

EDITORIAL

An important step for many professional groups at a certain point in their development is forming a large-scale coalition for the purposes of opening channels of communication and promoting common interests. Here at ACAT-NY, we feel that this time is imminent for the Alexander teachers of the United States, and we would like to offer *The Alexandrian* as a forum for discussion on this matter. Where feasible, we will publish letters or excerpts verbatim; in any case we will summarize and report your responses.

This issue offers some pleasant contrasts. Otto Luening, distinguished musician and youthful octogenarian, shares his impressions of the Technique after a year's study. Allen Spanjer, on

the other hand, Mr. Luening's junior by a half-century or so, is a recently-qualified Alexander teacher, whose paper was written in partial fulfillment of the certification requirements at ACAT-NY. Troup Mathews reviews Pamela Payne Lewis's 1980 doctoral dissertation on the implications of the Alexander Technique for singers and teachers of singing; we also reprint Professor Richard Morse Hodge's review of *Man's Supreme Inheritance*, which appeared in the *New York Times Book Review* of May 5, 1918. This last is of particular interest because it was a major essay in a major forum assessing the impact of Alexander's teaching on the contemporary scene. Hodge was Professor of English and Biblical Literature at Columbia University, a colleague of John Dewey, and an early pupil of Alexander in the U.S. We also conclude Walter Carrington's biographical sketch of Alexander's life, Part I of which appeared in our first issue.

Luening on Alexander

by Otto Luening

People who live to be 80 or over are either fortunate, have developed survival techniques, or are just tough and have a combination of all three of these attributes. I am no exception. The advice, medical and otherwise, that I received along the road has ranged from highly satisfactory to somewhat less so. Happily, my intuition led me to accept the positive interpretations and to avoid the negative ones, so I keep functioning.

When I reached 70, doctors told me I had osteoarthritis and spondylitis, prescribed aspirin and other drugs in varying doses and held out little hope for improvement.

One therapist prescribed vitamins, heat and massage, and got me to swim. My neck, however, remained stiff and I developed lower back trouble.

A few years later I had severe back spasms and I went to bed for a long while. My doctor prescribed drugs again, and I rapidly got worse. When I was quite helpless my wife suggested that I go back to vitamins and physical therapy, and I returned to my former therapist who again got me to swim.

But neck and shoulder stiffness, back spasms, leg and foot cramps continued sporadically.

For some years I studied preventive medicine of various kinds, and nutrition. I also read one of Alexander's books which I found interesting but difficult to use for self-instruction. A combination of circumstances, largely personal in nature, eventually led me to an Alexander teacher for lessons.

Two sessions at home got me out of my apartment and onto the table in his apartment, where it was easier for us to work. After four sessions my posture had improved. After a few more my friends noticed an improvement in my appearance and my sense of well-being expanded. Soon I began to get a picture of what Alexander was striving for.

Communication and coordination are much abused concepts, but I learned and am learning that it is possible to slowly bring about a coordination of mind, brain, nerves, muscles, respiration, circulation, and the movement of the joints. I also learned and am

learning that this coordination has a beneficial effect on the emotions, the imagination, and helps to balance the alternating euphoric and depressive moods that overcome us all.

None of this insight hits us like a flash of lightning. It has to be learned. Part of the experience is to overcome unproductive habits. At age 81 this is not easy to do. After all, how bad were the habits if they helped me to survive this long? But curiously enough, one reaches different plateaus of understanding. The one I have reached now is that old habits have brought me to where I am now, but if I want to continue to develop, explore and profit from and contribute to the world of today and tomorrow, new habits geared to my present age are just what I need.

My teacher is a little more than half my age. By sharing our experiences and insights, we both learned much. I think we have already found that Alexander can be of great benefit to older people, and I have been surprised at how much it has helped me physically, mentally and emotionally. I plan to continue the lessons.

Born in Milwaukee in 1900, Otto Luening studied in Germany and Switzerland (notably with Jarnach and Busoni), then returned to the U.S. in 1920 to begin a long career as composer, conductor, teacher, and administrator (Eastman School, University of Arizona, Bennington College, Barnard College, Columbia). Always active in organizations for new music and American music, he has been an officer—often the chief one—in such enterprises as the American Academy in Rome, Yaddo, the American Music Center, The American Composers Alliance, and Composers Recordings Inc. He is a life member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and has received many other honors. He has some 300 compositions to his credit. One of the pioneers in the development of tape composition, he also conducted the premieres of such landmark American operas as Thomson's *The Mother Of Us All*, Menotti's *The Medium*, and his own *Evangeline*. His memoirs, *The Odyssey Of An American Composer*, were published in 1980 by Charles Scribner's Sons.

