

## Philosophizing as an Esthetic Experience: A Deweyan Conception

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey's idea of philosophizing as an esthetic experience. The first section of the paper presents Dewey's general idea of esthetic experience as it figures in his main work on aesthetics, *Art as Experience*. With this general idea in place, the second section then moves on to analyze the way in which Dewey thought of philosophizing as an esthetic experience. Finally, the third section discusses how Dewey's thoughts about philosophizing as an esthetic experience can be seen as a contribution to the field of somaesthetics.*

**Keywords:** *Jonh Dewey, philosophy, esthetic experience, Richard Shusterman, somaesthetics.*

In his different writings on somaesthetics, the founder of this burgeoning new field of inquiry, Richard Shusterman, does not hide the fact that his thinking is deeply inspired by the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. In the introduction to his *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*, for example, Shusterman suggests that Dewey “provides probably the most balanced and comprehensive view among twentieth-century somathic philosophies.”<sup>1</sup> In his more recent collection of essays, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics*, Shusterman similarly ends the second essay on “The Body as Background” by concluding that “it is Dewey, however, who makes the most sustained and systematic argument for the qualitative background as necessary to mental life.” And elsewhere in the book, Shusterman explicitly states that Dewey was the “primary American inspiration” behind his earlier “pragmatist aesthetics,” which his more recent somaesthetics is “a natural extension of.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the places where Dewey's influence on Shusterman is most conspicuous is when it comes to his idea of the “soma” as “the living, sensing, dynamic, perceptive, purposive body” (47), which is explicitly inspired by Dewey's thoughts about body–mind in *Experience and Nature*. In a similar way, Shusterman's central idea of the body as “the basic instrument of all human performance, our tool of tools, a necessity for all our perception, action and even thought” (26) is also directly inspired by Dewey's thinking, just as his critique of the “dominantly Platonic–Kantian aesthetic tradition grounded in the art/reality and aesthetic/functional dichotomies”

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 12

<sup>2</sup> Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 58, p. 289, & p. 140

(282-3) is heavily indebted to Dewey's critique of the same dichotomies in *Art as Experience*.

Although Shusterman in this way has been deeply inspired by Dewey's philosophy, there are also certain parts of it that he has been mildly critical of,<sup>3</sup> just as he has drawn on a wide variety of empirical research to bolster and develop many of Dewey's ideas. The most significant way in which he has contributed to the development of a Deweyan form of pragmatism, however, is probably through his imaginative use of Deweyan ideas to analyze and understand the somaesthetic dimension of a broad range of phenomena reaching all the way from rap and country music to photography and Asian *Ars Erotica*.<sup>4</sup>

Although Shusterman has used Deweyan ideas to analyze phenomena that Dewey never wrote about, there is at least one subject that Dewey *did* write about and that has occupied Shusterman, too, for a long time, and that is the subject of philosophy itself as an activity or practice. From the very beginning of his somaesthetic project, one of Shusterman's key questions has been what a somaesthetic perspective implies for the way in which philosophy should be practiced and taught.<sup>5</sup> As Shusterman sees it, a somaesthetic perspective implies first and foremost a willingness "to overcome the limits of philosophy's institutionalized confinements as a purely academic practice of teaching, reading and writing texts" by returning to the old idea of "philosophy as a way of life," according to which philosophy should always be embodied.<sup>6</sup> And it should not just be embodied in the sense that it *theoretically* affirms "the body's crucial role in all perception, action and thought" in "the familiar forms of writing, reading and discussing texts," but also, more crucially, in the sense where one *practically* demonstrates "one's philosophy through one's own bodily example, expressing it through one's manner of living," as Confucius and many Greek and Roman thinkers did (4).

According to Shusterman, however, such a break with "philosophy's institutionalized confinements as a purely academic practice of teaching, reading and writing texts" is not the only way in which a somaesthetic perspective matters for philosophy. For it also raises a number of questions about the way in which philosophy should be done if one sticks to the more traditional practice of "teaching, reading and writing texts." As Shusterman sees it, one of the problems with philosophy as a "merely theoretical discursive pursuit" (142) is that it tends to be "essentially conceptual rather than experiential" (114), because it focuses on "verbal arguments" rather than "lived perceptual experience" (141) or the "nonpropositional, nondiscursive dimension of experience" (176) that a somaesthetic perspective highlights. Instead of breaking with the practice of teaching, reading, and writing texts, it is, however, also possible to inject more experiential, non-propositional content into this practice, and that is the other way in which Shusterman takes a somaesthetic approach to matter for the practice of philosophy. In several places Shusterman has thus questioned the way in which philosophy texts usually focus on "mere conceptual understanding" (122) and asked if philosophy, understood somaesthetically as "cultural politics," could not, instead, "intervene in literary practice by making itself a self-conscious form of literary composition – say, philosophy as literature in the essay style of Montaigne or Emerson; the fictional style of Sartre, Camus, Beauvoir, or Musil; the dramatic

3 See especially Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetic: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, 2000a), p. ix. Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 157-178

4 See Richard Shusterman, *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000b), pp. 60-75 & pp. 76-95 as well as Shusterman 2012, pp. 239-287

5 See especially Shusterman 1997, pp. 1-66, Shusterman 2000, pp. 3-61, Shusterman 2012, pp. 166-196 and Richard Shusterman, "Philosophy as a Way of Life: As Textual and More Than Textual Practice" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns – Essays in Honor of Pierre Hadot*, ed. Michael Chase et al. (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2013), pp. 40-56

6 Shusterman, 2012, p. 140 & p. 122

dialogical style of Plato; the poetic style of Lucretius or Dante; or in the form of literary criticism that Rorty at times has practiced with great skill?" (185)

Although Shusterman in this way admits that it is possible to make the writing of philosophy more experiential through literary means, it is striking that he does not seem to be as interested in this implication of a somaesthetic approach to philosophy. Despite his insistence on the need to break with "philosophy's institutionalized confinements," it is thus suggestive that Shusterman has not shown any interest in making his own writing more "experiential" and seems to prefer to stick to "the crisper, more lineary style of argument characteristic of the ordinary language analytic philosophy" (170) that he was introduced to in his formative years as a philosopher. At times, he even seems to operate with a dualism between the "conceptual" and the "experiential" that makes it virtually impossible for him to do so. This seems, for example, to be the case when he criticizes philosophy for being "essentially conceptual rather than experiential" (114), because it focuses on "verbal arguments" rather than "lived perceptual experience" (141) or the "nonpropositional, nondiscursive dimension of experience." (176) A similar dualism also seems to be operative when he says that somaesthetics can be seen as a way of "reminding contemporary readers that philosophy could and should be practiced with one's body rather than being confined to "the life of the mind," as well as when he claims that "the most convincing demonstrations of this truth are not in verbal arguments, but in lived perceptual experience." (141). Although I do not think that Shusterman, in the end, subscribes to such dualisms between "mind" and "body" or the "verbal" and "lived perceptual experience," the dualistic implications of his expressions are extremely unfortunate in so far as one of the main purposes of somaesthetics is precisely to overcome such dualisms.

