



Alexander Technique

INTERNATIONAL

— *ExChange* —

SUMMER 2021



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Greetings from Your Co-Chairs

“Change involves carrying out an activity against the habit of life.” F.M. Alexander

ATI continues moving forward in the direction of fresh energy with our administrative office and creative development with our dedicated board and committees. Our organization will grow and thrive with more involvement from our members, especially our younger ones. Please contact us and share your interests; how the benefits of the Alexander Technique have helped you cope with the pandemic; and/or how you see our profession evolving in the future. As you think about how the Alexander Technique has enriched your life, please consider joining a committee to help keep our work current and vibrant. We need people with fresh ideas to help ATI spread the word of the benefits of our work. Help us as we commit to bringing more peace and balance into our world.

Enjoy this summer edition of the *ExChange*.

We look forward to hearing from you,
Rosa Luisa Rossi and Marya Spring Cordes, your ATI Co-Chairs
chair@alexandertechniqueinternational.org

This *ExChange* was edited by Kathleen Juhl, Matt Goodrich, Debi Adams, and Diane Hovenesian. It was designed by Rileigh Roberson and the photos are by Bob Berry. The board thanks Juhl and Matt for their stewardship of the *ExChange* for the past four years.



Flow

By Hannah Adams

Make sure to rest
between your rising

Let

after you go

Do

but then be

All grand things try less than it seems

This is flow

Ask the sun
that knows to set

Ask the ocean
that is hammocked by sand

Man, you don't have to try so hard

Try soft

Try supple

and see how powerful you'll become

Reprinted with permission from *One Carry-On Item* by Hannah Adams, Cliff Street Books 2020

Hannah Adams is a life-long practitioner and international teacher of movement based in Boston. She has a diverse background as a professional salsa dancer, competitive boxer, philosopher, and spoken-word poet. Hannah's classes are uniquely powerful, incorporating an in-depth focus on breath movement and poetic dialogue. Hannah's passion is to hold space for her students to gain a greater somatic understanding of themselves, and a more refined sense of presence through the practice of movement and breath.

Hannah lived for many years between India, Brazil, Guatemala, and Peru where she studied and taught movement, philosophy, languages, and varied healing practices. During these years, she received a BA in philosophy, certifications as a 500 hour Yoga Alliance Experienced Registered Yoga Teacher, Ayurveda massage therapist, Reiki Master, National Academy of Sports Medicine Personal Trainer and Fitness Nutritionist, Balanced Body Pilates Mat and Reformer Instructor and ATI certified Alexander Technique Practitioner.



Introducing a New Discipline to an Old Country

By Christos Noulis

1. INTRODUCTION

What is it that drives us to this work, the teachings of F. M. Alexander? Surely, each and every one of us has a different reason for being attracted to, awed by and besotted with the Alexander Technique. However, once we become part of this community that opposes Cartesian dualism, there is usually a common desire: to keep practicing, sharing and disseminating this amazing work.

If you are reading this as an Alexander Technique teacher or student, then you will either be someone who has had the opportunity to learn and practice this work within an AT-informed society in your local community, or, you will be someone who has had to spend a considerable amount of time, energy and money to travel far away in order to gain access to lessons and/or training in the Alexander Technique. I belong to the latter category of people. Although I have lived in the UK for more than a decade, I relocated to my birth city Thessaloniki in Greece in 2003. In this article I will share with you the steps that I have taken so far to introduce somatics in general and the Alexander Technique in particular to Greece. I will lay emphasis on the difficulties and challenges that I have faced while attempting to introduce a new discipline to an old country.

In your Alexander journey, you may have come across difficulties like mine. You may have faced more intense difficulties if you live in politically or economically challenging areas. You may even live in areas where there are no other Alexander Technique teachers or societies around to justify and support your professional existence. If not, I take this opportunity to let you know that you have been extremely fortunate because you have had the luxury to concern yourself with ongoing learning, improving the circumstances of your work, introducing the Work and helping people who are willing to learn. Who knows, had I had the privilege to live in a more embracing environment if it would have been possible not to care as passionately about disseminating the work of F.M. Alexander. So, maybe there is a higher purpose for the challenges that I have met and am still facing.

Having returned to practice in a society uninitiated to the Alexander Technique, the main driving force for this journey was necessity: the necessity of being able to work legally and formally as a teacher of the Alexander Technique and of being able to be part of an organized society, where a relatively new discipline such as the Alexander Technique could be incorporated. Moreover, the feeling of holding a teaching practice alone, the next AT colleague being thousands of miles away, as well as my desire to help my students and future teachers find a welcoming community, led to many of the steps I took for promoting the work in every possible way. I understand that administrative and procedural problems are always to be found in any country and in any discipline and that laying too much emphasis on those problems may sometimes lure us away from the essence of our disciplines.

I felt the urge to write about the administrative and procedural problems I faced in my attempts to introduce the Alexander Technique as a new discipline in Greece exactly because I believe that when there is a strong social infrastructure upon which one can introduce new ideas, new methods and new practices, there is more hope to reach the essence of those ideas, methods and practices.

I will reveal my experiences introducing the AT to my professional discipline, which is music education. Any laws and regulations that applied to me as a music educator apply to any professional who wishes to register as a teacher of a new discipline in Greece and to some extent in all member states of the European Union.



2. CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL PARAMETRES

The necessity for legal and formal work in my own country as a teacher of somatics in general and the Alexander Technique in particular has been ongoing due to the complexities of various issues: cultural, social and financial.

In the first decade of practicing somatics in Greece, I managed to find ways to incorporate well-being principles into music education. There is still more work to be done because being a teacher of the Alexander Technique in a country where the discipline has not been introduced before meant that I had to find ways to overcome professional loneliness and provide professional perspectives to future colleagues.

2.1 Professional loneliness

In a country of 10 million people, where there are hardly ten Alexander Technique teachers, it gets really lonely. In Greece, 9 out of the 10 Alexander Technique teachers are based in the capital, Athens, a city of 4 million people. In my city, Thessaloniki, there is one Alexander Technique teacher per 1 million people – yours truly. It is common professional practice that when there are more people practicing a profession in a city or, indeed, in a country, there begins to be a network of students and teachers which gets renewed as there are many exchanges taking place. As a result, the new discipline becomes part of the social reality of a city and the discipline itself evolves.

Professional loneliness in a city can sometimes be misinterpreted as the golden opportunity for monopolizing a profession, which will guarantee a thriving business. If I'm the only greengrocer in town, I may have the opportunity of having to work all day every day. However, I can't possibly serve every single citizen at all times – definitely not in a city of one million people. If a new greengrocer opens business in the city, people will certainly go to them at first because the new greengrocer will be the exotic element. Then, slowly, gradually and steadily, some clients will see that they are more suited to my stall because, even though it may have less variety, it has more organic produce. Others might be suited to me because I greet them differently every morning.

Others, again, might be suited to the new greengrocer because they can't be bothered with my involved greeting on a daily basis! They just want the day's salad and a banana and be gone off to work. And then, of course, there is camaraderie. What would happen if, say, the fruit and vegetable market suffers from a weeklong hailstorm? Hailstorms are known for destroying the fruits and sometimes the trees themselves, which means that there will be damage to seasonal produce but also to produce of the next season. In such a difficult situation, both the new greengrocer and I will have absolute need of each other's business. We will need to make sure that we help each other with produce that is not available in our respective stalls. Keeping your clients happy will indirectly keep my clients happy. So, the desire of uniqueness and monopolization soon becomes replaced by the desire for healthy social interdependence and a stable, regular clientele. I have deliberately used a fictional and quaint example here, but I can assure you that in my 34 years of working as a piano teacher and 17 years as a somatics instructor in many different cultural contexts, I have come across the same scenario time and time again. Professional loneliness is tough and can more easily lead to creative stagnation and lack of inspiration. The Internet era has given a helping hand to professionally isolated individuals and has opened up new professional horizons, so I am very grateful for its existence.



2.2 Professional perspective

The second reason for wanting to establish the Alexander Technique as a profession is professional perspective. The few students from Greece who travel out of the country in order to train and qualify as Alexander Technique teachers, like I did myself, will be coming back to face difficulties in implementing a new discipline to an old country. I would love for them to at least have the opportunity of the right to work and not to have to go through the laborious procedures that I went through when I first started teaching.

Nowadays, the Alexander Technique as I have introduced it so far has appeared in important

national television shows, Greek periodicals and journals, music conservatoires, American and British colleges of further education in Greece, Greek universities, the Greek Red Cross and national music high schools. Initially, I found that I had no option but to make every possible effort to introduce and present this new discipline of the Alexander Technique to my ancient country. It was the only way through which people would start trusting before doubting. Now, with all these implementations that I have tried to establish, I believe that there is sufficient professional perspective both for teachers who are coming to Greece in order to start a life as Alexander Technique teachers as well as for students who wish to train as Alexander Technique teachers.



3. CULTURAL AND FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES

When I first started to introduce new disciplines to an old country, I encountered some difficulties that I attribute to the cultural and social traits of my country. In introducing the Alexander Technique to the Greek public, I had to consider two fundamental facts: a) the heavy cultural heritage that is (mostly unconsciously) inculcated in the average Greek family and b) the poverty, which was an immediate result of the recession of 2008 and was even more apparent in music students, my particular niche of practice.



