

EXCHANGE

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Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities

by Holly Sweeney, M. A.

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Introduction

An exploration of the Alexander Technique invites a brief introduction to some unique aspects affecting the world of the performing arts where the Technique is probably best known and most supported. Besides the fact that the Technique was developed by a performing artist, a look at the characteristic work demands and concerns of performing artists will provide information about the technique's popularity and its possible benefit.

Job demands for performing artists are rigorous: they have to perform difficult physical tasks with many repetitions; their instruments or the artistic demands of their work may require many hours at a time in awkward or extreme

postures; their work organization frequently involves erratic schedules of both day and evening work; they are largely self-employed and do not have insurance or disability provided by their contracts; the success of their careers is based on the endurance and reliability of their physical talents; and they are usually dissatisfied with drug treatments for pain or stress because even the mildest of side effects can negatively influence their level of performance.^{1,2}

From this list of career demands, some general characteristics of this occupational group emerge. Performing artists work repetitively and at maximal capabilities; they are highly motivated and process oriented workers; and their careers are dependent on maintaining physical health. They would be interested, therefore, in a training technique that offered drug-free relief from physical strain and psychological stress; supported a self-employed life-style with

low-cost, self-managed solutions for occupational duress; and maximized their performing capabilities while minimizing effort.²

Although performing artists form a small, unique occupational entity, they represent the concerns of the majority of workers everywhere: people who want to enjoy good health and do their jobs well over the span of a working lifetime without suffering from psychological stress, physical discomforts, or cumulative strain injuries.

So, while the Alexander Technique is practiced most widely by performing artists, its application is certainly not limited to that occupational group and may, in fact, offer solutions to common problems shared by many workers.³

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Coming Events

Do you have an event to list in Coming Events? Listings appear in Exchange and *ATI Communique*. ATI members can post listings for free. Nonmembers get their first posting for free, and subsequent

postings cost just \$35.00 in U. S. funds. Send listings to:
Alexander Technique International
1692 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138 USA

or send e-mail to:
chair@ati-net.com

April 22-25, Bruce and Martha Fertman : "On the Path"
Brookline, MA U. S. A., A workshop for trainees will be held Thursday night. Private lessons for anyone will be offered Thursday and Friday mornings. A workshop for teachers will be held Saturday and Sunday. Contact Debi Adams for details at 617-734-1136.

April 22 - July 22, Thursday evenings from 7:00p. m. to 9:00p. m. The Professional Association of Alexander Teachers (PAAT), **Birmingham, U.K.** Recreational Course in the Alexander Technique.

PAAT has a well-established Recreational Course in the Alexander Technique for individuals who are already having private lessons and who would like to deepen their understanding of the Technique by studying it in a broader context than private lessons allow. The Course is offered on a term-by-term basis, with each term consisting of 12 weekly sessions which take place Birmingham (U. K.) on Thursday evenings between 7.00-9.00 p.m. Sessions focus on the practical application of the Technique to the solution of life's problem and take both a general and participant-generated approach. Talks are given based on the writings of F.M.Alexander and related subjects. Cost is currently £192.00 per term. Open to all.
Contact: Fred Oldfield (e-mail: FOldfi1426@aol.com) Tel: +44 (0)121-248-1133

April 30-May 3 (Bank holiday weekend).

Richard Brennan Alexander Technique Workshop, **Lios Dana, Co. Kerry, Ireland**. Residential Workshop.

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EXCHANGE

Exchange is published quarterly by Alexander Technique International (ATI), the purpose of which is to promote and advance the F. Mathias Alexander Technique. Exchange is designed to disseminate information regarding the technique among ATI members and the public.

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For ATI membership information contact Debi Adams at the ATI home office address above. Exchange welcomes letters to the editor and submissions from readers. Contact the editor at the address above or at dan.arsenault@ieee.org

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River of Direction

by Bruce Fertman, M.Ed.

Some fifteen years ago, Meade Andrews, then my student, said to me that it seemed to her that “direction” was inherent in us. Over the years I was to discover, again and again, how the best ideas came from, and continue to come from, my students.

I began considering this notion of direction as inherent. Going back to my completely worn out copy of *The Use of the Self*, I read yet again Alexander’s footnote on direction: “The process involved in projecting messages from the brain to the mechanisms and in conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms.”

I thought to myself, “Our brains are certainly inherent and profoundly physical.” These projected messages, must also be inherent and their pathways of projection must also be inherent. And lastly, that the mechanisms, (a word connoting parts in relation), must also be inherent to us, that is, part of our design, part of us.

I looked up the word **inherent**: a natural, inseparable, inborn quality, characteristic or right.

I began to think about these messages like keys, that when shaped, fitted, and gently turned within the lock mechanism for which they were designed, resulted in the unlocking, and in the opening of gates, swinging gates, which allowed one free and easy access within and without.

I came to realize that even though I had the keys, I did not possess a good understanding of the locks, nor did I have the adequate sensitivity to sense the precise fit between the keys and the locks. More study was in order.

As my knowledge of the locks became more accurate, I began to realize how necessary it was that I understand the internal spatial pathways through which the keys (messages) traveled to reach their designated locks (mechanisms). I needed to know the message’s pathways of projection; that is, I needed to know the *direction of the directions!*

Slowly I came to realize that the direction, the direction of the direction, the location of the direction, and the innervation of the direction were all critical to “conducting the energy necessary to the use of these mechanisms.”

Webster. **Conduction**: a conveying, as of a liquid through a channel. Direction, I thought, is like a great branching river through our bodies. Perhaps Novalis was right when he said, “There is no doubt that our body is a moulded river.”

A molded river of direction. For years I have been following this river of direction.

James Glick writes:

“Just imagine a river’s basic shape, the shape you would draw on a piece of mental scratch paper. Inevitably and universally, we imagine a line, drawn with some curve or wiggle.

“It is not so. Our imaginations mislead us. In reality, a river’s basic shape—and it does have a basic shape, repeated wherever nature empties the land of water—is not a line but a tree. A river is, in its essence, a thing that branches. So are most plants: trees themselves, bushes, ferns. So is lightning, contrary to our common lightning-bolt stereotype, which is a sort of stretched Z. So is the human lung, a

tree of ever-smaller tubes: bronchi, bronchia, and bronchioles, intertwining with another tree, the network of blood vessels.

“North America’s longest river actually spans thirty-one American states and two Canadian provinces. It embodies without discrimination the great tributaries we think of as separate rivers; it is the Mississippi-Missouri-Ohio-Tennessee-Arkansas... Except in human perception and language, nothing separates its few wide and deep stretches from its many small and narrow ones. Although it flows inward towards its trunk, in geological time it grew, and continues to grow, outward, like an organism, from its ocean outlet to its many headwaters.”

Vital, organic opposition! Could this be a more natural, less mechanistic metaphor for what Mr. Alexander referred to as antagonistic pulls? A river, a human river of coherent, opposing, directive forces. Pathways of projection, and of return, like the headwater from the mountain spring, delicately spilling out, winding its way home to the sea. Like the salmon swimming upstream, upward through waterfalls destined to find their way back home to the headwaters, from where they were once spawned, and from where they will spawn again.

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Deadline for Motions Extended

The deadline for motions and proposals to the ATI board has been extended until May 15, 1999.

From the Chair

by Jamee Culbertson, Chair of Alexander Technique International

One hundred years ago Frederick Matthias Alexander was 30 years old. The radio had not yet come into being, nor had television. In 1899 the telephone had only been in use for 23 years and, certainly, such a thing as the computer or satellites orbiting the planet was not uppermost on people's minds.

As we enter not only a new century but a new millennium, I can only imagine what the world will offer next. Certainly Mr. Alexander dreamed of what his teaching would offer the world in the future, but I wonder if Alexander ever dreamed that there would be such a vast worldwide network of teachers and friends of his life's work.

