anxiety about the quantum of “content” that needs to be conveyed within a ten to twelve week teaching period. Sometimes a “slow teaching moment”—in which students are brought to comprehend the complexity and otherness of a text—happens fortuitously, but the time we could rely on happenstance is over. Universities are tightening the thumbscrews on philosophy as enrolments fall and, when surveyed, one of the most common complaints students make about philosophy courses is the reading: its difficulty, its volume, its irrelevance to their lives. Increasingly, it seems to me, students do not read, do not know how to read, or do not have the patience not to know in advance what a text is about, and what the point of reading it is.
There are various reasons for this: as Boulous Walker observes in the book’s introduction, online technologies have transformed literacy, and particularly the tempo of reading, as skim reading becomes normative. Students Google the précis before they read the text, and there is more pressure than ever to understand quickly, and to bypass reading altogether, to stick with the most surface interpretation available. Once a certain threshold of non-readers is reached within one class, teaching as a collaborative enterprise between teacher and students becomes very difficult. When students fail to read it also changes the quality of the lectures: teachers find themselves having to convey “content” rather than how to interrogate the material, how to bring different interpretations into conversation with one another, how to identify audience and communicative object... how, in other words, to read.

Add to this industrial innovations such as the institution’s increasing reliance on casual labour: precarious workers who are not only time poor, but whose time is also measured precisely and frugally by the institution. In this context, time saving has become the institution’s core business. My university and others are now flipping classrooms and introducing 10-week trimesters, with no reading week, and six days to submit final grades, inclusive of the weekend after teaching finishes. We are discouraged from setting essays because they take too long to mark. How will philosophy that needs to be read slowly—that is not already trained to the forensic desire to know—survive this latest corporate attempt to eliminate teaching? There will be more restructures to come, and more tinkering of courses to make them less challenging and quicker to grade. But in order to take up the challenge issued by *Slow Philosophy*, perhaps we should simply not attempt to comprehensively cover a whole region of thought in one teaching term. Perhaps we should halve the quantity of reading material, and even force students to read it during class time if they are not prepared to read it in their own time... studying the most complex and challenging paragraphs together in “real” time, that is, in the classroom: interrogatively, slowly, with delicate eyes and fingers... “staging,” as Boulous Walker quotes Gumbrecht, “our students encounters with the inevitable oscillations these instances entail” (19-20). Staging philosophy as reading—in an age when students prepare for class with the aid of Wikipedia and YouTube—is a wager for philosophy and against the ever-accelerating stopwatch of history.

Second, and to again invoke Nietzsche, God is dead... and email killed him. Many days, the greater volume of the text philosophers read takes the form of email rather than the great thinkers of the tradition. However absorbing philosophical
work is, or ought to be, that little “ding” that heralds the arrival of a new message beckons with an irresistible urgency. The absorption that allows the reader to forget herself and become insensitive to time’s passing is abruptly destroyed, as one is subjected instead to calls for papers, requests from students, library notifications... usually something, in any case, of little consequence or which at least could have waited. The thought of email piling up and becoming unmanageable is intolerable, its call upon us more insistent and immediate than the call to philosophy. Making time for philosophy requires turning one’s back on email and for a period of hours every day—to actually turn it off, disengage from its distractions, and ignore the call of administrators, students, and managers upon us. And while this on the surface may feel antisocial and selfish, withdrawing from email must be done collectively to be most effective. It is ultimately for the good of the community, and it must become a communal norm not immediately to reply to email.

While the reading privileged in Slow Philosophy requires an opening to otherness, and relinquishment of control over meaning’s destination, at least it preserves within it a relation to self that enables one to be transformed in positive, edifying ways. The call of email opens instead to alienation. It fritters time away. It accords to the tick-tock rhythm of clocking on and clocking off. Unlike a reading absorption that opens to others in their otherness, email—the paradigmatic form of institutional reading—cannot create time.

Finally, if we are to take Slow Philosophy seriously as an opening to an otherness held already in potential within philosophy, this otherness must include death as well as rebirth. What if philosophy within the university is unsalvageable? What if the only god that can save us heralds from elsewhere, without the institution? Is time for engaging deeply with an otherness that would shock us out of complacency to be found instead in the community meeting, or café, or concert hall, or the homeless tent city, or a union meeting? Upon discovering last semester that I could no longer make time to participate in reading groups—perhaps the last bastion of slow reading—without giving up something else of value, I chose to give up my reading group. If one has to choose between fulfilling intellectual activity and time spent with one’s children, or exercising, or playing music, or political activism, perhaps sometimes we have to find something else to do that is creative, that opens us to otherness, and that fulfills our love of wisdom. There are many ways to do philosophy, and the question seems to be not only “how does one sustain philosophy outside the walls of the institution?,” but even, “how can we sustain philosophy within them?” I take it that this is also Boulous Walker’s question, and it is a question that, as a community, we need to confront honestly,
and perhaps transformatively.

To this end, it must be said that *Slow Philosophy* is beautifully written, the better to inspire faith and transformation. This book invites precisely what it recommends: slow reading. It was written *to be read slowly*, and as such brings pleasure to reading. *Slow Philosophy* is a love letter to the “philosophy” from which professional philosophy risks becoming estranged, and a suggestion that perhaps this love may be rekindled. Unlike my ruminations above, Boulous Walker’s book is decidedly *not* an obituary: faith is maintained throughout that there may be a reunion; that there may be opportunities again for the “unhurried time” that philosophy requires, and even *within* the institution of philosophy. Absorbed by this beautiful and hopeful text, I found myself able to believe that we might *slow time down*, pause the system, even break the acceleration of time that accompanies the taylorisation of academic work. Retaining access to this moment of belief in the capacity to steal back time for philosophy is important, even essential to the possibility that we continue to *do* philosophy. After all, how else do we write books? In a time where research administrators need convincing that writing a book is a worthwhile thing to do... at a time when it would be better rewarded and take less energy to use that time to write a series of articles... Michelle stands by her principles by *writing a book*, a carefully written book that rewards slow reading. Whatever future awaits philosophy, the rewards of slow reading will continue to beckon us to that horizon.

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