

A Knowing Threshold

by Kathryn Miranda

Have you ever wondered why there is not more research supporting the scientific basis for the Alexander Technique? Of course, there are the problems of obtaining funding and engaging qualified researchers that, when solved, open the door to statistically significant evidence. But is there another barrier underneath this? Is there a threshold which we have not learned how to cross?

Just suppose for a moment that we have worked out the following testable theories, 1) to test primary control, and 2) to test awareness, inhibition, and direction.

1. If I allow my neck to be free in such a way that my head releases forward and away from the top of the spine and my whole torso lengthens and widens, then I have increased my stature and provided an organizational condition in my self (soma) that promotes optimal use and function.

2. If I attend to the present moment by preventing habitual responses to a stimulus and at the same time attend to the future moment by intending myself to expand, then I will have created a new experience for myself that will increase my repertoire of responses.

Would the Alexander Community support research testing these hypotheses? My concern is that the Alexander community, following in Mr. Alexander's footsteps seems to eschew the rigor of scientific testing for satisfaction of the felt experience.

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The Trouble With Alexander

by Anonymous

You bet. *Trouble*. Starting with a "t," and that rhymes with "p," and that stands for Primary Control - right here in Georgia. Alexander's Famous Technique has its share of problems, and at least out of intellectual honesty if not just plain common sense we need to get these things out in the open where we can deal with them.

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There's the trouble with money. Lessons aren't cheap, and insurance doesn't even pay. After all, one has done pretty well so far, how much do we really need to lay out just to get back on track? I heard about someone who went to one of the early psychoanalysts and said he'd give him every penny he had if only he could get help. "My usual fee of \$100 an hour will be adequate," said the shrink. "But isn't that rather excessive?" the guy shot back, suddenly feeling better. Really, it just isn't fair that otherwise perfectly competent adults should have to shell out hard cash just to learn how to stand up, sit down, and move around - they should've taught us that in school, if it's so important.

Another big problem is time. Not only the time you need for 45-minute lessons, as if that weren't enough, but also for coming and going - in Atlanta traffic, that can be a lot. And Lord knows how many lessons it will *really* take before you've finally got it. Never mind a few decades of neglect, what's Youth for, anyway? In the good old American spirit, let's figure out how to get on with it, some sort of Habitrol - "*It's a patch!*" - for pulling down on yourself, and be done with it. Somewhere I was reading about an English lady who had the whole time thing pegged when, at her first lesson, she came out with, "Oh, I understand Alexander perfectly well - it's a life sentence!"

And then there's the uncertainty and subtlety of it all. How will we ever know for sure that our heads are really poised just so and our torsos are truly long and wide, so that our Primary Controls can take over and we can get back to thinking about more important things? Why, old man Alexander himself had the gall to say, "To know when we are wrong is all that we shall ever know in this world." What's that supposed to

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Notes From the TCP

by Kim Jessor

We seem to have finally made it through a particularly arduous winter. Getting to school was almost more of a challenge than what we were working on once we arrived!

During February, we had a visit from Ruth Murray, who gave a workshop primarily focused around hands on the back of the chair. It was wonderful to experience her hands and particular perspective.

For our winter term presentation, Urs Sauer (currently an 8th-termer) spoke about presenting the Alexander Technique at the Union Bank of Switzerland. Urs, an employee of the bank, did this as part of his independent study requirement, receiving support from the Judith Leibowitz Fund. He outlined how he approached the corporation, and what the benefits were for them. He explained how the workshop was set up, with Lori Schiff as main teacher, assisted by Elizabeth Buonomo. He talked about the results, and the information gathered from a follow-up questionnaire given to the participants. Urs' project provides an excellent model for anyone who might wish to take the Technique into a corporate setting.

This spring, we have four new candidates in our program. Isabel de Sebastian, Arthur Tobias, and Vicki Yannias are 1st termers, and Claudia Peyton is a transfer student in the 5th term. Welcome to all of you.

I have been reelected by the faculty to another three year term as Director of Training. I have been granted a one year leave of absence beginning in September, as I am expecting a baby! Next year, Joan Frost will serve as Acting Director. She brings three years experience as Dean to the job, as well as a close working partnership with me during that time. Lori Schiff will be Dean of Students and Admissions, while retaining her position as Board Chairperson. Both bring a sense of humor and an ability to apply the principles of the Technique to these demanding positions - two essential qualities! I feel that ACAT will be in very good hands.

Notes From the Chair

by Lori Schiff

Happy Birthday ACAT! As of April 14, 1994, we are officially 30 years old.