3.1 Culturally inherited preconceptions

With regards to the first fact of the heavy cultural heritage, I had to face a peculiar mixture of xenophobia and xenomania. My main concern was with people's preconceived ideas and notions about the AT. "Why should I believe in this new, doubtful and suspicious promise of your Australian man's method?" is the crude version of these preconceptions. This co-existed with the curiosity, "Oh, wow, this exotic technique is something we don't have over here". In my experience, the latter is more risky as it fills the possessor with expectations. This problem is not exclusive to Greece, but it was apparent to me as having to re-adjust to a society from which I had been away for more than a decade. At a time when teaching the Alexander Technique had become my everyday professional activity, I had started to see more clearly how I could help students, and I had a sufficient amount of studying and teaching experience to realize the delicate issue of therapy.

Although students of the Alexander Technique may sometimes experience a form of therapeutic effect taking place as an indirect result of their lessons, the Alexander Technique is not a form of therapy. I, therefore, had to differentiate it from other somatic methods that incorporate therapy more directly into their methodologies. More importantly, I had to differentiate it from any form of medical therapy, with its longstanding tradition, which in the minds of Greek people travels back centuries.

Consequently, I found it of great importance to follow the protocols and categorizations put forward by PAMA, the Performing Arts Medicine Association, of which I have been a member since 2005. Ever since I started giving introductory lessons in the Alexander Technique in Greece, I have clarified the categories of problems that may occur in musicians, and I have provided information about how musicians can consult with the adequate professional according to the problem in hand. One important reason for which I needed to clarify these categories as I was introducing the Alexander Technique was that, within the institutions where I have been teaching, the many positive results of Alexander Technique

lessons were finding music teachers and medical professionals in suspicious opposition: As a result, I was risking being accused of "stealing" their clientele and possibly being sued, which could place doubt on the nature of my workshops that were, at the time, officially declared as music workshops. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I have always clarified that if a problem is pathological, then a medical diagnosis is absolutely necessary and for this, there is a clear need for a medical professional. If a problem is educational, then a diagnosis of a technical nature is necessary and there is a need for an expert teacher of violin technique, vocal technique, guitar technique etc. If, however, a problem appears as a result of what the student is doing to themselves while practicing or performing or going about their everyday life but is not related to the above two reasons, then an Alexander Technique teacher is on call. I am confident that most AT teachers are aware that, in most cases, a problem will surface as a result of combined and variable causes and not from a singled-out cause. In special education and medicine, this problem is called "comorbidity".

The clarification of the existence of different categories of problems was a means that gave me some extra time to find ways of introducing and encouraging the legalization of the practice of the Alexander Technique in some form without getting into too much trouble with traditionalists from medical or educational professions. I deliberately chose not to include the case of problems of a psychiatric and psychological nature because: a) in some parts of the Alexander world the line of distinction is very subtle and also because, b) in Greece, psychiatric and psychological support can be offered through the national health service only if there has been a referral from a medical doctor, usually a pathologist.

Once all these clarifications have been done, I can then talk about the Alexander Technique and the ways in which it can be of benefit to musicians and how this can be achieved. Thankfully, these clarifications set a neutral and objective ground on which I have seen many students become very keen on incorporating this fantastic work into their daily lives.



3.2 Financial facts

Finally, the financial repercussions of the recession were the second fundamental fact that I needed to take into consideration when introducing the Alexander Technique in Greece. I have tried to devise different ways of making the technique more accessible yet bearing in mind the risks of introducing a discipline that may be perceived as “too cheap to be important”.

As I am sure every Alexander Technique teacher knows, this is a managerial issue that has concerned many people from all walks of life, no less than Mr. Alexander himself. Usually, cultural, social and financial considerations go hand in hand, a fact that is also true for the teaching of the Alexander Technique.

Hourly fees for students have been kept relatively low in Greece when compared to European hourly rates. With respect to Greek standards, 33€ per hour is considered a high fee, but learning a musical instrument can cost up to 45€ per hour when the lesson is taken at a private music conservatoire. At university, the lesson costs nothing to the student because it is given at a state university; however, the lesson takes place in groups of 20 students per hour. Moreover, university lessons in the Alexander Technique are only available to students of the music department, whereas conservatoire lessons are available to anyone interested in having Alexander Technique lessons, regardless of whether they are musicians. There is also the opportunity of taking group lessons at the conservatoire in groups of 2, 3 and up to 4 students per class. This gives students the opportunity to pay as little as 16€ per hour.



4. LEGAL CHALLENGES OF INTRODUCING SOMATICS INTO 21ST CENTURY GREECE

Going back to when I returned to Greece in 2003, I would like to share the legal challenges that I faced in introducing somatics, as, until my return to Greece, I only had the experience of having worked in the UK, France and Canada. It never crossed my mind that making a new professional start in my own birthplace would be challenging. The challenge of introducing new disciplines to my country, Greece, has been an ongoing one for me personally since I started introducing the Rehabilitation Pilates Method to musicians in 2003. During that year I was re-connecting with music colleagues and including some ideas of the Rehabilitation Pilates Method in my music teaching with keen interest on the part of my colleagues and new students. In 2005, I was invited to present a paper at the first Congress of Music Medicine in Greece on the effects of the Pilates Method on me as a performing musician and subsequently on my music students. Following the congress, a flock of music students and colleagues approached me and asked to have lessons.

At first, I was enthusiastic that there was a response to my encouragement to introduce somatic methods into music education. But I gradually started realizing that there was no official educational frame through which I could organize lessons, and no legal taxation system under which I could be included as a professional practitioner. I did what most of my musical colleagues encouraged me to do. I went to people's houses and gave private lessons.

4.1 Attempts to legalize private tuition

A partial solution to the issue of teaching a new discipline was to teach privately. The problem with this partial solution was the legalization of a profession that did not officially exist. Not issuing receipts is illegal in Greece since no tax revenue is deducted from the fee. Therefore, this was not an option on which I could build a long-term career. When I went to my personal accountant for advice on how to issue receipts for lessons in the Rehabilitation Pilates Method, she explained that this "thing" was too complicated and too costly to legalize and that I should learn to take risks by teaching without declaring. Declaring private tuition meant that the profit of the hourly fee would end up at a mere 30% of what students paid. I tried a few other accountants who responded in similar ways.

This problem took on a new dimension when I completed a second training in Yoga Therapy. Because Yoga Therapy is a clearly therapeutic and hands-on modality, there was the issue of touching the students both for the purpose of healing and guiding.

Up until the time when I enquired about the legalization of alternative professions, most practitioners practiced either illegally or under

the capacity of a regulated profession such as physiotherapy. I clearly had to find a new solution.

4.2 The search for a legal path through national services

I consulted with people at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. When I explained the nature of the work I was intending to do, they immediately referred me to a new service called the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance. Every European country has one such bureau, and in many countries this can be the first and last port of call for anyone interested to be registered as a practitioner of a new discipline.

At the time, I was still only researching things at a national level and had not considered the fact that I could potentially address the problem to an equivalent European service, as Greece is a member state of the European Union. This later taught me that it is sometimes better to start at the top of the administrative pyramid and not at the bottom. Sometimes.

The National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance reported that they could accept the proposal of introducing new disciplines upon the condition that:

4.2 The search for a legal path through national services *Continued*

- a) I had proof of having taught the new disciplines in formal educational establishments for at least 150 hours;
- b) I would undergo standard vocational training for a year (equivalent to a postgraduate certificate in adult education); and
- c) I would take an exam in order to be awarded a certificate of practitioner in x, y, z discipline.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing this in 2021, music conservatoires and private vocational colleges are still not considered part of formal education in Greece. Music conservatoires and private vocational colleges function under the auspices of the ministry of culture and labour respectively – not under the ministry of education. This meant that even if I did manage to qualify as a legal practitioner in the Rehabilitation Pilates Method and in Yoga Therapy, I would not be able to teach in establishments that function under the auspices of ministries other than the ministry of education. I was just beginning to understand the meaning of bureaucracy.

I was also faced with the following impasse: I needed proof of having taught my newly introduced disciplines for at least 150 hours in state schools or state universities (which functioned under the auspices of the ministry of education) in order to possibly be able to have a certificate issued from a national organization that would, in turn, allow me to teach formally in those same state schools or state universities, in which I couldn't teach unless I had that certificate. Where would I start?

4.3 Choosing an alternative path towards the legalisation of teaching methods of somatic education

In the meantime, in parallel with performing and teaching the piano as a main profession, I had devised an alternative way to introduce somatics to musicians. I started running daily workshops, where I would focus on basic somatic principles, which I introduced theoretically and incorporated practical experimentations without any application

of hands-on techniques. This allowed me to work legally under my capacity as a music professor who was introducing ways of movement that would help with musicians' issues. Unexpectedly, this experiment developed exponentially, and I was invited to conservatoires and music schools all over the country to lecture on what I now coined "Somatics for Musicians©".

My problem was partially solved so long as there were music conservatoires that were happy to hire me for daily or weekend workshops, always in my capacity as music professor, in which I already had the right to teach in all levels of education because I held bachelor and master degrees in music. However, I was still declaring the teaching of one discipline whilst in actual truth teaching another. Legally, my employers could not hire me as a "somatics professor" as the title and the notion of "somatics" did not exist within the taxation system in Greece.

With regards to my efforts to establish the profession within the frame of the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, I was still facing the same problem. Since music conservatoires are not considered part of formal education, my teaching hours in workshops could not count towards the legalization of new disciplines. Nevertheless, I continued with this practice as a survival tactic and in the hope that this would be an intermediate stage for making somatic disciplines official later.