Attention and the Alexander Technique

by R. Allen Spanjer

The activity of conscious attention in relationship to the body and Alexander's principles create what Alexander referred to as "direction" in the body. One may describe the directions in practical terms as flows of energy that are either already present in the body and freed by our attention, or as creating energy as a product of the process of attention. As a practitioner of the Alexander Technique, the question of attention represents a locus of my experience and is the theme of this essay.

Attention, when applied to the Technique, activates Alexander's principles in the body by way of the mind. In order to help clarify this concept and distinguish its meaning from popularly held understandings, the following are examples of what I consider inappropriate references:

- 1) attention as concentration, i.e., the narrowing of focus or awareness on a specific object at the expense of negating all else;
- 2) attention as being drawn to something because of an external stimulus, such as a pebble in one's shoe drawing one's attention to the foot;
- 3) attention as being aware of energy without a focus or conscious intent, or, as Alexander expressed it, "mind wandering."

Attention is the conscious focus on something while allowing the context of the world, and the self, to remain a part of it. This is what I call "direction." As practiced in the Technique it is the conscious thought of Alexander's principles while being aware of one's self and the world.

Attention is an essential phenomenon. In other words, it is a source, a form of energy with an inherent capacity to overcome resistance. It is born of a focus. Here we may begin to comprehend an aspect of the power we receive from practicing the Alexander Technique.

At this point a question presents itself: is it Alexander's principles or simply the act of attention that creates the new energy and openness in the body?

When F. M. Alexander discovered these principles he used observation, that is, attention on himself. He was eventually able to identify the changes that occurred in his body and to communicate this with his method of touch and through his writings. Consequently, I purport that the indispensable element of his discovery, that ingredient which affords the Technique its "meta-physical" dimensions, was the quality he brought to the activity of attention.

This understanding comes from my own experience with the Technique, as well as observing several individuals over a period of a few years who reveal a marked increase of "direction" in their bodies without having studied the Alexander Technique. The activity that they share with me and my work is that particular quality of attention I have attempted to express above. This phenomenon relates, I believe, to what we have all seen as an increase of energy in people who have studied the Technique and that that internal force manifests in ways other than just physical.

Since the common denominator appears to be the activity of attention, the question we again confront is whether conscious attention creates energy in the body when it is directed with or without the assistance of the Alexander Technique?

This is a question whose answer will have its own process. I can not attempt an answer in this essay though my personal experience encourages me to remain watchful for the various methods in which people manifest attention and the freedom it produces.

Allen Spanjer is an Alexander teacher and French-hornist in New York City.

The Alexander Technique: Its Relevance for Singers and Teachers of Singing

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Fine Arts, Carnegie-Mellon University, by Pamela Payne Lewis, May 1980

Troup Mathews, Reviewer

It is with pleasure that, in this our second issue of *The Alexandrian*, we welcome this academic publication to the increasingly varied literature on the Alexander Technique.

To the best of this writer's knowledge, this is but the second doctoral dissertation devoted to our work in the eighty or more years that it has been spreading its influence. How appropriate it is that the first dissertation, *Frederick Matthias Alexander and John Dewey: A Neglected Influence*, by Eric David McCormack (University of Toronto, 1958) should have been in the field of Education and this second one in the field of Music (singing) and Voice Education.

Ms. Pamela Payne Lewis' dissertation had its origin, interestingly enough, in a situation surprisingly similar to Alexander's own original dilemma, namely, his vocal difficulties on stage, out of which he developed his lifework. Ms. Lewis observed "... a number of singers trained also as public school teachers whose use of their voices in teaching contributed to hoarseness, laryngitis, and in some cases, vocal nodes. These teachers were competently trained singers but seemed unable to apply what they had learned about singing freely in the classroom. ..." The author's conclusions, however, appear to reflect a broader conception of the relationship of the Technique to voice use in classrooms; she found considerable evidence of the value of the Alexander Technique in vocal training in speech and song.

She quotes Todd Duncan's remarks that the first requirement of good singing is freedom: "that inside readiness which results from the body's finely tuned response to the mind's direction to sing." Ms. Lewis concludes: "Acting upon this dialectical relationship between thinking and doing, wherein the doing accurately realizes a correct mental concept, is fundamental to the Alexander Technique. Singers and teachers of voice can be satisfied with nothing less than this level of awareness." This and other sensitive formulations of the Technique are evidence that the author was not merely writing of the Technique from the outside, but had taken enough lessons from several teachers to have experienced the work from within.

Let me briefly list the considerable ground covered in this work.