This year is our year of celebration. At thirty we are fulfilling the mission of ACAT as set forth in the Articles of Incorporation. Judith Leibowitz, Frank Ottiwell, Barbara Callen, Joyce Ringdahl (Suskind), and Deborah Caplan signed the Certificate of Incorporation stating that The American Center for the Alexander Technique, Inc. would organize, operate and maintain without profit, a Corporation for the teaching of the Alexander Technique to

(continued in next column)

(Notes from the Chair)

pupils and to those persons who wish to become teachers of the Alexander Technique.

ACAT can, according to the Articles of Incorporation, solicit donations from the public...to accumulate sufficient funds to cover all expenses connected with the operation, expansion, and development of the corporation. We can lease or procure office space and equipment, rooms and material for teaching; hire personnel for teaching and administration, establish a Board...

The objectives of the then new corporation would be accomplished by encouraging research, original work, and preparation of original papers on the Alexander Technique.

ACAT would hold meetings for the presentation and discussion of original work...we would encourage communications among teachers for the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience...maintain high technical, ethical, and cultural standards for membership in the corporation...etc.

We are doing it. All of it.

This year we sponsored two more lectures. *Back Pain Management and the Alexander Technique: A Medical Perspective*, and *Moving To Learn* - educational for teachers as well as the public.

The Judith Leibowitz Fund provided partial funding through a grant to Urs Sauer, a current trainee, for a project to run a course in the Alexander Technique on-site in a corporate setting. The results of this project are documented and available through Mr. Sauer at ACAT. In addition, as part of the project, Urs reported on the process of arranging and implementing the course to trainees at ACAT and to ACAT members at the Annual Meeting.

The Teacher Certification Program is continuing to provide high quality training. The TCP meets standards set by NASTAT and by ACCET, and more importantly, ourselves. We are currently working through the reaccreditation process with the goal of achieving a five year accreditation as opposed to the usual three year period.

We do hire personnel to teach, and to administer ACAT. And as we are definitely non-profit, we appreciate the long hours, work, and dedication of everyone involved.

And...we have had our first benefit, a concert. A Joyful Noise was our first major celebration of ACAT and our first fund-raising event.

As Chairperson, I am very happy. As an organization, we are reaching out to the public and saying that the Alexander Technique is terrific work, come learn

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"It was wonderful to experience her hands and particular perspective."

Published three times yearly by the American Center for the Alexander Technique, Inc®
129 West 67th Street
New York, NY 10023
Tel. (212) 799-0468

The articles in this newsletter are the opinions and explorations of the authors, and do not reflect a consensus of ACAT members or represent the official policy of the Center.

Closing dates: April 1, August 1, December 1

Editor:
Sheldon Berkowitz

(Notes from the Chair, from preceding page)

with us, see how this work applies in your life and celebrate with us. Help us continue to bring this consciousness-raising, life-enhancing method to all that are interested (and more)! We can do more of these kinds of events.

As members of ACAT, Inc., be excited, be encouraged. If you want to help promote your private

practice promote the activities of your organization and your school. Get involved. Think, write, move. Please, don't confuse inhibition and non-doing.

And thank you to our founders and to all who are continuing their dreams and realizing their visions.

Best wishes,
Lauren Schiff, Chairperson

(The Trouble With Alexander, from page 1)

mean? If we're going to take the trouble to learn his so-called technique, we at least have the right to know when we're right, right?

As if money, time, and downright slipperiness weren't enough to make us want to chuck the whole thing, how about the fact that all this stand up, sit down, stand up, sit down, stand up, sit down can get pretty boring? I mean, let's face it, most of us gave up piano lessons because we got tired of running those scales forever. Of course they tell you, it's all in the way you look at it. Some Zen master said that if you lose the spirit of repetition your practice will be quite difficult. Talk about spin, that really takes the cake, calling whatever it takes to do the same old

thing over and over again "the spirit of repetition!"

Last but not least re: Alexander's Troublesome Technique is that something which is supposed to help us deal with habits can be pretty habit-forming itself. Especially table-work, which always feels like more, even if you're not so sure the old bod is learning something by itself without any apparent help from the trusty gray matter. Maybe Alexander doesn't need to be put on some kind of list of controlled practices, but I do think that, just to make sure people don't get too hooked, some way should be figured out to make having lessons a little less pleasant – I mean, we don't find ourselves craving twenty minutes or so of diagramming sentences, do we?

Editor's note: This article was submitted to editor emeritus Ron Dennis, who forwarded it to ACAT because it was "too hot for Atlanta."