4.4 First formal implementation of the Alexander Technique in education in Greece

Demand for workshops in Somatics for Musicians© grew impressively and with this demand, the interest of musicians to learn this new discipline on a regular basis also grew. Some even started contacting me with queries on how to qualify to become teachers like myself, a capacity they had not come across before in Greece. Since my realization of the bureaucratic impasse, I had decided to follow along with the demands of my own students and to continue, as we all do, with my own personal development.



During that time, I had met Alexander teacher Penny O'Connor, who shares her time between London and the Greek island of Alonissos, and she became my teacher, mentor, friend and source of inspiration. Penny was the one person who could advise me both with regards to the Alexander Technique and as a professional with a dual perspective. I followed her two wise suggestions: go slowly and stick to your passion for helping musicians. If I did these things, the solution would appear.

In the seven years that followed, I conducted doctoral research at Birmingham City University in which I did a comparative analysis of the effects of three somatic methods on piano performance. At the same time, I trained as an Alexander Technique teacher as a prerequisite set by the university in order to be considered an expert in analyzing comparatively three somatic methods: The Pilates Method, Yoga Therapy and the Alexander Technique.

Holding a doctoral degree, I could now lecture on the Alexander Technique and on the other somatic methods in which I was certified as a visiting professor in Greek university departments. The oxymoron was that I was teaching disciplines that had not been granted official status at the highest educational level within the department of education. However, I was still not allowed to:

- a) use my hands in teaching,
- b) declare my profession as an Alexander Technique teacher, and
- c) have a permanent tax-deductible employment as a teacher of any somatic method.

I was holding an Alexander Technique certificate issued in England, which in the United Kingdom was treated as a professional qualification and was giving the right to practitioners in the UK to work and be insured as professional Alexander Technique teachers. In my own country, which was a European Union member, I did not hold the right to teach, be insured or be taxed as a legal professional, unless it

was within the context of a university lecture.

The reasons for not having the right to teach the Alexander Technique on a regular basis within an informal (i.e. other than primary, secondary and tertiary) educational frame were:

- a) the profession of the Alexander Technique was not a registered one
- b) in order to register the profession, I had to have proof of having practiced it in the country within a formal institution
- c) in order to practice the profession in question in Greece, I was obliged to be insured by the state, which does not approve the profession!!!

In the meantime, I learned, through European friends and colleagues, that there was no issue of professional insurance in their respective countries. I have an Alexander Technique colleague in Spain who teaches on a legal basis and is insured by the same company that insured her for teaching math! I also recently learned that in Sweden there is no special permit needed in order to incorporate touch in a lesson, whereas, in Italy, there needs to be a special state permit for any professional using touch.

A new hope arose in 2014 when a funding programme was launched in 28 countries entitled the European Structural and Investment Funds of the European Union. In conjunction with administrations of state universities, this programme announced a competition for the introduction of new disciplines with the purpose of enriching the already existing curricula in old and established disciplines such as Physics, Math, Literature, Medicine and Music. This was a golden opportunity, and, following two years of fruitless attempts, in 2016 I managed to be part of the winning team of PhD holders introducing new disciplines into an old tertiary educational system. Ever since, I have acted as adjunct professor of the Alexander Technique at the music department of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the university with the largest student population in Greece.



With regards to my efforts of establishing somatic methods and the Alexander Technique in particular, thirteen years of teaching and lecturing had helped me reach a stage where:

- a) the Alexander Technique was taught at a Greek state university, in other words, in a formal educational frame,
- b) it was approved as a taught discipline, but
- c) it was not yet approved as a paid-for discipline for independent practitioners!

In order for an approved discipline to be granted the right to be practiced by specialized practitioners and insured by the government, there needs to be a clarification of the level of education that has been delivered upon training.

4.5 Diving deeply into bureaucracy

This is an issue that has concerned many young international graduates, who are in the beginning of a professional career in a different country from the one which awarded their degree.

The bureaucratic details that concern degree accreditations are too many to fit in a readable article. However, I have kept this one crucial piece of information which I hope will save new professionals from wandering through the labyrinths of bureaucracy, especially citizens of EU member states who are interested in registering the Alexander Technique as a profession in their respective countries.

The National Recognition Information Centre, also a local service that exists in every EU member state, is a service that is responsible for re-accreditation and recognizing a degree or a studying certificate that has been awarded in a different country from the intended country of professional practice.

Because every National Recognition Information Centre is only concerned with higher-education

qualifications, I had to find if there was an equivalent service concerned with vocational certifications such as the certificate held by Alexander Technique teachers. There is one, and it is called CEDEFOP, Centre Européen pour le Développement de la Formation Professionnelle (European centre for the development of vocational education). CEDEFOP supports the development of European vocational education and training policies and contributes to their implementation. CEDEFOP is the agency that deals with the issue of putting the Alexander Technique on the map as an accredited profession. CEDEFOP alerted me to the standards and regulations that have been created by the European Qualifications Framework.

For every European country, there is a slightly different standardization of qualifications. European teachers should refer to their respective ministries of education for these in case they need to place their Alexander Technique practice within this frame. The boundaries between levels 3 and 4 are not easily distinguishable and have different standards according to the country in question. Levels 3, 4 and 5 of education are all awarded certificates and/or professional certificates. This is where the Alexander Technique can be placed in the education pyramid of any European country.

I need to stress here that in every country, every single component of a training course is considered differently. In order to be formally placed within the European Qualifications Framework, a certificate in the Alexander Technique, which testifies that you have studied the work within the educational frame of a training school, will need to be accompanied by a transcript of the individual lessons or activities taken throughout the course. The density of each respective course will determine whether the certificate from one country will be considered in the same level (3, 4, or 5) in a different country.





5. PRESENT STATE OF AN ONGOING JOURNEY – FUTURE AIMS

At present, I am at the stage of having completed 2 out of 3 prerequisites needed in order to go through with my application to the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance:

- a) I have more than 150 teaching hours of the Alexander Technique in formal educational establishments,
- b) I have undergone vocational training for a year through the national organization and
- c) I have put myself on the waiting list to be examined in order to have the right to establish a new discipline.

Once this procedure is completed, the following will be possible in Greece:

- a) Any Alexander Technique teacher wishing to work will be able to do so legally with a proper national insurance number and as a registered professional.
- b) Any Alexander Technique teacher wishing to train students to become legal and registered Alexander Technique teachers in Greece will be able to do so.
- c) For both of these capacities – teacher and trainer – there will be an Inland Revenue and tax code.

6. EPILOGUE

Due to Covid-19, the final stage of registering the Alexander Technique as a formal profession with the National Organisation for Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance has been postponed indefinitely. Nevertheless, I am positive that there will somehow be a way through to completing this journey of introducing the new discipline of the Alexander Technique to this old country of mine, known to you as Greece and to me as Hellas.

Alexander Technique teacher **Christos Noulis** is also a performing pianist, a Yoga Therapy (P.E.I.) instructor and a Rehabilitation Pilates Method® instructor.

He studied at the Royal College of Music obtaining First Class Bachelor, Teaching and Masters degrees on a full scholarship by the Leverhulme and Exhibition trusts. His doctoral research at Birmingham City University was a seven-year project based on a comparative analysis of the effects of the Alexander Technique, Yoga Therapy and the Pilates Method on piano performance. He has been active as a piano soloist with orchestras, in recitals and as a chamber musician performing worldwide.

Christos started his Alexander Technique journey as a student at the Royal College of Music. He continued learning with Penny O'Connor, whom he still considers his mentor. He trained as an AT teacher in Bristol with Dr. Weed. He is a certified Alexander Technique teaching member of ATI. Christos has attended Penelope Easten's TTO course and is currently attending Tommy Thompson's online course "The Gift of Understanding". Every summer he joins Penny O'Connor as her teaching assistant on her Alonissos workshops. Christos introduced the Alexander Technique at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki music department under the support of the European Union. He currently teaches somatics at the University of Macedonia postgraduate programme and is professor of piano and the Alexander Technique at the Macedonian Conservatoire of Thessaloniki.



When Things Happen

By Debi Adams

How many times have you attended a workshop or class where someone says something that you think warrants a response—and nothing happens?

At the 2020 ACGM, I led a session called First Do No Harm. I knew going into this session that the very thing I was addressing might happen during the session: someone might experience harm. The thread of the discussion revolved around our inability to anticipate everything that may happen while we are teaching, including how students may respond to our good intentions. During the discussion, a participant made a comment that I did not anticipate. I didn't know what to do.

I was talking about the simple act of approaching a student from the left or right, or front. I asked the participants to imagine the three scenarios and notice how their nervous systems responded. Several people noticed differences and understood that their students might have preferences they were unaware of. One participant related a story from their youth saying that during a fencing exercise, a left-handed fencer, a black man, had approached them from the right side. They realized during our exercise how much less comfortable they were with people approaching from the right. But why did they say "black man"? It was not clear from the telling of the story why saying that was important.

I had an initial response to that incident. And I had questions about whether or not to stop the conversation in order to address the comment. I decided not to stop the conversation. Instead, I decided to have a discussion with this participant after the workshop. I knew them well enough that I thought I could have a meaningful conversation. And maybe I could help them see the potential problems with that statement-- if they did not already. That's what I did. I waited until the session was over and contacted that participant. What was the result? Growth. They gained a new understanding of the language of their youth and the contemporary

meaning that is attached to it. They looked deeply into their experiences and confronted the possibility of bias.