ATI, of course, is a part of that network, having grown and thrived through the years by staying true to its purpose, and by responding to the needs of its members. One way we are serving members is through the many modes of communication available to us today—through the use of new technology. At the same time we are reaching into the foothills of smaller communities, by word of mouth if need be, to meet the needs of those who are not yet computer inclined. While technology is a powerful tool, it's the people who make the true difference in helping to meet your needs.

We have recently created the ATI phone tree, initiated by board member Jan Baty, your Corresponding Secretary. As this phone tree grows, we will endeavor to reach every ATI member and



From the November, 1998 ATI annual general meeting held in Plymouth, Massachusetts. From left to right, Anne Seelye, David Gorman, Jamee Culbertson, Chair, Tommy Thompson, Ex Officio, Debi Adams, Membership Committee, Jan Baty, Corresponding Secretary.

friend of the Alexander Technique to provide them with access to a world Alexander community as well as to the smaller grass roots gatherings in your own locale. We are expanding into new countries and communities to create an even stronger worldwide link. We are enthusiastic about creating goodwill among other Alexander societies around the world. We recently have had the pleasure of bringing numerous members of PAAT (Professional Association of Alexander Teachers), of Birmingham, England on board to join our membership. We have responded favorably to STAT Chairperson Dorothea Magonet's invitation to join STAT in dialogue about building bridges of communication between our two societies. We

hope to be working together soon.

The board is committed to finding ways we can serve you better, and in having ATI help you enjoy a rewarding experience in your relationship with the F. M. Alexander Technique.

We welcome all suggestions, and remember you can reach us collectively at:

board@ati-net.com

or individually at:

chair@ati-net.com

assistantchair@ati-net.com

treasurer@ati-net.com

execsec@ati-net.com

correspondsec@ati-net.com

or call ATI at 617-497-2242 or 888-321-0856 (voice mail only). ☺

A Fond Farewell

Keynote Address, 1998 ATI Annual General Meeting,
John Carver Inn, Plymouth, Massachusetts

by Tommy Thompson, *Outgoing Chair*,
ATI

Fontveille, a small town in the South of France between Arles and Avignon, although much nearer to Arles, has four shops, two uninhabited abbeys, several restaurants, and a number of small, picturesque, postcard hotels. Recently, while teaching in Fontveille, I stayed in one such hotel. While my room was discreet enough to have belonged to one of the two abbeys, having only one window, this window faced sunrise, and commanded a panoramic view of sun-streaked, burnt orange and red terracotta rooftops and sweeping hills—where once, when there were wheat fields, Van Gogh painted his haystacks. The wheat is gone now. With the advent of railroad lines from Paris to the South, farm vegetables shipped from the South to Paris proved to be more appealing to farmers for remunerative returns rather than keeping the rolling fields of wheat for provision of the muse.

Given my personal muse and the fact that I had a few hours before teaching to reflect on how history writes itself in change and divisions of landscape and mind, I realized while looking out from my cloistered window that six years had passed since I was last in the south of France. Then I had taught for the same dance organization, *autre pas* (translated “other steps”), when only several months earlier ATI had been created—our version of “other steps.”

Feeling a connection somehow, I decided to commemorate these two separate occurrences and write my last keynote address. As I step off this ATI bus, bound-for-glory, I give my seat to a lady.

Rummaging through my briefcase, I must have rubbed elbows with a genius,

for out came a copy of my first keynote given at the Maritime Institute in 1994.

As I began to read my paper I was struck with wonder and amazement over what we had accomplished in a little more than a year prior to the Maritime meeting. For those of you who were not present at the Maritime Institute, the meeting was pivotal to our existence. Which way to travel—apart or together? It was our first experience with Formal Consensus and our initial experience in respecting each other’s differences—somewhat unheard of in the Alexander community at the time. In my paper I offered an observation of where I thought we were in time. I explained what Ken Carey, in his book *Terra Christa*, termed “The Resonant Minority.”

“I was struck with wonder and amazement over what we had accomplished in a little more than a year...”

“Presently, each human being on earth is sounding a note or tone of sorts, but for the most part these notes are not in any kind of harmony. Just as no two snowflakes are alike, no two discordant notes are ever similar enough to build upon one another’s harmonics. Consequently, their destructive effects on the surrounding environment are arithmetically cumulative, but far from exponential. If it were possible for dissonance to become amplified through resonance, the earth would have long since perished.

“Physicists call this curious amplification of harmonics ‘rhythmic entrainment.’ Perhaps the best example of it was discovered by the

proprietors of 19th century clock shops who repeatedly observed that all their clocks with pendulums of the same length would sooner or later end up with their pendulums swinging in harmony. Experiments showed that no matter how randomly the pendulums were set in motion, sooner or later, they would all begin swinging together. Moreover, it was found that the length of time that it took for all the pendulums to begin swinging in harmony (after they were set in motion randomly) decreased exponentially in direct proportion to the number of clocks that had begun to move together. In other words, it would take a while for the first two clocks out of a roomful of forty-five clocks to begin to swing together once the pendulums of all forty-five clocks had

been randomly set in motion. It would not take quite so long for the third clock to join the first two. The fourth would come in with much less hesitation and so on, until by the time there were (say) a dozen clocks with pendulums swinging side by side, it would seem that the rest would join them almost instantaneously. The number that it takes to cause this almost instantaneous shift of the whole is called a ‘resonant minority’.”

And, this is how we have grown; indeed perhaps why we’ve grown. ATI could not have happened earlier, and later on would have been too late.

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A Fond Farewell

A Fond Farewell, continued from page 5

When we happened was perhaps the only time we could have happened. Now, over four years later there is no longer danger in having ATI and the evolving nature of what it stands for fade away. There are simply too many people who want it to continue.

Our numbers by the time I gave this address had grown to over 200, up from 28 charter members a year-and-a-half earlier. That was impressive, most certainly an example of the 'Resonant Minority.' Today I fret because even with membership increasing every year we cannot seem to get beyond 320 or so members. For all who join, some elect to resign. Which brings me to the point of this talk and the thoughts I wish to share with you as I step aside as Chair of ATI.

Although substantial membership is not necessarily a measure of the merit of an organization, numbers do reflect the fact that people are attracted by what you stand for. So, while we increase our numbers, there is also attrition. Certainly, we in ATI must attend to the disgruntled in our membership; however, we must attend as well to those who have joined for the reasons we have attracted them, and we must strengthen what makes ATI attractive. The question of why people resign is too broad, so I will limit my thoughts to what we offer which other societies do not, which in my view attracts people to us.

We offer **sponsorship**—This is an idea initially introduced to the Alexander community by David Mills and adopted and modified by David Gorman and myself as a way of ensuring a professional standard for ATI.

The sponsorship process is identified with ATI now. Indeed, as Chair I have

signed hundreds of ATI certificates bestowing Teaching Certification to Sponsored Teaching Members. It is part of our signature. The process itself is written into our bylaws, albeit with the provision that the individual criteria we use to evaluate a teacher is for the interim. We await standard criteria by which all sponsors must abide. However, I repeat, ATI is very much identified with this process now. People join us because the process expands the notion of what is the most effective way to address training in the Technique. Many people from other recognized societies join us because they wish to be a part of our exploration.

However, now that we have sponsored so many teachers we know our process needs more clarity in a variety of areas. We will discuss this issue this weekend and hopefully we will arrive at solutions. I urge you to remember, however much you might have misgivings about certain aspects of sponsorship, the process itself has proven to be an effective way of evaluating the competency of teachers. Likewise, let us not forget that the process of sponsorship has proven attractive to quite a large number of teachers. This is one reason why our numbers make us the third largest society in the Alexander world. However, we must now give the Alexander community and governmental agencies reason to believe that our process of certifying teachers is every bit as exacting and as valid as board certification. To this end, our board has revived the Sponsorship Committee and our principle charge will be to shore up the original charge of the committee as outlined in our bylaws. The board has appointed me Chair of the Sponsorship Committee.