I. A biography of Alexander, which does not, however, avoid some fairly serious omissions and errors of fact.

II. An interesting speculation on the origins of misuse which recognizes Alma Frank's pioneering contributions in her March 1938 "Study in Infant Development," but omits reference to the work of Dr. Raymond Dart.

III. Discussions of experimental confirmations of the Alexander principles, which may lean a bit too heavily on the work of Coghill.

IV. A fine diary based on tape recordings of her lessons with Barbara Kent in New York and Marjorie Nelson in Seattle.

V. A report in detail on a statistical survey of a large group of experienced singing teachers and professional singers with respect to the efficacy of the Technique.

VI. Application of the Alexander principles in private lessons and in classroom instruction. She enumerates ways in which Alexander principles can be used in instruction and gives actual cases of such application as well as interesting excerpts of students' favorable reactions to the experiment.

This dissertation is a fine addition to our literature and deserves to be made available in an abbreviated form.

Troup Mathews is a practicing Alexander teacher and Chairman of the Board of Directors, ACAT-NY.

What Is Man's Supreme Inheritance?

by Professor Richard Morse Hodge

Man's supreme inheritance is his body, consciously controlled in thought and action. No book could have a greater subject nor a better title. Every one is interested in his own development and that of the race. To this problem the author has made a distinct contribution, based upon first-hand information. His conclusions are couched in popular language, and the result is a very readable book. The first edition, issued three months ago, is already exhausted.

Civilization has made a normal body a problem. Our complex life has developed too rapidly not to make strange and sudden demands upon the human organism. Civilized people are unhealthy in comparison with animals and primitive races. Does our health demand that we return to a less civilized life, or can we adapt our bodies to the civilized environment which the race has developed? The author furnishes the evidence necessary to show that we can use our bodies and our minds, therefore, to much greater advantage than the most of us do, and that the way lies in a further general progress of the race from instinctive guidance to conscious control. According to his observation, while some persons are able to adapt themselves to civilized life with a fair degree of success, the great majority fail in adjustment to their ever-changing environment, with results, which, in an alarming number of cases, are progressively disastrous. The soundness of the vital organs does not of itself command maximum health and mental power. Diet, sleep, exercise, and sanitation count for much, but their variations by no means account for all of the difference in health to be met among those whose organs are all sound. Our organs are interdependent, and the working power of a complex unit, like the human body, depends upon the co-ordination of all of its parts. The control of the muscular mechanism governing carriage, or habitual posture in standing, walking, and sitting, is a determining factor in the co-ordination of the organs of breathing, circulation, and digestion, and of speech and eyesight as well. If this be so, we identify in posture a cause of subnormal health of far-reaching importance. If also a person whose posture is poor has not the power to command a correct carriage, how one holds himself is all the more significant. The stooping, round-shouldered man knows that he cannot straighten himself entirely when he tries. He cannot throw back his shoulders without hollowing his back. Nor can he maintain this position for more than a few minutes without fatigue. Whereas he observes that in the truly straight person the erect posture is the position of rest. Is there, then, an art of posture, an art which some persons have never been without, and which others do not possess? And may not this art be taught? And may not adults learn it, although with more difficulty than children?

Mr. Alexander holds that posture is an accomplishment and that the conscious control of the position of "mechanical advantage" is an art of primary importance. The very large part which posture plays in the evolution of man appears in two phenomena of common knowledge. The first of these is that of the assumption by man of the erect position and is probably the most radical single change in habit in the history of mammals, and we cannot expect that every individual of the species will develop this position of equilibrium with equal skill, especially in our complex civilization of various occupations in the office, home, and shop, and in the general absence of a really intelligent training of babies in their first efforts to walk. The second phenomenon in point is that our so-called vital organs are all hung as though man was intended to go on all fours, a circumstance which argues that these organs cannot be expected to function at their best unless the erect position be maintained in the most favorable manner.

Every person co-ordinates himself somehow, for he must maintain his equilibrium. One maladjustment in consequence will be balanced by another. If the back be unduly bent in and the abdomen out false strains are put upon the feet. If the chest is thrown up an undue strain is put upon the heart and the lungs are cramped. The author contends that the military posture adopted in army training by all nations is

abnormal and lowers the working power of the organs of breathing, circulation, digestion, and locomotion, and he intimates that the rule of exercise of the British Army results in the physical breakdown of many soldiers every year and their having to abandon the service. He condemns only less severely the prevalent systems of calisthenics and much of "free expression" dancing, as exercising the body in faulty positions and cultivating some new attitudes still more serious. In the position of mechanical advantage, on the other hand, which he advocates, a man is in the best attitude either to welcome a friend with outstretched arms or to land a blow with the fist, or, on bending the knees and hips, to lift either a heavy or a light weight from the ground without having to know in advance what amount of pull the given weight will demand of him.