Would that have happened if I had called them out in the moment? Perhaps I could have brought attention to the statement in a way that I didn't necessarily derail the direction of the discussion. Or maybe I needed to let the discussion get derailed and figure out how to integrate it into the original discussion. Or maybe in that moment, integration would not have seemed important.

Inhibition is not about stopping. It is more about an opportunity to expand our sense of time in all the in-between moments of our lives, so that we can make choices—perhaps choices we have never made before. In this case, the opportunity for inhibition surfaced in the moment I felt I had to make a decision. But was I the only one who had to make a decision right then? Were other attendees also considering their choices? That, itself, is interesting. I was clearly not the only person in the room capable of addressing the comment. And I suspect I was not the only one who noticed it either. Did I feel a responsibility, as the presenter, to be the person to respond? I think so. Did my relationship to the participant factor into my decision? It most certainly did. They were a close friend and mentor. How would I have felt if someone else had spoken up about it? Would I have been surprised? Irritated? Relieved? Would I have responded differently if I knew there was at least one black person among the participants? Was I sure there wasn't?

What's equally interesting to me is that in my recollection of the incident, I heard the participant say "big, black man". What does this tell me about myself? This whole incident, that took place in a matter of seconds, was different than I had recollected. I watched the video to check my memory. Whose biases was this about? Was the comment the participant made any more thought



provoking than my incorrect recollection of the event? It is clear that the number of questions here far exceeds the number of answers. It is also clear to me that it's time to ask the questions.

Our only way to prepare for these moments is to honestly consider all the possible responses. We can examine them so we can sit with them all and see which ones make sense to us. I use that expression, "making sense" in its most literal way. We are often asked if something makes sense with the assumption that we mean logical sense. I believe we can get truer answers to our questions by considering our whole sensory system when asking the question, "Does this make sense to me?" "Do I feel something in my gut? Does my body contract or expand in response to my question? Is there a sense of integration or disconnection when I consider each possible response to a situation? Regarding this situation, can I sense a response now to that moment that rings true to my whole sensory system? I think that writing this reflection is a part of my sorting that.

I believe this story is not about that single moment, but rather about all of us and all our biases. I believe we are blind if we don't recognize that we all have them. And these biases will factor into our responses to moments like the one I have described here. Our ability to see our responses and consider all the possibilities that could have been, or that might be in the future, depends so much on our ability to have compassion for ourselves and others. It is this compassion that leads us to growth.

We are living in a time of great change. Change itself is at the core of our work. As we face important changes in our interactions, we are reminded of the challenges our students face as a result of their lessons with us. We invite them to change on the deepest level -- how they know themselves. We can do the same ourselves. We can question the language we use and have used for decades. We can assert ourselves in new ways to ask others about their language. And we can have compassion for those who have not yet had their biases revealed to them—ourselves included.

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Compassion and the willingness to grow can guide us. If it seems useful to do so, I will point out in the moment when someone has misspoken. But I will not embarrass someone in order for the group to know that I have addressed the issue. At least I don't



think so. Or maybe I'm not yet ready to. Or maybe I am now. More questions. I do know I won't always handle these moments as everyone in the group wishes I had.

Growth will come from compassion and understanding. It did in this situation--for both of us. People of a certain generation have used their own language for decades-- many decades. Can we not find compassion and help them learn to change? As their understanding grows, their misspeaking will diminish. As our understanding grows, our misspeaking will diminish. We can trust that compassion and the willingness to grow can guide us for when difficult things like this happen.

Debi Adams is currently a member of the ATI Board. She is an ATI Certified Alexander Technique Teacher as well as an MTNA Nationally Certified Teacher of Piano. She has a Master's Degree in Piano Performance and continues to perform as often as possible. Debi also completed the Actors Secret Training, with Betsy Polatin, which combines Alexander Technique with the trauma work of Peter Levine and the breath work of Carl Stough. Debi teaches the Technique at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, where she also directs a teacher-training course - and she maintains a private practice. She has been fortunate to share her work in Canada, the Czech Republic, Japan, Korea, Germany, Peru and throughout the United States.



All that is Mortal

By Marcia Barton

It's very odd, I think to myself,
that I don't consider my skeleton,
yet here it sits perched
on the shower chair, bending
forward under warm, soapy water,
leaning back, moving easily by means
of the muscular engineering crew.

My brain box grins inside my face,
holds my thoughts folded under
my fingers, as they busily work
shampoo over my scalp. I try to keep
my brain occupied, trying out
this poem's lines as I rinse. Still,
I really can't quite see it, though I peer
straight through the eye holes and wipe
steam from the mirror as I reach
for the comb and part my hair.

As a child I was terrified by the very
idea of Jolly Roger, and I hid my face
when the Wicked Queen bestrode
her cobwebbed dungeon and plotted
Snow White's bloody fate. She stepped
disdainfully over the bony arm reaching
through bars for the empty pitcher.

The skull in the cell was scarier far
than the cackling Witch with the apple.

I think about other parts -- my lungs,
toxically dirty, may be up to something.
Perhaps my heart stiffens for a surprise
attack -- it can happen. And I admire
how neatly organs are packed inside,
kidneys and bladders and folded guts.
They're busy with their tasks, secreting,
constricting, relaxing, and how they wail
when things go wrong. Until something
does, I'm advised, I'm not to interfere.

I have dialogues -- no, better call them
what they are: petitions to joints and muscles.

Please, please, don't betray me, I beg,
not today, not in front of all these people,
not when the children are watching. I do
envision the tiny bones, especially
when one is insulted. I'm grateful
that my fingers still work though
they're baffled now by piano keys;
I forgive my sacrum its barnacles.

Still, as I lay all this out in my mind,
carefully drying and dressing, I cannot
make myself picture the whole thing,
though it goes with me to the elevator
and into the car, turning the wheel,
driving away with the very frame of it
inside me right now, necessary,
holding everything together.

Marcia Barton began to write poems because she made a bet with her husband and lost. That was about forty-five years ago. The issue of the bet is long forgotten, but the pleasure of writing poems has remained a lively and sustaining one, a "very present help" in troubled moments as well as in joyful ones and the ordinary times in between.



Origins of My Irrepressible Enthusiasm for Advocating AT as a Method for the Control of Human Reaction

By Sharyn West

This article has its beginnings at an Alexander Technique International (ATI) conference. The issue of racist language in the writings of Frederick Mathias Alexander (FM) drew Alexander Technique (AT) teaching colleagues together into a willing conversation that deepened a pre-existing, on-going conversation about addressing systemic racism. An ad hoc group formed to write a statement clarifying ATI's position. A full backstory was published in ATI's on-line Journal ExChange under the title "From Here: ATI Addresses Racism and Begins a Process to Confront Systemic Racism Within Ourselves and Our Organization." (Schlump et al 18) (https://alti.memberclicks.net/assets/docs/The-ExChange/ExChange_2020_Number_2.pdf)

The theme of that conference was presciently titled Alexander Technique in the Digital Age. During the events since that conference, we have been well served by technology. In the time of the 2020 global pandemic, ATI convened an impressive annual conference and AGM online. In their message following the conference, the co-chairs of ATI wrote, "Four-hundred-eight participants from around the world attended the first virtual ATI Annual Conference in October 2020." Our online event enabled ATI to connect with the international Alexander Technique community more easily and profoundly and show itself as an organization with high professional standards. The conference website was easily accessible, and with the assistance of Google translation, international participants could access their own languages." (Ibid Rossi and Cordes 8)

I am relatively new to ATI but find myself at home

in the means-whereby energy and collective agency that are operating in the organisation.¹ Recent opportunities to interrogate urgent matters in conversation with like-minded others have shown me precisely how much my personal journey has been grounded in endeavour and political commitment in the struggle against the brutal racialised inequality of Apartheid South Africa. In the wake of wonderful conversations with articulate, experienced, astute and generous collaborators on diversity issues, my early steps towards the AT and the subsequent journey have been retraced, reviewed and refreshed by a process of thinking back and readings around the life of the Alexanders' work.² In one conversation I said, with tremendous conviction, "I am convinced that the AT is the best option; it is powerful and has proven its worth as a tool for on-going transformation."

My exploration of my unequivocal belief in the work started by addressing the question "...how to take ownership of issues that confront existing power structures is a challenging question, since the issues are built into the power structures themselves" (ibid Schlump et al 20). After looking at my response, I set off to find the stimulus. This sent me as often to look into a book, a pamphlet, a document, as well as musing and applying my mind to working with times such as these when "there is a groundswell of awareness of the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion within ATI and the Alexander Technique world at large." (Juhl and Goodrich, December 2020 ExChange 2).

I expected my thinking to take me back to recent conversations, present colleagues, present

1) There is an explicit framework in which ATI conducts business. It is "led by the principles of the Alexander Technique, through the Formal Consensus Process, and by ATI's Vision and Mission Statement" (ibid Rossi and Cordes).

2) Evans writing about the development of "the Work" (Ch. 13) says it became "known as a Technique" in 1935. (194) She writes the phrase the Work, 'w' always capitalised.