Fortunately, however, there are resources in the writings of Shusterman's own primary source of inspiration, Dewey, for developing a non-dualistic understanding of the experiential dimension of the reading and writing of philosophy texts that may provide valuable inspiration for the somaesthetic attempt not only to reconceptualize the relationship between philosophy and the esthetic, but also to change the way philosophy is written and read. Although the question of the esthetic or experiential dimension of philosophizing seems to have occupied Dewey from early on, his most mature and developed thoughts about the subject are to be found in his main work on esthetics, *Art as Experience*. In this work, Dewey thus not only states that "philosophy, like art, moves in the medium of imaginative mind," but also talks about "genuine artistry in ... philosophical speculation" just as he claims that "an experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality" and criticizes the idea "that scientists and philosophers think while poets and painters follow their feelings," because he is convinced that "there is emotionalized thinking" in both "to the same extent in the degree in which they are of comparable rank."<sup>7</sup> So, in *Art as Experience*, Dewey treats philosophizing – the reading and writing of philosophy texts – as an esthetic experience, and although Shusterman never really seems to have delved into these thoughts about philosophy as an esthetic experience, the many scattered remarks about the esthetic dimension in philosophizing to be found primarily in *Art as Experience* (but also elsewhere) seems, when put together, to add up to a full-blown, non-dualistic picture of philosophizing as an esthetic experience, which may be able to provide valuable inspiration for the somaesthetic attempt to change the way philosophy is written and read.<sup>8</sup> That is, at least, the main claim of this paper, which will try to substantiate it in the following way. The first section presents Dewey's

<sup>7</sup> John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Perigee Books, 2005), p. 309, p. 39 & p. 76

<sup>8</sup> Although to my knowledge, Shusterman has not written in detail about Dewey's conception of philosophizing as an esthetic experience, he is clearly aware of it as evidenced, for example, by Shusterman 2000b, p. 22

conception of esthetic experience as it figures in *Art as Experience*. With this in place, the second section then examines the precise sense in which Dewey took philosophizing to represent a form of esthetic experience, before the third section, finally, discusses what implications Dewey's conception of philosophizing as an esthetic experience may have for the somaesthetic attempt to change the practice of "teaching, reading and writing texts" in philosophy.

## Esthetic experience

As the title *Art as Experience* indicates, Dewey's thinking about art and the esthetic is rooted in his conception of experience. This conception deviates from traditional empiricist understandings of experience because it does not primarily designate anything peculiarly subjective, but instead comes very close to the idea of life itself as Dewey understands it. In *Art as Experience*, for example, Dewey explicitly states that "the nature of experience is determined by the essential conditions of life," just as he emphasizes the need to mention a number of "biological common places" if one wants to get at "the basic vital roots" of experience.<sup>9</sup> The way in which Dewey links his conception of experience closely with the idea of life itself becomes clear the moment one takes a look at this conception. As he explains in *Art as Experience*, the most basic element in this conception is that experience is something that comes about through "interaction of organism and environment" (22). The use of the terms "organism" and "environment" here clearly indicates the way in which Dewey relates experience to embodied, biological life, and the same point comes through when he argues that "Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living" (36). So, experience, as Dewey understands it, occurs constantly because the interaction between organism and environment that defines experience occurs as long as life continues.

Although the conception of experience as an interaction between organism and environment is described from the perspective of a bystander looking at the interaction from the outside, Dewey also gives a description of experience from the point of view of the organism itself. From this perspective, experience can, according to Dewey, be said to consist in a constant alteration "between doing and undergoing" (49) in the sense that the organism, first, *does* something to the environment, and then *undergoes* something because of this doing. When I eat, for example, I *do* something: I take something in my environment and put it into my mouth. Because of this doing, however, I also *undergo* something: I feel, perhaps, the texture of the food in my mouth and experience some kind of flavor. In a similar way, when I read a book, first, I *do* something: I open the book and direct my eyes toward the first couple of words. Then, I *undergo* something: I experience that the words make sense, that they sound good and so on.

From the perspective of the organism, experience is thus an indefinite series of such doings and undergoings. The organism implicated in such doings and undergoings may, however, relate to these in different ways. On one hand, the organism may perceive the relation between the different doings and undergoings. On the other hand, it is also possible that the organism does not perceive the relation between them. William James' classic example of a child that reaches out to touch a fascinating, flickering flame provides a good illustration of the distinction.<sup>10</sup> First, the child *does* something in the sense that it reaches out to touch the flame, and then it *undergoes* something in the sense that it experiences a painful burn. If the child does not perceive or realize

9 John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Perigee Books, 2005), p. 12, p. 13 & p. 20. The biological roots of experience are also discussed in John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 8 and in John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1938), pp. 23-41