NOTE: Since this paper was pre-

sented, the consensus of a small focus group on professional development at the AGM was to charge this committee with further responsibilities and to expand the committee to include the chairs from each standing committee and other members as they wish to join. Specifically, the focus group introduced a proposal to charge the ad hoc committee on sponsorship to design non-disruptive changes to the sponsorship process to accommodate criteria and standards to promote quality teaching and preserve creativity as the PDC completes its tasks. The committee will meet soon into 1999 and we will report to the membership as our work unfolds. It is important to note that the charge was prefaced with that whatever we recommend in the way of change to the existing process, we do so with as little disruption as possible to the process as we know it which is already in place. We will not be adding more work to the sponsors, rather we will be looking at ways of clarifying what is expected of them to both sponsors and those being sponsored. This leads me to the second attraction.

Formal Consensus—This was originally the outgoing board's desire to find a way to make it possible for all members concerned with the future of ATI to be heard and to have their differences of opinion respected. What happened is that in the process of the meeting, we realized we had stumbled upon a way of making decisions that was consistent with what we professed to teach. This was radical and went directly against what all the other societies had in place as a means of making decisions within their organizations. What was initially meant to get us through one crucial meeting became a permanent feature and a feature that has attracted many new members and

lot of interest. As with sponsorship we are at a crossroads as to what might be the best means of implementing Formal Consensus in ATI. Do we adopt it as it stands, or in some modified version more suited to our needs?

NOTE: Since this paper was presented, an exploration of this issue has been discussed on Interchange. The board appreciates the efforts of those members engaged in the discussion and invites all ATI members, especially those not able to attend annual meetings, to join this exchange. Additional member input will give all of us a more accurate representation of member's views about Formal Consensus.

International Representation—When Eckart Schopf first introduced Alexander Technique International as a possible name for our fledgling society at our charter meeting, we were immediately attracted to the idea of being bold about being international. Little did we know there was an undercurrent of desire among many teachers throughout the world to interact globally. The desire to provide an international forum was written into our mission statement. This forum has been extended by the board during a variety of interchanges amongst the world Alexander societies during the past five years. Our efforts have been facilitated enormously by what David Gorman has created for ATI via the ATI Web site, which includes: ATI's Interchange, which is our in-house member forum; the International Member Data Base; Link Sites for ATI Offices throughout the world for extracting any ATI document needed to facilitate communication amongst ATI's Regional groups; and finally our new ATI Bookstore linked to Amazon.Com

Finally, ATI is **personal**. From the very

beginning, even while ATI underwent a shift in focus, albeit not an easy one, toward being professionally oriented, members have consistently sought to listen to each other and get past misunderstandings. We sought out C. T. Butler to consult us for this very reason. We did consciously what no other Alexander society had done to date; we determined to remain open and inclusive, realizing, interestingly enough

“From the very beginning, even while ATI underwent a shift in focus, albeit not an easy one, toward being professionally oriented, members have consistently sought to listen to each other and get past misunderstandings.”

during the process, that we had to learn how to do that among ourselves if we expected the same from the Alexander community. When we were criticized for whatever reason, we explained, rather than defending ourselves, and we invited those who criticized us to join us. When NASTAT Chair Don Krim came into office, I wrote and congratulated him, expressing my desire to build bridges and heal wounds. Little did I know that he harbored the same feeling.

Thus began a series of exchanges, including phone conversations, e-mails, and letters which, among additional entreaties to individuals in other societies, resulted in the relationship we have today with NASTAT, STAT, PAAT, and the affiliated societies. By no means are all these relationships without blemish, but we have come such a long way from years past in respecting differences. We will be challenged, but the stage has been set.

I offer as an example the story of what happened with one ATI member who found herself the only ATI member in a country filled with teachers from another society. Several times this teacher complained to me about her treatment by colleagues not willing to consider her as their colleague. Some went so far as to discredit her publicly because she was not a member of the professional society they felt to be the legiti-

mate one. One teacher had suggested to this country's orchestra that they not have lessons with her. I took the case to the board and we all agreed that something must be done.

Our custom is that one of us will draft a letter, then send it around and we'll come up with a consensual rewrite. Our letter sought both to clarify our member's credentials in no uncertain terms, and to explain ATI to members of another society who might not actually know what we're up to.

We suggested that what they were doing belonged to the past and was no longer acceptable, and that our desire was to work together in harmony when possible, and when not, in mutual respect one for the other. A copy of the letter to the teachers was sent to their society. In a bold move just prior to mailing the letters, I decided to include membership forms. Brazen, perhaps, but even Jimmy Hoffa never passed up

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A Fond Farewell

A Fond Farewell, continued from page 7

an opportunity to procure a new member—if necessary, right off the street. Numbers count, in so many ways. Months went by as events played out, then a response. First, our teacher wrote and thanked us describing what had happened. It turns out that the other teachers were so impressed that we had gone to such lengths to help out one of our members that the teacher who had maligned her the most considering joining us.

I offer this characteristic example of how the outgoing board chose to represent ATI, as one instance where when you take ATI personally, you represent

ATI personally, and when you represent ATI personally you have a personal interchange. Although my intention was never to become Chair of ATI, I'm glad it happened that way, and I want to thank you all for this gift of a wonderful learning experience. Among many wonderful experiences, what I shall remember most is my ongoing personal interchange with all of you present, and with teachers, trainees and friends of ATI from around the globe.

And now, the "Fond Farewell." Your new board, when asked by the Nominations Committee to run for office,

did not hesitate to say yes. Their desire to serve you and ATI is motivated by their sincerity. Your new Chair, Jamee Culbertson has carried many batons and she'll certainly carry this one for you.

It is her nature to do so. What if our beginnings were as rocky as the coast of Maine, look where we've come to, look at what we have learned not to do—never to do. In the words of the Bard, "All's Well That Ends Well." Where do we go from here? In the words of the American Sometime-Bard of Baseball, Yogi Berra, "It ain't over till its over." We, the outgoing board leave you in good hands. ☺

Coming Events

continued from page 2

This will be a residential 3-day course on the West Coast of Ireland at Lios Dana Holistic Centre which overlooks Dingle bay and the beautiful mountains of Kerry. It is an opportunity to combine the beauty of the West of Ireland with the inner stillness that the technique enhances. The course starts on Friday evening at 8 p. m. and finishes on Bank-holiday Monday at lunch-time. Cost £185 fully residential.

Contact : Lios Dana, Inch, Co. Kerry, Ireland. Tel. 00353 (0) 66 58189 or
Richard Brennan
rickbrennan@tinet.ie,
<http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique>.

May 13-16 in Rheinfelden, Switzerland (near Basel).
Workshop with Tommy Thompson of Boston, MA, U. S. A., 9:30 - 12:30 / 14:30 -17:30. Teaching the

Alexander Technique in a group: "Why and Why Not Me?" This workshop will examine the relevance of using groups to convey the discoveries of F. M. Alexander. In the afternoon, we will be "practicing" and applying the principles seen in the morning to persons from the public. Open to the general public in the afternoon.
Cost: Sfr 600 for the four days.
Contact: Rosa Luisa Rossi, tel/fax 41 61 831 51 19.

May 15-16 Richard Brennan Alexander Technique Workshop. The Healthy Way Centre, **Kildare, Ireland.** Weekend nonresidential introductory Workshop in Leixlip which is a small town within easy reach of Dublin City. This workshop will be useful for those new to the technique as well as those with previous experience. The course runs approximately from 10.30 am till 4.30 p. m. each day. Cost £85.

Contact : The Healthy Way, Leixlip, Co. Kildare 00353 0(1) 624-4288 or Richard Brennan
rickbrennan@tinet.ie,
<http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique>.