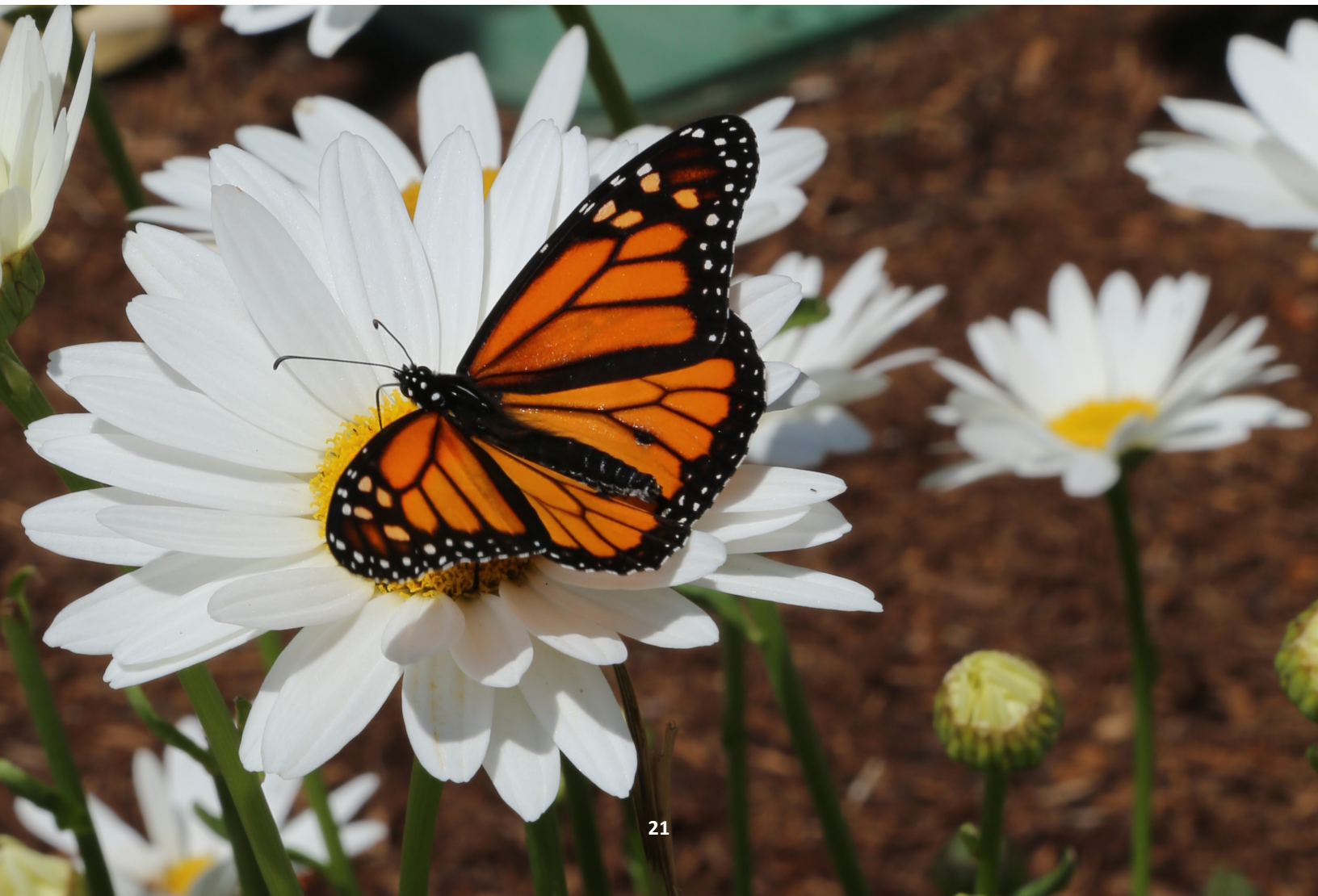
challenges. Being with my grandmother kept showing up. I resisted that until I got it. I was judging an unwanted response, and then my crafted, practised, well-honed means-whereby showed up. If that was my response, what was the stimulus? End-gaining!³ AT returned me to recognise my grandmother's keenly practical gaze; it shaped my childhood self-noticing. Awareness of others was there too. So I went along with a reflective research process to help make explicit hidden biases that would influence how I might lean into deciding what might be done.

This inquiry asks if this is my response, what is the stimulus? In the pages that follow, I will describe my germinal lessons about AT. I will look at meeting AT in South Africa. To do this, I will briefly consider elements of my upbringing that laid particular, relevant foundations. These created a readiness I

would bring to recognising principles in AT. There are personalities to consider who I will place alongside recollections and research into public events that look at a particularly telling part of AT and his-story, especially what led FM to sue two prominent South African government officials for extreme and derogatory claims made against himself and AT. That led to a court case that very publicly scrutinised, criticised and ridiculed the worth of AT. I will place that against the backdrop of wider, socio-political events to muse on the impact of the development of AT internationally and as a community of practise.

My inquiry process is reflective and based on two key claims: that 'mental' and 'physical' are not separate entities, and that the operation of this psychophysical unity enables agency that can be self-noticing and self-aware. This provides an investigatory use of the

3) I.e. the principle of a reasoned consideration of the causes of the conditions present, and an indirect instead of a direct procedure on the part of the person endeavouring to gain the desired end (Alexander 52). Mouritz.org provides AT resources. There is a library that includes definitions and phrases, PDFs, etc.



self (Alexander 4). Specific to AT is a sequence of deliberations amounting to a method for site specific research. The self can be a site of inquiry based learning.

I am going to characterise certain kinds of conversation as a joint inquiry that shared AT as a method of engagement. Shared skills and explicit frameworks allow and even welcome the opportunity to sit with hard questions. Agonistic inquiry⁴ is a term that is useful to describe aptitudes, attributes and aspirations in inquiry of this kind. The ethos (character) of these conversations is that they describe conversations where receptive readiness to explore the potentially positive effect of conflicting experiences is present. With this sort of outlook, being willing to raise difficult topics, welcome different views, choose positive, constructive frameworks to facilitate agreement about collective action is considered valuable political action on which to base decisions about subsequent action.

Using a combination of personal and collective reflective processes such as these, I also drew on secondary research (mostly text based), and I have found much to integrate from the period of struggle to inform current issues. In my personal journey to the AT, intense waves and groundswells of racialised politics contributed to a critical period in the life, and almost death, of the work in South Africa and internationally. I have drawn on biographers and other relevant sources to add to what I learned from thinking back to where the influence of AT resonated in South Africa. How I learned to understand relations of power about who starves, who dies of Covid and who dies directly from police brutality coincides with what and when I learned there about how we enable ourselves to be vectors of power⁵ in times such as these.

I am a recent teaching member of ATI but have been a 'friend in the family' since its inception. I

graduated in 1994 in Oxford, England, having trained with Elisabeth and Dick Walker. My trainers were not known to me in South Africa but had lived experience of South Africa and were part of building AT there. I advocate AT as a most suitable method for remaining flexible in the face of extremely challenging circumstances. That is also an inheritance from my trainers inherent in my claim, which I can now clarify further. AT is a methodology, capable of application to any project that seeks to uncover and un-learn bias that interferes with integrity. It is, for me, precisely the method that addressed the systemic inequality and social injustice - for pupils and teachers of the AT in a comparable milieu – the growth of Apartheid from the structures and institutions of Colonialism. I am very aware of how that lived experience provides a shared language that cannot be gained by any other means. A method cannot provide experience of the oppressive force of social injustice, but it might be the very means whereby we enable the attributes by which we show up as worthy allies, colleagues and collaborators in struggle.

I have an inheritance from my grandmother. She brought me up during the decade when South Africa was still under British colonial rule and into the early years of transition into the Republic that legalised, expanded and deepened racialised segregation and inequality from the 1950's through the 1960's. She wanted me to be able to survive the horror of living under Apartheid without fear by choosing integrity and by developing and being a character who could do that. She made it her project to show me that I was being offered an identity built from ideas of white supremacy and nationalism. We didn't have the word 'othering,' but she made sure to show me how a dynamic of diminishing others was fundamental to these ideologies. She was able to convey that the cost of dehumanising another, indirectly or directly, would harm my integrity too. She demonstrated an alternative in how she watched

4) Agonism is a term derived from socio-political theory about political struggle. The word derives from the Greek word for struggle.

5) The political perspective that indicates how my values allow me to see these systemic structural relations is succinctly expressed by Judith Butler here <https://youtu.be/6Bnj7H7M>.



the world. We spent time placing me behind her eyes so that I could see how kindness was always an option, even in extreme situations on the everyday streets of racist violence that surrounded us. Being kind to self mattered too. Little wonder I later took to the means-whereby like a duck to water. As my ability with this stop and search process grew, a deeper process also grew. I call it “endearing othering.” Stopping to notice myself amongst others, to take stock, I gained a sense of myself and my needs. Seeing myself while looking at others, I grew to be able to intentionally allow the possibility of disarming, even outflanking whatever derogatory othering might be surfacing. Discrimination and discernment become operations of sentience over time, cultivating the way the means whereby comes to operate for an AT practitioner as the work⁶ becomes one’s habit, one’s ethos. One’s project in activism is one’s character in the world.

I first encountered AT in South Africa in the lives of others. They were stalwarts, thought leaders and activists. My university teachers, and several others who built alternatives to the State’s regime of Bantu Education, and other areas of movement work against that struggle were supported by and were supporters of AT. AT was an intrinsic part of the story of resistance to the Apartheid. I didn’t meet the AT as self-development. I learned about AT as an education theory of inestimable practical importance in education that develops self-reliant and self-directed learners. I first met AT in an academic university course - philosophy and history of education - and was initially intrigued and then persuaded by learning theory that favoured John Dewey.