10 William James, *The Principles of Psychology Vol. 1* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), p. 25

the relation between the doing (reaching out to touch the flame) and the undergoing (a painful burn), it will, as Dewey sees it, not *understand* that the undergoing is a consequence of its own doing and therefore not *learn* that it is painful to touch flames. The next time it sees a fascinating flickering flame, it will probably just reach out to touch it again and undergo the same painful burn. If the child instead perceives the relation between its doing and undergoing, however, it will *understand* that the undergoing is a consequence of its own doing and *learn* that it is painful to touch a flame. The next time it sees a fascinating, flickering flame, it will, accordingly, probably inhibit the spontaneous impulse to touch it and instead be more circumspect in relation to flames.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey uses the distinction between these two ways of relating to what is done and what is undergone to define two concepts that play an important role in his understanding of esthetic experience. First, he uses it to define the idea of *intelligence*. As he sees it, “perception of what is done and what is undergone” thus “constitutes the work of intelligence” (47). So, the child that did not perceive the relation between its doing (reaching for the flame) and the undergoing (the painful experience of being burned) is, as Dewey uses the term, less intelligent than the child who did perceive the relation. In addition to intelligence, Dewey also uses the distinction to define the closely related concept of meaning. As he explains in *Art as Experience*, he believes that “The consequences undergone because of doing are incorporated as the meaning of subsequent doings because the relation between doing and undergoing is perceived.” (65) When the child perceives the relation between its act of touching the flame and the painful burn that results from the act of touching, both the doing and undergoing gains meaning, as Dewey sees it. Instead of the flame just meaning a fascinating colorful thing, it now gains the meaning of something that may burn and hurt. At the same time, the act of reaching out for the flame also gains new meaning. Instead of being a joyful attempt to get in touch with something fascinating, it becomes a dangerous attempt to play with fire. So, perception of the relation between doing and undergoing does not just define intelligence, but also gives meaning to the acts of the organism as well as the objects of the environment. In this way, as Dewey sees it, the original, biological body becomes “the living, sensing, dynamic, perceptive, purposive body” (47) of somaesthetics. For it is through such intelligent interaction with its natural and cultural environment that the organism not only learns what things and acts mean, but also gradually builds up a whole stock of meanings (habits), which makes it possible for it to understand, perceive, and intend things.

A look at Dewey’s most succinct definition of esthetic experience may explain why the ideas of intelligence and meaning play such an important role in his understanding of esthetic experience. As he puts it in one place in *Art as Experience*, esthetic experience is defined by the fact that “what is done and what is undergone are ... reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other” (52). It is probably easiest to understand this idea by means of a concrete example, and because Dewey himself refers to Matisse at some point (141), let us imagine Matisse in front of his canvas getting ready to paint, say, *Le Bonheur de Vivre (Joy of Life)*. First, he does something. He dips his brush in red paint and places a first brushstroke somewhere on the canvas. Then he undergoes something. He sees the red brushstroke there on the canvas surrounded by the background color. Then he places a second brushstroke next to the first one and undergoes the experience of two red brushstrokes next to each other, and so on throughout the whole process with different colors and brushstrokes. If this process has to qualify as an esthetic experience, the first condition that has to be satisfied according to Dewey’s definition is that “what is done and what is undergone ... are instrumental to each other.” By

this Dewey simply means that they should control each other or be a means to each other. What Matisse undergoes after the first red brushstroke should thus be the experience of the red color there on the canvas and not the sound of a dog barking outside his window or the pleasant memory of last night's party. And this controlling relation should, as Dewey's definition puts it, be "reciprocal" and go both ways in the sense that the red color on the canvas that Matisse experiences as a consequence of the first brushstroke should control his second brushstroke and influence what color it has, where he places it, and so on. And this "reciprocally instrumental" relation between the different doings and undergoings should hold "continuously" throughout the process, according to Dewey's definition. So, it is not enough if it holds, say, only between the first 1,000 doings and undergoings but not between the last 1,000. Finally, the continuously and reciprocally instrumental relation between what is done and undergone should also be "cumulative." This means, as Dewey explains by reference to the etymology of "cumulative," that there should be a "heaping up" or "massing" throughout the process in the sense that the, say, ninth brushstroke should not just be controlled by the experience of the consequences of the eighth brushstroke, but should be controlled by everything that has gone before, just as the tenth brushstroke should be controlled by everything that has gone before it. In this way, the experience will have a direction and move toward some culminating whole or end, which Dewey takes to be a defining feature of esthetic experience.

The previous explication of Dewey's definition of an esthetic experience has taken as its starting point the idea of experience as a long series of different doings and undergoings. Sometimes, however, Dewey also treats an experience as consisting of just one undergoing and doing. When looked at this way, an esthetic experience begins when a person undergoes an "inner vision" (279) or "inspiration" (68), which then leads to the production of a work of art through an act of expression. As Dewey sees it, however, such a process always begins with an "inchoate" (68) or vague idea (in the case of Matisse, his first idea of *The Joy of Life*). This initial vision then prompts the person to do something (Matisse places the first brushstroke on the canvas). The person then undergoes the consequences of the doing (Matisse experiences the red color on the canvas), which then modifies the original idea or inspiration, before this idea then prompts the next doing and so on throughout the whole process. Although this constitutes a slightly different perspective on esthetic experience, it still fulfills the conditions laid down in Dewey's definition of esthetic experience. Here, the relation between the initial, inchoate idea, or inspiration, and the outer work can be said to be "reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other" (52). The initial, vague idea controls the first act of expression. The work done then controls the modification of the idea. The modified idea then controls the next act of expression and so on, back and forth continuously throughout the process until it culminates in a fully worked-out idea and a finished work of art.<sup>11</sup>

Although the previous elucidation has used the activity of an artist like Matisse to illustrate Dewey's idea of esthetic experience, it is important to notice that Dewey does not limit the idea to creative artists like Matisse, but extends it to "the perceiver and appreciator" (54) as well. As he puts it in one place, he thus believes that "what is true of original production is true of

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11 Because Dewey, in this way, takes an esthetic experience to begin with a vague idea that is gradually worked out, he can also claim that "the unexpected turn, something which the artist himself does not definitely foresee, is a condition of the felicitous quality of a work of art" (145), just as he can say that the esthetic is to be found "between the poles of aimlessness and mechanical efficiency" (40) or "caprice" and "routine" (51). In *Art as Experience* he also claims that esthetic experience is characterized by a special immanent relation between "means and ends" (204-5); "the practical, emotional, and intellectual" (56); "the past, present and future" (127 & 183); and "all the senses", which he sums up by describing esthetic experience as "imaginative experience" (279), where the imaginative "designates a quality that animates and pervades all processes of making and observation" in so far as "it is a way of seeing and feeling things as they compose an integral whole." (278) I will not, however, go further into these ideas here.