May 21-24 Workshop with Tommy Thompson of Boston, MA U. S. A. in Lausanne, Switzerland "Why and why not me?" his workshop will examine the relevance of using groups to convey the discoveries of F. M. Alexander. In the afternoon, we will be "practicing" and applying the principles seen in the morning to persons from the public. Open to the general public in the afternoon.
Cost: Sfr 600 for the four days.
Contact: Phillip Cotton, tel/fax: 41 21 781 12 16 email: cotton@creation-entreprise.ch

May 28-30 Richard Brennan Alex-

Coming Events

ander Technique Workshop.
Chrysalis, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

A weekend residential course in a quiet retreat centre near Dublin which is an opportunity to relax and be looked after. The course starts on Friday evening and finishes on 4 p. m. on Sunday. Cost £125.

Contact: Chrysalis, Donard, Co., Wicklow Ireland. Tel: 00353 (0)45-404-713 or Richard Brennan rickbrennan@tinet.ie, <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique>

May 29-30 Robin Gilmore and Lucia Walker in **Kyoto, Japan** e-mail RGKAPPA@aol.com for info and other AT events in Japan.

June 5 Cambridge, MA U. S. A. "The Alexander Technique as Applied to Chi Kung" with Jamee Culbertson, of Boston, MA U. S. A.

This course will be taught with Marie Favorito, Director of the Boston Healing Tao. Chi Kung is the discipline of moving your life force energy. In this workshop we will explore both standing and moving Chi Kung. Bringing these two "practices" together offers the experience of a quality of movement that is meditative, rejuvenating, and healing.

Cost: \$50.00 Contact: Jamee Culbertson, tel: 617-628-6570 email: jameelc@aol.com

June 14-18 "The Alexander Technique and Authentic Movement." A five-day residential intensive for the community of teachers and students of the Alexander Technique at the Seven Oaks Pathworks Center near **Charlottesville, Virginia, USA** in the foothills of the Blue

Ridge Mountains. Susan Schell (Authentic Movement) will be joining core faculty Meade Andrews, Jan Baty, Cynthia Mauney and Dale Beaver. Contact: Jan Baty tel. 302-368-5141 for more information.

June 19-26 The 26th Annual Barstow/Alexander Technique Institute, Doane College, **Crete, Nebraska** (near Lincoln and Omaha). Residential Course in the Alexander Technique.

The Institute is open to new and experienced students and emphasizes the unique approach to teaching the Technique pioneered by the late Marjorie Barstow.

Contact: Robert Rickover e-mail: robert@alexandertechnique.com, 2434 Ryons St., Lincoln, Nebraska 68502, U. S. A. tel: +1 402-475-4433 or visit the web site at: www.alexandertechnique.com/barstow

June 26-July 3 "Walking, Biking, Canoeing, and Horseback Riding with the Alexander Technique."

In an old renovated Mill in the countryside of **France near Basel** with Rosa Luisa Rossi from Basel. This workshop will explore how the principles embodied in the Alexander Technique can be applied to "vacation" activities to make them even more pleasurable. This workshop will draw on the experience gathered in the three previous workshops on horseback riding that Rosa Luisa has conducted these past summers. Open to the general public.

Contact: Rosa Luisa Rossi. tel/fax: 41 61 831 51 19.

July 11-17 "The Extraordinary Art of Seeing, Thinking, Moving."

In a splendid old castle overlooking the **Lake of Constance in Switzerland** and for the first time in Europe, a workshop with Peter Grunwald of New Zealand.

Peter successfully got rid of glasses for myopia that he had worn since age three; this workshop will draw upon that experience and those gathered during his courses on vision held in New Zealand.

Cost: call for details.

Contact: Rosa Luisa Rossi, tel/fax: 41 61 831 51 19 or Phillipe Cotton, tel/fax: 41 21 781 16. email: cotton@creation-entreprise.ch

July 30-August 2 (Bank holiday weekend). Richard Brennan Alexander Technique Workshop, **Lios Dana, Co. Kerry, Ireland.**

This will be 3-day residential course on the West Coast of Ireland at Lios Dana Holistic Centre which overlooks Dingle bay and the beautiful mountains of Kerry. It is an opportunity to combine the beauty of West of Ireland with the inner stillness that the technique enhances. The course starts on Friday evening at 7 p. m. and finishes on Bank-holiday Monday at lunch-time.

Cost £185 fully residential.

Contact : Lios Dana, Inch, Co. Kerry, Ireland. Tel. 00353 (0) 66 58189 or

Richard Brennan rickbrennan@tinet.ie, <http://homepage.tinet.ie/~alexandertechnique> ☺

International Congresses in the F. M. Alexander Technique

Their Background and Significance

By Doris Dietschy

Why have International Congresses?

We are now fast approaching our sixth international congress and we have begun to expect these events as a familiar landmark on the AT calendar. But are we simply following a trend? Helping to organize this latest congress has made me consider them not merely as a trend, but as vital for the survival of the Alexander Technique.

In Latin, congress means joining together. In the physical coming together of hundreds of people, all sharing the same professional path, the feeling of belonging becomes reality. Whether at the beginning of our training or not, whether teaching a little or a lot, whether since only recently or over many years, we all belong to a group of people who work in a particular way. Working closely together is the very nature of the Technique, and at the same time a certain amount of friction is to be expected.

The international congresses do not have any direct aims in the public domain. They serve the purpose of open exchange among experts eager for knowledge about the whole spectrum of the Alexander Technique. We see where and how the Alexander Technique is being used, yet the congress is also the arena of the untested and undeveloped.

We are able now to look back on five congresses. They are characterized by the desire to bring together Alexander teachers from all over the world to work with the generation of teachers trained by Alexander himself, so they can directly pass on their knowledge of the Technique to others. The older, more experienced members pass on their skills with their charisma, their words and their hands. Hands on as

an experience of continuity: linking back and linking forward.

And it is our privilege that the Alexander Technique hardly ever takes the form of a lecture, but instead consists of application, experimentation, and practice; of interchange, participation, and movement. In other words, the congresses are active opportunities to get to grips with the Alexander Technique.

The international congresses are not supposed to compete with the Alexander Societies, but to complement their work. Without the continuing enterprise from these societies the Alexander Technique would not be so widely acknowledged and accepted as it is today. It is in recognition (and appreciation) of this that the concept of an international congress was born.

A Little Background History

It was Michael Frederick who successfully managed to bring together the people who had shaped the Alexander Technique since the death of F. M. Alexander. Following his invitation, Dr. Wilfred and Marjory Barlow, Marjorie Barstow, Walter and Dilys Carrington and Patrick Macdonald came to Stony Brook near New York in August 1986 and along with them 230 Alexander Technique teachers and students from all over the world. The theme of this first congress was *The Alexander Technique, a World Wide Perspective*.

Two years later in 1988, he was able to welcome as many as 450 participants to Brighton, England. This second congress was dedicated to *Research, Training, and Stagecraft*.

In 1991 the snow-covered mountains of Engelberg, Switzerland, provided the backdrop for the third congress. This time about 500 Alexander experts came to-

gether to take part in *The Development of a Profession*. This congress, too, was initiated by Michael Frederick and was marked by his talent for bringing people together. Marjory Barlow, Marjorie Barstow, Walter and Dilys Carrington, Richard and Elisabeth Walker and Dr. Wilfred Barlow, who was suffering from a severe heart condition, were once again able to be convinced that their *Senior Master Classes* were vital for the continuity of the F. M. Alexander Technique. *Master Classes* of the second and third teaching generation and the numerous lectures were grouped around their teaching, as had been the case in Stony Brook and Brighton.

This third congress was also confirmation for Michael Frederick himself that the international feeling of belonging experienced by Alexander teachers had become reality and was no longer dependent on one single person.