The position of one part of the body automatically makes another part rigid or relaxed as the case may be. This law is of prime importance both in diagnosis and in re-education. Suppleness of hands, wrists, shoulders, and neck, for instance, depends upon muscle control. The stiff-jointed person is limited in control, holding some muscles taut which should be relaxed, and some muscles relaxed which should be taut, if he is to execute a given motion with freedom; and he is unable to command these muscles properly. The result is inelastic carriage and movement.

And rigidity of body induces rigidity of mind. A "stiff-necked" people is a designation which occurs more than once in the writings of the ancient Hebrews, and points to an accurate observation in ancient times of the habitual posture of the most obstinate individuals. Does not the rigidity of the German mind of the present generation owe something to the military posture to which the whole male population has been trained? It is the attitude of arrogance and even of throaty speech. A brain highly trained in its way is capable of amazing stupidities through rigidity as through ignorance. There are few who do not fail frequently to act on their best judgments in time. No one can know how rigid he was in mind or body until after he has been re-educated in physical co-ordination. If one fancies that he has only to be informed vocally how to lengthen and relax his body he will find that his control of his muscles is too limited for the purpose. He learns on being re-educated that what he conceived to be relaxation is collapse. He learns, too, how his debauched sensory appreciations fail him in registering muscular adjustment. Habit has limited his muscle control. But habit is the great stabilizer. It is the power to repeat an action automatically in the absence of a mental order to the contrary. A bad habit has to be overcome by a conscious control which inhabits [*sic*] Obviously "inhibits"] it and at the same time cultivates a new habit by a repetition of another action until it in time becomes automatic. The first step in this re-education is the development of the brain tracks necessary for the mental orders required. This is promptly accomplished, however, under the voice and hands of an expert. How long it will take to re-educate a given individual depends upon the mental rigidity of the person in question.

The correct co-ordination of the muscular system results in accelerated lung action, better circulation, and the conditions present, which command these advantages, brings about also a constant and effective massage of the organs of digestion during sleeping and waking hours. Upon the much-debated subject of respiration Mr. Alexander speaks at some length. He claims that the correct co-ordination of the muscular system induces normal respiration, and also that a partial vacuum in the lungs gives atmospheric pressure its opportunity, and that this should prevent that harmful depression of the larynx and lowering of air pressure in the nostrils which are the forerunners of throat and nose troubles. He has something to say, too, in regard to the evils of what is called "deep-breathing."

A so-called cripple may lack only a proper control of certain muscles in order to become normal. Corpulence and flat-foot are involved in the question of carriage. A stammerer presents a case of

local control.

Parents will be especially interested in the chapters on Race Culture and the Training of Children, Synopsis of Claim, and the Processes of Conscious Guidance and Control. The athlete may learn not a little from this book of how to handle himself in his sport. The golfer will appreciate its pages and what they record regarding the position of mechanical advantage and the light they shed by indirect illumination upon the vexed problems of why he goes off his game, and why he does not improve his play. The plowman should be no less interested in the position of mechanical advantage than the golfer. As a brain-worker, however, a man stands to gain most of all.

The technique of Mr. Alexander's own art of re-education, which is the subject of the book, is incommunicable on paper, especially as

every case for treatment is a special case. It is cheering to note, however, that while it requires an expert to correct the co-ordination of an adult, yet almost any one may be taught by an expert how to train children to hold themselves correctly. Moreover, a correct co-ordination once achieved by child or adult promises to be permanent.

The author has demonstrated his theory in a practice covering a period of over twenty years, first in Australia, and then in London and New York. Obviously, as Professor Dewey remarks in the foreword of the volume, here is a book of basic significance to physiology, psychology, education, and every phase of contemporary life. In this significance of his work and its theory Mr. Alexander shows himself to be especially interested.

F. M. Alexander: A Biographical Outline — Part II

Walter H. M. Carrington, Compiler

Alexander's second important book, *Constructive Conscious Control of the Individual*, was published in 1923. Dr. Peter MacDonald and Professor John Dewey both studied the manuscript carefully prior to publication, and made valuable alterations in the baffling attempt to describe in words something which has to be experienced to be understood. F.M. made a particular effort to break away from the use of the word "mind" which is so prolific of misconception generally, and in particular of the idea of man as a divided individual. Much confusion, which is basically verbal, can be avoided if one substitutes "brain," "thinking," or "thought" for the much-abused and very ambiguous "mind."