appreciative perception” (184) in the sense that both activities have to fulfill the same conditions if they are to qualify as esthetic experiences. Just as with the creative artist, the creative perceiver or appreciator of a work of art like Matisse’s *Joy of Life* will, as Dewey sees it, begin the experience with “a first total, unanalyzed qualitative impression” (311), which will then guide his or her activity of looking, and it is only if the perceiver, on this basis, manages to have an experience where all of the different doings and undergoings that make up the activity of looking at Matisse’s *Joy of Life* are “reciprocally, cumulatively and continuously instrumental” to each other that the activity will qualify as an esthetic experience. It is, of course, still possible to distinguish between “the artistic” as something that “refers primarily to the act of production” and “the esthetic” as something that refers to “perception and enjoyment” (48), but then it only designates a difference of content and not a difference of structure, as Dewey sees it. When painting the *Joy of Life*, Matisse is obviously doing something different than the one who perceives it afterward, because he is handling brushes and paint, whereas the perceiver is moving his eyes and body. But in so far as they both have an esthetic experience, the relation between their different doings and undergoings will, according to Dewey, be similar because it will be “reciprocally, cumulatively and continuously instrumental.”

As this idea of esthetic experience suggests, it is possible for different experiences to fulfill these conditions to different degrees depending on the extent to which what is done and what is undergone are “reciprocally, cumulatively and continuously instrumental to each other,” and in *Art as Experience*, Dewey introduces a rough distinction between experiences having “esthetic quality” (57) and “distinctively” (57) or “peculiarly and dominantly esthetic” (58) experiences in order to differentiate between those experiences that fulfill the conditions to some extent and those that do it to a high degree. If an experience has “esthetic quality,” it is, as Dewey sees it, because it fulfills the conditions for an esthetic experience to some degree, whereas a “distinctively esthetic experience” is one that fulfills the conditions to a high degree. The distinction between experiences having “esthetic quality” and “distinctively esthetic experiences” is, however, just a rough one because it is possible for different experiences to fulfill the conditions for an esthetic experience to all kinds of degrees.

It is so important for Dewey to emphasize that the esthetic is a matter of degree because he is critical of traditional attempts to make a sharp separation between “fine art” and “ordinary experience” (4). This critical attitude is founded on his conviction that the “customary distinction [“between fine art and useful or technological art” or “ordinary experience”] is based simply on acceptance of certain existing social relations” (27). As Dewey sees it, it is, thus, solely social conditions that have decided that some activities (say painting) have been allowed to fulfill the conditions that define an esthetic experience to a high degree, whereas an activity like masonry, say, has been reduced to a rather monotonous line of work. His belief in the social relativity of the distinction between fine art and ordinary experience is in fact so deep that it can be said to motivate the whole of *Art as Experience*’s attempt to rethink the idea of esthetic experience. As Dewey himself puts it in the introductory chapter, the whole point of the book’s basic idea of continuity between esthetic and ordinary experience is thus to make it possible to “explain how and why” “artistic and esthetic quality” “so generally fails to become explicit” despite the fact that it is “implicit in every normal experience” (11). In this sense, the purpose of Dewey’s idea of esthetic experience is not only to allow the reader “to indicate the factors and forces that favor the normal development of common human activities into matters of artistic value,” but also “to point out those conditions that arrest its normal growth” (10), and, as the next section will demonstrate, one of those common human activities that Dewey took to have the potential to

develop “into matters of artistic value” is the activity of philosophizing.

### Philosophizing as an esthetic experience

That Dewey takes philosophizing to be one of the kind of experiences that has a potential to develop “into matters of artistic value” is something he states explicitly in a number of places in *Art as Experience*. In one place, he simply states that “an experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality” (39), whereas elsewhere he claims that the way in which thinking orders “a variety of meanings so that they move to a conclusion that all support and in which all are summed up and conserved” is “the essence of fine art” (179). In other places he similarly claims that “philosophy, like art, moves in the medium of imagination” (309), just as he emphasizes the possibility of “genuine artistry in scientific inquiry and philosophic speculation” (125). So, there can be no doubt that the activity of philosophizing is one of the activities that Dewey took to have the potential to develop “into matters of artistic value.” But how, exactly, does he see philosophy as an experience with (at least) esthetic quality?<sup>12</sup>

At the most general level, Dewey thinks that an experience of thinking has esthetic quality because it fulfills the general conditions for an esthetic experience. When one has an experience of thinking, what is done and what is undergone are thus “reciprocally, cumulatively, and continuously instrumental to each other” (52). Although Dewey takes this idea to apply to the “artistic” philosopher who creates a work of philosophy, as well as the “esthetic” reader who reads it, it is probably easiest to understand in relation to the reader of a work of philosophy. As Dewey sees it, philosophical ideas and arguments are, in a sense, works of art, just like a painting by Matisse. In *Experience and Nature*, he thus states that “the idea is, in short, art and a work of art.”<sup>13</sup> And just as he thinks that the real work of art is not the physical painting by Matisse hanging on the wall, but the esthetic experience that is called forth when an encultured person interacts with it, he also thinks that it is the experience called forth by the definition of an idea or the presentation of an argument that is the real experience of thinking, and not the words in themselves. In *Art as Experience*, he explains this idea in relation to an argument as follows:

*We say of an experience of thinking that we reach or draw a conclusion. Theoretical formulation of the process is often made in such terms as to conceal effectually the similarity of “conclusion” to the consummating phase of every developing integral experience. These formulations apparently take their cue from separate propositions that are premises and the proposition that is the conclusion as they appear on the printed page. The impression is derived that there are first two independent and ready-made entities that are then manipulated so as to give rise to a third. In fact, in an experience of thinking, premises emerge only as a conclusion becomes manifest. The experience, like that of watching a storm reach its height*