Constructivist approaches to education and experiential pedagogies brought me to John Dewey who led me to Alexander Technique. By this stage,

circa 1975, one decade into Apartheid, I had come to see how education operated as a means of production and reproduction in any state’s social, political and economic construction. In the midst of the Apartheid State’s operations of sophisticated dehumanisation, I found conscience, consciousness, awareness and agency in learning theory. AT confirmed and completed my ideology of education being a practical tool for education contributing to liberation from internalised oppression. My confidence in a pedagogy that is experiential, learner centred, and instills an orientation to lifelong learning persists. It’s this pedagogy of AT that I advocate with exuberant enthusiasm. I commend its usefulness for aligning our personal, public and private lives, and even our professional bodies, as we navigate a world where the personal is, indeed, political.

In Dewey’s work, reflective practice is central to the learning-teaching process. In his writings he attributes to FM a breakthrough in his own understanding of methodology that resolves theory into practice. I came across Alexander work as being important to Dewey, foundational in experiential education and personally inspirational to several members of the teaching staff. They were practitioners of the work for their personal development, and ‘professors’ of the pedagogy I have recognised as relevant to a racialised, political milieu. It is here that I first came across Irene Tasker’s⁷ influence. Reflective practise epitomised the professional practise of an educator, and I was introduced to the language of means-whereby and use. I had no experience of the concepts accompanied by the hands-on confirmation of percept with a teacher, no experience of ease achieved by attention to primary control. Nonetheless, I appreciated how practising this theory-in-activity was about the agency of the learner and involved self-noticing as a process for learning. I was drawn to the aspect of the process

6) I will use the phrase ‘the work’ interchangeably with AT. My trainers, Dick and Elisabeth Walker called AT the work because it was what Frederick Mathias’s (FM) and his brother Albert Redden (AR) used. Their sister Amy also assisted in teaching. The term Alexander Technique (AT) started with the first training course. The work seemed to become FM’s ‘intellectual’ property despite AR’s enormous contribution and Amy being a collaborator since FM’s earliest teaching of technique.

7) Irene Tasker and Ethel Webb were the first two active AT teachers who were not members of FM’s family. They were FM’s assistants at Ashley Place in London. Irene started lessons with FM shortly after training with Dr. Maria Montessori in Rome where she met Ethel Webb in 1913. Regina Stratil’s biography of her life and work is a valuable and comprehensive resource.



that relied on learning happening at the learner's end. I already preferred a teacher's role to be concerned with preparing conditions for learning. I was drawn to supportive facilitation that guided a learner to own their insights via thinking-in-activity. I was particularly drawn to the politics of work concerned with establishing learner agency.

My next steps into AT were much later. I left South Africa in 1982. I started having one-to-one lessons. My motivation was for personal and practical self-care. My teacher was Elisabeth Walker. She had trained with FM at Ashley Place in London at the same time as Dick whom she met there and married. A war intervened in their training. When FM returned to Ashley Place they, like others, completed their training. The Walkers had moved to South Africa to take over Irene Tasker's practice when she left to return to England after the libel trial. The AT community of pupils and supporters that Tasker had built were diverse, dedicated to the work and ever-growing. They welcomed and embraced them.

Elisabeth frequently spoke about those years in South Africa and how AT continued to grow there. She was always honoured to have known and taught the Technique to several of those activists many of whom became close friends. Those who became their AT pupils had started their Alexander work with Tasker whose reputation and networks guaranteed a continuing and growing practice for the Walkers. Amongst these friends was Braam Fischer, who headed the legal team⁸ that defended FM. Fischer also defended Nelson Mandela, his co-accused in the Rivonia Trial in 1964 where they received life sentences and were imprisoned on Robben Island. Elisabeth wrote in her memoir *Forward and Away*:

Through the Berengés we met lawyers and barristers who helped FM and Irene to win the Jokl⁹ case - a libel case against the charge that the Alexander technique was a 'quackery.' They also

introduced us to many men and women working for freedom against apartheid. In 1953 at a party of the supporters we met Nelson Mandela and talked to him for some time and came away appreciating that he was a very special man. He was a lawyer obviously pretty blessed with great strength and intelligence but little did we know what he was to go through and what a great leader he was to become.

A few paragraphs later she writes:

Dick was active against the apartheid regime; he worked for the Congress of Democrats, a group of whites who were invited to join the Congress of the People. An important legacy of this work was the Freedom Charter - a document that served as the template for the impressively rights based Constitution of South Africa. Many of these activists were jailed for life for their work but close friends of ours were even more active in this area and spent much time in jail"... [and she goes on to name most of those jailed for life in the same trial as Mandela] (112).

In the same chapter Elisabeth offers this anecdote:

Hendrik Verwoerd, the architect of Apartheid who was hated for his racist policies, was prime minister at this time. Among Dick's Alexander pupils was a David Pratt. Pratt was attending the Rand Agricultural Show when during the show jumping he tried, but failed, to shoot Verwoerd. Later Dick's friends jokingly complained that he had not taught Pratt a good hand-eye coordination (99).

Dick would use the anecdote from time to time, usually in relation to inhibition. The first time I heard it was a month or so into my training. One of the trainees took the opportunity to ask how to deal with the problem of not being able to like a pupil personally. Dick considered this for a while and replied that he liked all his students, always. The trainee persisted, "how is that possible?"

8) FM's legal defence was planned by Advocate Vernon Berrangé KC but presented by Adv. Harold Hanson KC. Berrangé appeared instead as a witness to testify for the efficacy of the AT. These two defended Mandela et al in the Rivonia Trial. Hanson offered the plea of mitigation against the death sentence being available to the Prosecution. The State Prosecutor in that trial was Adv. Pirow KC.

9) Dr. Ernst Jokl was a sport and exercise scientist with a worldwide reputation who criticised the AT in extremely derogatory language found to be defamatory.



Not everyone is likeable or possible to connect to.” Dick considered that for a while and replied, “I am looking for the best in them.” As a teacher, he knew how to respect and to connect to whoever a person was. He considered proactive expression of respect to be a necessary professional attribute. He also held the view, honed in processes of political work in South Africa, that a method is likely to produce behaviour related to values that motivate the inquiry and the inquirer. Ontology begets epistemology (or vice versa if you prefer) and together these beget methodology. Values beget viewpoints. Dick and Elisabeth were always eager to listen to and work with new input from science and education and always respected the professional experience that their students brought from other disciplines. Their pupils included people like Raymond Dart.

In my university years, the paradigm that nurtured the scientific myth of ‘race’ was both under criticism in all my studies while it was being actively cultivated in every aspect of Apartheid society. The notion that is central to all race theory is a robust and powerful scientific myth. It has been powerfully discredited, but the term persists. I was able to loosen its grip because of the work of Professor Raymond Dart. He took AT lessons with Irene Tasker.

My first encounter with the work of Dart was when I was an undergraduate Theology student circa 1970. It was about the implications from findings in paleo-archeological evidence that drew together sociological research from rock art and findings at a site that revealed rich physical evidence of cave dwelling humans engaged in mining activity. A particular red colour featured in several paintings associated with a particular kind of crystalline rock was called bloodstone. The rock-art representations of the lived world these early hominids experienced, it was proposed, indicated an abstract awareness likened to religious thinking. I deeply embraced this into my understanding. It confirmed and made clear and explicit a necessary unity principle that enabled me to find my phenomenological mind.

Dart was a living legend in the University of the Witwatersrand where I did a post-graduate degree

in Education. He had been a teacher of anatomy. His specialty was neurobiology. He was also an ‘amateur’ archaeologist with a remarkable eye. He saw something in a small skull and jawbone, which drew him into extended research. The location of the eye sockets and the human-like jawbone and teeth showed a being whose head would have balanced very precisely on its spine. This would allow the spinal cord out of the magnum foramen into the sacro-cranial canal created by the vertebral column. This being, the Taung child, must have stood upright. He described this new species in the journal Nature in 1925, but his theory met with strong resistance. It took more than two decades (1924-47) to gain recognition. When it did, it confirmed what Darwin had predicted - that human origins were in Africa. This work also confirmed Darwin’s intuition that there is no linear evolutionary development. Dart’s work established a biological basis for poise and skill and an evolutionary timeline that is a mosaic in which human and ape forebears intersect. The idea of evolutionary continuity between animals and humans was so full of delightful meaning that I embarked on work to digest and integrate it. It confirmed for me the post-colonial perspective my grandmother had given me and was energising African nationalism at the time. The symbolic and material import of this would colour my life’s work. My training as an AT teacher added to my knowledge and skillset to do this.

By this time (the mid 1970’s), I knew I had inherited a central nervous system that informed my learning abilities. I also knew that the operations of my peripheral nervous system offered relevant, albeit somewhat misinformed information about what was taking place around me. I had the boldness to know that I was the agent of change in myself. I frequently experienced great bursts of delight with the realisation that I was able to resource my own nervous system simply by paying attention to my responses to strong stimuli. I had inherited a readiness from my grandmother that opened me to what I learned from Dart and Tasker’s legacies. The myth of humans standing in descending order to other humans and all other sentience and materiality is plainly not in FM’s principles of the work. But it





is present in the offensive attitudes he expresses in his writings. FM's mash up of evolutionary, archaeological and human history timescales in his writing brings Eurocentrism to my AT teaching studio and teacher training curriculum most conveniently. This work is, for me, implicitly decolonising work. In teacher training, changes in our use of language become a measure of growing sensitivity, and appreciation of ourselves, and to communicate the work we speak of as 'use'. In activism and movement work for social justice, I choose to speak of racism to indicate the operation of dehumanisation and the lived inequality that we deplore. I have tasked myself to shift from the performative contradiction of using the term 'race' in the same way as I have worked to find expression in ways of speaking that do not offend the principle of unity and use in AT and its work.