In 1994 Australia applied to host the congress, for it was there almost exactly a hundred years before that F. M. Alexander had developed the Technique. Dr. David Garlick, already well-known for his physiology lectures at previous conferences and for his book, *The Lost Sixth Sense*, took over as director. This time our colleagues in Australia were able to attend a congress without having to travel to the other side of the globe. Many people came from the U. S. A., a whole group came from Japan and together with a few Europeans about 250 guests were accommodated at the University of Sydney. This time the theme was *The Meaning of Change*. The *Senior Master Classes* were very different. Dr. Barlow had passed away on October 21, 1991, as had Patrick Macdonald on November 23 the same year, and also Richard Walker on January 16, 1992. For health reasons, Marjorie Barstow and Walter and Dilys Carrington

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The Sixth International Congress of the Alexander Technique

by Doris Dietschy and Karoline Erdmann

Its motto: *The Alexander Technique—An Ongoing Discovery. Looking Towards the 21st Century.*

The sixth international congress will take place in Freiburg, Southern Germany, from August 9 to August 14, 1999. Set in the heart of a new Europe, the congress will be organized by Doris Dietschy, Karoline Erdmann, Michael P. Fortwängler and Daniel Süssstrunk who together form the team of directors. They are responsible for its conception and administration. This congress will be accompanied and supported by the Board of Congress Directors which is formed from all those who directed former congresses and is responsible for the continuity of the international congresses.

The Alexander Technique, with its focus on continued investigation and discovery, encourages us to realize that our environment directly influences and challenges our thoughts, feelings and actions. What has changed since F. M. Alexander first developed the Technique and how has this influenced us in our teaching? We have selected three areas or topics, all of which, whether we realize it or not, determine our behavior, our **Use of the Self**.

EMOTION—We are individuals with feelings. What did Alexander say on the subject of emotions? What do we understand by the concepts of attention, awareness, feeling, and emotion? What do they mean when teaching the Alexander Technique? What different views exist? What can be revised?

CONCEPTS—We are individuals continually making perceptions about reality. How do we use the variety of human thought? How do our ideas and views of the Alexander Technique differ from those of our colleagues? Can we be open and honest in our discernment of such concepts and allow them to influence our thoughts?

COMMUNICATION—We are individuals who communicate. Can we develop our ability to communicate? How did Alexander approach this? How has our environment changed since then? What is the meaning of communication nowadays?

In these topics we would like to make use of the experience and knowledge of experts who have explored these fields. They will be experts with an understanding of and respect for the concerns of Alexander teachers. In their exploration of these topics they will show us how to apply these ideas in practical situations.

EMOTION will be introduced by Walter Carrington and presented by Transactional Analyst Mary Cox D.A.S.E., M.Ed. from England.

CONCEPTS will be presented by Neuroscientist Professor Kevan Martin from Switzerland and England and by F. M. Alexander teacher Lucia Walker from England.

COMMUNICATION will be presented by F. M. Alexander Technique teacher and actress Cathy Madden from America and F. M. Alexander teacher and actor Jeremy Chance from Australia.

The **Application Groups** will focus on practical ideas and there will also be a daily **Exchange of Work** which

will provide the opportunity to work freely with one another. The **Forum** will provide the framework for lectures and demonstrations in speciality fields by Alexander teachers from throughout the world.

We would like to dedicate our **Open Morning** to the theme of spirituality. More and more people are turning to this area of interest. We will be asking: Can the Alexander Technique fulfill our innermost religious needs (C. G. Jung) or is the role of the Alexander Technique a means to an end? We hope answers to these questions will be provided by spiritual teachers taken from different religious traditions.

For the first time there will be no senior master classes. We are nevertheless fortunate to be able to welcome so many teachers trained by Alexander himself: Marjory Barlow, Walter and Dilys Carrington, Elisabeth Walker and Erika Whittaker. We are delighted that for the first time Peggy Williams will also be among our guests. Peggy Williams, who continues to teach in London, was herself trained by F. M. Alexander and worked for many years with Walter Carrington in the Constructive Teaching Centre. We hope that our Senior Guest Teachers will feel free to take part in any topic that interests them and that they will answer questions from the floor in our final plenary session and give us their impressions of the congress.

We hope that the sixth congress will be a rich source of experience for all participants and that it will open up new avenues in the teaching of the Alexander Technique. ☺

Alexander Technique Poetry



I am the Wind

by Gabriel Thompson, aged 7 years

When I am mad
 I swirl
 Round and round
 Across the hot desert.
 When I'm happy
 I joyfully move
 Around the beautiful Earth.
 When I'm sad
 I don't move at all. ☹

Walking Still

by Jamee Culbertson

Seamless;
 like naked water
 I walk.
 Seamless
 across the naked tundra
 walking.
 Removing stitches
 with every step,
 I am tall now
 and I walk.

Earth is orange
 burnt by history,
 mountains purpled
 meditating...
 and I walk.

I am Country
 walking, still.
 Called by winds
 and prospering waters.
 Pulsing landscape
 cardiac thrill.
 Walking, seamless
 walking still.

Letting fall
 silks and jeans,
 leather boots
 and silver hoops.
 I move
 within,
 seamlessly.
 I am seamless
 walking in.
 Seamless entry
 once again. ☹

International Congresses, continued from page 10.

could not make the journey. Teaching demonstrations and recollections from their training period given by Marjory Barlow, Elisabeth Walker and Erika Whittaker were all the more appreciated. Thanks to Dr. Garlick and his colleagues with their scientific lectures, which included a visit to the dissecting room, the congress took on a new look.

For a long time it had been widely accepted that the fifth congress should take place in Israel, the country with the most

Alexander teachers per capita. Congress directors, Shmuel Nelken, Ora Nelken and Rika Cohen gave their concept the title *Back to Basics*. The previous congresses had created a basis of trust which now made it possible to focus on our practical work together, because it is this practical work which helps us to understand the foundations of the Technique:

Alexander's principles. The *Senior Master Classes*, the *Special Interest Classes* and the *Open Forum* were all grouped around daily

exchanges of practical work. Everyone working together. By the end of the congress it had become clear that working with the Technique was the best way to break down language barriers and differences of opinion. A special event was dedicated to the memory of Marjorie Barstow, who had passed away on July 31, 1995.

In the *Congress Papers*, published by Direction, a full transcript in English of the first four congresses is to be found. ☺

Alexander Technique on the Internet

Alexander Technique International uses the Internet in a number of ways. Log into the ATI World Wide Web site at www.ati-net.com. Alexander Online provides links to the rapidly growing number of Alexander Technique resources on the internet. Log on at: www.alexandertechnique.com/online.

ATI maintains an electronic mailing list of members. You can send e-mail to all listed ATI members by mailing to :

interchange@ati.com

If you are member of ATI and gave an e-mail address you are listed automatically. Additionally, you can reach the ATI board as a group at:

board@ati-net.com

or individual board members at:

chair@ati-net.com

assistantchair@ati-net.com

treasurer@ati-net.com

execsec@ati-net.com

correspondsec@ati-net.com

Local Practitioner's Directory

"Alexander Technique International participates in the Ask Dr. Weil Local

Practitioner's Directory, a selective database of alternative medicine practitioners endorsed by Dr. Andrew Weil on his site on the World Wide Web. You'll find your name listed among thousands of others by going to the Ask Dr. Weil site

<http://www.drweil.com>, a site which promotes the health philosophy of Dr. Andrew Weil, and clicking on "Local Practitioners" in the left-hand navigation column on the page.

"To use the Practitioner's Guide, readers simply choose the discipline they are interested in and input their state and zip code or area code. At this time there are ten disciplines represented: Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine, Alexander Technique, Ayurvedic Medicine, Biofeedback, Feldenkrais Work, Guided Imagery Therapy, Herbal Medicine, Homeopathic Medicine, Naturopathic Medicine, Rolfing, and Trager Work. Other groups to be added currently have their applications under review.

"Dr. Weil is a leader in the integration of Western medicine and alternative medicine and the author of seven books, including *Spontaneous Healing* (1995)

and the most recent best-seller *8 Weeks to Optimum Health* (1998). The Ask Dr. Weil site has become a primary resource for people seeking information about integrative medicine and access to its practitioners. It is one of the most popular health sites on the World Wide Web, receiving about a quarter of a million visits every week.