"In the good old American spirit, let's figure out how to get on with it, some sort of Habitrol"

Free Your Wood To Allow Your Knees To Iron

by Elizabeth Buonomo

My husband, Urs Sauer, and I planned to present the Alexander Technique in St. Moritz, Switzerland while on vacation there in February. Urs, a native of the country, has many friends and family members who often inquire about the work. We decided to host a lecture-demonstration to answer all their questions.

I have travelled and lived in Switzerland intermittently for several years but never received a formal education in the German language. I am able to communicate reasonably well, but am far from fluent. So when the prospect of this lecture-demo arose, I was anxious. How could I explain the work in a foreign language, not to mention, in front of my in-laws! I set to work grilling Urs on the words for various body parts which we practiced repeatedly. In addition, Urs' sister Claudia, encouraged me to teach her a first lesson in German.

My introduction to the first lesson went smoothly. But when I began putting hands on, I had to verbally direct Claudia in German while taking care of my use and listening to what was happening under my hands. Remaining attentive to these three aspects felt like

mental gymnastics: one moment I was listening to my hands, then perusing the German chamber of my brain for a word, then returning to my use. I would feel movement under my hands and want to verbally direct my student in that moment. But often I could not find the exact word and some approximation thereof would come out of my mouth. "Allow your wood to be free," I repeatedly requested, mistakenly using the word "Holz" (wood) for "Hals" (throat). "Let your fingertips lead to the bottle cap!" was another zealous request, using the word "Deckel" (lid or bottle cap) in lieu of "Decke" (ceiling). But when I requested Claudia to iron her knees, using the word "buegeln" (to iron) instead of "beugen" (to bend), she could no longer contain her amusement.

The lesson did not help much in allaying my anxiety. I continued practicing my directions in German diligently. Finally the evening of the lecture-demo arrived. To relieve my and the group's initial tension, I shared my unique German directions with them. The event started off with laughter that paved the way for important work to follow.

(The Threshold of Knowing, from page 1)

"Magnus proved by means of what may be called external evidence the existence of a central control in the organism. But Mr. Alexander's technique gave a direct and intimate confirmation in personal experience of the fact of central control long before Magnus carried on his investigations. And one who has had experience of the technique knows it through the series of experiences which he himself has. The genuinely scientific character of Mr. Alexander's teaching and discoveries can be safely rested upon this fact alone." —John Dewey

The practical, personal and subjective nature of testing the hypothesis for oneself creates such a satisfactory experience in the subject, that no other form of validation is required. In other words, when I test the hypothesis for myself, the experience validates the hypothesis so that I have no need to validate through other more scientific experiments.

If we are to go forward in the objective process of research, I think it is important to recognize this threshold between subjective and objective knowing. As teachers and students of the Alexander Technique, we are essential advocates reclaiming the value of subjective knowledge and the individual process of knowing. Can we return to the objective process seeking "external evidence" wholeheartedly and with a thirst for knowledge? The benefits of objective research are very attractive, but what is the means-whereby? If I cross that knowing threshold, I want the tools that will ensure the process is moving forward and up.

"What is exceedingly clear is that the field of life is, by definition, ambiguous and thatched with polarities. The goal of somatic science can never be total prediction and control - somatic process is always just beyond prediction and control; instead, the goal is an ever revised understanding of somatic process and an ever modified set of guides for its enhancement and fulfillment. This is to say that somatic science is just as adaptive and mutational as is life itself."

—Thomas Hanna

References: John Dewey from the Introduction to The Use of the Self, pp. xv & xvi, and Thomas Hanna from The Field of Somatics, SOMATICS, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 32.

Wanted: Book Reviews

Would membership please submit reviews for the following new books?

The Expanding Self by Goddard Binkley
Alexander Technique by Glynn Macdonald
How to Learn the Alexander Technique
by Barbara Conable and William Conable

I know you guys were snapping up these tomes at the AGM, so get me some reviews ASAP. Incidentally, just as a reminder, the Summer ACATNews submission date is August 1. Thank you. — Ed.

Whither AT: An Editorial Initiative

The NASTAT annual general meeting raised some thoughts concerning the future of our profession. There seems to be a large gulf of opinion separating Alexander teachers as to where the Technique could and should be going.

Many new teachers (according to my informal oral survey) are finding it difficult to market and justify what they teach. This is not to question the validity of our work. We certainly understand the importance and potential benefits of what we have to offer, but it is becoming increasingly frustrating to find a market for what we are trained to do. Let's explore some reasons for this.

First there is the issue of cost. Despite its tongue in cheek tone, Ron's article strikes home. The issues are raised because they come up all the time. The cost of a series of lessons (in my experience of introducing the Technique to a new market) is a major deterrent for many people. Why shouldn't they try some other alternative to AT if it will be covered by their health plan? Even if orthodox health care isn't helping, the providers will maintain that they can continue to provide care. They don't give up. They fund something else for the client to do. The fact that other modalities are covered by insurance gives added credibility to them and detracts from ours. In marketing terms, we are just not making it easy for the consumer to say yes.