In my AT journey, what opened my understanding and allowed me to grasp the implications of use

as conceptualised in AT was, again, not a typical private or group lesson. It was a court case. FM's libel judgement focused on the concept of use and in this AT was vindicated, while his use and understanding of the science supporting his work was harshly criticised. In the next paragraphs, I introduce and summarise the background to the trial and then give brief descriptions of its three distinct phases: the Commission hearing in London, the trial in Johannesburg, and the appeal in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The whole saga stretched over 6 years, from August 1944 when the offending article was first brought to FM's attention until its final settlement in January 1950.

War was declared on 1st September 1939, ended on 2nd September 1945, and it had a huge and lasting impact on the growth and development of the life of AT work. The libel trial saga straddled much of the period after the war ended, during which the intensely white supremacist, nationalist Apartheid



political agenda was launched. The AT became damaged in a way that has yet to be fully addressed.

Against the backdrop of the war, an article was published in March 1944 in a government journal for the Department of Education in the Union of South Africa when the country was still a member of the Commonwealth. The Journal was distributed to a limited but significant readership. The article, "Quackery versus Physical Education" was a disrespectful and derogatory critique of FM's work, pupils and supporters, who included high profile persons. The article only came to FM's attention many months later, and it was several more months before he responded. Two of FM's pupils, British statesmen¹⁰, and close friends, approached the High Commissioner directly-he immediately asked FM to write a letter setting out his objections and a remedy. FM did this and asked for a printed public apology. The letter was sent off in December 1944. By the middle 1945 there was still no response. South African law of the time stipulated that to sue for libel, proceedings must be instituted within a year of reading the offending material.

The author of this article, an extensive writer, was Dr. Ernst Jokl - SA Government's recently appointed Director of Physical Education. He was a serious and dedicated sports scientist who went on to become known as the 'father of sports medicine' in Germany, Britain and South Africa. He asked Tasker to teach him and even showed up at her home unannounced. In 1942 he asked that she demonstrate the AT to him. She finally relented and arranged a meeting with invited witnesses. Details of the evening came out during the trial. Despite Jokl writing an appreciative letter, and a telephone call to ask for lessons, Tasker never again relented. She wrote to give her reasons: he could not learn the work without accepting the principle of psycho-physical unity, and she could not work with his particularly heavy physique. (Stratil 109). Barlow puts it succinctly: "there had been a few skirmishes in and out of print" (Barlow 287). Irene had given public lectures and published articles,

some of her prominent pupils proselytised the work and Jokl had publicly countered all of these with considerable energy and dedication. He considered this to be necessary for the protection of a gullible public. He was not alone in his thinking.

In August 1945, FM finally sued for defamation and claimed damages. He probably thought that notice of such proceedings would nudge the authorities to apologise. This didn't happen even though many imminent persons had been ridiculed. Lord Lytton, respected, retired international British statesman, was a close friend and colleague of Jan Smuts, the incumbent South African Prime Minister. Symbolic and material politics of power and clashes of ideology appeared in relation to the looming court case. Then in a departure from custom, an agreement was reached between the parties to hold preliminary hearings in London. Most of the defence witnesses were resident in London. The date was set for October 1946.

THE COMMISSION

The defence, paid for by the South African State, had managed to secure several delays. The commission did not sit until 2 July 1947. The seven witnesses who gave evidence on FM's behalf included two British statesmen (Lytton and Cripps) and five medical professionals (three of them specialists) who were all highly experienced, accomplished practitioners of the AT. Costs were mounting and apprehension began to grow when Jokl made it known that he was "... "inundated" with doctors and physiologists eager to testify against Alexander." (Jones 87). The defence planned to call nine witnesses, "some of the most eminent medical names in London." (Bloch 205). Two were Nobel Prize winners for research in physiology; two were members of government - the Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Health and the Physical Education Director for the Ministry of Education. A former pentathlon medalist who was Brigadier and Inspector of Physical Training in the British Army, the President of the Royal College of Surgeons,

10) Sir Stafford Cripps held influential government posts throughout the 1940's and 1950's. Lord Lytton, central and powerful member of the British upper class establishment, actively promoted AT.



a Professor of Physiology of University London's Middlesex Hospital, a renowned cardiologist and surgeon, a director of the department under the Nobel Prize winner Sir Alexander Flemming would also appear. None of these nine witnesses had taken any lessons and only one had read more than one of FM's books. Most had not read any before agreeing to give evidence.

By the time the commission's proceedings had concluded, the distinguished defence witnesses had cast doubt on and ridiculed various statements in FM's writings but had shown themselves unable to comment on the practical value of FM's work. Ethel Webb wrote to Frank Pierce Jones, "The whole thing has been a knock for him, and he looks older and worn by it." (Bloch 217). FM suffered a stroke in Dec 1947 and never attended the trial.¹¹

THE TRIAL

The case opened in Johannesburg on 14 February 1948 and lasted 12 days. It was a highly charged time politically with a general election looming. Every day the public gallery was packed, and crowds waited outside hoping someone would vacate a seat in the public gallery. The daily newspapers allocated a page each day to report the proceedings.

The defence (Jokl et al) rested its case based on witness testimonies from the commission's proceedings. Their attack on Alexander's claims about a physiological 'mechanism' of Primary Control had succeeded in London. The court case was prosecuted by Oswald Pirow, who later played a major role in getting Nelson Mandela jailed for life.

In South Africa, however, FM's legal team had devised a winning strategy. They planned to use two eminent legal representatives as witnesses for

FM. Advocate Hansen¹² replaced Berrangé. He was assisted by Advocate Fischer. They spelled out the case they would make at the start: "before this libel the onus was on FM Alexander to satisfy the scientific world. The defence must now prove that he is a quack" (Barlow 290). They failed to do that. Berrangé (QC) and Barrister Coaker, both long-time Tasker pupils, appeared as witnesses to confirm that FM's method worked and ensure that the case made on FM's behalf couldn't focus on flawed science. Their combined testimony was reliable, legally astute, very knowledgeable about FM's work and succeeded.

Judge Clayden says:

In the absence of evidence showing on the balance of probability that "proper use", as taught, cannot improve body mechanics, and by reason of the evidence as to the effect of good body mechanics, the defendants have in my view failed to establish that the system is unsound. They have shown that Mr. Alexander supports his technique by wrong physiological reasoning and by reference to work, which almost certainly has nothing to do with it. But that in my view is not enough.

In regard to the claims to prevent disease, Clayden said, "This was not claimed in the books."

He also said, "All of the witnesses for the defendants say they cannot discover, from his books, what Mr. Alexander does to bring about proper use: none has seen the technique in operation... the defendants do not offer proof that Mr. Alexander's teaching does in fact bring about improvement in body mechanics, whilst the plaintiff does offer such proof." (Barlow 292). He decided the case in FM's favour, and he was awarded damages and costs. However, application to appeal this judgement was granted.

11) A week later he suffered a second serious stroke. Within a year, he was fully recovered.

12) Adv. Harold Hansen would go on later in life to deliver a successful plea for mitigation of the death penalty in the trial that jailed Nelson Mandela and colleagues for life. Vernon Berrangé (KC) and Norman Coaker (KC), both long-time pupils of Tasker, gave evidence supporting FM's case. They were also on the defence team in the Rivonia trial (Mandela et al.). Oswald Pirow (KC) prosecuted.





THE APPEAL

One of the Appeal judges said in his final ruling in June 1949 that the article “expressed an appreciable quantum of malevolence” (ibid 289). The article was found to be defamatory and not a fair representation of Alexander’s theories. The Appeal ruling was more favourable for FM than the trial. The lengthy delay, a further year and four months, was because of some difficulty putting together the Appeal panel of three judges. Many of the Appeal judges had been AT pupils of Irene Tasker’s. The British Medical Journal published an account of the trial and a further article when the verdict was given. The Appeal was dismissed with costs. Settlement would pay one thousand pounds damages plus costs that amounted to five figures. There was a further delay; authorized release from the South African Republic’s Treasury was not signed until January 1950. (Evans 232)

There is a range of views expressed by FM’s biographers and colleagues about the making of this case. Barlow (288) thought FM had to sue because the article besmirched so many reputations that he had little alternative than to request its withdrawal. And when that was refused, he had no other option than to sue for libel. Evans (228) agrees to some extent, but offers details that show FM was reluctant. Nonetheless, because imminent statesmen were named and their reputations besmirched, he had to sue. Jones said, “Most of F.M.’s friends thought it would be wiser and more in keeping with the means-whereby principle to ignore the attack” (Jones 86). Bloch takes a more panoramic view and says the “great drama of F.M.’s later years had its origins in Irene Tasker’s decision to teach his work in South Africa” (Bloch 197).

The court case in South Africa presented a considerable battle for control of the Educational sector, the main mechanism of ideological production and reproduction. In London, the war had caused general hardship and the trial, following so closely, had a devastating impact. The training course had resumed at Ashley Place for those trainees whose study had been interrupted by the war. A team of teachers worked with FM. He paid them a poor salary

and kept the teaching practise and business very much under his control.