"Participation in this directory represents an endorsement by Dr. Andrew Weil of our organization and we are very excited to be affiliated with Dr. Weil in this way. We urge you to take a few minutes and look at the site and this feature in particular. The producers at the Dr. Weil site are highly interested in receiving feedback from you, especially if you have received new client inquiries from your listing. If you see information there that is incorrect or outdated send changes and corrections to chair@ati-net.com. For feedback about the site specifically, please contact Martha Simon, Assistant Producer, Ask Dr. Weil at msimon@pathfinder.com, telephone 212-522-6261." ☺

Exploring The Alexander Technique: Its Central Hypothesis and Teaching Modalities

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Part I The Central Hypothesis

Let us begin by placing the Alexander Technique in the context of historical time and scientific inquiry. F. Matthias Alexander, a professional Shakespearean actor from Australia, developed the Technique during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Around that time several scientists were making ground-breaking observations about the structure and the function of the nervous system and the relationships between the development of the nervous system and the evolution of behavior. Great names in science like Sherrington, Magnus, Darwin, and Coghill were just revealing their discoveries. We do not know if F. M.

Alexander's initial observations or discoveries were entirely independent of these leaders of science, like Sherrington and Coghill, who later commented upon and generally supported Alexander's work.⁷ Alexander, in his four published books, makes no reference to being influenced by any other scientist or researcher.⁵ We do know, however, that by 1904 he had solved through inquiry and self scrutiny a six to ten-year problem with his voice that had both defied medical solution and adversely affected his acting career. On the basis of on his own intuition that something he was doing in performance caused him to lose his voice, and on his discoveries during the period of inquiry and self observation, Alexander had developed by 1904 a generalized hypothesis and the beginning of a teaching methodology, which he took to England and established a teaching practice based on The Alexander Method.⁴

Whether or not Alexander developed his theories in total isolation remains a provocative mystery.⁵ His first book,

Man's Supreme Inheritance, was published in 1910, preceding by at least a decade Magnus' *Korperstellung*⁶ and almost concurrent with Sherrington's early papers.⁵

Subsequent mid-20th century researchers such as Dr. Frank Pierce Jones of the Tufts University Institute and Nobel Prize winner Nikolaas Tinbergen have enthusiastically endorsed the efficacy of Alexander's process of scientific inquiry that led to the formulation of his central hypothesis and teaching practices.⁷

After 1923, following the publication of his second book, *Conscious Constructive Control of the Individual*, Alexander adopted the terminology that he would subsequently use to express his central

Alexander's own words from his final book, *The Universal Constant in Living*, further describes the significance of his concept of **use**: "A good manner of use of the self exerts an influence for good upon general functioning which is not only continuous, but also grows stronger as time goes on, becoming, that is, a constant influence tending always to raise the standard of functioning and improve the manner of reaction. A bad manner of use, on the other hand, continuously exerts an influence for ill, tending to lower the standard of general functioning, thus becoming an constant influence tending always to interfere with every functional activity arising from our response to stimuli from within

Unlike heredity and previous experience, however, **use** was a plastic entity which could be "brought under the conscious control of the individual and redirected to enlarge the individual's potential for creative development."

hypothesis. He began to use the term **use** as a way of describing "the total pattern that characterizes a person's response to stimuli."⁷ Alexander made this abstract noun, **use**, of equal significance to genetic and environmental factors in the development of an individual. Unlike heredity and previous experience, however, **use** was a plastic entity which could be "brought under the conscious control of the individual and redirected to enlarge the individual's potential for creative development."⁷

Figure 1 shows a diagram designed by the author of this paper illustrating Alexander's hypothesis: **Use affects functioning**.

and without the self, and harmfully affecting the manner of every reaction."⁸

Interestingly, Alexander's hypothesis anticipates two major late 20th century concepts in health care: the recognition of "cumulative trauma" as a factor in injury or disability and the "biopsychosocial" health model.

In Figure 1, möbius strips are used to express the interconnectedness of the stimulus-response relationship, according to Alexander's definition of **use**. Even though the möbius strip figure appears to have two different sides or surfaces, (in this case, representational of two entities: stimulus and response), the möbius strip really has only one con-

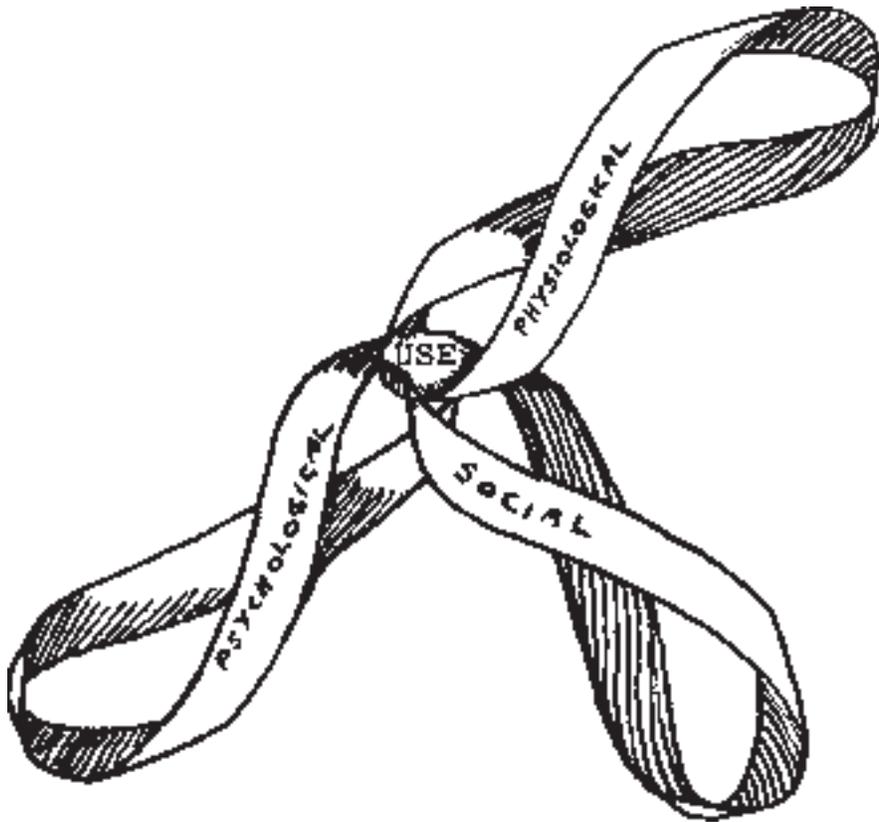


Figure 1. (Sweeney) Alexander's Hypothesis: Use, the total pattern that characterizes a person's response to stimuli. Use affects functioning in all domains of human experience.

tinuous surface or "side" just as there is a continuity of relationship between stimulus and response in living system because each response becomes a stimulus which initiates new responses which then become new stimuli. Remember from Alexander's own definition that he is explicit in describing stimulus as coming both from "within and without the self" and affects the manner of every reaction. He is also explicit in describing that these stimulus-response relationships affect functioning at all levels of human experience.³

What is perhaps most unexpected about

Alexander's hypothesis is that it is not purely philosophical, but is anchored in a simple, observable physical marker: the dynamic physical relationship between the head, the neck, and whole body. The primacy of this relationship in influencing the quality of use led Alexander to name this fundamental, observable, head-neck-whole body relationship as "The Primary Control."⁷ The primary control "governs the working of all the mechanisms and so renders the control of the complex human organism comparatively simple."⁹

The relationship between functioning,

the "primary control", and the "total pattern that characterizes a person's response"⁷ can be explored through the work of scientists who investigated the importance of the head-neck-body relationship in the development of coordination and the manifestation of behavior in vertebrate animals and humans.