A nationalized health plan seems to be imminent, and the question we should ask ourselves is whether AT will be a part of it, or become a fringe discipline. The use of the word "discipline" on my part is intentional. This distinction is what begs the inclusion of AT in a preventive health plan, without sacrificing the educational nature of the work. In the different focus groups I sat in on at the AGM, I sensed a split in the community along certain lines of thought. Some teachers think that a scientific basis or quantification of the Technique is an important avenue of exploration, while others seem adamantly opposed to the idea. Yet scientific analysis points towards a solution for the issue of prohibitive cost.

If the Technique is ever to gain more widespread acceptance and be accorded its due recognition, it must somehow be scientifically validated. I can almost here some people groan at those two words, used either singly or together. Scientific. Validation.

Let's take them one at a time. Scientific, as defined by my on-line *American Heritage Dictionary*, is "The observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of natural phenomena." Isn't this exactly what we all do? Validation, in and of itself, seems to be a word that makes people nervous. I imagine protestations along these lines: "Why should we validate a Tech-

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"I think it is important to recognize this threshold between subjective and objective knowing."

(from preceding column)

nique that we KNOW is effective and important?" "How can you prove something by taking it apart, when by its very nature we are dealing with the whole?" What is the fear I sensed at this idea? Could people be afraid of being proved wrong, and that there is no scientific basis for the Technique?

Let's allay some fears. First of all, to quantify the Technique does not require proving the basis of the Technique. We do not have to prove the existence of, or locate, a primary control. We only have to quantify results of the Technique. It is not even necessary to quantify therapeutic benefits of the Technique (although there already exists anecdotal evidence of such). It would be sufficient, using a large enough group and control group, to prove that certain kinds of symptoms do *not* occur in a statistically significant amount. In other words, we could scientifically demonstrate the preventive benefits of the Technique, which would be sticking to principle and the original intent of the founder.

To do this will require time, cooperation, and planning. It would have to be organized on a big enough scale so that a large number of Alexander Teachers can deal with a specific kind of group (e.g., typists who come for lessons *without* tendinitis or carpal tunnel syndrome.) Say 200-300. Nationally. Then track the rate of injury in this group over five years and compare it to a national average (control group) to see if there is a significantly lower incidence of over-use injury. Or back injury, or neck injury. Maybe migraine headaches and TMJ. That is what the insurance companies would want to hear. At least that's what my resident Risk Manager says.

There seems to be resistance to the idea of a national undertaking to scientifically investigate and market the Technique. Why would that be? I have heard expressed (as well as written about) the question of what role our national organizations have, it being expressed that a national organization is not for marketing, but for an exchange of ideas. Nonsense. An organization with a voluntary membership can be influenced by that membership as to its goals. If we want to help AT become more recognized, we can make that happen. While this may be a difficult undertaking, the need seems inescapable. Without some way to give the Technique scientific credibility, we may be doomed to become a fringe discipline.

Would the AT be weakened by becoming more acceptable in the mainstream? I suspect not. In the past, I have heard and read Alexander teachers say that what we don't want is unsuccessful students, since they could give the Technique a bad name. That is why F.M. reportedly only accepted students for a fixed course of lessons given over a short time period. This practice ensured results. We, due to financial realities, cannot usually expect this kind of commitment from our current-day students, no matter how serious their problem.

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If the Alexander Technique was accepted as a covered element in a national health plan, we could provide the kind of care that some of us would like to give. A more concentrated lesson schedule, made feasible by insurance, would ensure a higher success rate, even in the curative sense. How many teachers have had people come for lessons with a problem that they had been unable to solve with other modalities, give up on AT because symptomatic relief was not forthcoming right away, and they could come only once a week? After several weeks of single lessons, it was all too easy for them to say to themselves "This doesn't work!" We habitually dismiss this kind of failure, saying "Well, they're addicted to their ailment, or are unwilling to change." These excuses may be true or not, because money is often also the deciding factor. We do not always know. Now the opportunity is presenting itself for us to show what the work can do. Are we afraid that it will fail? I don't believe that it would. If we can get credibility and validation, we need not fear a failure rate.

People go to doctors who fail to help them, chiropractors, acupuncturists, massage therapists, etc., and will then say whatever they will say. Once these modalities have been accepted into the mainstream, failures do not seem to stop them from being tried. People just say "Well, it didn't help me, but..." I think that it is important that we not be afraid to fail, or look bad, or whatever it is that we're afraid of. Let our work be more widespread, gain acceptance, and then let it stand or fall on its own merits. We'll always have supporters and detractors, let's just have more of them. Then maybe we'll find out.