In 1924, Miss Tasker began a school at Ashley Place for the children of pupils; the children's ages ranged from three to eight. As a fully qualified teacher, she followed a normal kindergarten or preparatory school curriculum, but the main emphasis was on how the children used themselves while learning. When Miss Tasker went to South Africa in 1934 to found her own practice there, Miss Margaret Goldie took over from her, and the school was transferred to F.M.'s house in Bexley where it was conducted on a larger scale. In 1940, Miss Goldie and other members of staff accompanied the children to America, and the school was evacuated to the Whitney Homestead at Stowe, Massachusetts. It was a successful experiment, and provided Alexander and his assistant teachers with valuable experience in maintaining in children that vastly better use of the self which the adolescent and the adult subconsciously and negligently lose.

During the early 1930's, a number of doctors in Britain began to take an especial interest in Alexander's work, and with their enthusiastic support, some impression was made on the medical body in this country through discussion, debate, lectures, and correspondence in the medical press. Among these were Dr. Peter MacDonald, already mentioned, Dr. R.G. McGowan, Dr. Mungo Douglas, Mr. J.E.R. MacDonagh, FRCS, Mr. A. Rugg-Gunn, FRCS, and Dr. Andrew Murdoch. Although there have been many cordial relationships established with medical practitioners throughout the years, the Alexander Technique has yet to receive the recognition of the profession as a whole.

F.M. continued to number among his pupils, and often subsequently his friends, many distinguished people: William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, took lessons; Sir Linden Macassie, K.C., leader of the Bar, was introduced through the famous Jeeves, K.C.; and Aldous Huxley, Sir Stafford Cripps, the Earl of Lytton, and George Bernard Shaw were active propagandists for the promotion of the technique. Other notable pupils included Robert Nicholl, Professor Geddes, Paul Nash, and Leonard Woolf. With leaders of industry, Alexander had less success during his lifetime. He met many of them, but found that, particularly where they came up the hard way and were self-made, a rigidity of thought and habit, which precluded the acceptance of new ideas essential to a comprehension and adoption of the technique, was characteristic.

In September of 1930, a training course for student teachers was started at Ashley Place and from that time until F.M.'s death in 1955, except for the war years, there were always a number of people taking the three-year course which, if they had the capability, entitled them to set up in practice on their own as certificated Alexander teachers. This tradition has been continued.

F.M. revived the practice of giving public performances by his students during the years 1933-5, with performances of *The Merchant of Venice* at Sadler's Wells, *Hamlet* at the Old Vic, and a recital in the Rudolf Steiner Hall. Lilian Bayliss, at that time head of the Old Vic, and Marie Ney, were both pupils of Alexander.

In 1932, *The Use of the Self* was published with Alexander's description of "what I did myself to work out the technique." It was enthusiastically received by publishers and critics in America but never achieved a great sale there, contrary to its reception in this country, where it proved very popular and continued to be the best-selling of the four books.

The years before the outbreak of World War II saw a peak of achievement leading to the recognition of Alexander's work, but once again the war put a stop to the flow of pupils. With the school, its staff, and women assistant-teachers, Alexander, now aged seventy-one, sailed for America in June, 1940, and again took up his work in the United States. His brother A.R. had been continuing the teaching in Boston since 1934, and there were many people anxious to meet the founder of the technique or to renew acquaintances made sixteen years earlier, when F.M. was last there. American children joined those brought from England in the school at Stowe, where Alexander and three resident teachers also gave lessons to parents who stayed with their children at the Homestead during the summer holidays.

Before he returned to England in the summer of 1943, F.M. had published his fourth book, *The Universal Constant in Living*, mostly written in London, but completed during a three-month holiday at Southwest Harbor, Maine, at the house of a friend, and with the help of Miss Ethel Webb. He had also been down to Florida to meet Professor George Coghill, then living in retirement at Gainesville.

For the last two years of the war and during 1946-7, Alexander worked hard to re-establish his practice in London, and to set up the training course again. The school, to his regret, could not be reopened. At the end of 1947 he had a fall which displaced one rib and bruised several others. Within a week of this accident he suffered a severe stroke, losing the use of his left hand and leg, and with paralysis of the side of his face. It is not often that a man of seventy-nine recovers from such an affliction, and the three doctors who attended him had little hope for Alexander. Yet he was again giving lessons by March, 1948.

In January 1949, his eightieth birthday was celebrated with a public dinner given in his honour at Brown's Hotel; Sir Stafford Cripps, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the chair. From then on F.M. continued to work actively, taking private pupils and supervising the work of his assistant teachers until 1955, when after a chill and brief illness, he died suddenly on October 10th, in his eighty-seventh year.