Körperstellung (Body Attitude) was published by Heinrich Magnus in 1924.⁶ In it, Magnus describes in detail the central role played by various tonic reflexes in vertebrate animals which govern the position of an animal's head in relation to space and in relation to the rest of the body. He summarizes vertebrate organization as follows: "the whole mechanism of the body acts in such a way that the head leads and the whole body follows."⁷ Magnus' work demonstrated that head-neck reflexes were "the central mechanism in orienting the animal to his environment both in maintaining a posture assumed for a particular purpose and in restoring the animal to the normal resting posture."⁷ The work of Magnus was the primary inspiration for later 20th century researcher, Tadashi Fukuda, who conducted research on the presence of "statokinetic reflexes" of the head-neck relationship in normal healthy adults.⁶

Sir Charles Sherrington, with whom Magnus studied before conducting his own research, made some of the most significant discoveries on the way nerves control muscles and how the muscles are vital in providing information to the nervous system.¹⁰ Sherrington met Alexander in England and became a supporter of his work. He commented that Alexander had "done a service to the subject (the physiology of posture and movement) by insistingly(sic) treating each act as involving the whole inte-

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grated individual.”¹⁰ He also acknowledged the crucial role played by the head in the control of posture, balance, and movement.¹⁰

The work of American biologist, George Coghill, offers some of the most compelling support for Alexander’s observations of human beings despite the fact that Coghill spent a lifetime observing *Amblystoma*, a species of salamander. Coghill’s work was innovative in that it dealt with the “embryology of behavior.”¹¹ Coghill’s research embraces a question which is still profoundly provocative: What is the relationship between the development of the nervous system and the emergence of behavior?¹¹ The sum of his research could be summarized as follows: “...all organisms develop in an integrated and orderly manner reacting from the beginning as a

dividual as a whole, as a self-vitalizing agent. He reconditions and re-educates the reflex mechanism and brings their habits into normal relation with the functioning of the organism as a whole. I regard his method as thoroughly scientific and educationally sound.”¹⁰

Coghill’s description of the human individual as a “self-vitalizing agent” directly corresponds with his observations of *Amblystoma*. He classified learning as the “development of behavior” and noted that “behavior is always in the process of development in animals that can learn by experience.”¹¹ He noted that “when new turns in behavior cease to appear in the life of the individual, its behavior ceases to be intelligent.”¹¹ Writing specifically about the physiology of the nervous system, he commented: “it (the functional nerve cell) is

“Primary control” was the term Alexander chose to describe the supreme influence the head-neck-whole body relationship exerted over all domains of function in a human being.

total pattern of behavior with discreet movements of parts (reflexes, etc.) individuating but always under the dominance of the organism-as-a-whole.”¹¹ Coghill’s “dominance of the organism-as-a-whole” resonates strongly with Alexander’s idea of *use* as a “total pattern” of response.

Alexander gave Coghill a lesson in his Technique in 1941, shortly before the ailing scientist died. Coghill was so impressed with Alexander’s discoveries that he wrote a forward to Alexander’s last book in which he said: “Mr. Alexander’s method lays hold of the in-

dividual as a whole, as a self-vitalizing agent. He reconditions and re-educates the reflex mechanism and brings their habits into normal relation with the functioning of the organism as a whole. I regard his method as thoroughly scientific and educationally sound.”¹⁰ Current knowledge of the human nervous system agrees with Coghill’s assessment that the growth of the nervous system is stimulated by motivations involving the whole individual and that growth within the nervous system has a profound influence on behavior throughout the life-span of the individual.¹² These concepts which allude to

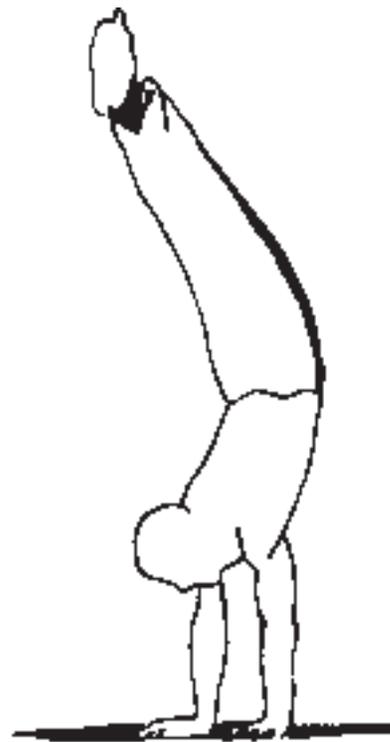


Figure 2. (From Fukuda, 1981) “... in this position, the head is bent as far back as it will go relative to the trunk, and by virtue of the tonic neck reflex thus induced, the four limbs are fully extended and the trunk is dorsiflexed.”

the “self-vitalizing” capabilities of living organisms seems to be what Alexander referred to when he wrote about “the use of the self” as exerting a constant influence over the “general functioning of an individual.”⁸

Alexander’s notion of a “primary control” comprised the physiological basis for his larger concept, *use*. “Primary control” was the term Alexander chose to describe the supreme influence the head-neck-whole body relationship exerted over all domains of function in a human being.⁸ Japanese medical doctor and researcher, Tadashi Fukuda, ex-

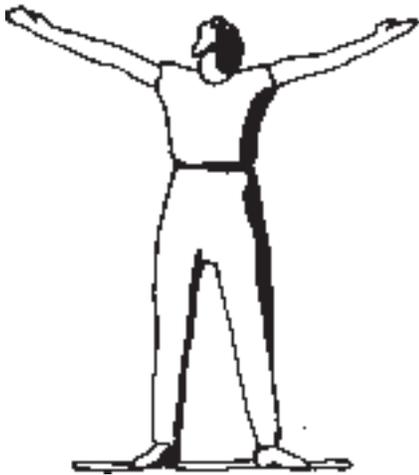


Figure 3. (From Fukuda, 1981) EMG studies indicated the presence of tonic neck reflexes in normal healthy adults. Dorsiflexed head (extension in all four limbs).

plored a similar idea during his lifelong scientific inquiry into the action of so-called “pathologic reflexes” (such as tonic neck reflexes) as important postural reflexes that formed the basis of human posture and movement in normal healthy adults.⁶ Fukuda’s work was inspired by observing practitioners of judo, sumo wrestlers, baseball players, gymnasts, and tennis players. His writings do not indicate any knowledge of Alexander’s work but he did credit Magnus’s *Körperstellung* as being a primary and seminal source.⁶ Fukuda developed tests that demonstrated that the attitudinal reflex patterns which Magnus had verified in animals were latent in healthy humans and could be actively stimulated. The deliberate stimulation of these reflexes seemed to be the basis for much of judo and sumo training as well as “instinctive” in highly skilled athletes. Stimulation required orientation of the head in specific ways in relationship to the body.⁶

Fukuda identified and experimentally qualified that the distribution of muscu-



Figure 4. (From Fukuda, 1981) “This suggests that a man may be able to display his muscular power most efficiently if he assumes a posture conforming to the reflex.” Ventroflexed head (flexion in all four limbs).

lar tone throughout the trunk and each of the four limbs “shows characteristic changes in accordance with definite laws when the position of the head is changed.”⁶ Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 show the characteristic changes in muscular tone which Fukuda demonstrated experimentally with EMG studies and other tests such as the “blindfold vertical writing test” along with a test devised by Hellebrandt et. al., that demonstrated the ipsilateral head reflex as predictive of increased limb strength and that normal people often spontaneously applied it when they became fatigued.¹³

The conclusions Fukuda drew which have the most relevance to Alexander’s theory of the “primary control” are illustrated in Figure 6 (next page) which shows a soccer player “heading” a ball. Fukuda noted that “postures” or “attitudes” are comprised of two kinds of movement—“pure voluntary movement and unconscious reflex movement.”¹⁶ In Figure 6, the line drawn between the



Figure 5. (From Fukuda, 1961, in Kelso) Turning the head to one side results in limb extension on that side (jaw side) and limb flexion on the other side. The “ipsilateral” tonic neck reflex.

head and the body of the soccer player indicates that the voluntary movement (the will to hit the ball with the head) is above the line and the involuntary, or reflexive and unconsciously performed, movements are below the line.⁶