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12 Although Dewey clearly insists that philosophizing may have “esthetic quality,” it is less clear if he thinks it may constitute a “peculiarly and dominantly esthetic experience.” Sometimes he seems to suggest that it may, in so far as he seems to claim that the only difference between philosophy and those activities that are traditionally recognized as the fine arts is *material*. Thus: “An experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality. It differs from those experiences that are acknowledged to be esthetic, but only in its materials. The material of the fine arts consists of qualities; that of experience having intellectual conclusion are signs or symbols having no intrinsic quality of their own, but standing for things that may in another experience be qualitatively experienced” (39). At other times, however, he seems to suggest that the difference is not just *material* but also *formal* in a sense that the formal has to do with the purpose that drives an activity. Thus: “Nevertheless, the experiences in question are dominantly intellectual or practical rather than distinctively esthetic, because of the interest and purpose that initiate and control them” (57). Although precisely what he means by this is an important question, I will not pursue it here, but limit myself to the more modest claim that philosophizing at least has esthetic quality. The relation between philosophy and literature is also discussed by Shusterman in relation to Rorty and Habermas in Shusterman 1997, pp. 113-129

13 John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 371



*and gradually subside, is one of continuous movement of subject-matters. Like the ocean in the storm, there are a series of waves; suggestions reaching out and being broken in a clash, or being carried onwards by a cooperative wave. If a conclusion is reached, it is that of a movement of anticipation and cumulation, one that finally comes to a completion. A "conclusion" is no separate and independent thing; it is the consummation of a movement (39).*

As this passage makes clear, Dewey equates the conclusion of an argument with "the consummating phase of every developing integral experience." It corresponds, in short, to the culmination of an esthetic experience or, at least, an experience with esthetic quality. The thought is as follows. If one reads an argument printed on a page, one does something: One directs one's eyes toward the first line/premise. Then one undergoes something in the sense that one experiences some kind of meaning. This experience of meaning is, as Dewey sees it, a product of the interaction between the printed signs on the page and the embodied meanings/habits that one has acquired through one's previous experience with such signs. The meaning attributed to the first premise then automatically creates an expectation of what the next premise/sentence will be about because it leads one to expect that it will be about something that is related to and relevant to the first premise. If the experience is a real experience of thinking, however, the meaning attributed to the first premise will be only a tentative suggestion so that, when one does something again and moves one's eyes toward the second sentence/premise, it is perfectly possible that it does not correspond to the anticipation or expectation that was set up by the meaning attributed to the first premise. Instead of "being carried onward by a cooperative wave," it is thus possible that the suggestions will be "broken in a clash." Of course, this may just be because it is a bad argument, but it may also be because the meaning assigned to the first premise was premature and inappropriate. If the second premise thwarts the expectation created by the meaning assigned to the first premise, it may then lead to a revision of the meaning originally assigned to the first premise, and similarly, if one moves on to the conclusion. Even if one feels that the reinterpretation of the two premises have made them fit together and carry one's thinking "onwards by a cooperative wave," they may then clash with the meaning spontaneously assigned to the conclusion and start a similar process of revision all over again. In this sense, as Dewey sees it, the premises and the conclusions in a real experience of thinking are reciprocally, continuously, and cumulatively instrumental to each other in so far as one's understanding of the premises is informed by one's understanding of the conclusion, just as much as one's understanding of the conclusion is informed by one's understanding of the premises, and this process of mutual adjustment continues throughout the experience until it culminates in the acceptance or rejection of the argument. In this way, as Dewey puts it, a conclusion is thus "no separate and independent thing," but "the consummation of a movement" of thinking, in the same way that the physical painting by Matisse is not the real work of art, but the consummation, culmination, or conclusion of a movement or experience of painting or looking.

The same idea of an experience of thinking as having esthetic quality applies, as already mentioned, to the thinking of a single idea just as much as to the thinking of an argument. Because Dewey, in the passage from *Experience and Nature*, in which he refers to ideas as works of art, specifically refers to the idea of art itself as a work of art, his own idea of art may be used to illustrate this idea. As I have presented it, the essence of Dewey's idea of art is that "what is done and what is undergone are ... reciprocally, cumulatively and continuously instrumental to each other" (52). This idea is, as Dewey sees it, itself a work of art in so far as it, like a painting by Matisse, is the product of an experience that fulfills the conditions defining an esthetic

experience and is capable of eliciting the same kind of experience when a suitably encultured organism interacts with it. Just like the person who looks at a painting by Matisse has to connect the different parts of the painting with each other, the person who tries to understand Dewey's idea thus has to relate the different parts of the idea to each other: the idea of doing, the idea of undergoing, the idea of instrumentality, the idea of reciprocity, the idea of continuity, and the idea of cumulation. And for the person who encounters Dewey's idea of art for the first time, there will, just as with an argument, probably be a continuous movement back and forth between the different ideas before the experience finally culminates in a real understanding of Dewey's idea of art.

So, as Dewey sees it, an experience of thinking has its own esthetic quality, because such an experience – no matter whether it deals with a single idea or an extended argument and no matter whether one is “artistically” creating them or “esthetically” perceiving them – is structured in such a way that “what is done and what is undergone ... is reciprocally, cumulatively and continuously instrumental to each other.”

It may seem surprising that Dewey in this way treats philosophizing as a form of esthetic experience, but in *Art as Experience*, he applies precisely the same ideas to philosophizing as to esthetic experience in general. Just as he claims that esthetic experience is imaginative experience, he thus insists that philosophizing depends on the imagination. Inspired by the English romantic poet John Keats, he claims that:

*Even “the greatest philosopher” exercises an animal-like preference to guide his thinking to its conclusions. He selects and puts aside as his imaginative sentiments move. “Reason” at its height cannot attain complete grasp and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination – upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense. (34)*

As this passage makes clear, Dewey takes a real experience of philosophical thinking to share the same imaginative quality that characterizes all forms of esthetic experience. Similarly, he also takes an experience of thinking to be creatively inspired in the same way as other forms of esthetic experience. This is how he puts it in one place in *Art as Experience*:

*Persons who are conventionally set off from artists, “thinkers,” scientists, do not operate by conscious wit and will to anything like the extent popularly supposed. They, too, press forward toward some end dimly and imprecisely prefigured, groping their way as they are lured on by the identity of an aura in which their observations and reflections swim. Only the psychology that has separated things which in reality belong together holds that scientists and philosophers think while poets and painters follow their feelings. In both, and to the same extent in the degree in which they are of comparable rank, there is emotionalized thinking and there are feelings whose substance consists of appreciated meanings or ideas. (77)*

As Dewey suggests here, an experience of thinking begins with the undergoing of a vague idea of something that one wants to express or think through (“some end dimly and imprecisely figured”) whose “aura” then guides the philosopher's creation of an idea or argument in such a way that both the original idea and its expression in words (written or verbal) gradually form each other through an experience of thinking characterized by a reciprocally, cumulatively, and

continuously instrumental relationship between what is done and what is undergone.<sup>14</sup> The quoted passage also reveals that Dewey takes philosophizing as breaking with a rigid distinction between the practical, the emotional, and the intellectual in the same way that he takes all forms of esthetic experience to do. As he points out, he thus believes that “there is emotionalized thinking” and “feelings whose substance consists of appreciated meanings and ideas” to the same extent in philosophy and in conventionally recognized forms of art, like poetry and painting. So, as Dewey sees it, the conventional picture of philosophy as purely intellectual or abstract, having to do only with reason as opposed to emotions, is deeply flawed.