"We do not have to prove the existence of, or locate, a primary control."

Last Minute Stuff

I again urge the readership to submit articles as well as responses to articles and editorials. All discussion and points of view would be welcome. I can be reached by mail at:

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My apologies for the lateness of this issue; moving, taxes, and weltschmerz conspired against me. Also, there should have been a cartoon here, but the *Rozinator* dislocated her shoulder! But she promises "I'll be back!"

Coming up next ish: The AGM!

Admission deadlines for applying to the training program are as follows: July 1 for the Fall term (begins late September; November 1 for the Winter term (begins early January) and February 1 for the Spring term (begins early April).

News from the Center

Ingrid Lorch-Bacci (ACAT, 1992) has written a wonderful article on the importance of mind-body work for the recent *Somatics Journal*.

Hope Martin (ACAT, 1987) was interviewed about the AT for a book that is being written by Sally Freeman entitled *A Woman's Guide to Home Remedies* to be published by Doubleday - probably in 1996. Hope will also be spending the summer in the mountains of Colorado working closely with an American Buddhist teacher, Pema Chodron. For anyone interested in Pema's teachings, check out her book *The Wisdom of No Escape and The Path of Loving Kindness*, published by Shambhala. Hope feels that she is truly a wonderful and genuine teacher.

Kathy Miranda (ACAT, 1990) will speak about AT to the para-professionals at the Northeast Craniomandibular Society's annual conference this May.

Lynn Shapiro (ACAT, 1992) presented *Ambition Bird* at the Dance Theater Workshop's Bessie Shonberg Theater this spring. Lynn invited members of the ACAT community to watch this piece and others performed during an evening of her dances.

Since moving to Albuquerque, **Charles Stein** (ACAT, 1992) has been writing a series of articles for the local community paper. He writes about Ending Pain, the Process, Walking and Whiplash and the Psychological Aspects of AT.

In The Library: Check out *Effects of Relaxation Therapies and Re-educational Techniques on the Functioning of the Cardiovascular System* by Diane McCullough Young. It is a survey of Techniques and a report of Diane's findings. Also, in the library: *Early Writings of F. M. Alexander* edited by Alexander Murray. ACAT copy donated by Alex. And - the audiotape from the All School Assembly Panel Discussion 12/1/93. On the panel were Kim Jessor, Debby Caplan, Judith Lakin and Inez Zeller. Another library addition are the *Vertebrae Sketches* Lisa Trank did for her Independent Study.

Congratulations to **MaryBeth Hraniotis** and **Terry Hraniotis** on the birth of twins Peter Jacob and Alexandra Lura. Jake and Alex were born March 10, 1994.

Congratulations to **Lauren Jones** and **Mark Hornung** on the birth of son Christian Shiloh Augustus Hornung. Kit weighed in at 9 lbs 20 oz on March 17th. Giving Lauren hands-on support during the stages of labor preceding the birth were Fran Robertson, Susan Arthur and Pearl Ausubel. Lauren says the the Alexander Technique is unequivocally helpful in childbirth and is willing to accept questions from anyone about this experience.

Congratulations to **Robin Schiff** and **Bill Holab** on the birth of **Raye Schiff Holab**; April 14 (ACAT's birthday!) at 3:38 am, 6 lbs. 15 oz.

Special thanks to **Robin Schiff** and **Bill Holab** for donating many hours of their time to create ASP, the new ACAT computer scheduling program. This program will make the process of creating class schedules for each term much more efficient, and keep the Director from going crazy!

Sarnie Ogus was at the Boulder, Colorado Training Program for a week where she was a guest teacher and led the Training Program. She also presented a workshop to the Feldenkrais practitioners of that area on *The Alexander Technique and The Use of the Self* which was very well-received. She has been invited back. Also, a book entitled *Managing Menopause Naturally* will be released soon featuring an interview with Sarnie on the Alexander Technique and its relevance to menopause.

FYI - ACAT sent out 456 teacher lists last year, most of those in response to a specific request for information about teachers and classes.

You may be well co-ordinated, but are you well connected?

Announcing A World-Wide Electronic Forum: Alexander Technique On line! The forum is open to anyone who has an interest in the Technique and would like to participate. Currently there are no costs involved. Send your ideas, articles, and e-mail address to:

Jeff Jaas and Rick Carbaugh
<alextech@nicnext.life.uiuc.edu>

Get right out there and buy those PCs! That does not stand for politically correct or primary control. - Ed.

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