Fukuda’s interpretation mirrors Coghill’s observation of the “total pattern” of the head-trunk dominating the “partial pattern” of the limbs.¹¹ Fukuda also noted that when an athlete’s body was subjected to the action of reflexes, it was able to produce maximal muscular coordination. In his words: “...in sports, a posture is beautiful or ideal when it

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Figure 6. (From Fukuda, 1981) *The Ipsilateral tonic neck reflex.*

coincides with the posture produced by the action of postural reflexes. For each position of the head relative to the trunk or to space there is a characteristic posture.¹⁶ In Alexander's words: "I discovered that a certain use of the head in relation to the neck, and of the head and neck in relation to the torso and other parts of the organism—constituted a primary control of the mechanisms as a whole—and that when I interfered with the employment of the primary control of my manner of use, this was always associated with a lowering of the standard of my general functioning."¹⁴

While the scientific observations of Fukuda, Coghill, Sherrington, and Magnus all give validity to Alexander's theory of the "primary control," Alexander's concept of *use* makes things a bit more complicated. Alexander implies in his writings that a person's manner of *use* is the way he

chose to operate his "primary control." In other words, through a discriminating conscious attention to his "primary control," a person can generate a constructive influence over his entire state of being. Without the benefit of this ongoing conscious influence, a person's *use* of himself could become stagnated, and the physical marker for this stagnation could be seen in habituated head-neck-whole body relationships that would create problematic patterns of muscular tension. When *use* is unconscious, habituated and idiopathic, the effect on the whole person is analogous to Coghill's observation on *Amblystoma* that when behavior ceases to develop, "behavior ceases to be intelligent." Intelligent in this context means "problem solving."¹¹

Alexander's concept of conscious and constructive *use* implies an integration of both volitional (consciously pursued) and reflexive (involuntary) responses. The goal of this integration is optimal balance and coordination in movement without excessive muscular tension.⁵ With this end in mind, he developed a technique to teach a person how to improve his overall quality of *use*.

Part II will be included in the next issue of *Exchange*.

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Holly Sweeney received her Alexander Technique teacher training from Bruce Fertman and Martha Hansen at The Alexander Technique Foundation in Philadelphia, she also studied with Marjorie Barstow and selected teachers in Lincoln, Nebraska. She completed her Master's degree at New York University's Occupational and Industrial Orthopedic Center for the Hospital for Joint Diseases in Ergonomics and Orthopedic Biomechanics January, 1997. This paper was presented at the Hospital for Joint Diseases as part of her graduate program. Holly maintains a teaching practice in Alexander Technique in Montclair, New Jersey, and in New York City. She also teaches traditional Yang style Tai Chi Chuan and is an active member of Bill Walsh's Yang Chenfu Tai Chi Center in New York city. ☺

River of Direction

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Salmon Rising, Water Falling

Kao Ch'ü-p'fei, Chinese, 1672-1734

Inscription: Picture of freedom in all directions. Ink and color on silk.

Person:

The salmon have to go up.
The water has to go down.
What kind of freedom is this?

Salmon:

Freedom for us is knowing where we are;
Knowing which way we need to go.
The Great Freedom for us is
Returning endlessly to the Head Waters;
No matter what the obstacle.
Freedom for us is knowing exactly what we
are.
And to whom we belong.
Freedom for us is staying together.

Person:

I think freedom is
Doing anything I want,
Being anybody I want,
Going anywhere I want,
Whenever I want,
No matter what!

Water:

You speak of partial freedoms.
There are freedoms from,
And there are freedoms toward.
Freedom in all directions is
A simultaneous freeing from and towards.
Freedom in all directions is
A buoyant, courageous giving in to the forces
of this world.
Freedom in all directions is a continual current,
a streaming, swirling, sparkling darkness,
an outpouring within river bank and river bed.
The Great Freedom for us is
Forever winding our way back to the Sea.

Rock:

Freedom for me is here;
Here where I am.
Staying put,
I am always here.
The Great Freedom for me
is sensing the cool water
Gushing around me and over me
sometimes with such lightness,

sometimes with such force,
yet always soft, always soft.
No one has seen how long it has taken
for my rough edges to wear away.
All they see now is a round, smooth rock.

But the Great Freedom for you,
Responsible One, can only be
freely choosing to go where you are needed.
Freedom in all directions, for you, can only be
freely choosing to do that which is required of
you,
completely,
wholeheartedly,
until you are empty,...open...full.

Tree:

The Great Rising and The Great Falling, for
you,
Conscious One;
what I hear and see and feel
running beneath me
is coursing through you,
(and through me).
This most ancient of patterns
whirling within you,
(and within me).

The Salmon Rising in you is you,
And is more than you.
The Water Falling in you is you;
And is more than you.
Salmon Rising, Water Falling.
Not one, not two.
Rather a confluence
Of vital opposition,
Swelling
With unstoppable intent,
Destined to return home
To the Source
(Infinitely small)
Of your beginning,
And to the Source
(Infinitely large)
Of your ending.

Water Falling

(for Ziggy and for all of us, together)

There are deep sorrows that live
in each of us.
Nothing to be done. Loss is forever woven
into the fabric of this world.
Over time, we will lose everything.

But I have learned from this life
that sadness and beauty are also woven to-
gether.
And that we can choose to draw near,
ever closer,
to what we find beautiful and moving.
Our work together
is not only about use and function,
structure and design.
it is also about time.
When you touch someone through this work,
you touch time. You touch time passing.
You touch the hidden pattern of imperma-
nence.
Through touching time and loving imperma-
nence
over and over again,
slowly sadness spirals,
rising and falling into beauty,
showing its face,
her countenance unveiled,
his countenance unmasked, quietly radiant,
utterly human. ☺

Call for Submissions

Exchange is actively seeking your input. Do you have a story to tell? If you have something to share with teachers, students, and admirers of the Alexander Technique, we want to hear it. Letters, poetry, scholarly work, articles, feature items, etc. As a member of ATI, Exchange is *your* journal.

We gladly accept submissions on paper or in digital format. Send paper submissions to:

Alexander Technique International
1692 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138 USA

Send digital submissions as e-mail or as attachments to e-mail to:

dan.arsenault@ieee.org.

Alexander Technique International (ATI) is a worldwide organization of teachers, students, and friends of the Alexander Technique created to promote and advance the work begun by F. Mathias Alexander.

ATI embraces the diversity of the international Alexander community and works to promote international dialogue.

About the Alexander Technique

Experience of the technique has to praise from George Bernard Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Prof. John Dewey, Sir Charles Sherrington, Julian Bream, John Cleese, Kevin Kline, Roald Dahl, Roberstson Davies, and many others. It is taught at the Juliard School of Performing Arts in New York, at the Royal College of Music and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London, The Stratford Shakespearean Festival and the Shaw Festivals in Canada, Boston University, Brandeis University, and many other centers.

Olympic-level athletes have similarly used the Technique to improve their performance, as have leading golfers and business people. Medical studies have shown the Technique to be as effective in lowering blood pressure as the normally prescribed beta-blocking drugs. Other studies have shown significant improvement in respiratory function.

The common factor in all of these aspects of life is that how we are using ourselves — the way we do things — affects the result we get. The Alexander Technique is a means of improving that use. It has been called a

“pre-technique” which people can apply to furthering their own special skills and activities. It is also essentially a preventive technique with which we can learn to improve and maintain our health.

The individual is the focus of the Alexander Technique. We are all unique, with different bodies, different experiences, and different problems. We go about the process of change in different ways and at different rates. For these reasons, what happens in a lesson depends very much on the needs of the student at the time. In the basic sense, though, you will learn an attitude of not trying to gain your ends at any cost, and, at the same time, how to prevent your harmful habits that cause unnecessary stress and restrict your capabilities. Obviously, since what you are changing are patterns built up over many years, a permanent change will not be brought about overnight. However, the person who learns to stop and take time, to think constructively about how he uses himself in everyday life will find that this simple procedure can have far-reaching results.

Further information about the Alexander Technique is best gained directly from a teacher near you as your changing experiences through lessons are the only real way to understand the nature of the work and what change is possible.

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