Dewey takes the ability to feel to be so important in philosophy because he is convinced that a philosopher has to have a bodily rooted “feel” for his materials in the same way that any artist, whether a painter or a sculptor, needs a “feel” for his or her material. As he puts it in one place:

*It is quite true that certain things, namely ideas, exercise a mediating function. But only a twisted and aborted logic can hold that because something is mediated it cannot, therefore, be immediately experienced. The reverse is the case. We cannot grasp any idea, any organ of mediation, we cannot possess it in its full force, until we have felt and sensed it, as much so as it were an odor or a color. (124)*

So, just as a painter needs a certain “feel” for colors – an immediate experience of their meaning – ideas have to be “felt and sensed” by a philosopher if an experience of thinking is to occur. That the importance of feeling in philosophy is not generally recognized, Dewey seems to suggest, is partly because it is difficult for outsiders to understand, since they cannot help but experience philosophical ideas as “signs or symbols having no intrinsic quality of their own, but standing for things that may in another experience be qualitatively experienced” (39). The case is different, however, for the thinker who has had intense experiences philosophizing. As Dewey points out:

*Those who are especially addicted to thinking as an occupation are aware when they observe the processes of thought, instead of determining by dialectic what they must be, that immediate feeling is not limited in its scope. Different ideas have their different “feels,” their immediate qualitative aspects, just as much as anything else. One who is thinking his way through a complicated problem finds direction on his way by means of this property of ideas. Their qualities stop him when he enters the wrong path and send him ahead when he hits the right one. They are signs of an intellectual “Stop and Go.” (124)*

So, those who know the art of philosophizing from the inside are aware that it is guided by the immediate, qualitative feel of certain ideas, just as all other forms of art are guided by a feel for their peculiar material. And just as Dewey takes such a feel to be necessary if an experience is to take on esthetic quality within all other fields, he also takes it to be necessary within philosophy. As he puts it:

*Whenever an idea loses its immediate felt quality, it ceases to be an idea and becomes, like an algebraic symbol, a mere stimulus to execute an operation without the need of thinking. For this reason certain trains of ideas leading to their appropriate consummation (or conclusion) are beautiful or elegant. They have*

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<sup>14</sup> Dewey also expresses the same idea in a slightly different way by saying that “the beginning of a new idea, terminating perhaps in an elaborate judgment following upon extensive inquiry, is an impression, even in the case of a scientific man or philosopher” (317).

*esthetic character. In reflection it is often necessary to make a distinction between matters of sense and matters of thought. But the distinction does not exist in all modes of experience. When there is genuine artistry in scientific inquiry and philosophic speculation, a thinker proceeds neither by rule nor yet blindly, but by means of meanings that exist immediately as feelings having qualitative color. (124-125)*

So, as Dewey sees it, in the end it is the qualitative feel of certain ideas and the sense for such “feel” that conditions the presence of “genuine artistry” or “esthetic character” in an experience of thinking, because it is the guidance provided by them that makes it possible for the thinker to proceed “neither by rule nor yet blindly” and thus avoid the two extremes that he takes to delimit the esthetic in experience. But in what way may such a conception of philosophizing as esthetic experience be able to contribute to the field of somaesthetics? That is what the next section will explore.

### Somaesthetic lessons

Shusterman defines somaesthetics as being “concerned with the critical study and meliorative cultivation of how we experience and use the living body (or soma) as a site of sensory appreciation (aesthesia) and creative self-fashioning.”<sup>15</sup> As this summary description indicates, somaesthetics has both a theoretical (“critical study”) and practical side (“meliorative cultivation”), because it studies not only the role of “the living, feeling, sentient body” in experience *theoretically*, but also tries to come up with and implement *practical* ways of “improving specific somatic skills of performance” by means of increased “somatic understanding and awareness.”<sup>16</sup> Given this understanding of somaesthetics, it is clear that Dewey’s understanding of philosophizing as an esthetic experience, which is deeply rooted in the interaction between an encultured body and its environment, can be seen as a *theoretical* contribution to somaesthetics. More importantly, I also think that it is able to go beyond the purely theoretical and contribute practically to the somaesthetic task of “improving specific somatic skills of performance.” Implicitly, Dewey’s conception of philosophizing as an esthetic experience thus points to a number of ways in which the activity of philosophizing – for example, when philosophy students read philosophy texts – may be improved by means of increased “somatic understanding and awareness.”

To appreciate this idea, it is important to understand how central Dewey thinks the body is even in a supposedly intellectual activity like reading a philosophy book. As explained previously, Dewey thinks that an experience of thinking depends on a certain “feel” for specific ideas. But as Dewey sees it, these feelings are deeply rooted in the body. This becomes especially clear in *Experience and Nature*’s seventh chapter on “Nature, Life and Body–Mind,” where Dewey explains the bodily rootedness of ideas as follows:

*When I think such meanings as “friend” and “enemy,” I refer to external and eventual consequences. But this naming does not involve miraculous “action at a distance.” There is something present in organic action which acts as a surrogate for the remote things signified. The words make immediate sense as well as have significance. This something now present is not just the activity of the laryngeal*

<sup>15</sup> Shusterman 2008, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Shusterman, “Body and the Arts: The Need for Somaesthetics” in *Diogenes*, 59 (1-2), 2013, p. 16. There Shusterman also explains his distinction between analytic, pragmatic and practical somaesthetics

*and vocal apparatus. When shortcircuiting through language is carried as far as limitation to this apparatus, words are mere counters automatically used, and language disappears. The ideas are qualities of events in which all the parts of organic structure which have ever been implicated in actual situations of concern with extra-organic friends and enemies: presumably in proprio-receptors and organ-receptors with all their connected glandular and muscular mechanisms. These qualities give body and stuff to the activity of the linguistic apparatus.<sup>17</sup>*

So, as Dewey sees it, the meanings that certain ideas – whether the ideas of “friend” and “enemy” or “experience” and “nature,” for example – possess for a specific person “are qualities of events in which all parts of organic structure which have ever been implicated in actual situations of concern” with the things that the words or ideas designate. In this sense meaning is, according to Dewey, a bodily affair of “glandular and muscular mechanisms” and “proprio-receptors and organ-receptors.”