MY CONTINUING EVOLUTION

In my growing knowledge at the time, some three decades later, these symbolic and material connections were important in forming my understanding of the possibilities of the work. Between learned, internalised repression and brutal weaponised suppression, racialised brutality rules until such institutionalised forms of power can be decolonised. I understand precisely why the idea of the ‘how to’ practicality of the work, inserted into schooling could work. Here the question of “... how to take ownership of issues that confront existing power structures,” (Schlump et al 20) can be articulated in AT, but not strategised in our professional organisations or collective work. This is the work of the politics that battle for control of the state. It becomes congruent work when the unit of work is the individual honing and owning their character. It is indirect in that sense. We change our self, feed that into civic commitment, operate as worthy allies, and in our organisations bring congruence between civic work and professional organisation. This is what I learned in South Africa, and it influences the confidence with which I make this claim. I will continue the AT work that requires that I retain a critical gaze at my belief.

In June 1948, Berrangé, proactive ally as FM’s advocate and loyal supporter to Tasker, his teacher and friend, proposed a meeting and travelled to London to act as chairperson, with a view to establishing a society with the proposed name of STAT. No accord was reached. Quite the contrary. There was a great breakdown between FM and his closest assistant, but an organization with that name came into being with no mandate from FM. The Barlows later revived it in the 60’s. FM remained resistant to discussing approval of any kind of continued teacher training in his method during his lifetime. This included a refusal to support training in South Africa even when a group of ardent, informed supporters of his work urged him not to allow a collapse of all that had been achieved there.



Some of these were the men and women who helped him win his libel case. A memorandum was prepared and sent to FM asking him to allow Tasker to return to South Africa and train AT teachers. Much of that memorandum, brought to him in London by Berrangé, remains relevant in principle and detail about teacher training.¹³ Consider the following:

Point 7. We think it is possible that those at the centre of the Alexander Technique may overestimate the need today for safeguards against it falling into unworthy hands. To overdo such safeguards may become Utopian, impracticable and harmful. The world is full of bad and inept teachers of every subject under the sun, and the Alexander Technique, which is pre-eminently human, cannot escape the incidence of humanity. (Stratil 219)

FM had worked hard all his life and become a wealthy man, but as he approached his eightieth birthday he was in financial difficulties. A rival centre for training teachers was set up, funded by formerly loyal allies and very dear friends. FM publicly distanced the AT from the work of that centre, publicly refuting the claims of its advertising as being AT. The man behind the split was Charles Neil, a former star pupil, colleague and close friend of FM's. He left FM to earn better money, and after 1945 he offered lessons and teacher training from The Dame Isobel Cripps Centre in London, named after her to reflect her patronage and shift of support from FM to Neil. (Mouritz.org)

Bloch (biographer, historian, barrister/QC, accomplished AT pupil) suggests that this very public split spurred FM into agreeing to a meeting in 1948 with his other assistants to plan ahead. The intention was to set up a Teachers Guild with trustees and a Board of Governors, but it failed completely. The Barlows left the meeting after a shouting match. Marjorie Barlow, once his favourite niece, chose to never see him again. "There were no further attempts during his lifetime to create a body to promote or regulate the teaching of the Alexander Technique." (Bloch 236) In the aftermath of the trial and with permission to train teachers denied, Tasker returned to England in November 1949. There is no record of what

that meant to her. She refrained from speaking about the trial, but it is clear from her and FM's combined response to the Memorandum from South Africa that, despite hundreds of pupils in waiting, FM would not sanction teacher training there or anywhere else.

By the end, there is a will dated around 1950, seen by Bloch, that seemed to indicate he intended to bequeath his practice, the lease to Ashley Place and copyright to his books, to the last four assistants working there. He continued to work with them there to within a fortnight of his death on 10th October 1955. After his death it came to light that persuaded by Beaumont, his youngest brother, he had altered and signed his final will on 25 July 1955. Beaumont inherited everything except two small cash legacies. There is no mention in the will of any part of the world of AT that FM had built at 16 Ashley Place- copyright of the books, premises for the teaching practise or any of the assistants and teachers of his method- and no mention of Miss Goldie, his companion.

None of this story of intolerance, fissiparousness and intractable breakdown between members of the AT community came into the picture I have described. My impressions had no information about the aftermath of the war and the trial. When Elisabeth and Dick Walker returned to London in 1960, Elisabeth taught at Lansdowne Road with the Carringtons, Dick worked at Albert Court with the Barlows and travelled to Cardiff to regularly teach. They maintained friendships with almost all of their teachers, peers and students. This inclusive flavour of continuing curiosity about exploring the principles and researching the most effective ways of teaching and training was a hallmark of their training course. Through their training, and in the postgraduate teaching that Elisabeth offered from 2000 until her death in 2013, they explicitly passed on their view that the principles show up in a variety of ways, and that people would advance AT as a process of principles in application. And this process cultivates the teacher's own art. Dick and Elisabeth were always eager to listen to and work with new input from science and education and always respected the professional experience that their students brought from other disciplines.

The Walkers started a training school in 1984 - both

13) The full document of the memorandum is provided in an appendix in Regina Stratil's valuable biography of Irene Tasker.



were in their seventies. I was trained by people who had spent their life teaching and learning from their teaching, and they taught us what they had learned. Elisabeth once answered my question, “What is it that you love most about the Technique?” She said, “You get to meet so many wonderful people.” And then she thought for a while and said, “I get to teach what it is that I have just learned...” After Dick died, Elisabeth went on to travel widely, teaching at AT training schools, summer schools, retreats, conferences and congresses. She eagerly supported all AT international communities and had a particular love of the spirit of ATI and its ethos.

In order to methodically unpack my response in conversations with colleagues about challenges we faced as professionals, I have looked into what I personally bring to my professional knowledge. I have approached this writing with an agonistic, generative, critical research question: if this is my response, what is the stimulus? This can be a momentary inquiry; it can be highly systematic.

The stimulus is both present and historical. The political background to the influence of AT in South Africa and to my personal story emerged. The symbolic and substantive influences our work. The political environment we find ourselves in is always in the present, reiterating and revealing a local past. The global pandemic and the local outbreaks of police brutality and who dies from Covid are connected, and that can be with or without our understanding it to be so.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

FM’s story and character affected how the work developed. However, there is also development and training from other influential teachers from his time and since. We learn and teach from our personal and collective experience. It is so important to cultivate receptivity to others, even and particularly when we encounter another that is not dear, not near and with whom we do not share values. This makes possible a

response of endearing othering – meaning we are able to respect, value and ‘hold dear’ another – however different - so that we continue to work together.

My thinking back has brought me into the company of dear agonists.¹⁵ In ATI, our current conversations continue exploring how to respond to ourselves, each other, internationalism enacting locally so that we can bear to think globally. I find like-minded others in this company of peer and self review. This was familiar to me. I also find myself to be the only one like me for a moment. Resourcing my nervous system, I’ll be a better ally and collaborator. Yay. I have character - and a method for doing, sharing and collecting around character building, honing and owning ourselves carefully. Notions of changing the world is the world’s own business.

Amidst the hatred Apartheid had cultivated, the struggle that pushed back against inhumanity had cultivated around me and in me a willing agonism that looked for a generative response. I hold a view that radical non-violence is the only solution to inequality; that re-imagining a post-capitalist world is time well spent. Collective reflective search for the next action can make our response a stimulus towards becoming more worthy allies. We don’t need to be like each other. We need to like ourselves enough to recognise another and look at the values they hold.

AT has enormous usefulness for aligning our public and private lives and even our professional bodies as we navigate a world where the personal is, indeed, political. To hold an internationalist gaze, I must own and understand that my lived experience is the source of my motivations and commitments. If I value my values, I must recognise and know that others’ value theirs. My enthusiasm is refreshed, as is my commitment to commending the means-whereby. I find it fit for personal and professional purposes. This allows for civic and collective action for social change, especially in the pursuit of justice and sustainable well being for all sentience.

14) Judith Butler explains this analysis succinctly in a lecture, with Q+A and conversation, indicating my perspective and reason for this claim. The lecture is entitled On Covid 19, the politics of non-violence, necropolitics and social inequality. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Bnj7H7M_Ek

15) An agonist is a chemical that binds to a receptor and activates the receptor to produce a biological response.



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Sharyn West completed her training with Elisabeth and Dick Walker in 1993 and has maintained a private practice and taught workshops for 26 years. She first 'met' Alexander work in the Department of Education at Wits University in Johannesburg, first as a student and later as a teacher trainer/researcher. She moved to Oxford in 1982.

After graduating from the Walkers' school, she continued her job as a senior lecturer at the Oxford Brookes School of Education. She moved to the School of Health and Social Care in 2000 where she wrote AT into core undergraduate and masters curricula that informed practitioners' management strategies, self-care and referral choices. The Dean of School appointed her to chair the Inclusion and Diversity Committee. She was tasked with developing staff training and curriculum development support to bring the curriculum in line with changes to Equalities legislation that placed a burden of positive delivery on education and state service delivery. She has a long-standing and deep commitment to social and environmental justice and has integrated this perspective into AT practice.

After moving back to South Africa in 2014, she has co-directed with Lucia Walker The Alexander Technique Learning and Teaching Programmes (ATLTP). Until recently, ATLTP was based in Johannesburg, but they currently live and work in Oxford, offering a variety of levels of on-line, blended learning programmes that include teacher training.

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OTHER RESOURCES

Mouritz.org: A Companion to the Alexander Technique <https://mouritz.co.uk/260.libraryitems.html> (link to library for PDF texts listed below. There is also a link to key concepts.)

Charles Neil <https://mouritz.org/?article=charles-neil> last accessed 25th March 2021.

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