The feel for ideas that guides thinking is thus deeply rooted in the body, according to Dewey, and the significance of this for an activity like reading is tremendous. For, as Dewey goes on to explain in the next chapter on “Existence, Ideas and Consciousness,” even “our most highly intellectualized operations” depend on the “immense multitude of immediate organic selections, rejections, welcomings, expulsions, appropriations, withdrawals, shrinkings, expansions, elations and dejections, attacks, wardings off, of the most minute, vibrantly delicate nature” that constitute the organic substratum of thinking (299). When it comes to “reading a book” (306), for example, it is thus the case that, if “a reader” does not repeat “something of these organic movements, and thus “gets” their qualities, he does not get the sense of what is said; he does not really assent, even though he gives cold approbation” (300). So, as Dewey sees it, a process like that of reading a philosophical text is in this sense deeply rooted in a multitude of minute, organic movements. Based on the meanings that have been deposited in one’s body through previous engagement in “actual situations of concern” with the things that the ideas refer to, certain organic movements (and meanings) are automatically activated the next time one encounters similar signs on a page. Provided that the activity is running smoothly and one understands the text, there is of course no need to pay any attention to these minute “organic movements,” which are then better left in the background. Unfortunately, however, “the act of taking which enables dialectic [reading] to exist or occur” is not always successful in so far as “taking is fallible” and, as such, “often mis-taking” (287). For philosophy students, for example, who have to read complex and abstract (historical) texts, it is thus a fact that they often have a hard time understanding or making sense of the texts that they read. Of course, there are many reasons why this is so, but from a Deweyan perspective they will, in the end, always be rooted in bodily movements. As he explains in *Experience and Nature*, understanding may thus

*... flag because of fatigue; it may take one meaning for another because of perverse sensory appreciations, due to organic maladjustment; haste, due to absence of inhibition, may lead one to take a meaning to be clear when it is cloudy or ambiguous with respect to the purpose for which it is used, although in itself it is neither clear nor obscure. (288)*

So, all of these ways of mistaking or misunderstanding a text are, according to Dewey, rooted in organic conditions such as “fatigue,” “perverse sensory appreciations,” “organic

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<sup>17</sup> John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 2000), p. 292

maladjustment,” and “absence of inhibition;” when such mistakings occur, it becomes, as he explains, a substantial problem that “we are not aware of the qualities of many or most of” those organic movements that condition our understanding in so far as “we do not objectively distinguish and identify them” even though they “exist as feeling qualities, and have an enormous directive effect on our behavior” (299). And the reason why it is such a problem that we are not aware of these organic movements is that we, then, cannot adjust or change them in such a way that we can move from misunderstanding and mistaking to understanding and an experience of thinking. So, just as with someone who is unable to “stand” or control his “posture and movements” (299), the solution for someone who cannot understand a philosophy text is, as Dewey sees it, to strengthen “the plane of conscious control, the direction of action by perception of connections” (296).

But how could one strengthen the plane of conscious control so that philosophy students, for example, will perform better when reading philosophy texts? Of course, one way to do this is through theoretical lectures on philosophizing as an esthetic experience, which might change the way in which students approach this type of text.<sup>18</sup> But that would still be a very theoretical intervention. Practically, one of the most important things would probably be to teach them to slow down when reading. From a Deweyan perspective, reading is a bodily activity that takes time in so far as it not only involves eye movements, turning pages, and so on, but also constant activation of the embodied habits that are responsible for the meaning ascribed to individual words.<sup>19</sup> If students are to become more aware of this process, they need to slow down so that they become able to pay more attention to it. This also seems to be implied by Dewey’s suggestion that “haste, due to absence of inhibition, may lead one to take a meaning to be clear when it is cloudy or ambiguous.”<sup>20</sup>

The all-importance of slowness when reading philosophy texts has recently been emphasized by Michelle Bolous Walker in her *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution*, where she suggests that slowness is a precondition of appreciating philosophy texts in exactly the same way as eating slowly may be a precondition of appreciating food. As Walker describes it, many students come to philosophy with reading habits formed outside philosophy, where they have developed “superficial skimming techniques ... online” that make them “ill-equipped” for philosophy, because they simply lack “the basic skills of concentrated attention, uninterrupted thinking and receptivity” that philosophy demands.<sup>21</sup> According to Walker, this situation is exacerbated further by the institutional setting of philosophy. As she explains, drawing on Pierre Hadot and others, the institution of philosophy was originally inspired by the ancient idea of philosophy as “a way of life that binds the philosopher to philosophy” or as a “love of wisdom” that “inaugurate a transformative relation” (2). Gradually, however, this original idea has been replaced by the idea of philosophy as a “forensic desire to know” (1), which, as Walker sees it, has had profound effects on philosophical reading habits because it has encouraged a “cult of speed and haste” (10) guided by images of reading as “information extraction” or “mining” (18) that positively prevent the practice of philosophizing as “a slow and repetitive art” (21)

18 In a similar way, one could also make students aware of the fact that philosophers write within many different genres, as has been emphasized by Berel Lang in *The Anatomy of Philosophical Style* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 9-44 or make them read some of the essay in an anthology like Costica Bradatan (ed.), *Philosophy as a Literary Art: Making Things Up* (London: Routledge, 2015)

19 Here Dewey is in line with Siri Hustvedt who in her *Living, Thinking, Looking: Essays* (New York: Picador, 2012), p. 134 claims that “the act of reading takes place 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 ideas, and of our fingers that turn the pages, but we do not pay particular attention to any of this.”

20 This fits in well with Shusterman’s analysis of Thoreau in Shusterman 2012, p. 297, according to which “Slowness is another method Thoreau recommends for heightened awareness.”

21 Michelle B. Walker, *Slow Philosophy: Reading Against the Institution* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 13

of reading that “grounds thought in the body, in experience” (29). The question which these considerations lead Walker to raise, and which I think Dewey’s thinking about philosophizing as an esthetic experience also raises, is if there are “ways, then, that we can, as teachers of philosophy, welcome our students into an ethical community of readers” and teach them “what it means to read philosophy slowly and patiently” (22). I will not go further into Walker’s own positive suggestions (which she develops through slow reading of other philosophers) here, but rather take my cue from a suggestion that she makes and then develop it in a Deweyan way. Walker suggests that teachers could help students learn how to read slowly by making “slow reading exercises a standard part of the curriculum” (14).

But how could one go about introducing such exercises into the curriculum in a Dewey-inspired way? Here I draw on a personal example.<sup>22</sup> A year ago I gave an introductory lecture on phenomenology to a class of roughly 40 first-year philosophy students. As part of their preparation for the lecture, the students had been asked to read a number of introductory texts about phenomenology. One of these was the text “Phenomenology and psychology” by the Danish phenomenologist Løgstrup; another was Merleau-Ponty’s famous “What is Phenomenology?” preface to his *Phenomenology of Perception*. The lecture lasted three hours and began in a quite traditional way in so far as I first gave a general introduction to some of the key concepts in phenomenology (such as phenomenon, subject, lifeworld, intentionality, epoché, reduction, and so on), and then went on to say a bit about how these ideas figure in Merleau-Ponty’s dense text. Next, however, I projected a PowerPoint with a difficult excerpt from Merleau-Ponty’s text<sup>23</sup> and suggested to the students that I would like to use it as a reading exercise. Then, I read it slowly to them aloud before I suggested that they should go over the passage, two and two together, and see if they (with the background understanding of phenomenology that I had given them) could make sense of the whole passage. I also emphasized that I thought it was a difficult passage even for me, while I pointed out that they would have plenty of time to do the exercise (I had reserved 45 minutes for it). Then the students started reading and arguing with each other, and after approximately 25 minutes, I asked if anyone was willing to hazard an interpretation of the first couple of sentences or even of the whole passage. Several students were willing to do so, and we then went through the whole passage word by word and line by line. Each time a student suggested an interpretation that was able to make sense of some parts of a sentence but not all, I asked how they would make sense of the rest of the sentence or passage and, in this way, we collectively/collaboratively finally managed to make sense of the whole passage (or so we

22 While the example is personal and inspired by Dewey’s thoughts about philosophizing as an esthetic experience similar exercises have also been suggested by university didacticians. See for example John C. Beane, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking and Active Learning in the Classroom* (San Francisco, John Wiley & Sons, 2011, pp. 133-148

23 The relevant passage can be found in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. xiii–xiv, where Merleau-Ponty explains that “For Husserl, on the contrary, it is well known that there is a problem of other people, and the alter ego is a paradox. If the other is truly for himself alone, beyond his being for me, and if we are for each other and not both for God, we must necessarily have some appearance for each other. He must and I must have an outer appearance, and there must be, besides the perspective of the For Oneself – my view of myself and the other’s of himself – a perspective of For Others – my view of others and theirs of me. Of course, these two perspectives, in each one of us, cannot be simply juxtaposed, for in that case it is not I that the other would see, nor he that I should see. I must be the exterior that I present to others, and the body of the other must be the other himself. This paradox and the dialectic of the Ego and the Alter are possible only provided that the Ego and the Alter Ego are defined by their situation and are not freed from all inheritance; that is, provided that philosophy does not culminate in a return to the self, and that I discover by reflection not only my presence to myself, but also the possibility of an “outside spectator”; that is, again, provided that at the very moment when I experience my existence – at the ultimate extremity of reflection – I fall short of the ultimate density which would place me outside time, and that I discover within myself a kind of internal weakness standing in the way of my being totally individualized: a weakness which exposes me to the gaze of others as a man among men or at least as a consciousness among consciousness. Hitherto the Cogito depreciated the perception of others, teaching me as it did that the I is accessible only to itself, since it defined me as the thought which I have of myself, and which clearly I am alone in having, at least in this ultimate sense. For the “other” to be more than an empty word, it is necessary that my existence should never be reduced to my bare awareness of existing, but that it should take in also the awareness that one may have of it, and thus include my incarnation in some nature and the possibility, at least, of a historical situation. The Cogito must reveal me in a situation, and it is on this condition alone that transcendental subjectivity can, as Husserl puts it, be an intersubjectivity.”

thought, at least).

How can this exercise in slow reading be said to help the students perform better philosophically? Based on my knowledge of their abilities, I feel certain that most of them would not have been able to make sense of the passage when they read it at home – probably because they lack the appropriate background understanding of phenomenology and read too fast. Often, however, students are not even aware that they have not understood a text, because they simply project a more or less arbitrary meaning on it and then think they have understood it. So, the first thing an exercise in slow reading may do is make them aware that they have not really understood the text. Next, of course, it may also make them aware that it takes time to read such texts and that it pays to slow down while reading, because this is what allowed us to move from a situation of non- or mis-understanding to understanding. In this way, the exercise in slow reading may thus be said to have given them a concrete experience of how slow reading is able to improve performance when it comes to reading philosophy texts. Instead of the reading process being a mysterious black box that some get and some do not, it was, so to say, opened up collectively and became something that we did together, in public. The evidence here is of course anecdotal, but I think it points to the fact that, in principle, the situation with philosophy students who are unable to read philosophy texts are not different from the case of a person who has bad posture and does not know how to correct it. From a Deweyan, somaesthetic perspective, the solution in both cases is the strengthening of “the plane of conscious control, the direction of action by perception of connections” and, as I hope to have indicated here at the end of this paper, slow reading exercises inspired by Dewey’s understanding of philosophizing as an esthetic experience is one way in which this plane of conscious control may be strengthened, so that it may lead to somaesthetically improved performance within the very special practice of reading philosophy texts.

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